“(Mahasweta Devi) holds a mirror to the conditions of the world as we enter the new millennium”

Nelson Mandela

CHAPTER I

THE POLEMICS OF SUBALTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND MAHASWETA DEVI AS A SUBALTERN HISTORIAN
Introduction

History is a powerful medium which serves to articulate one’s existence. Historiography, on the other hand, as an independent branch of history does not simply study the past but analyses the various interpretations of an event by individual historians. Historiography which came into being as a part of the epistemological revival of 19th century European Enlightenment encompasses concerns as veracity of sources, credibility of the author and the legitimacy of the text; historiographical tradition; and historical meta narratives which evolved from being a secluded and a separatist representation of elite into an encompassing mirror of the masses as a whole. Historiography, as has been debated by critics ascertains whether its interpretation should be served by a singular artifact or an accumulation of it. Edward Said has vigorously arrested homogenizing of history which has been discrediting the multitudinous histories of the non-western world which are intentionally hence undocumented. Speaking against the universalization of history via master narratives, the critic has assailed the issue by stating:

...historicism meant that one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West...What...has never taken place is an epistemological critique ... (of) homogenization of histories...

(White Mythologies 2)

This lucid argument over the interpretation of history challenges the Western or the elitist model of historiography and allows the recognition of narratives beyond the confines of Western canon. Robert J.C. Young informs this debate by referring to history as ‘West’s greatest myth’ (White Mythologies 2). The contention is that European or elitist histories assume a mythical stature hence ennobling themselves as master discourses which apparently cannot be subjected to subversion. This eurocentric dogma perpetuates the interpretation of historiography as the one ordained by the imperial empire which further disengages the subaltern records of tribals, low castes or indigenous communities from the official accounts, implying that the former are not legitimate or authentic or worth classification to begin with.
Theories right from Marxism to Subaltern Studies have attempted to assign history a paradigm. In the academia, there have been questions raised to put forth the attributes of a legitimate history. Various theories including Subaltern Studies have been grappling with inquiries as - Who should history document? Under whose supervision? What is misrepresentation, and what is true representation? What is dominant history, what is subaltern history? The evaluation of these enquiries is primal to recognize the intricate developments of history writing. How an authoritarian model has been attempted to reach and what were the motives, strategies and repercussions of it? These are questions pertinent to the development of historiography from Marxist to Subaltern model. The impetus of subaltern history can be traced back to the roots of Marxist theory, and in this chronological analysis, the development of subaltern historiography can be explored.

In the study of Marxism, history has been considered as a superstructure determined by an economic base. The usual analysis of proletariat and bourgeoisie is manufactured while discoursing on the dynamics of history. The major drawback to this evaluation has been that it restricted itself to Western discourses of oppression. In other words, it relegated and often discounted the histories of the Third world countries while perpetuating the Western struggles as master discourses. It was an epistemological blunder of this theory which encouraged critics to apprehend this orthodox exclusivity of Marxist theory that had catastrophically failed to include the subaltern histories of non-Western world. The extent of this bankrupted interpretation can be ascertained in Hegel’s assertion that Third world countries contain no history. Even Marx has been known to reject the history of Third World by advocating the primacy of Western historiography when he opined:

Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call history is but the history of its successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.

(Empire and Modern Political Thought 317)
In examining these assertions, it is evident that histories of the non-western world have been disparaged, and even eclipsed entirely in favour of the Western master discourses. Said’s lucid argument, as discussed earlier, over this interpretation of history has challenged the elitist model of historiography to allow the recognition of narratives beyond the confines of Western canon. It is only by putting the elitist renditions of history or the master narratives of the West under the scanner that any space can be created for the subaltern to speak. In attacking the use of master narratives, G.N. Devy in his seminal work *Of Many Heroes* (1998) has pointedly apprehended the application of master-narratives to analyze Indian literature. He intends to revitalize history writing which is devoid of a universalized western style that does not take into account the indigenous methods of history making. According to him, Indian literature is a complex phenomenon which can be addressed only by the tradition of ancient, medieval and modern India. According to him, “…the Western sense of history came to be considered in India as the universally valid sense of history” (*Of Many Heroes* 2). It has been a misconception that Indian historians have not furnished any historical artifact as they apparently lacked historical consciousness. In comparison to Greek or modern historical framework, the historic consciousness of India is invariably different and hence such a mistaken belief came into play. In order to debunk these false claims on Indian history, it is significant to trace the genesis of history-writing with respect to the aim of the thesis.

The present chapter will trace how universalization of history has been contested in India and will highlight the attempts made to formulate a paradigm of writing an authentic history. When the model of history-writing in India is investigated, it has been understood that it followed a dichotomous development. The traditional genres of history-writing in India have had two prime models:

One (model of history-writing) was derived from the cosmic histories of the Puranic or mythological tradition in Sanskrit, in which mythical stories about gods and goddesses merged unproblematically with dynastic histories of earthly kings and queens. The other was the court history tradition written mainly in Persian for the
Muslim rulers of India, which chronicled the deeds of kings and dynasties...

