 CHAPTER-II

Reformation And Regeneration: Thematic Concerns in the Selected Novels
Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand is the champion of the downtrodden and his concern for them does appear clearly in all his novels. Contemporary critics are of the opinion that he is the most ‘committed’ and ‘propagandist’ writer. This is because he has served the cause of the ‘down-trodden’ and ‘under privileged’ to the fullest in his capacity as a writer and reformer. His life style and achievements are mere dream-realization for many ordinary people. On the other hand it is his heart breaking concern and love for the oppressed and agony over a plethora of evils existing in the Indian society which appropriately find a place in his writings.

There is ample variety in Anand’s search for themes. In every incident, he draws the readers’ attention to the consequences of a particular form of evil. The two novels Untouchable and Coolie represent Anand’s art and also his achievement as a novelist. They also stand as evidence for his insight into so many social evils in Indian society. Then and there he explores his themes of stories and plots of his invention by looking at the incident. By handling these components together, he makes his themes more real to the reader, leaving them all to his reflection and imaginative participation.

In spite of his socialistic concern and firmness in ideology, Anand is by instinct a novelist and his characters are shaped by their individual will and environment. So, when one studies his themes, automatically one sees social evils present in them and a close study of his characters, particularly of his protagonists proves it. It is they who come to the reader’s mind when he thinks of Anand’s novels like Bakha in Untouchable and Munoo in Coolie
which together recreate the changes in their lives. Anand’s novels have to be viewed and evaluated finally as novels, as contribution to the art of fiction, in spite of the fact that Anand does intend to inspire his readers to react to the different kinds of evils present in Indian society.

Mulk Raj Anand wants to address various problems in his popular novel *Untouchable*. Certainly he has successfully captured the reader’s sympathy for the exploitation of Bakha as he is subjected to, as an oppressed minority. Anand wants to make Bakha a hero, even though he is an uneducated, identity-seeking protagonist. If he is to be seen as a representative of his class, his inability even to articulate the words of Gandhi, for example, puts him at an immediate disadvantage. To be frank, Anand’s portrayal of Bakha is really complex, and he certainly allows Bakha to be rebellious.

However, this rebellion is always internal and uttered with a silent voice. After the novel’s ‘touching’ scene at the village market, Bakha reacts to the event with anger: “the strength, the power of his great body glistened with the desire for revenge in his eyes, while horror, rage and indignation swept over his fame. In a moment he lost all his humility, and he would have lost his temper too”, (*Untouchable*, 42) if it were not for the disappearance of the man who struck him.

Bakha is depicted as a person having a “smouldering rage within his soul”, and then resorts by questioning himself: “Why was I so humble? I could have struck him!” Thus, it is seen that Bakha has the potential for rebellion, yet Anand chooses to silence this rebellion by creating a condition that does not allow for the expression of it. Bakha then comes to a self-revelation a few paragraphs later: “I am an Untouchable! He said to himself
an Untouchable”. (43). Yet what good is this recognition if there is no possibility of its being overcome? This self-affirmation is also damaging consequences.

The Second important thing to be discussed in this novel is how Gandhiji has been introduced personally at the end of the story. Bakha at one point of time hears people saying that Gandhiji is a saint and also an ‘avatar’ of the Gods Vishnu and Krishna. Gandhiji is referred to as a powerful person who can change the whole world. Bakha too, like others thinks that only Gandhi can cure the illness spread in the modern world by teaching the true religion of love. Bakha feels proud when he realizes that the Mahatma is also black in colour like him. Gandhi’s simplicity, purity and innocent smile remain with the sweeper-boy for ever.

In the novel, Bakha’s day consists of several incidents, some enjoyable and some sorrowful. At the start of the novel, the author vividly word-paints three humiliating experiences of the hero: a slap from a high caste Hindu for polluting him, a priest trying to molest his beautiful sister, and a housewife scolding him and throwing a pancake at him from the top of her house. When he reaches home, his father Lakha ‘Jemadar’ of the sweeper community criticizes him. All these frustrate the young man. From here onwards the author begins to alternate pleasant and unpleasant things in a typical day’s life of Bakha by flashbacks.

Finally, one can see at the end of the novel a sort of ambiguity: that is, Bakha is neither happy nor unhappy. As he listens to the missionary, and sways with the crowd that has assembled to hear Gandhiji speak, and from a distance he tries to follow a poet’s long verses with their content of Vedanta. At the end of the novel, the author reveals three possible solutions to
eradicate the evil of untouchability. The first one speaks of the efforts being made by the Christian missionaries through their local salvation army, the head of which is Colonel Hutchinson. He says Christianity and Christ stand for equality of all human beings. Answering Bakha as to who Christ was, the Colonel says: “He sacrificed Himself out of love for us…. He sacrificed Himself to help us all: for the rich and poor: for Brahmin and the Bhangi”.

Bakha begins to feel that there is no difference between a Brahmin and a sweeper-boy, this idea takes him to Christianity. Yet, when told by the Sahib that Yessuh Messiah died for human beings as they are sinners, Bakha fails to understand him. ‘He didn’t like the idea of being called a sinner’. He was further discouraged by the Colonel’s wife who scolds her husband for messing about with all those dirty bhangs and charmers. There is no consolation for Bakha here.

The alternatives offered to him during the course of the evening, produced the quickest remedy for him. His hesitation to accept it was not owing to any conviction, but because the missionary in his contact with God had lost touch with the people. The next instance is Bakha’s fascination with Gandhiji’s campaign against untouchablity. Gandhi like Colonel Hutchinson, “relies on religious sanctions and the scene of sin” (K.N. Sinha, Mulk Raj Anand, 46) and, therefore, even his approach is not accepted as the total solution.

The author refuses to be carried away by the emotional appeal of Gandhi and has concentrated on realizing the identity of Bakha with dignity and recognition, the novelist can give him at his best. G.S. Balarama Gupta aptly says, “a total fusion of Anand’s social preoccupation and artistic
concern is seen in “Untouchable”. *(Mulk Raj Anand : A Study of His Fiction in Humanistic Perspective, 32)*.

When the Mahatma says that he regards untouchability “as the greatest blot on Hinduism” and explains it in personal terms detailing how he reacted to it in childhood, Bakha is over excited. But when the Mahatma asks the untouchables to improve their own lot by giving up evil habits, drinking and eating carrion, Bakha is confused and fears that the Mahatma is deviating from the main issue. Bakha makes a third attempt before that evening. This time the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar says that, when the scavengers change their profession, they will end their caste; and a modern sanitary system, the flush will bring about this change. “Then the sweeper can be free”, the poet concludes, “from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society”. (36).

Bakha is more relaxed and feels hopeful of the future. He informs his father about the Mahatma and about the machine that cleans the dung without manual effort. Here one has to recollect the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar : “Bakha is only partly the prototype ‘untouchable’, for he is also himself, a unique individual, even in some measure an exceptional ‘untouchable. The many things that happened to him could have happened, perhaps they still happen somewhere or the other even today, only the dramatic telescoping, the juxtaposition, the linking up, of so many events in the course of hardly more than twelve hours-is Anand’s greatness. There is no doubt that he has drawn upon what he had seen and heard as a boy, for there is a photographic fidelity about the picture that convinces at once, though it also overwhelms the reader by its cumulative ferocity and force of detail”.
Life in the town and cantonment- the colors and the smells, the chant and noises-the filth and cruelty-the kindness and humanity-the shifting scenes in the temple, the market place, the playground- the quiet of the hillside- the stir at public meeting; all are evoked with an uncanny accuracy, so that ‘Untouchable’ strikes the reader as the picture of a place, of a society, and of certain persons not easily to be forgotten: a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy. As a novelist addressing himself to the task of exposing certain evils, Anand has almost been as effective as Dickens himself. (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writings In English, 339).

Anand’s first novel Untouchable (1935) was written while he was in England during his Bloomsbury days. The young Anand of the Nineteen-Thirties had completed writing his ‘Confessional’ of 2000 pages, which helped him comprehend the sense of ‘lostness’ and the need to search for himself and for fellow Indians a motivation in life. It was Irene, his artist girl friend and revolutionary of the IRA underground army, who suggested to him that he should write short stories around the characters of his ‘Confessional’.

In Anand’s own recounting of a conversation with E.M. Forster, Virginia and Leonard Woolf in Tavistock Square, members of the legendary ‘Bloomsbury Group’, learn how Forster narrates finding a remark in the Reform Club Library copy of his A Passage to India. “A mind, burn when done. Has dirty. Forster then says he turned to that page and there found the phrase. “The sweepers of Chandrapur had struck and the commodes lay desolate in consequence”. (Anand, 71).

According to Anand, it was this conversation that gave him the idea of writing Untouchable around Bakha, an untouchable slaughter boy of 18
years, virile, youthful and a physically handsome specimen, who was a companion friend of his youth in North India; he appears again in *Seven Summers*. And so, out of the volcano of Anand’s “crazed imagination”, the novel “poured out like hot lava”? (Anand, *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*, 6). It was written during a long weekend, day and night in his long-hand. This work was read out to some of his Bloomsbury friends and “Only one thing they said about the fictional narrative was that it portrayed poverty, the dirt and squalor of the ‘lower depths’ even more than Gorky had done.” (Anand, 5).