(The Cambridge History 485)

Nevertheless, these models of history were in time superseded during late nineteenth century through an “interlocution” with British histories of India, and such a step was initiated by the industrious efforts of Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhay who stated, “We must have our own History!” (The Cambridge History 485). In further debating on the model of Indian history, we come across the contentious binarism of history as in history defined as a ‘genre of knowledge” and history expounded as a “national practice”. The well-known historians namely Akshay Kumar Maitra and Bankim Chandra proposed contrasting models on which history-writing had to be based on. Firstly, according to Maitra:

...the need of a “correct and worthy history” had to be highlighted as “there was as yet no consensus in India on what history was and therefore no correct methodology of doing history…that education should henceforth be oriented towards training in ‘discovering, collecting, preserving and assessing levels of evidence...truth was a greater ideal than patriotism and the ethics of practice.

(Fabrications of History 291)

In this model of history as stated by Maitra, emphasis is laid on rigorous scrutiny of facts in order to create a legitimate record of Indian past. And in order to accomplish it, intense training and a methodology has to be framed to ensure history-writing is disciplined as a practice. In contrasting to this view, Bankim Chandra was of the opinion, that history should be “for and by all” suggesting that everyone can pitch in to write history without any regard to whether history being created is following a correct methodology or not. These two opinions of history-writing in India suggest the nuanced development of India historiography. Tracing the development of history-writing in India, further it is discovered that history in India had been a telling of the past, but there had also been a proposal which believed history
should also encompass “imagination (kalpnana)”. One of the advocates of this vision was Rabindranath Thakur who stated:

To be born in a particular nation was an accident...The territorial nation, therefore, itself could never become the true subject of history. The true subject of history was the nation that one imagined...the nation could never acquire an identity through knowledge of it, however scientific, such knowledge might be...

*(Fabrications of History 293)*

The claim here is that history should not only dictate how a nation was, but how a nation ought to be. An epistemological survey of Indian history cannot serve to declare the true identity of India. It is only by means of incorporating the past and the imagined future, that the real history of India and, thereby, its identity can be established. In only recording the past, and leaving no space for correcting this past and imagining a future, history fails to abide by its role of being a “witness of the past, the director of the future” (*Who were the Shudras* Vol 1). In doing so, it is also pertinent and highly important that history should be irrefutably encompassing with reference to the aboriginals and other marginalised communities. In the light of various critical opinions of history-writing vis-a-vis subaltern history, critics like Benoy Sarkar have further added:

Primitives were ignored by history, at its own peril because by doing so historicism failed to harness the creative intelligence of man...only by incorporating the primitive and the creative temporality that s/he represented, could the nation achieve ‘totality’ – for history is incomplete and quite unable to guess the future of mankind...so long as it (did) not concern itself with the whole of human life and its thousand and one
manifestations...(He further espoused) national unity was possible only through the study of “folk culture”.

(Fabrications of History 293)

As stated by Sarkar, primitives imply the aboriginals, the non-Aryans, and other marginalised communities whose history is preserved in the folk culture as in myths, legends, songs and other media of Orality. When these sources are included within the history of the nation, it is then only the authentic version of history can be created and legitimatised. In doing so, history needs to have an investigation and incorporation of folk culture, memory, oral and written accounts to serve as an encompassing whole. Such a construction of history and such a model of history writing allows for a scrutiny between “popularly fabricated past and professionally constructed histories” (Fabrications 3). In this paradigm, the indigenous models of history writing as in Orality is hence given credit which otherwise were obscured by the British and native elitist historians. According to prominent subaltern critics, “Regionalist histories were replaced by official elite history; the erasure of non-western models of history-writing facilitated the erasure of (marginalised communities) (Fabrications 234). In this discussion, it is hence evident that development of history has by definitive strides moved beyond the Western canon. The chapter now progresses towards finding how histories contested this homogenization beginning from Marx to Subaltern Studies. In doing so, the chapter aims to throw light on the Marxist paradigm of history-writing notably the views of Louis Althusser, Sartre and others to trace how the encompassing model of today’s historiography came into being. Louis Althusser attempted to check the incumbency of an imperialistically designed interpretation of history as ordained in the Marxist model. However his approach according to J.C. Young has been ambivalent as he on the surface recognized the subaltern histories but would still consider the Western Marxist model of imperialist history as legitimate. Taking Althusser as a representative of Marxist model, it can be argued that despite knowing the relevance of non-western histories, critics still legitimatized the western model of history. Moreover, Althusser was in contention to Sartre’s sympathy for Third World revolutions and also derided Fanon who attempted to rewrite the history of the wretched of the world. Consequently, he came across as an advocate of white Marxism and accordingly ignored the non-Western historiography of the indigenous
communities of the East. The question which this chapter proposes to ask is – how did historiography break away from this rigid structure of historiography?

The major impetus to an encompassing history came from the essays of Mao Tse-Tung who gave precedent to culture as the determinant of a superstructure than economy. In his activist writings, Mao addressed the cause of the peasants, the agrarian revolutions and anti-imperialistic revolutions of the Third World. This clearly heralded the study of cultures of indigenous populations, subordinated minorities, immigrants etc. and made prominent the issues of racism and other forms of discrimination. It invariably led to an awakening in the history writing of these subaltern cultures, and ushered in the era of Postcolonialism. The latter as a theory emphasized on the cultural composition of a base which stratified the society as high and low. Further it can be said that though Maoist ideology due to its misrepresentation and consequent fragmentation is seen as a symbol of atrocity, dictatorship and violence, however its revolutionary role in addressing the cause of the common people, the subaltern cannot be negated. It invariably spearheaded the disciplines of Postcolonialism and its localized terrain- Subaltern Studies. Sartre further commended the contribution of Maoist ideology, in reforming the paradigm of history-writing as the new model aims to document the history of common people where he asserted:

Maoists understand this and I agree with them...truth comes from the people. It is no longer a question of giving ideas to the masses, but of following their movement, going to search them out at their source and expressing them more clearly, if they consent to it...I wouldn’t dream of writing a book which would determine everything from beginning to end.

(White Mythologies 17)

Sartre, thus, highlighted how there has been a rejection of the deterministic, and universalized mode of historiography as this mode of historiography entailed a premeditated record of history which conveniently abandoned the people’s movement and disregarded their consciousness and culture. It was this conviction of Sartre that did not sit well with Althusser who only on the surface rejected the homogenization of history. As discussed
above, though Althusser rejected the Hegelian conception of Western history, but in theory he was against an inclusion of non-Western histories. Hence, ambivalent in his approach, he indicted Sartre for his articulation of subaltern histories as it conflicted with the homogenized model of history as ordained by Marxism. In this clash of elitist models of this and that mode of history, the subaltern was not being abandoned but ignored. What did the subaltern want, was not a concern in this rigmarole of Western and non-Western politics. The consequence as Young points out was, “It was never a case that the subaltern could not speak: rather that the dominant would not listen” (White Mythologies 5). Then it was pertinent to create a space in which the subaltern could be heard, and that space founded itself in Postcolonialism which in India enhanced itself as Subaltern Studies. Young has emphasized on this subaltern space that had been egregiously neglected by the Marxists and which came to be recognized with the beginning of Postcolonialism. He eloquently traces these breakthroughs which confirmed the need for a history of the oppressed:

The shift of the Third-world radical left, following Mao, towards peasant struggle, towards a politics of the subaltern, that is, all constituencies of the oppressed, exploited and disadvantaged on this earth, not simply one specific economic class of the industrialized countries, represents the major innovation of Marxist tricontinental thinking in the second half of the twentieth century, one which continues to inspire peasant movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America today, as well as providing the basics for much postcolonial politics.

(White Mythologies 15)

In the light of these insightful breakthroughs, the subaltern critics made a bold and formidable endeavor to seize the agency by which the marginalized community could rectify their identity, existence and history. Tracing, further, the genesis of subaltern historiography, the chapter highlights, how its first inception was marked by the deliberations of a group of historians of South Asia whose work appeared in 1982 in a series titled Subaltern Studies. Partha Chatterjee highlights the major progenitors of these series: “Amin and Chakrabarty 1996, Arnold and Hardiman 1994, Bhadra et al. 1999, Chatterjee and Jeganathan 2000,
Chatterjee and Pandey 1992, Guha 1982-9" (Empire and Nation 94). The critic further notes the original implication of the term ‘subaltern’ as employed by Gramsci who in his rendition of the term subaltern aimed to address the ‘history of the subaltern classes’. Subaltern critics in the course of their investigation rather reinvented the implication of the term - subaltern who earlier was used to identify the vassals and peasants and by 1700 denoted the low military ranks. In its contemporary notion, found in the discourses of Antonio Gramsci, the subaltern groups were defined as those masses who are relegated to the margins of the hegemonic structure. It can be further noted how Gramsci confronted this historical subjugation of the subalterns by the ruling class and paved the way for the genesis of subaltern historiography or history of subaltern groups:

The history of subaltern groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (unify the) historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern Groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up’ only ‘permanent’ victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately.

(Postcolonial Literature 172)

Here, Gramsci has emphasized on the significance of history which in case of subalterns has been disjointed and lacking an organic unity. The root cause of this social calamity is the interference of the elite class that has dictated the terms of subaltern history. How is one to apprehend this subversion of history? According to Gramsci it is only by means of a permanent resolution of this issue that the historical subordination of marginalized communities can be dealt with. The hijack of history hence is invariably linked to the subordination of subalterns. This school of thought was appropriated by the scholars of
Subaltern Studies to signify the mass of population who are deprived of an agency. In doing so, the binary opposition of bourgeois and the proletariat was transformed under the encompassing terms: elite and subaltern. This reference does not stand in opposition, as the notion of Subaltern Studies is to record both sides of the story than making history a lopsided harangue of one on the other. Consequently the subaltern is reclaimed and the objective is to expose the misrepresentation of the subaltern by the elite. Subaltern Studies, hence, rose as a school of thought deliberated on this new model of history-writing while appropriating the significant observations of Gramsci. Subaltern Studies rather in its development became a space where the discipline of history began to be re-imagined from the context of subaltern classes. It is pertinent to note that Gramsci utilized the term ‘subaltern’ to imply two senses:

In one, he used it as a code for the industrial proletariat...In the second sense, Gramsci talked of the subaltern classes in (the)... more general relationship of domination and subordination in class-divided societies...he wrote about the subordination of the peasantry. Gramsci was very critical of the negative and dismissive attitude of European Marxists....Positioning himself against this attitude, he wrote of ...the everyday lives and struggles of peasants, and of the need for revolutionary intellectuals to study and understand them... he also highlighted peasant consciousness (which) remained enveloped by the dominant ideologies of the ruling classes.