The distinction of Anand as a writer has always been with reference to the choice of themes and their treatment in his works. His novels are mainly on themes around human suffering caused by political, economic, social and religious factors. *Untouchable* depicts the hero Bakha’s one-day odyssey through social wrongs and mental crises arising out of encounters with caste Hindus, traders, house-wives, and Brahmin priests in the Nowshera Cantonment town of North India. On the outskirts of this army settlement, Bakha’s Chambra brethren lived in despair and frustration over the society’s restrictions and limitations to acquire an identity and fulfill one’s ambitions to better the existing sub-human status. Amidst his morning and evening rounds of regimental latrines, Bakha craves for ‘Red Lamp’ cigarettes, trousers, putties, sola topi, only as an unconscious reaction against his life in the ‘smoky world of refuse’, so graphically described by Anand. He realizes that even education is denied him, for “the masters wouldn’t teach the outcastes lest their fingers which guided the students across the text should touch the leaves of the outcaste’s books and they were polluted.” (*Untouchable*, 20).
When this eventful day of his life ends at nightfall, Bakha realizes he is a polluting agent. A Hindu merchant pours water over the coin Bakha had placed at a designated spot, a packet of cigarettes is thrown at him and the encounter on the street ended in a traumatic experience. A caste Hindu slaps Bakha for polluting him, and shouts “Dirty dog! Son of a bitch”. (Bakha then utters a telling indictment of his fate: “Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable.” (57).

Bakha’s problem revolves around cleaning the latrines. The solutions proposed—Christ, Gandhi, Marx and Machine, in particular the last, the flush system—give an optimistic conclusion to this novel of protest against the miserable life of the untouchables.

To make Bakha a sweeper the chief character of his novel, was certainly a revolutionary stance in an Indian novelist in the 1930’s. But to make a novel on the theme of untouchability and to treat it as a national problem is one of the highlights of Anand’s Untouchable. Indian social reformers had strongly condemned the practice of untouchability—the most important expression of the Hindu caste system. Gandhi had also condemned it:

“Untouchability, as present practised, at present is the greatest blot on Hinduism. It is (with apologies to Santanists) against the Shastras. It is against the fundamental principles of humanity. It is against the dictates of reason that a man should, by mere reason of birth, be forever regarded as an untouchable. “The Hindu references have come to the conclusion that it has no support in the Hindu Shastras taken as a whole”. (Gopinadh Mahanthi, Harijan, 2).
Mulk Raj Anand describes the suffering of Munoo, the chief character in his popular novel *Coolie*. Munoo, an orphaned village lad from the Kangra Hills, works as a domestic servant in Shamnagar, as a wager in a pickle factory, as a laborer in the Bazaar of Daulatpur, as a coolie in a cotton mill and finally as a rickshaw puller in Simla. His last transformation results in his untimely death at the early age of sixteen. The entire novel brings open the exploitation of the downtrodden poor by the established rich.

Owing to his poverty, Munoo, a young boy starts his career as a domestic servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram. He is utterly ill-treated and he skips away as Babuji’s small daughter has a complaint on him. He is of the opinion that ‘he was condemned by an iniquitous system always to remain small, abject and drab’. (*Coolie*, 35).

He clearly understands the exploitation of capitalists, when he works with ‘George White Cotton Mills in Bombay. There was tremendous work pressure which makes him lose his spirit like his friend Hari, who is also a worker there. Finally, Munoo is taken to Simla by Mrs. Mainwaring to lead life as a rickshaw puller. He accepts the job readily as he has the deep-rooted feeling of inferiority to the superior people who lived in bungalows and wore ‘Angrezi clothes.’ (267).

The novel’s central theme is the extreme exploitation of the poor and the underprivileged by the forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. The protagonist, Munoo moves from place to place from village to the town, from town to city and then to the mountains in search of livelihood and finally puts a full stop to all his the troubles with the help of the ultimate, that is death by suicide. The chain of events touch the reader’s heart and raises the human feeling for the poor and oppressed. It gives
enough energy and fire to light the reader’s soul to work for an egalitarian society.

It reminds the reader of the master writer Dickens’ “Hard Times”; K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly calls it “a prose epic of modern India” (K.R.S. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, 342) for its incomparable spirit and power of narration. The hero emerges from the novel as an individual and special type at the same time. As he says, “Coolie carries no specific indictment of individuals: the indictment is against a society as whole a society that breeds such prejudice and cupidity and cruelty” (341). Hence the novel remains forever. Here Srinivasa Iyengar’s observation is worthy of mention:

“Coolie is more like the macrocosm of the Indian society. It is strictly a cross section of India, the visible India, the mixture of the horrible and holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful. The general effect is Panoramic, good and evil being thrown together as in actual life. The reader is constantly shifted, a new situation and new cruelties and absurdities whirl round us; village, taluk head quarters, district head quarters, presidency capital, the national (summer) capital. This is progression indeed, but only spatially, for the human situation hardly alters wherever we may be. Munoo is exploited all the time, one way or the other, by one person or another and his fate is typical of the fate of millions whose only distinguishing badge is patient sufferance.” (340).

Poverty provides scope for exploitation and it is the root cause of Munoo’s tragic end. His quest to make both ends meet “In a world where
poor man’s flesh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread, makes him restless and forces him to move from place to place and finally fall into the clutches of death.” (Suchitra Mistra, *Coolie : A Universal Human Tragedy*, 123).

Munoo, who is a Kshatria by caste, is poor and feels that “Poverty itself is a caste. the capitalists treat coolies like a cattle”. (Premila Paul, *The Tyranny of class system : The Novels of MulkRaj Anand : A Thematic Study*, 34). He is a miserable, poor creature who doesn’t receive any compassion in society.

The problem of class is a universal phenomenon but the author Anand’s interest lies in exploring the stresses and strains generated in Indian society as a result of the basic economic transformation brought about by various acts of the British Government (such as the new type of land forms) the penetration into the Indian society by commercial and other forces from the outside capitalist world and the establishment of modern industries in India, which necessarily demanded new class arrangement in society.

However, *Coolie* exhibits the tribulations of coolies in a class-based society. At the pickle making factory child labour was in a miserable condition. Children had to work for many hours is a horrible situation which still prevails in India in some places. In Bombay, the poor state of people is visible on even larger dimension. Even today child labour does show its gigantic form in many small hotels and small scale work places.

In the novel, at Sir George White’s cotton mills, the unscientific working conditions, the wicked creditors and the tyrannical foremen treat the Indian labourers like beasts. The author “Anand believes that poverty is a
cruel evil and cruelty is itself a deadly evil. We see in “Coolie” how these evils of poverty and cruelty crush a bud of youth before it could bloom to any extent” (Balaram Gupta, Mulk Raj Anand, 38).

Sanjay Swarankar aptly says, “The novel indicates Anand’s trust that pain is a brute fact in the world and that it is not inescapable provided man treats his fellow-men as his equals regardless of their economic and social status.” (Humanism in the first three novels of Mulk Raj Anand, 117) This is the reason why all the characters representing the rich in society (Nathoo Ram, Ganapathi, Chinta Sahib) have contempt for Munoo, they slap, abuse and kick him.

The rich in the society are most of the time carried away by their egoistic nature and treat the poor even less than animals. It is the very attitude of these people that differs. They feel from their hearts that they are superior to others and therefore inhumanly beat, slap and kick other humans not remembering that the other too belong as they do to the human species. Madhumati Ganguli explains well about the differences of the rich and the poor on the basics of Granscis concept of ‘base and superstructures. “The economic base influences the social upper structures, such as education, culture and religion. They are superstructures that replicate the inequality of the economic base. The oppressed classes believe that this order of inequality is ‘natural’ or pre-ordained, and do not even recognize that they are oppressed. They accept their lot and bow down to suffering silently, offering no resistance. Munoo who is the simple village boy is the victim of circumstances. He silently accepts the suffering and exploitation of society.” (Madhumiti Ganguli, A Post-Colonial Reading of Mulk Raj Anand’s Coolie, 94).
Pointing at the double intensity of troubles in a class ridden society based on cash nexus than in caste ridden society, Edgell Rickword says, “with ‘Coolie, Anand’s second novel, we are plunged into a much more complicated world, a world where everyone apparently is free to move about and earn his living at whatever trade or craft he pleases, but which actually imposes an even more rigid discipline than the old (caste system)” (MulkRaj Anand, The Three Views on Coolie, The Novels of MulkRaj Anand, 78). Thus the novel represents or is based on class distinction between the rich and the poor. Munoo represents the poor. Munoo begins himself as a member of a typical underprivileged section of the society.

Indian farmers readily, unquestioningly accept that everything is as fate has decreed. They certainly work hard, but the result they leave for God. They do not want to revolt. They wait for the good times to support them. In this way, Munoo’s father, who is a peasant, dies of a slow death of bitterness and disappointment because he doesn’t pay the interest to his landlord on the money he borrows from him. Munoo cannot forget the utter helplessness and tragic destiny of his poor mother after the death of his father. In spite of the sorrowful memories and the ill-treatment meted out to him by his aunt and uncle, he is happy and contented. He is a sensitive and intelligent boy with all animal spirits.

Munoo’s uncle, Dayaram feels the boy a burden and wants to make him live on his own. He takes the boy like he does an animal to the town and hands him over as a domestic servant to his superior officer Babu Nathu Ram, Sub-Accountant, Imperial Bank at rupees three a month: a good wage’. Munoo’s strenuous ten-mile walk with his cruel uncle is just the beginning of his suffering that is to follow. His delight at having come to a colorful city
soon vanishes. His unending experience of exploitation and humiliation actually begins there, and intensifies as he is forced to go from place to place. The pity is that he doesn’t move from one place to the other as he wishes, but does so only when he is forced to do so. He ultimately turned himself into a domestic slave; his condition is identical to that of a bonded labourer. He has to live in an “atmosphere charged with sharp abuse, unstoppable complaints and incessant bullying. (Coolie, 59).

Munoo’s troubles start from the very minute he is installed in the service of Bibi Uttam Kaur, the wife of Babu Nathu Ram. After a long march through the hills and plains in the hot sun, he expects that he would be given at least some food to eat as that is the custom. Instead, he is asked to go on a task at once. His uncle, whose name ironically, is Daya Ram, doesn’t think of his hunger, but chooses to tell the boy of his servitude, “You will be looked after here. You will get plenty to eat in this home. Don’t forget to do your best for the masters. You are their servant and they are big people.” (24).

His unimaginable experience in this household is plainly depicted in this scene that happens within hours of his arrival at the house. He used to run into the fields every morning to relieve himself, and unable to know where the lavatory is, he relieved himself close to the wall side of the house. He is discovered, panic-stricken and shamed. A violent abuse from Bibiji follows “He is warned that he has to use the servants’ latrine at the foot of the hills, not theirs, because they are superior people. He is also warned that he had no right to join the laughter of his superiors or the sports of her children.” (34). To top it all comes from her the humiliating insult, adding to the injury already made. “Since you are being paid a good wage, more money than you ever saw in your whole life in the village more money, in fact than your
mother or father ever saw – it would be good for you to do a little work for it.” (38).

Bibiji calls Munoo for no particular reason, ‘savage’, ‘brute’ ‘thief’ ‘idiot’, ‘stupid’, ‘fool’, ‘good for nothing pig’ etc. His life under her roof becomes one of “drudgery from morning to night (and) is equaled only by the most violent invective and insults hurled at him”, (Saros Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, 64).

Spiritedly Munoo attempts to be a role model for servants, but there was no difference in the treatment meted out to him by his mistress. His daily routine consists of scrubbing the vessels, sweeping the floor, laying the table, receiving serious abuses for the slightest mistakes he commits. In spite of Dayaram’s warning that he is their servant and they are kind people, he observes that there is a distinct line between his masters and him. “His impish curiosity, about the potencies of civilization and his juvenile buoyant spirit often spells trouble for him because he is unaware of the sinister operations of class-consciousness”. (Saras Cowasjee, Anand’s Princes and Proletarians, 45). Thus the theme of the novel touches the hearts of the readers at every level. As an author of Thirties, “Anand’s affirmed purpose to treat literature as a social evidence or testimony rather than the literary problem of what happens to the novel when it is subjected to the pressures of politics or political ideology”. (Edgell Rickward, Three views on Coolie, The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand, 63).

In all its realities a coolie is to be more miserable than an untouchable. Edgell Rickward says, a coolie is to be more miserable than an untouchable “for the untouchable may be chided or kicked off if he offends the law of caste, but he has his place in the system, he is necessary; but the
cooler, in a Bombay cotton mill, under debt and fearful of the sack, is not necessary to anyone- there are too many waiting to take his place.” (Edgell Rickward, *Three views on Coolie, The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, 78).

Finally, the communal riots, plotted by the capitalists to foil the strike plan of trade Unions, explicating the religious orthodoxy or fanaticism that has a greater grip on the minds of people provide scope to the forces of communalism; victimize the poor coolies or wretched destitute whose home is the pavement or the street. Anand’s finely built and realistic portrayal of Hindu-Muslim riot is intended to give a vision to the nation which was about to be freed so that it may follow a true secular ideal, making no compromise to fanaticism. It also foreshadows the horrible happenings during partition. It also clearly predicts the hatred that spreads in the minds of both Muslims and Hindus.

Confused and shocked at communal riots, Munoo runs away from the scene. He is knocked down by the car of Mrs. Mainwaring, an Anglo-Indian lady who takes him to Simla and employs him as her servant. He finally ends up as a rickshaw puller. The deep-rooted feeling of inferiority to the superior people who had lived in bungalows and wore ‘angrezi cloths’ (267) makes him accept without regret his share as a rickshaw puller. This strenuous work leads to his death. “His death at the age of sixteen is intended to focus attention on the injustices of society and ills of the economic system” (Edgell Rickward, *Three views on Coolie, The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, 17).

Thus Coolie brings out a picture of the then society and how the labour class suffered hardships due to the cunning politics adopted by the capitalistic section of people. Munoo - like labourers are victims of the
capitalist rich class. The novel *Coolie* of Mulk Raj Anand makes the reader “come into contact with the people who have a lot of appetite, but no food to eat as well as people who have plenty of food but with no appetite. The rich are restless with their wealth and the poor are restless with the sufferings of poverty. On one side people suffer with excessive riches, on the other the people suffer for want of basic needs. A Minor section of the people rules the major section with their money power. The suppressed suffer with patience. They don’t revolt. Though they have strength, they do not unite and protest. Instead, they suffer. They accept their inferiority to the rich.

Dr. MulkRaj Anand, through his rare proficiency, bold experimentation and aesthetic sensibility, has made immense contribution to Indian as well as world literature in English. His choice of unconventional subjects and characters has been determined by his Dickensian humanistic philosophy. He set up new trends by introducing negative hero/anti—hero in his novels. His fictional world is peopled by characters from various strata of society— from the lowest to the highest rungs in the hierarchy. Anand has revealed exceptional, psychological insight in the portrayal of these characters who “once were real men and women” and are not mere phantoms of fantasy.

However, his otherwise authentic and objective delineation of character is superb which the chief requisite of a work of art is. This paper presents a confrontation and interaction between Anand’s métier as an artist as a compelling demand of his humanistic creed. Not that humanism is, in any way, contrary to art. It will not be far from truth to assert that all is, at bottom, humanistic, even though not expressly “a criticism of life”. The greatness of an artist lies in synthesizing art and reality.
When he handles reality imaginatively and presents it artistically, the result is a great aesthetic delight for both the reader and the artist, but it is when humanism obsesses the mind of the artist so strongly that he is ready to make out subservient to his philosophy that the artist’s failure starts. The present study discusses the oscillation of Anand’s oscillation between his integrity as an artist and his enthusiasm as a reformist.

Mulk Raj Anand, the most prolific and the most widely criticized Indo-Anglican novelist, feels that characters in his novels have been the motivating force- rather the chief cause- behind the writing of his novels. In Anand’s novel, it was not the action that decided the choice of characters in his novels. The action instead, was chosen according to the characters he decided to write about. His characters are mostly people who once were ‘men and women’.

Anand, in his childhood and youth had been intimate with them. He had himself shared their feelings, thoughts, action reactions, troubles and joys. And he had studied their emotions from such close quarters that he could easily identify himself with them. Anand’s complete identification with his characters accounts for the remarkable authenticity in their portrayal.

In this period of confusion, Anand felt that one could depend more on art and literature for solace than on religion and philosophy. According to him literature, music and art are better able to fulfill the needs of our time than religion and beauty is better worth worshipping than God or a Deity for whom the sanctions lie in the institutions of a few mystics.

The fact is that Anand uses literature as a means to modify society and so it has led critics to dub him as a propagandist, despite his repeated
emphasis on the fact that Indian content demands art with purpose. He boldly accepts the negative appellation, as he observes: All art is propaganda. The art of Ajanta is propaganda for Hinduism. The art of Ellora is propaganda for Hinduism. The art of western novel is propaganda for humanity against the bourgeois. Gorky as a humanist dared to speak of man, man’s condition, not only to say how awful it is, but he also suggested what man could be. And thus he did propaganda for man. Anand, a great admirer of Gorky’s fiction about Squalor and dirt, regards him “the prophet of new literature.” And he tries to do in India what Gorky and Dostoyevsky had done in Russia.

Anand’s concept of literature is closely related to life and is a by-product of his humanistic ideas. It is his own ardent love for human beings and his pity for the suffering; wretched, downtrodden humanity that lead him to believe that all writers write only for the sake of bettering the lot of man and the function of literature is to enable man to recognize his dignity.

Anand calls his humanism “comprehensive historical humanism” and discusses it in detail in his “Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization? Apology for Heroism, Hindu View of Art”, and Prolegomena to a “New Humanism” incorporated in “Lines Written to an Indian” air with many scattered remarks in his articles, essays and letters. His humanistic faith has been discussed with minute observation by Margaret Berry in *MulkRaj Anand: The man and the novelist* and by Balarama Gupta in his famous *MulkRaj Anand: A Study of His Novels in Humanist Perspectives.*

Anand is a ‘comprehensive historical humanism’. He derives much from the history of Indian religious and philosophical thought and blends it with modern scientific ideas so that his theory achieves universal significance and comprehends the whole of mankind. The traditional values which Anand
wants to be operative in modern times are universalism, and compassion. Universalism has been inherent in Indian tradition since very remote periods of history. Anand traces this element in the Vedic hymns in the “simple universal values of mankind, in their worship of nature and their bold speculative outlook about the meaning of creation.” Anand is intolerant of orthodoxy and irrational taboos of Indian religious thought, but he is full of admiration for the human values which have percolated through traditional history to modern times.

Anand is an admirer of humanistic philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru. But he does not accept the ideology of any one of them unconditionally. He owes much of his love for the down-trodden humanity to Mahatma Gandhi and his synthetic approach towards the ideologies of East and West to Rabindranath Tagore. He is full of praise for the socialistic pattern of society as preached by Jawaharlal Nehru and stands for his humanism laced with a scientific approach, but he differs from Mahatma Gandhi’s capitalistic ideas and from the spiritual sanctions which Tagore and Gandhi find for their philosophies. He wants to strike a balance between Gandhian love for humanity and the Marxian gospel of classless and casteless society. He admires the ethics of Tagore based on a deep study of eastern and western cultures, but he does not approve of spiritual sanction in his philosophy.

Anand pins his hope on ameliorations of mankind. He wants men to organize themselves and dedicate themselves to the cause of mankind. It may be possible if there is a feeling of brotherhood among men and if they selflessly fling themselves in the arena to fight against all these forces which condemn them and their brethren to subhuman life.
Anand dedicated the gathering of the conference “to the task of healing the wounds of the insulted and injured, through full engagement in the widest areas of knowledge and action, so that all the tears of all the children can be wiped and in the words of the Spanish poet Garcia Lorca the black boy come announce to the whole of the world the beginning of the reign of a year of corn. He reiterates his faith in the capability of artist to liberate mankind from the shackles of pain this, then, seems to me the true mission of the writers today.