(Transnationale 94)

In these assertions, it is the second sense of the term Subaltern which was productively employed by the South Asian historians of Subaltern Studies. Accordingly they deliberated on: the life and struggle of the peasant; secondly, in doing so they countered the superficial assessment of the Marxists towards the peasants; and thirdly the impetus was to highlight the peasant, his consciousness and the peasant uprisings. It is through these dynamic deliberations, that the group began to rectify the fabrications of elitist historiography
as spearheaded by Ranajit Guha, who edited the first six volumes of Subaltern Studies, and also claimed, “The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism’ (Transnationale 95). While an endevour was being made to rewrite elitist history, the discourse on subaltern historiography was taken up by two groups – one which was located in the Cambridge, UK while the other were based in Delhi, India. The objective of subaltern historiography as propounded by the two groups was:

...to oppose the two elitisms. The former (group based in UK) argued that Indian nationalism was a bid for power by a handful of Indian elites who used the traditional bonds of caste and communal ties to mobilize the masses against British rule. The latter (group based in India) spoke of how the material conditions of colonial exploitation created the ground for an alliance of the different classes in Indian society and how a nationalist leadership inspired and organized the masses to join the struggle for national freedom.

(Transnationale 95)

Ranajit Guha contested these critical viewpoints on subaltern historiography as hinging on an elitist view and asserted that:

...the former representing a colonial elitism and the latter a nationalist elitism. Both assumed that nationalism was wholly a product of elite action. Neither history had any place for the independent political actions of the subaltern classes.

(Empire and Nation 288)

While dissecting these elitist views, historians of Subaltern Studies began to address two fundamental issues vis-a-vis subaltern classes. The first focus was to emphasize on the
difference between the political methods of colonial/nationalist elites and those of the subaltern classes, while the second area of concern was autonomy of subaltern consciousness. In establishing these claims, Chatterjee notes that the conflict was not only towards the declarations of the colonial historians but also nationalist historians as both believed that subaltern consciousness was something imported and not an integral, and self-formed aspect of the subaltern. Highlighting these issues, Chatterjee opines:

Pursuing the first question, the historians of Subaltern Studies showed that the claim of colonialist historians that the Indian masses had been, so to speak, duped into joining the anti-colonial movement by Indian elites using primordial ties of kinship and clientelism was false. They also showed that it was untrue to say, as nationalist historians did, that the political consciousness of the subaltern classes was only awakened by the ideals and inspiration provided by nationalist leaders.

(*Empire and Nation* 290-91)

Understandably, the second question progressed towards asking, “What was the source of its (subaltern politics) autonomy (if it was different from elite politics)? (Further) What were the principles of that politics?”(*Empire* 291). In revisiting these moot enquiries, the analyses led to the generally ignored aspect of a subaltern – subaltern consciousness. According to Chatterjee, subaltern consciousness is the realization of the subaltern of his exploitation at the hands of the elite and it is this consciousness which is manifested in a subaltern insurgency, say, a peasant revolt. It can hence be said, “(subaltern) consciousness evolves out of the experiences of subordination—out of the struggle, despite the daily routine of servitude, exploitation and deprivation, to preserve the collective identity of subaltern groups” (*Empire* 292). In further, speaking about subaltern and subaltern consciousness, Gayatri Spivak has also highlighted how subaltern consciousness has been the major thematic concern of Subaltern Studies project. She has averred:
Reading the work of Subaltern Studies from within...I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and “situate” the effect of the subject as a subaltern.

(In Other Worlds 205)

In light of these arguments, the question that hence, arose was which sources, historical records and papers should be researched to identify the authentic evidence of this consciousness as asserted by Chatterjee:

Where was one to look for the evidence of this autonomous consciousness? It could not be found in the bulk of the archival material that historians conventionally use, because that material had been prepared and preserved by and for the dominant groups. For the most part, those documents only show the subaltern as subservient. It is only at moments of rebellion that the subaltern appears as the bearer of an independent personality. When the subaltern rebels, the masters realize that the servant too has a consciousness, has interests and objectives, methods and organization. If one had to look for evidence of an autonomous subaltern consciousness in the historical archives, then it would be found in the documents of revolt and counterinsurgency.

(Empire and Nation 292)

Realizing that official records as scripted by the dominant groups, were suppressing the notion that subaltern could have a consciousness, the only record of it could be found in the documents of revolt and counterinsurgency. It was this realization of discovering and scrutinizing the authentic documents of subaltern revolt, that the first phase of Subaltern Studies found its establishment. In tracing the development of subaltern historiography, it has
been found that this first phase of Subaltern Studies was resplendent with the theme of peasant revolt which was firmly inaugurated by Ranajit Guha's seminal text *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983). This project faced many obstructions due to lack of verified sources, nevertheless a sincere attempt was being made to rewrite and reclaim the history of peasant revolts from various regions of the India. A scrutiny of the widely available official documents of peasant revolt was hence taken up by the historians to attack the vicious eclipse of subaltern history vis-a-vis the peasants and peasant revolts. It was discovered that elite historians had given a hyperbolic or metaphorical representation of the peasant revolt while severely ignoring the subaltern consciousness of the peasant as something which was real than metaphysical. Hence, it can be said that the first phase of Subaltern Studies which embarked on the rectification of official history paved the way for creating a space for the subaltern to speak. Chatterjee notes the seminal contribution of subaltern historians in this area to trace the aspects which together formed an encompassing model of subaltern historiography:

Writing about peasant revolts in British India, Ranajit Guha (1983) and Gautam Bhadra (1994) showed how this powerful strand of anticolonial politics, launched independently of bourgeois-nationalist leaders, had been denied its place in established historiography. Gyanendra Pandey (1984, 1990), David Hardiman (1984), Sumit Sarkar (1984) and Shahid Amin (1995) wrote about the two domains of elite and subaltern politics as they came together in the nationalist movement led by the Congress. Dipesh Chakrabarty (1989) wrote about a similar split between elite and subaltern politics in the world of the urban working class. Partha Chatterjee (himself) (1986, 1993) traced the development of nationalist thought in India in terms of the separation of elite and subaltern politics and the attempts by the former to appropriate the latter.

(*Empire and Nation* 293)
The thrust of these deliberations was to underscore how the subaltern despite being a cardinal part of India’s history was but detached from its making and allotted only a meagre space. It is in this early phase of Subaltern Studies, that model of ‘history from below ‘was established. Further, realizing that subaltern consciousness could not be recovered as the plethora of documents available on it were elitist in production, Subaltern Studies entered a new phase. This progress was launched by the understanding that subaltern histories due to the elitist interference and intrusions were “fragmentary, disconnected, incomplete, that subaltern consciousness was split within itself, that it was constituted by elements drawn from the experiences of both dominant and subordinate classes,” hence the major impulse of this project shifted from “what is the true from of the subaltern” to “How is the subaltern represented” (Empire 295). It is in this new phase that Subaltern Studies experienced new changes and transformations. To add more, the emphasis on peasant revolt was then opened up to include more subjects and the entire realm of knowledge production in colonial India was placed under the scrutiny of subaltern history. Chatterjee notes these defining shifts in subaltern history-writing where the institutions which otherwise were hidden from the scrutiny of history-writing were hence put under the radar of subaltern history:

Much studied subjects such as the expansion of colonial governance, English education, movements of religious and social reform, the rise of nationalism—all of these were opened to new lines of questioning by the historians of Subaltern Studies. The other direction of research concentrated on the modern state and public institutions through which modern ideas of rationality and science and the modern regime of power were disseminated in colonial and postcolonial India. In other words, institutions such as schools and universities, newspapers and publishing houses, hospitals, doctors, medical systems, censuses, registration bureau, the industrial labor process, scientific institutions—all of these became subjects of subaltern history-writing.

(Empire and Nation 296)
While analysing the discourses on knowledge production which were elitist in nature, and in further examining them as carrying an official sanction, the project of Subaltern Studies hence found a mutual link with Postcolonialism. Postcolonialism highlights the discrimination faced by the Orient due to the unaccountable power of the elite. It is concerned with the Orientalist model of colonizer/colonized as spearheaded by Edward Said in his phenomenal book *Orientalism* (1979). It attacks the false rendering of knowledge about the native communities and their codification as inferior races. To challenge this colonial epistemology, Said and other post colonial critics such as Cesaire, Fanon and Memmi confronted the binary opposition of elitist colonizers and native colonized. This same concern has also been shared rather amplified by the Subaltern Studies group in subverting the elitist prejudice against the aboriginals of India. Subaltern Studies localized this struggle to address the racial conflict in India. If post-colonial critics discourse on the repercussions of colonial-colonized dichotomy, then the Subaltern critics investigate the cause and consequence of elite-subaltern bifurcation primarily in South Asia.

Throwing light on this affinity, David Ludden in the Introduction to *Reading Subaltern Studies* (2002) has also remarked on this affinity between the analysis of post-colonialism and Subaltern Studies. According to his claim, “Subaltern historians and post-colonial critics stand together against colonial modernity to secure a better future for subaltern people, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalize them, documenting their past” (*Reading* 20). Gayatri Spivak, the co-editor of *Subaltern Studies* volume has in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* meticulously attempted to invest the subaltern with a historical agency (Spivak 271-313). It is in speaking out against the victimization that according to Spivak, the subaltern can address their situation. This protest however shouldn’t be fragmented or episodic rather if it is to persevere then the demand is for a collective action. This collective action is what Homi Bhabha reiterates in regard to subaltern resistance. He has emphasized the importance of social power relations in defining subaltern social groups. He declares that the presence of the subaltern minority group serves to define the majority and that the former have the command to undermine those in power (*Encyclopedia* 823). Bhabha also affirms to the Gramscian notion that, “subaltern classes are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a State” (*Subalterinity and Representation* 133).
It is in these discourses by major postcolonial critics such as Said, Spivak and Bhabha that Subaltern Studies has become a major element of Postcolonial Studies. So much so, according to Dipesh Chakraborthy, “Subaltern Studies could be seen as a postcolonial project of writing history” which further attests to the common ground between Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies (Nepantla 9-32). Hence, in appreciating the affinity between Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies, it can be claimed that both intend to expose the epistemic stratagems which justify elitism. Hence, if race was seen as a sanctioned tool of discrimination, in the Indian context, Subaltern Studies began to investigate the social malaise of caste, for instance, to expose the complicity between high caste and knowledge production. Further, Subaltern Studies or subaltern historiography began to delve into the arena of — “religious minorities, caste and gender” in order to destabilise the institutions of power and highlight how they have and continue to relegate the subaltern to the fringes (Empire 239).

In the light of this development of Subaltern historiography, it is pertinent to note, that though Subaltern Studies is credited to have employed the Gramscian notion of subaltern, before its inception it is to E.P. Thomson’s work The Making of the English Working Class (1963) that the recognition is given for pioneering the trend of writing about the neglected histories of low classes. Thereafter, Eric Stokes’s book The Peasant and the Raj (1978) revisited the peasant struggle in the colonial history. In India this movement of writing on histories of below began at the end of 1970. Edward Said, in the foreword to Selected Subaltern Studies (1988) embraced this project by stating, “(its) a self conscious part of the vast post-colonial cultural and critical effort” which aims to retrieve the subaltern history, a history that is, “in literal fact…a narrative missing from the official history of India” (Selected Subaltern vii-viii). In deliberating on the aspect of official history, it is clearly evidential that there has been a supremacy of elitist account of past. It hence can be inferred that official history needs a re-visioning to rehabilitate the history of the subaltern. Edward Said has further espoused this aim of the project and has acknowledged the role of the subaltern critics in, “understanding the need of a new historiography …Indian history has had been written from a colonialist and elitist point of view, whereas a large part of Indian history had been made by the subaltern classes…” (Selected Subaltern v).
Reiterating the findings of this chapter, it has been observed how the narrative representing the subaltern emerged in the second half of the 20th century making inception of subaltern history a fairly recent phenomenon. The primal step in its expression has been abstaining from the Western and elitist depiction of subaltern communities and embracing the oral lore immersed in the fabric of rural, or rustic, or otherwise mainstream India. Hence, subaltern has become an epithet for a person or a community that has been denied its existential voice, and subaltern has emerged as a voice to forge a dialogic base between the elitist factions and the subaltern communities. In radical contrast with Marxist models, subaltern history has emphasized on the mode of history from below which is seen as a progressive advancement on the erstwhile models. The endeavour has been to record the voice common people who were but most insidiously deleted from official documents. It is this eclipse that gave an impression that subalterns do not have a history to begin with. The subaltern, for instance, the peasants of India have recurrently raised their voice against the elitist factions, and have consciously executed insurgencies for the freedom of the masses yet the organic struggle of these subalterns find no mention in the official history. It is in the inclusion of these histories that the model of subaltern history was formulated that hence follows ‘history from below’.

An exhaustive overview of the development of subaltern historiography shows that there has been a progress in the field of historiography as it has evolved from being a secluded and a separatist representation of the elite into an encompassing mirror of the subaltern as a whole. The present study has addressed the disengagement of subaltern history from the official accounts, which renders the subaltern vulnerable to misrepresentation, and consequent subjugation. From Marxist to Subaltern discourse, history has transited from being a homogenous account of the elite to a multitudinous account of the subalterns. It has also been analyzed how from Marxism to Subaltern studies, History is generally taken at its face value, especially if formulated by the elite authority. Under these circumstances, the subalterns who are misrepresented by the elite remain a scapegoat. It is in consideration of these putative reasons, the need to rectify and reclaim subaltern history is paramount.
I

I.1. Mahasweta Devi as a Subaltern Historian

The groundwork objective of the present study has been to analyze Mahasweta Devi’s radical and pioneering role in reclaiming the past of the subalterns, rehabilitating their lives for a better future and apprehending the germ of marginalization in India. Mahasweta Devi seeks a rehabilitated future of the subalterns and as such has prosecuted the culprits to expose their insidious hand in relegating the subaltern to the margins. The author has highlighted the rich oral lore of the tribals with the aim of rehabilitating their history and to recover the identity of the tribals. The emergency behind her endeavor lies in the backdrop of the criminalization of the adivasis society by the British and hence her endeavour to cleanse the modern India of this recurring colonial ‘stigma’ which has continued to resuscitate itself. Devi has listened to the orality of the tribals and other marginalized communities and has accordingly rectified the gaping errors of written histories. During her conversation with Gayatri Spivak, the critic notes how the author considers it to be a personal responsibility to record the past of the subaltern else it will be forgotten, lost and fabricated for generations at end. Mahasweta Devi’s zeal, anxiety, and fervent determination to document a subaltern past can be discerned in her words:

I had such a great asthirata in me such restlessness; an udbeg, this anxiety: I have to write, somehow I have to document this period which I have experienced because it is going way, it is vanishing...