To act as the conscience of the people, be aware of their pain, to have a creative mission of all that affords joy in life, to realize the vital rhythms in the personality, to make man more human, to seek appreciation of freedom from all forms of slavery and to give this freedom to all others throughout the world – in fact to awaken men to the love of, liberty, which brings life and more life.” and that is what Anand himself is doing vigorously even at the risk of being called a writer with propagandistic leanings.

Anand’s humanistic philosophy is sufficient explanation for his choice of characters- the sufferers and the saviours. The sufferers reveal the real plight of contemporary India and the saviours provide hope against despair. They reveal Anand’s existentialism combined with a streak of an optimistic attitude towards life. The relation between the two heroes, however differs in various novels.

The relationship depends on the suffering hero’s own personality. When he is too passive and weak to fight, a saviour figure is introduced from a higher stratum of society. When the sufferer attains maturity of sensibility and strength of mind, he himself fights for the liberty for all those who suffer like him. And when the plight of the sufferer is beyond redemption, and when he is
a man of high social profile, no saviour character is brought in. In other words, no saviour characters are introduced when either the suffering protagonist himself is strong and combative enough to throw a challenge to the iniquitous and suppressive forces of society or when the conditions are so terrible as to be irremediable. In addition, there are also some novels in the Anand canon which are fairly free from the shadow of the suffering syndrome and therefore have a more disinterested aesthetic dynamic of their own.

The distinctiveness of Anand lies in his bold stride both in the choice and treatment of themes. He fearlessly chooses his protagonists from the “dregs of humanity” and tries to identify them with the so called high-caste and high-class people. Anand’s delineation and use of the sufferer and saviour characters is all his own, and to me, it seems to be a very important feature of his fictional output, right from Untouchable.

Narendra Jadhav

Every sixth human being in the world today is an Indian, and every sixth Indian is an untouchable. For thousands of years the untouchables or Dalits, the people at the bottom of the Hindu caste system, have been treated as subhuman. Their story has rarely been told. Narendra Jadhav’s Untouchables achieves something altogether unprecedented. It gives voice to India’s voiceless.

In Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India, Narendra Jadhav tells us the awe-inspiring story of his family’s struggle for equality and justice in India. While most Dalits had accepted their lowly position as the decree of fate, Jadhav’s father rebelled
against the oppressive caste system and fought against all odds to forge for his children a destiny that was never ordained.

Based on his father’s diaries and family stories, Jadhav has written the triumphant story of his parents – their great love, unwavering courage, and eventual victory in the struggle to free themselves and their children from the clutches of the caste system. Jadhav vividly brings his parents’ world to light and unflinchingly documents the life of untouchables – the hunger, the cruel humiliations, the perpetual fear and brutal abuse.

Compelling and deeply compassionate, Untouchables is a son’s tribute to his parents, an illuminating chronicle of one of the most important moments in India’s history, and it is an eye-opening work of nonfiction that gives its readers access and insight into the lives of India’s 165 million Dalits, whose struggle for equality continues even today.

There seems to be disagreement on what this book is? One’s library has it classified as a biography. May be it is narrative nonfiction, a classification that one hasn’t been able to get his mind around. The book is about the author’s parents. They were Dalit- (Untouchables) Indians who grew up in a small village, moved to Mumbai, were involved in the political movement to bring equality to the Dalits.

The father, Domu was only a semi-literate. The mother, Sonu, never learned to read. The author has them take turns telling their story. It is a glimpse into rural India in the early 20th century and the migration into the large cities. One sees them struggle with jobs, living conditions and discrimination. One has the perspective of an under-class Indian family as the country attains its independence from the British and sets up its government.
One sees the father’s determination to see that his children get educated and we see the children thrive.

It almost reads like a novel and the readers learn a lot about India and the Dalits. This surprises the reader by being a straight memoir rather than a sociological explanation of one family’s experience. As it is, Jadhav tends to get bogged down in personal recollection, to the neglect of showing how those personal experiences typify life under the caste system as a whole.

Judged as a memoir, this was just okay. Jadhav is honest, eloquent and not given to self-pitying, nor does he gloss over or melodramatize the hard realities of living under caste. Still one would recommend starting off with a good sociological study of caste before reading, as too little conceptual background is given. The greatest thing about this biography is that it educates the readers on a greater level on India’s untouchable caste. One had never heard of Babasaheb Ambedkar before, but he is glad to get a chance to learn about the extraordinary man who challenged both the cultural and religious system of India. Also, Untouchables unintentionally helped provide foundation for one’s dislike for Gandhi. Before one didn’t like him mostly out of a gut feeling based upon his actions, but Jadhav’s biography helped ground to one’s intuition. Gandhi historically did not support the Dalit equality movement, and held a pitying and slightly condescending view of them. One does not have any respect for a man who refuses to acknowledge an entire population. On the other hand, the Untouchable Ambedkar proved himself to be the true hero of India as he roused the conscience of thousands of Dalits and endlessly strove to secure for them equal rights.

If one is hazy on the history of the Untouchables in India, definitely one had better check this biography out. It’ll open his eyes to the struggle
thousands of Dalits underwent to free themselves from caste slavery, including the incredible personal journey of Jadhav’s father. The nonfiction biography, Untouchables, by Narendra Jadhav is an awe-inspiring story set around the 1990s in India. It is about the journey of an untouchable family breaking out of the oppressive caste system. Jadhav writes this true story based on his father’s diaries and many family stories, which talk about his parents’ struggle for equal rights and justice. For thousands of years, Dalits (untouchables) have been treated harshly and not only by the gore (British) but also by their fellow Indians who believe that Dalits should not even be treated as human beings.

Jadhav’s family rebelled against the caste system because they wanted to free themselves and their children from the life of an untouchable, which is filled with fear, abuse and cruel humiliation. This book, Untouchables, gives voice to those who are not able to speak out and tell their story. This book tells the story of India’s 165 million Dalits, who are still struggling for equality and justice today. In one’s experience, while reading the book Untouchables, there were many tiny details that appealed to one. There were many unique and small moments throughout the book that brought on a rush of emotion. But, out of all these small moments and characters, one character stood out the most. Sonu, Jadhav’s mother, not only spoke to but inspired all readers as well. It’s difficult for one to highlight a specific reason why she stood out. May be it is because she is not the normal ‘hero’ character. She does not protest when she is married at the age of ten for a huge dowry. She follows her husband to unknown situations and places because it’s her duty. She follows the social norm and does not stand up to it. While other readers may believe that she is a coward for not standing up, some see her as a brave girl, wife and mother. She is courageous because she does what many fail to do.
Sonu follows and walks behind her husband through the good and the bad. She does not leave him even when he cares more about equality than about her. She stays by him when he talks and praises a white girl over her. She follows her duty to him by doing everything she can to please her man. These are the aspects in Sonu’s character that are very inspiring. She makes one wonder how many wives would stand by their husbands during this situation. One would like to think, if one was ever faced with this situation, would one act like Sonu and follow her husband because one vowed to be by his side through everything. Therefore, one believes Sonu is a very feminine but strong woman who inspires all the readers to be strong as well.

The narrative nonfiction, Untouchables, begins with a dedicated note on educational facts about India and its caste system. But just a few pages later, the book dives into the personal stories of Damu (father) and Sonu (mother). As one keeps on reading the stories of Jadhav’s parents, one realizes that it is very difficult for one to find a strong plot line. Many of these random stories from Damu and Sonu started to pile together and it is hard to see how it all relates to breaking out of the caste system. To be honest, the reader would get quite bored throughout the beginning of the story and would prefer on putting his book down. But as he pushes through the chapters, he realizes that many of these stories are tied together around at the end to form a strong plot.

There are still some random stories scattered throughout the book that do not spark any emotion from the reader. But when he nears the last chapters, he sees how the characters develop and how this Indian family comes about to live a free life. Overall, the reader likes this book. He also learns much about India and the caste system and about Hindi vocabulary. It’s truly interesting to
learn about Indian culture. One believes, teenagers would love this part of the book.

To read the book *Untouchables*, there is a strong need for patience and understanding. He would recommend this book to someone who is older and may be wiser than teenagers. This book would be a great read to those who have patience and more understanding. Even though one enjoys reading this book as a teenager, he feels like he would have loved this book when he is old enough to grasp all the concepts. All in all, *Untouchables* is a good book to read but it would be good one had waited to read this book when he grew older.

Indian English prose writings wish to represent India in terms of its cultural identity and political establishment. Besides the other genres, the autobiography, being a literary device, also represents the Indianess. During the Independence struggle in the 1920s, movements ran parallel to each other. One was freedom movement and the other is Dalit movement. Dalits want social freedom exactly as Indians need political freedom.

The caste system is a very peculiar feature which is widely visible only in Indian society. Caste system has its mechanism to control the society. This controls the society from birth to death of an individual giving a status to him at every level. No society is called an ideal or civilized one if the members of it are treated differently for different reasons. A cultured society cannot support granting of elitism entirely based on birth. Of course, birth certainly plays an important role in man’s life in other societies too. Great peoples’ sons and daughters are given more priority in the social gatherings. But in India, it is totally irrational. Right from ancient times, the Dalits have been treated as a neglected creed. Man should become great by his deeds and not just by birth.
So, an autobiography is considered to be most effective to comprehend the reality that exists in the Indian society. Thus Narendra Jadhav’s *Outcaste: A Memoir* exposes the world he had lived in and had struggled for existence. The theme of the story is that a Mahar from his incredibly low beginnings in a slum went on to receive national and international awards in academics and career. It explains the saga of the journey of Damu (Damodar Runjaji Jadhav), the author’s father, from a small village in Maharastra to Mumbai to run away from the pressure he faces as a Dalit. It elaborately discusses a story that spans three generations.