(Chotti Munda 367)

It is in the author’s tireless efforts to reclaim the subaltern past, that one can analyze Mahasweta Devi’s oeuvre as an epitome of social activism. The author has arrested the falsification of official histories, thereby indicting the elitist makers of these false narratives. She has cross-checked official histories by weighing them from the yardstick of oral sources
as in myths, legends, folklores, and songs etc to create a subaltern history which is encompassing and authentic. As a champion of the cause of the tribal communities of India, Mahasweta is determined to correct the fabrications of history by revisiting elite history, resurrecting the power of orality, and hence creating a subaltern history by listening to the subaltern. As a formidable voice of the marginalized communities, she has apprehended the system of caste that has been an instrument of the elite to suppress the subaltern. In exposing the colonial roots of racism, Mahasweta hence has also exposed the native roots of discrimination which has assaulted the very existence of the low castes and tribal masses. Consequently, the author has actively committed herself to the salvation of the subaltern masses from the stigma of racial parochialism. She has represented the lives of the marginalized to underscore the race hierarchies that polarize the society into high and low during colonial and post-colonial times. In her works, one begins to comprehend that the adivasis, for instance, may have been criminalized by the colonial regime but the racism that continues to this day among the high and low castes of India is perpetrated by the native bourgeoisie of India. Fanon in his prominent work *Wretched of the Earth* (1956) has attacked this colonial ideology of the native bourgeoisie who first fought the colonizers, freed their country and when the reins were in their hands, they used this power to augment their own status and portfolio. What Fanon states is the genesis of polarization in post-colonial societies:

…the cracks in the edifice (of national consciousness)…is not solely the result of the mutilation of the colonized people by the colonial regime. It is also the result of the intellectual laziness of the national middle class…The national bourgeoisie of under-developed countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour…The national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement.

*(Wretched of the Earth 152)*

It can be aptly inferred from these words of Fanon, just as the low castes and the tribals were dehumanized by the colonizers in the colonial India, they are meted out with the same treatment by the elites of post-colonial India. It is a mortifying fact that the tribals are not considered citizens of the country and if they are then the rights and privileges of a citizen
are not provided to them. They have been conveniently erased from the map of India owing to the deeply entrenched bigotry of caste. To effectively right this wrong, Mahasweta has methodically exposed this travesty of India in her works:

Globalization is not only coming from America and first world, my own country has always wanted to rob the people…The tragedy of India at independence was not introducing thorough land reform. A basic feudal land system was allowed to stay… A feudal value system is anti-women, anti-poor people, against toiling people.

*(Chotti Munda and His Arrow xv)*

In noting these assertions of Devi, it is pertinent to note that India in this era of modernity is still ravaged by the brutal systems of prejudice, discrimination and hate as there has not been an effective mandate to correct the errors of the past. In her works, the author has traced these abominable discrepancies from pre-colonial to postcolonial era due to which her works stand as a mirror of our present society. The novels taken in the chapter, for instance, are a testimony to why a subaltern has been marginalized, why still this subjugation persists and in what ways can the present government and the society at large rectify the same. In her works, the thesis has analyzed that Devi does not resolve these matters by identifying the subaltern in isolation or by attacking the elite in isolation. It is by investigating the relationship between subaltern and the elite that Devi has attempted to show that only by mutual reconciliation, and mutual address of discrimination, can the country find an answer to its conflicts. In refocusing the voice of the subaltern, Mahasweta Devi has hence explored the relationship between the subaltern and the elite. If the tragedy of India is to be resolved then the solution should emanate from both the sides than being a lopsided affair of redress. Lata Mani in this regard has posed a conclusive method in accessing the voice of the subaltern when she opines:

The question ‘Can the Subaltern speak?’ then is perhaps better posed as a series of questions: Which group constitutes the
subalterns in any text? What is their relationship to each other? How can they be heard to be speaking or not speaking in any given set of materials? With what effects?

(Cultural Studies 403)

These are straight questions which a subaltern critic begins with in his/her investigation. It is by knowing the subalterns can one approach the question of subaltern history. It is also imperative to know the relation of the subaltern with the elite, otherwise the chord of dissension cannot be located and addressed. Then finally what are the means by which the historical documentation can allow the subalterns to speak and be heard by the masses. Mahasweta Devi manifests these questions in her investigation. She emphasizes on the ‘dynamic relationship’ between the elite/subaltern and the variety of social hierarchies that influence this relationship. This binarism cannot be studied in isolation of the socio-economic factors, and only by invoking the latter into the discussion can the historiography entail a holistic assessment of the subaltern voice. Mahasweta has in this respect painstakingly explored the relationship between the elites and the subalterns with respect to the myriad ‘forces and discourses’ that interplay with these hierarchies (Postcolonialism/Colonialism 200).

The thesis further proposes to highlight Mahasweta Devi as being well versed with the principles of writing a subaltern history. Her attempt has been to highlight the gross demotion of the subalterns from the mainstream history. It is acknowledged that the indigenous communities, for instance do not have a written script, which hence engenders the need to write a subaltern history so the masses may know the truth. The history of the aboriginals is present in the oral sources as myths, legends, folklores and so on, hence only by recording these, the written history of the tribal can be engendered from the vantage of truth. It is due to this, Mahasweta Devi has emphasized the need to preserve Orality and has signified its importance as a corroborative tool in rectifying written histories. In her works hence we find how she intends to recover the voice of the tribals, for instance, and has actively endeavored to balance the use of oral and written histories to inform a subaltern history. She claims:
Mainstream Society is carrying on a continuous, shrewd and systematic assault on his(tribal) social system, his culture, his ever tribal identity and existence…History should be re-written, acknowledging the debt of mainstream India to struggles of the tribals in the British and even pre-British days. The history of their struggles is not to be found only in written scripts but in their songs, dances, folktales, passed from one generation to another. So much of it has perished with the people who have died with all this history carefully protected in the very depths of their hearts. But so much still exits.