It is narrated from the perspective of the author’s father, mother, of himself and of his teenage daughter’s. In Mumbai, Damu lived and succeeded in overcoming all odds and educated his children. He worked on the railways, then in a textile mill and later sold newspapers when removed from the job in the mill. At that time he worked as a servant in a white man’s house.

Inspired by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit leader and chief architect of our Constitution, Damu participated in various struggles that Ambedkar launched against the caste system and its perpetrators- the caste Hindus. Sonu, Jadhav’s mother, though illiterate, was courageous and hard-working. Both Damu and Sonu trained their children and grandchildren and made them realize their aspirations. Their eldest son becomes a district collector, youngest son; Narendra Jadhav becomes the Head of Economic Research at the Reserve Bank of India and of course, a writer. Apoorva, Jadhav’s youngest daughter is studying in America.

*Outcaste*, written in the form of a memoir, bears testimony to the success of a Dalit family in the course of a single generation. It stands out very special as a golden glare of social renaissance in the dark, dingy
Universe of untouchables. In spite of its being a story of a single man and his family, it optimistically shows how an ideology called Ambedkarism, helps a man with extreme self-dignity in his way to freedom.

Narendra Jadhav was born in 1953. Apart from being a world-famous writer, he is a well known economist, banker, public speech maker and especially a Dalit leader. He was born in a Mahar family as the son of Damu, an illiterate but self-respecting and remarkable untouchable who fought with great resistance to help an entire generation to come out with flying colours through education. This is the only solution to overcome all odds.

Outcaste: A Memoir is a tale of an ordinary man Damu who certainly did extraordinary things: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system. His struggle to be allowed to live with dignity and self respect in the middle of extreme untouchability and casteism from the 1920s till his death in 1989 is remarkable. Damu’s refusal to calm down in the face of any injustice done in the name of caste, religion or social status, and his sheer courage to fight for his identity from the heat of the memoir, highlight the need of the Dalits to stand up, fight injustice and free themselves from the tyranny of the caste system.

He was born in a poverty damaged Mahar family but refused to adjust himself to the conventional caste-codes prescribed by society and religion. Having migrated from Ozar (a village in Maharashtra) at the tender age of twelve, to Mumbai, the great city which brought the bliss of ‘touchability into his life’, Damu got an opportunity to know and participate in the Ambedkar’s movement against untouchability. As a person he valued
dignity and self-esteem very much, a rare quality to be observed in the then lower castes.

Unlike his mates who had fatalistically given up themselves to their sheer inferior status in life, Damu fought hard to come out of such wretched condition and rightly realized that the path to freedom lies only in education. He was forced to perform Yeskar duties and let the city clean. He was in and out of jobs for a major part of his life but nothing diminished his spirit to follow Ambedkar and to achieve his mission in life, to uplift his family first and to give his children the best possible education and raise them with dignity and spirit to prove themselves in this wide world of challenges.

-Outcaste- is the story of a Dalit family written by a Dalit author, and so it may be called a Dalit text. Secondly, this story of a Dalit family is quite different from the Indian family stories that deal with the themes of high caste Brahmins or the elite. Moreover, this is a narrative about Indian’s untouchables who are now known as Dalits and it is in this way different from the other stories. Narendra Jadhav describes his central character, Damu, of his memoir in the following words, Damu was not a leader. But he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own destiny. Damu had no formal education. Yet he steered his children to educational heights and inculcated in them the spirit of excellence.

Damu was no guru…. But he taught his children to believe in themselves and retain human dignity…Damu was often humbled…yet he maintained, “Goats are sacrificial offerings, not lions’. Damu was an ordinary man, they said … but he did an extraordinary thing: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system”. (Outcaste: A Memoir, xi.xii).
The theme of *Outcaste* is very simple, but it touches the heart of the reader directly. One may describe Damu as one of the few assertive, independent Dalit characters in Indian writers in English. Damu was doing his Yeskar duties (village Dalits to Mahars) in his native village, Ozer; Damu was running in front of the Mamledar, senior revenue official announcing his arrival. Later, Damu was asked to look after the dead body of a woman found floating in a well. He was not allowed to go home and inform his dear wife and to have some food.

When Damu was so tired and expecting something to eat, a police arrived and scolded him. “Eh, Damu Mahar, I have been looking all around for you. Where have you been wandering around, you son of a bitch?.” (3). He was abused, insulted and was ordered to stay at the dead body throughout the night. The next morning the Fauzdar (a police officer) arrived and asked Damu to get into the well and pull the corpse out. Damu refused to do so under the pretext that he was not supposed to touch the body of an upper caste woman.

He was beaten up by the Fouzdar for refusing to obey his orders. Damu was stubborn and determined, but didn’t bring the body out. He suffered all the whippings, but did not want to do what the Fauzdar asked him to do. When his cousins remind him that Damu was violating the tradition of Yeskar duty, Damu speaks out, “I spite of these men’s human traditions. I am not going to abide by such traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for *Baluta* (Thalic) what are all of you going to do? Kill me?” (10).

Thus, Damu rejects the external definition of his identity as a Mahar, an untouchable and represents himself as a man of dignity. Damu’s
assertive spirit has attributed to his migration to Mumbai and to his participation in the Ambedkar’s movement only when he was twelve years old. Damu decides to leave the village that very night. He runs away along with his wife Sonu to Mumbai. “Together, they started walking towards freedom”. (11). Damu struggled hard, as Jadhav narrates, ‘to survive through the great Depression in the 1930s, he worked in the Railways, in the port trust, and in some textile mills to earn his bread in Mumbai. Inspired by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s call for Dalit emancipation, Damu participated in the Dalit movement. He has actively participated in the Dalit movement. He has actively participated in the Nasik Tennille Entry Movement in 1930s, in Mahasatyagraha in 1927 and in the conversion movement in 1956.

Damu converted himself to Buddhism along with thousands of Mahars in 1956. He tries to inculcate in his children the ambition to succeed in life through two important things that is education and hard work. Damu strongly refuses to get cowed down by all the odds in life. He had always declared himself as the master of his own will. He has presented himself as a self made man in many ways.

The character created by Jadhav is again that of an assertive self-made Dalit in the text. Actually Jadhav inherits the philosophy of his father Damu that a human being is a master of his own will. So only Jadhav says, “If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is their problem, not mine. I certainly do not need to torment myself over it. I pity them, for they are the victims of their own obsolete prejudices. My mind was racing with a million different answers. Dignity, after all, rests in the mind and heart… and soul. I have to reclaim it not from outside, but from within.
And for that, I must cut off the albatross of the caste system from my soul, once and for all…” (214).

From the reader’s perspective, Outcaste may be a narration of Dalit history. At a level it is the story of a Dalit family and its proven transformation in two generations, but at another level it is the epic that consists of Dalit history. Damu first sees Ambedkar during the Mahad Sathyagraha. He recollects time and again what Babasaheb spoke and how everyone listened to carefully. He wanted the untouchables to do away with dead cattle. “It is utterly disgraceful to sell your human rights for a few crumbs of bread. It will attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect and gain self-knowledge”, Babasaheb said : “What touched me the most were his thoughts about raising a family. There will be no difference between parents and animals if they do not desire to see their children in a better position than their own. What a man! What a leader!” (22) He exclaims. Narendra Jadhav treats Ambedkar as a character and as a superb symbol of Dalit assertion. Making of modern Dalit is a process that is rooted in the Ambedkarite movement of the 1930s and the 1940s. One can never separate the story of the likes of Damu and Jadhav from the history of Dalit movement.

So, only Narendra Jadhav says with an authentic tone, “I was a mere Mahar, a Dalit, a Harijan, and a Scheduled Caste, belonging to the lowest stratum of society” (207). All the above mentioned terms Mahar, Dalit, Harijan and Scheduled castes represent the identities of Untouchables in India. These identities have a history each of their own. All these Damu, Sonu and Jadhav the Dalit identities belong to the Mahar caste, one among the untouchable castes in Maharashtra. As in Sonu’s own words, “We began
to bathe daily and dress neatly with freshly washed clothes and tie our hair into a neat bun. We kept our houses neatly, immaculately clean with all the brass pots and pans polished and shining.

“Truly, we sensed a change in the way we carried ourselves. We proudly proclaimed ourselves Dalits, with our chin up, and we looked everyone in the eye. We began to lose our former servility, associated with being born in a low caste.” (178).

The identification of this modern Dalit is possible because of two historical processes. One aspect is the journey of Damu from his village in his urban space, Mumbai, and the other aspect is the Dalit movement led by Ambedkar, the great. Very early in the text Jadhav wrote that he (Damu) had worked in Mumbai for several years and the very city had brought touchability into his life along with an awareness of rights as a human being. Jadhav certainly walked out of the mask of untouchability, illiteracy and backwardness; let one may have a look at the identity claims of Narendra Jadhav and his daughter Apoorva Jadhav who explains,

“ Yes, I do come from the Mahar caste.

Yes, my father was an illiterate lowly employee doing menial jobs to earn a square meal for the family.

Yes, my forefathers were untouchables.

Yes, my forefathers were required to wear clay pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and the brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.
Yes, as village servants, my forefathers were mercilessly forced to run…… human pilots, foaming at the mouth under the scorching sun, to herald the carriages of government officials. So what?

Have I not reclaimed my dignity through my achievements?

Why should the caste into which I was born count now? ” (207).

Jadhav’s daughter still says,

“ Now, I think I know who I am. I am just Apoorva, not tied down by race, religion or caste. My ancestors carried the burden of a Dalit…. I have the torch they have lit for me and nothing can stop me.” (263).

Narendra Jadhav narrates a series of anecdotes to highlight the practices of untouchables in the village. They have already been discussed at the opening of the text when Damu was ill-treated and beaten up in the village for not doing the manual Yeskar duties. Remember the scene where Damu has been insulted by an upper caste man by pouring water in his cupped hands and the scene where Damu was abused for distributing sweets at his land lords’ house. When the educated Dalits go to their villages, they were served tea in separate cups there. These scenes remind the reader that the evil of untouchability continues to exist in crude forms in the villages.

The Dalit self in Outcaste is the self of a new humanist individual self constructed in the global context. Jadhav claims his community heritage but refuses to identify himself with the village. He is pained at his recognition only by his caste identity. He wants to be treated as a normal person, a universal citizen with no tags. This identity is called a cosmopolitan Dalit identity.
The theme of this autobiography is to exhibit Ambedkarism which is the ultimate solution to all problems the Dalit society faces. It is strictly the opinion of Dalit writers that ‘as Gandhi is to Hindus, so Ambedkar is to Dalits’. Slow but steady literary rebellion spearheaded in the 1920s through 1950s, in the view of a western champion of human rights, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who is regarded as a saviour for he was the first person who strategically encountered India’s 3,500-year old caste system that still remains a stigma on humanity.” (Arjun Dangle, Poisoned Bread, 237).

For all practical reasons Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is the father of Dalit literature. His message is the magnetic force behind the Dalit writers in India. He is the gist of social revolution and a real embodiment of Dalit ideology. His speeches are a watershed in the history of Dalit as well as national history. Ambedkar is the mythic giant of Dalit literature. With the idea of establishing a model for Indian Democracy, he re-established Buddhism, the philosophy of anti-spiritualism and atheism, the philosophy with dynamic and humanistic perspective. He also spoke for the nationalization of land, business and industry. He is the one who substituted ‘Bheemasmruti’ for ‘Manusmruti’. He is the man who gave a new twist to Dalit-hood, Dalit reality, Dalit-consciousness, Dalit-self respect Dalit-ideology and Dalit-perspective to Dalit literature. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar attempted to free Dalits from the clutches of the Hindu caste system which is considered to be the most prominent one in the Twentieth century. His massive attempt to remove the yoke of the caste system from off the necks of Dalits was at a number of levels, i.e. social, cultural, economic, religious and constitutional. The seeds of Dalit literature were sown by the struggle and movements of Dr. Ambedkar. Therefore, there is no exaggeration in calling him ‘The Father of Dalit literature.’ It was mainly his inspiration that sets Dalits to work with
determination and vigour to record their miseries which they were going through for centuries at the hands of Hindu caste system. Therefore a vast number of writers came forward and started ventilating the pains and pangs of the ostracized class of the Hindu society through various forms of literature.

Dr. Ambedkar, the apostle of the Dalits, historically is the first to break the Sanatan Hindu tradition of negation of learning for the untouchables. His individual achievements in the field of learning are the source of pride, prestige and model to Dalits. This is because, first, Dalits were supposed ineligible to learn due to want of blessings from the Goddess of learning. Secondly, no one among the Dalits rises to the height of Dr. Ambedkar at the caste level, as well as on the national level. It is a fine example of rejections of national identity and locates Dalits in a global space and calls them Dalits and gives cosmopolitan Dalit identity as liberating collective identity.

Narendra Jadhav likes all the leaders who influence the people with their leadership skills. He understood the thoughts of Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar. But, finally he followed Ambedkar’s ideology and thoughts. Dr. Ambedkar is a modernizer asking the Untouchables to give up all “humiliating and enslaving traditions”. He also emphasizes the importance of human rights and rising the status of the family. It is crucial to note that in this representation Ambedkar’s notion of modernization involves idealization of the middle class family and assertion of self-help.

Jadhav reinforces this notion of modernization through the narration of a series of events in the text. In Outcaste Damu was inspired by Ambedkar’s speeches which touched many of Dalit life to come out of their
struggles. In Nasik Movement to enter Hindus Kalaram temple Ambedkar said: “We will not die if we aren’t allowed into the temple, nor are we going to be immortalized by gaining entry. We are fighting for equal rights as human beings, and we are not going to accept anything less.” (128).

**Mahasweta Devi**

Mahasweta Devi began to show keen interest in literature since when she was a young girl. This can be witnessed in her contribution of several stories to the various literary magazines. Her first novel *Nati* was published in 1957. Gradually, she raised herself to the level of a writer, activist as she led many crusades fighting for the rights of the tribals. From 1980 onwards, Mahasweta Devi has been actively associated with many grass root level social movements around the plight of bonded labour, persisting feudalism in rural polity, state negligence, especially to the marginalized section of the society which includes communities like untouchables and tribals.

In recognition of her social activism through the media of literature, she has been honored with Padma Vibshvan, Magsaysay and Padmasree awards for her activist work amongst dispossessed tribal communities. Besides this, she is the recipient of the covetous, and India’s highest literary award ‘The Gnanpeeth’ Award (1996) and Yashwant Rao Chavan National Award for 2010 “for her contribution to national integration, democratic values and the socio-economic development of India”. Recognizing the work of the writer and social activist, the Human Resource Development Ministry has appointed her as National Research Professor for a second term of five years from February, 2011. This has added another feather to the crown of her glory as a dynamic writer. Being a social activist, this octogenarian recently actively took part in the Sigur- Nandigram political controversy, the undocumented plight of the
tribals in Gujarat. Her plays represent a profound concern for human predicament and sincere hope for the better future of mankind.

Before acquainting the readers with the plight of the marginalized, to know the exact meaning of the term ‘marginal’ or ‘marginalized’ is of vital importance. According to the Oxford Dictionary ‘marginalize’ means ‘to make somebody feel as if they are not important and cannot influence decisions or events; or to put somebody in a powerless position’. So, the word ‘Marginalized’ refers to the group of people who are deprived of their minimum rights and are exploited.

In Post-colonial dialects the term, ‘marginalized’ occupies a prominent place. The term ‘subaltern’ or ‘marginalized’ incorporates the entire people who are subordinates in terms of class, caste, gender and office. It is the subject’s position that defines marginality. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect, mark the lives of ‘marginalized’, even when they resist and rise up. They feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives or spokespersons in the society they live in and shamelessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential parts as human beings.

The Naxalite movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's was also an important influence on her work. Devi, in a 1983 interview, points to this movement as the first major event that she felt, an urge and an obligation to document. This leftist militant movement, which started in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal, began as a rural revolt of landless workers and tribal people against landlords and money lenders. In urban centers, this movement attracted participation from student groups. Devi's play *Mother of 1084* (Hajar Churashir
Ma) is the story of an upper middle class woman whose life is shattered, when her son is killed for his nexus with Naxalites. The play ‘Mother of 1084’ is the original translation of Mahasweta Devi’s Bengali play *Hajar Churashir Ma*. It has the best illustrations for the marginalized category.

The neglected and suppressed plight of the woman is represented by Sujata Chatterjee, mother of the protagonist of the play. Brati Chatterjee whose ideology i.e., commitment to the revolutionary and Communist Naxalite movement had labeled him a rebel, and he was ruthlessly killed in an ‘encounter’. In the play *Mother of 1084* Sujata Chatterjee, a traditional apolitical upper middle class lady, an employee who awakens one early morning to the shattering news that her youngest and favourite son, Brati, is lying dead in the police morgue bearing the corpse no.1084. Her efforts to understand her son’s revolutionary activism lead her to reflect on her own alienation from the complacent, hypocritical, bourgeois society against which he had rebelled.

The theme of the play moves around Sujata, a middle-aged woman belonging to a ‘bhadralok’, bourgeoisie Calcutta family. Born into a conservative, affluent family, Sujata is advised to pursue her B.A. So that it helps her marriage prospects, but is ultimately married off to Dibyanath Chatterjee, a chartered accountant, despite his unsound financial situation. In thirty-four years of their married life, Sujata gives birth to four children, two sons (Jyoti and Brati) and two daughters (Nipa and Tuli). When the novel opens, two of her children are already married, Jyoti to Bina and Nipa to Amrit. In the eyes of the world, all of them are leading perfectly happy and settled lives, but as Sujata goes on to discover later, this happiness is only superficial.
Significantly, Sujata makes several other discoveries, only after the sudden and mysterious death of Brati, her younger son, with whom she had always shared a very special relationship. For instance, she discovers that all the thirty-four years of her married life, she has been living a lie, as her husband, being an incorrigible philanderer, always cheated her with his mother’s and children’s tacit approval. He fixed up a petty bank job for her, when Brati was barely three years old, not out of any consideration for her economic independence, but essentially to help the family tide over a temporary financial crisis. And, as soon as the tide is over, he wants her to give up the job, which Sujata simply refuses.

Later, she also discovers that her children, too, are leading lives very similar to her own. If there is someone who has dared to be different, it’s Brati. Sullenly rebellious, right from his childhood, Brati has made no secret of his disregard, even contempt, for his familial code and value-system. Turning his back upon this decadent and defunct code, Brati decides to join the Naxalite movement sweeping through the State of West Bengal in late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Unaware of his secret mission, Sujata is not able to dissuade her son from joining this movement. During his period of struggle, he comes into contact with a young girl, Nandini, who is also a member of the underground movement and with whom he shares his vision of a new world order. On being betrayed by one of his comrades, Brati and three of his close associates, Somu, Parth and Laltu, are brutally murdered by the hired assassins of the police.

Later, the police call up his father, asking him to come and identify the dead body of his son, who, has in the meantime been divested of his identity as a person, and given another ‘dehumanized identity’ as corpse number 1084. Not only does the father refuse to go, but he also forbids other
family members from doing so. Outraged at the manner in which his associates, his immediate family and the state have abandoned the dead Brati, his mother, Sujata decides to go, throwing all pretensions to false social respectability and the fear of public censure, to winds.

Dibyanath Chatterjee, father of Brati Chatterjee is represented, as an honest representative of the male dominated society. As soon as he comes to know about the news of his son, instead of rushing to the police station he tries to hush up the matter. Sujata is aghast to see the indifferent behavior of her husband. He was least bothered to talk about this matter to his wife Sujata. The following sentences reveal very clearly how much she was neglected by him, “Sujata : (uncomprehending, in a panic). What will you hush up? What are you talking about? Dibyanath : Jyoti, there is no time to waste. He goes out.

Sujata : Jyoti! (Jyoti busy in dialing a number. He does not reply) Jyoti! (Reproving). Jyoti! What’s Happened?” (Anthology of Five Plays, 4).

One can easily conclude that Sujata was neglected though she was the second important member of the family. Dibyanath Chatterjee bothered to consult his son Jyoti rather than his wife, Sujata. Sujata feels shocked when Dibyanath Chatterjee refuses to go to the police station with the fear of stigma in the society for his son’s involvement in anti-government affairs. In the words of Sujata, “But that soon? Even before the body’s been identified? A father gets the news on the telephone and does not even think of rushing to have a look? All he can think of is that he’d be comprised if his car went to Kantakapukur?” (9).

The four chapters in the play mark a new stage in the evolution of Sujata’s consciousness, as it enables her to re-order her fragmented and chaotic
life in search of a cohesive identity. Every time she visits, her own past or that of Brati, Somu’s mother or Nandini, her long-suppressed personal loss is slowly released into the ever-widening, spirals of betrayal, guilt and suffering. From a weak-willed, hopelessly dependent and non-assertive moral coward, Sujata is transformed into a morally assertive, politically enlightened and a socially defiant individual.

In the first chapter, significantly titled ‘Dawn,’ Sujata primarily returns to her interior, private world of personal suffering, torture, betrayal and loneliness. Negotiating the inner time in relation to her immediate familial situation, she becomes aware of how she and Brati were not just fellow sufferers but also soul mates.

In the second chapter, ‘Afternoon,’ Sujata’s visit to the bank to get jewellery from the locker is only a pretext for her to visit the house of Somu’s mother. A close associate of Brati, Somu had been killed in the same encounter. More significantly, Brati had spent his night in a Somu’s house before his mysterious disappearance and death. While Sujata goes to Somu’s mother with the specific aim of retrieving the memories of Brati’s last few hours, it turns out to be her entry and initiation into another world altogether. It is the world of primitive squalor, filth, poverty, degradation and subhuman existence that only hovers tentatively at the margins of ‘bhadraloks’ consciousness. She enters into the little known world of slum dwellers. The sight of a Somu’s ageing mother, her disgruntled daughter and that of their ramshackle tenement with a straw roof is enough to complete the rituals of initiation.

In the third chapter, titled ‘Evening’ she visits Nandini, who apart from being Brati’s comrade-in-arms was also his beloved friend. It is Nandini,
who reconstructs for Sujata all the events leading up to Brati’s betrayal and murder. In the process, she also initiates Sujata into the little known world of the underground movement, explaining to her the logic for an organized rebellion, giving her firsthand account of state repression and its multiple failures. It’s through Nandini that Sujata is finally able to understand the reasons for Brati’s political convictions and his rejection of the bourgeoisie code. All this leaves her so completely bewildered that she openly admits to Nandini, “I didn’t really know Brati.” (87).

In the last chapter of the novel titled ‘Night,’ the readers meet a transformed Sujata, one who is more self-assured, morally confident and politically sensitive. She decides to leave the house in which Brati never felt at home, where he wasn’t valued while he was alive, nor his memory respected after his death. Having found a soul mate in Brati, she turns her back on Dibyanath and his decadent value-system. Bound by a sense of moral responsibility, she does go through all the rituals and ceremonies connected with Tuli’s engagement, but during the party, she maintains stiff, studied silence. Her insistence on wearing a plain, white sari for the party is also a significant gesture. The feelings of Sujata were not respected, but were misinterpreted by the members of the family. The following conversation between Sujata (Tuli, the second daughter of Sujata) and Tuli represents this thought,

Tuli: Didn’t Brati laugh at other people’s beliefs?

Sujata: Brati’s belief was so different from your belief in the Swami, or Bina’s in her prayer room, that it sounds utterly absurd when you drag his name into the same context.
Tuli: The same thing again! You will react every time we mention Brati.

Sujata: Yes.

Tuli: Are we not worthy enough to pronounce his name?

Sujata: The way you pronounce it! To hurt me! (8).

On one occasion Dibyanath Chatterjee accused Sujata for misleading their son which has led him to become a rebel. The egoistic nature of the father is understood in his words: “Bad company, bad friends, the mother’s influence” (29). It is a well known fact in the society that both father and mother play an important role in bringing up the children. But it is ridiculous to notice that when the children get spoiled, complete blame is thrown on the mother. Being physically weak and fragile, (for a few years, she had been living with a rotten appendix inside her system), and traumatized by her younger son’s death and subsequent repression of grief, she simply gives up on life. When she screams and collapses into a heap, her husband is quick to react that her “appendix” has burst. Whatever the symbolic overtones of his statement, she certainly succumbs to the slow process of inner-outer rot and decay.

Finally, as she herself says, “Now that Brati is dead, I, too, wouldn’t like to go on living.” She discovers her inner self but on the whole loses her will to live or somehow survive. Time constantly swings back and forth, and so does the pendulum of two interconnected, intertwined lives, that of Sujata and her son, Brati. Interestingly, it is death that unites them both, irrevocably asserting the authenticity of their lives, too. Mahasweta Devi’s predominant concerns are the tribal backwaters, the “exploitations of the Adivasis by the landed rich or the urban-administrative machinery callously perpetuating a
legacy of complicity with the colonizers, bonded labour and prostitution, the
destitution and misery of city dwellers who are condemned to live at the fringes
and eke-out a meager livelihood, the plight of woman who are breadwinners
and victims of male sexual violence, dependent widows, ill-treated wives, and
unwanted daughters whose bodies can fetch a price – are adequately
represented”. (Sen, Nivedita, 34).

From the aforesaid situations, one is likely to infer the insignificant
role of Sujata in the play Mother of 1084, as a woman who has been relegated
to the position of a neglected, suppressed, ill-treated, mechanical and
marginalized one in all forms in the male dominated society that consider
woman as an object of sex only, to reproduce, bring money when needed and
as one who does not possess even a voice to express her own concerns.

Mahasweta Devi is a distinguished Indian Bengali writer, studying
and writing ceaselessly and unremittingly about the life and struggles faced by
the tribal communities in a number of states like Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya
Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. She is a reputed Indian writer who was born in the
year 1926 into a middle class Bengali family at Dacca, Bangladesh. She
received her education from the prestigious Shantiniketan founded by the great
Indian philosopher and thinker, Rabindranath Tagore. Mahasweta Devi
graduated from the University of Calcutta and this was followed by an M.A.
Degree in English from the Visva Bharti University. Even though the Gayatri
Chakraborty Spivaks voice has gained some recognition in the Western
academic space, Mahasweta Devi is not so widely known to academics outside
Bengal in her own country. Mahasweta Devi, the most renowned social activist
among the contemporary Bengali literary artists, penned stories to render and
reveal to our gaze the charade and duplicity of the democratic set-up in our
country and to give a picture of the fates of the marginalized women experiencing and undergoing untold miseries within and without their own communities.

Mahasweta Devi’s Outcast : Four Stories powerfully and realistically presents the dismal and pitiable fate of four marginalized women characters Dhouli, Shanichari, Josmina and Chinta who are marginalized even by those who are generally considered as the marginalized in society. The theme of the writer gives a picture of a three-tier structure in the Indian social order composed of three rungs, the first of the mainstream, the second of the marginalized, and the third of the outcast. Here in the writer explores and exhibits the gendered causes lying beneath the social and economic exploitation of three women belonging to a backward minority.

The writer reveals the implicit slave trade that continues to prevail under the disguise of the democratic society of India, and unmistakably indicates the miserable and hopeless plight of these women who usually have nobody to turn to. The worst that can be said of them is these are women who are not considered as human beings, but treated only as commodities both within and outside of their own communities. The first of these stories, eponymously titled Dhouli presents the miserable and the heart-rending plight of a dusad (untouchable, lower caste) young widow who is seduced and impregnated by Misrilal, the son of a wealthy, upper-caste Brahman named Hanumanji Misra. Misrilal does away with the liability and accountability of the newborn child and its mother by marrying another woman belonging to his own caste and by settling in Ranchi, a distant Indian city. Under the circumstances Dhouli and her son are forced to starve for want of bread. Dhouli is compelled to sell her body in order to keep her body and soul together for her son and for
herself. Misrilal returns and forces her to leave the village and move to the city to become a prostitute.

In Mahasweta Devi’s second story, Shanichari, an Oraon girl is Marginalized like Dhouli in her own society for coming back with a diku’s (upper caste’s) child in her womb. A middle-aged woman, Gohuman has sold Shanichari to a brick kiln owner in Barasat, West Bengal, where she faces economic and sexual exploitation leading to pregnancy. Subsequently, Shanichari is sent back to her native village, but only to face social ostracism. To some extent different, however, is the story, “the fairy tale of rajabasha,” a self-imposed ostracism, not from her own society, but from the world (as she commits suicide), is the result of the love of Josmina for her husband Sarjom.

Both of them are sold to a landowner in the distant Indian state of Punjab, where Josmina is meted out the same treatment as Shanichari, even though she finally manages to somehow come back home with the hope of beginning life anew. But her hope of a new life gets belied, as she develops the symptoms of motherhood, brought upon her by her master in Punjab. At last, Josmina commits suicide to keep her husband from ostracism from his own community. Although these characters and their stories seem to be unrelated, they still remain in the same bracket as what brackets these three characters together that is the label of “Otherness”. It is noteworthy that this leitmotif of “Otherness” is recreated in the narrative mode of the three stories at different levels.

An air of marginalization, which increasingly gets intensified, is suggested by the use of words like “poor”, “run down buses for poor”, “run down people”. At a different level, the word “buses,” an unambiguous symbol for the modern lifestyle and civilization, sets the character and role of the
people of the “Other world”, as these buses are rejected vehicles fit only for the poor or marginalized. In total dissonance from the reference to the civilized world in the opening paragraph, the concluding paragraph of Dhouli signifies another frame of marginalization.

Here Mahasweta Devi delineates the natural world and thereby ironically affects dissolution of the nature-civilization dichotomy. “The sun shone brightly. The sky looked blue and the trees as green as always. She realized that nature was unaffected by the upheaval in her life. This painful thought made her weep. Wasn’t everything supposed to change from today? Everything? The day Dhouli was to finally enter the market place? Or is it that, for girls like Dhouli, nature accepted such a fate as only natural? Nature, which, after all, was not created by the Misras or had the sky, the trees and the earth [been] sold out to the Misras as well?” (33).

Significantly, the effacement of the nature-civilization binary leads to a kind of identification between the two apparently dichotomous entities and suggests an ominous absorption and annihilation of nature by a soul-killing civilization. Like the world of civilization represented by the “metalled road” in the opening paragraph, at the conclusion of this short story nature remains indifferent to Dhouli’s ostracism from her own subaltern community. Mahasweta Devi, though, makes it plain through her narrative that the label of “Otherness” is conferred by the politics of power dynamics and the hegemony exercised by the upper class.

In the Panchayat meeting where Dhouli’s fate is sealed by the senior Misra, Dhouli is given two choices, of being burnt alive, or of adopting prostitution in an “Other world.” Hanumanji pronounces, “Dhouli cannot practise prostitution in this village. She can go to some town, to Ranchi, and do
her whoring there. If not, her house will be set on fire and mother, daughter; child will be burned to death.” (31) It would be worthwhile and significant to note that even the tribal untouchables, the dusads and ganjus, make no protestations against his verdict. Here, the narrative delineates repression of the marginalized class, which is the product of a societal power structure born of the domination and supremacy of the dominant class. The repression and ostracism of the marginalized is the direct fallout not only of the indifference of the upper class but also of the members of the repressed community themselves.

In the story Shanichari the writer acquaints us with the young tribal girl, Shanichari’s status in the social hierarchy. Shanichari, in the company of her grandmother “enjoyed the train ride to Tohri, sitting on the floor of the compartment, chugging along, having a good time picking the lice from each other’s hair” (34).

This round about reference to Shanichari and her grandmother’s subaltern status, suggested by the phrase “sitting on the floor of the compartment,” is further reinforced through a seemingly innocuous folk-tale narrated in fragments by the grandmother: ‘Don’t you know the one about the carpenter who carved a girl out of wood and became her father? The weaver who gave her clothes and became her brother? The goldsmith who gifted her jewellery and became her uncle? Didn’t the sindoorwalla bring her to life by giving her sindoor?’ (35).

The story is reminiscent of the myth of the birth of Eve. As Eve was brought to life from out of Adam’s rib, so too was this girl carved out from wood by a man and brought to life by the sindoor of another man, the sindoorwalla, who finally owned her. The very opening of the short story
foreshadows what fate awaits her. Thus we can assume that Shanichari will be
treated as a commodity and discarded as soon as she commoditized existence is
of no use to the males in her life. This suggestion becomes even more
unambiguous with the coming of Hiralal, the itinerant folk-song singer who
ekes out a living by singing his songs in train compartments. Hiralal, who is
endowed with an obvious choric function in the narrative, unravels Gohuman’s
guile and deceit in trapping young girls like Shanichari. Mahasweta Devi, by
her deft use of an intimate conversational tone and sometimes a direct narrative
and descriptive style, exposures Gohuman’s devious ways of trapping trusting
and gullible tribal girls like Shanichari.

The tragic fate that a tribal girl like Shanichari meets with is skillfully
delineated by the writer. She gives a realistic and matter of fact depiction of
how the Indian paramilitary forces are pressed into service to subdue and crush
the tribal people by burning their huts, looting and killing them, and even gang
raping their women. Mahasweta Devi discriminates between the civilized
mainstream readers, who read stories on exploited tribal girls sitting at leisure
in their cosy homes, from those of the “Ho-Oraon-Mundra girls ” living in
appalling conditions and leading despicable lives:

“The BMP [Bihar Military Police] took the young
girls into the forest and raped them. Imagine the scene.
Familiar to you, no doubt, from innumerable story books-the
lush green forest and a group of Ho-Oraon-Mundra [three
Indian tribes] girls who look as if they have been exquisitely
carved out of black stone. Only the bestial howls of the BMP
would have been left out of such a picture book scene.” (46).
Finally, when Shanichari is driven out of her village, she is compelled to head to an even more inhospitable place than her own inhospitable forests where she was born into. Starvation forces Shanichari to go to the brick kilns to face a situation worse than her earlier one. There she is provided with clothes by the owner of the brick kiln, but only to be later stripped and raped. “Rahamat would dress Shanichari in good clothes and nice jewellery, rub fragrant oil on her hair—and then tear into her ruthlessly (51).

Very soon she is replaced by another tribal girl and she began working as a reja. As labourer, she is only underpaid and exploited, and later when impregnated by the owner of the brick kiln, Shanichari returns eventually to her people only to discover that she is an outcast in her own lower-caste community. This marginalization of Shanichari and her marginalization by the marginalized is efficiently and powerfully presented through the dialogue between the brother of her murdered lover, Chand Tirkey, and the naiga, the village head-priest:

“We should think about this as a community. There could be more Shanicharis in the future. Should we cast out our own women? Will that benefit our society?” The naiga said, “We’ll think about it if it happens again. Not now. (54).

In The Fairy Tale of Rajabasha, Mahasweta Devi, besides providing a realistic and striking depiction of the exploitation of Sarjom and Josmina, a tribal couple, projects certain instinctive reactions of the tribal people living below the poverty line, and finally records the behavioural patterns of the well-off people belonging to the mainstream.
The story opens with the description of an arrangement of a tribal feast on the occasion of the marriage ceremony of Sarjom and Josmina, and we hear Sura Jonko saying: “Not just turmeric and salt, let’s cook it [the meat] with onions, pepper and other spices” and the narrator voices their unuttered sentiment: “Great fun, great food” (57).

Even in the midst of such deprivation and poverty the couple are very excited and happy: Josmina collected roots and tubers from the forest. Living off just these and ghato made of makai, she looked gorgeous. A new mother, the curves of Josmina’s body filled out like the gushing Koyena in the months of rain. “There was much happiness and peace in this first chapter of the fairytale of Rajabasha!” (59). Afterwards, following the tragic upheaval in the lives of the couple caused by their moving to Punjab as slaves, when they return to their village, Mahasweta Devi tells the minimum that a subaltern requires:

“Within no time everything became as it was before. It was so refreshing to bathe in the waters of the Koyena. So peaceful to boil some makai at the end of the day and cook ghato in the evening. To sprinkle salt on it and eat in leaf plates. So pleasant to sit by the banks of the river, washing pots and pans while chatting to girls you’ve known all your life” (78).

In contrast to the happiness of the couple even in the midst of their poverty, Mahasweta Devi’s presentation of Nandlal Sahu’s unhappiness amidst affluence is revealing: “He had two fine houses in the districts of Monoharpur and Raikera. And two wives in those two houses. Now his first wife, who lived in Rajabasha, was pestering him for a pucca brick house” (59). So to fulfil the
desire of his first wife, Nandlal sold Josmina and Sarjom to an “Adarsh kisan of Punjab”.

Mahasweta Devi shows that the crux of the problem of the marginalized lives lies in the characteristic power dynamics of the master-slave relationship between the village feudal upper caste and the lower class wherein the former treat the latter as a mere commodity and an instrument of labour, akin to bonded labour. That is why, while buying the couple, the Punjabi agriculturalist, Niranjan Singh, “pinched Sarjom’s arm and shoulder muscles,” and a little later when Josmina, “gaping open-mouthed at everything around her, put a nipple to the child’s mouth,” Niranjan mused: “Feed her for a week and these goods will be just right.” (66). Throughout the story, Mahasweta suggests that these subaltern people are nothing but “maal,” “goods,” commodities, “jungle jaanwars”, forest animals, to those at the top of the social hierarchy: “To Niranjan, she [Josmina] was just fresh meat; dark, junglee [savage] flesh which he had paid for. They bought it all up, everything. Everything that belonged to the Josminas.” (72).

Accordingly, the master treated them as he pleased, subjecting them to sixteen to eighteen hours labour, stripping and abusing the wife in front of her child, and putting them under lock and key at night: “It was his [the master’s accomplice, Harchand’s] job to keep the buffaloes, cows and bonded labour under lock and key” (68).

Somehow, when she gains freedom from this slavery, her new-found freedom is short-lived. Back at their tribal village their hopes of happiness are shattered when Josmina come to realize that she is carrying the child of the Punjabi, his former owner who had raped her. She was shocked as she knew that her own tribal community would never forgive this, and further that both
she and her husband would be socially ostracized, Josmina, in utter desperation drowns herself in the Koyena river.

One way to look at these short stories of Mahasweta Devi is to read them as the voiced articulations of the tribal “Others” in contemporary Indian society. Gayatri Spivak’s question as to whether the subaltern can speak, after reading Mahasweta Devi can say with full conviction that the Subaltern do speak. It is worth noting that Mahasweta Devi speaks not only about the marginalized, but, far more importantly, about the marginalized within the communities of the marginalized.