*(Dust on the Road 109)*

The author has situated the subaltern history in her works while carefully assessing her materials and has investigated sources which are authentic. As discussed, Devi has employed written as well as oral sources to vehemently expose the ploys of the elite in silencing an entire community from existence. To check the surge of false histories and criminal representations, she has attacked the shocking obliteration of knowledge about the subalterns, and has developed an epistemology that is of and for the subalterns. In this endeavour, Devi has reiterated the importance of Orality and how it serves as an ally of subaltern history to hear the subaltern speak. Mahasweta Devi has explored oral sources with an ethical integrity as has been declared by her:

I have always believed the real history is made by ordinary people… in various forms of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people…the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human veins…my writing is really their doing (hence asserting that the subaltern is infact the maker of his own history).

*(Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels 24)*
It is self-evident in these words that Mahasweta Devi intends to rewrite history and make the subaltern a maker of his/her history. It is also evident that Orality in the form of folklore, ballads and so on holds a greater significance for her, and she intends to keep it alive in the modern India, as it is in Orality, the voice of the subaltern can be retrieved. The author has considered history as a powerful medium to address the subalternization of the ethnic communities of India and to rectify it, she has highlighted the need to go back to the roots – the oral sources. This makes her a staunch subaltern historian which in the social activism of Subaltern Studies is considered an important element of study. According to subaltern critics, the role of the historian or a writer is paramount. The writer has the onus to research his materials, examine them from the foci of critical standards and then chart history to correct history. Spivak emphasizes that the work of Subaltern Studies historians has sought to correct, “the class and gender blindness of elite bourgeois national independence in India by re-writing history from below…there are numerous other examples of subaltern resistance to colonial rule and class oppression from the eighteenth century onwards, but these are largely unreported in the annals of official history” (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 6).

The momentous incidents of subaltern resistance have found little or absent record in history. A writer who aims to reinvent subaltern history hence has to recover these records from Orality and other legitimate sources. It is this sole objective and its successful adherence by a writer that the genuineness of subaltern history can be retrieved. The colonial historian Fernando Coronil has also affirmed that the objective of a historian is “to listen to the subaltern subjects”, and “to interact with their voices…the power to narrate somebody’s story is heavy task, and we must be cautious and aware of the complications involved” (“Listening to the Subaltern”15). These observations have been aptly discerned in the writings of Mahasweta Devi who has made a conscious effort to record the voice of the subaltern and hence destabilize the dirty stratagems of the elite which suppressed the subaltern.

In this agenda to voice the subaltern and to develop an authentic history, there is yet another crucial point which is raised by Ania Loomba when she questions, “objectivity (is) possible, or are we merely ventriloquising our own concerns when we make the subaltern speak?”(Postcolonialism/Colonialism 202). Understandably, be it the colonialist discourse about the tribals or the oral lore of the tribals, they are discovered and narrated by the scholar,
historian or the critic. In this scale of mediation, can the voice of the subaltern be accessed? To this note, Gloria Jean Watkins describes the adverse relation between the academic and the subaltern to highlight how by punctuating one’s own agendas in the guise of hearing the subaltern, the entire enterprise of empowering the subaltern fails most wretchedly. Watkins observes:

(There is) no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better that you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority, I am still (the) colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.

(“Marginality as a Site of resistance” 241-43)

Gloria Watkins, as observed above, represents a shocking picture. The writer in rewriting the history mustn’t abuse his power to become the elite he is supposed to dismantle. It can either happen by intention or unintentionally, hence the writer should realize the importance of rewriting official history otherwise he will imitate the authority, he intends to dismantle. Subaltern critics have emphasized on a cardinal rule of writing a historiography. They have opined, “the subaltern is the maker of his own history and the architect of his destiny…the subaltern groups are to write that history and oppose elitism through the detailed intensity of their scrutiny of the past record no matter how great the difficulties posed by the recovery of information about the past” (Reading 192). In this statement, it becomes clear what the essential prerequisite is before embarking on the social enterprise of writing a history. There should be an authentic collection of materials that stand the test of critical methods. The position of the subaltern should not be consigned to the margins of elitist history. It is to his autonomy and to the recovery of his voice that the focus of Subaltern Studies premises on. This is the aim of the author taken in the present study. In the novels considered the objective is to stress on deconstructing the polemics of subaltern historiography with special reference to the rectification of elite history and how Orality serves as an ally of subaltern history to correct the violence of official history.
1.2 Methodology of the Research

The research employed in the thesis is analytical in nature. It is based on a critical investigation of Mahasweta Devi’s novels which serve as primary sources while the critical books, research papers, journals, articles and online content are used as secondary sources. In addition to this, the research has employed the theoretical analysis of Subaltern Studies which critique on the dichotomous rendering of history as in official history and unofficial history. In the former, precedence is given to records and documents of the elite and their methods of writing as well as interpreting history. In the latter, the histories of the marginalized, disadvantaged and underprivileged classes are brought to the forefront following the model of inclusion than exclusion. The procedure of inquiry has been to analyze the theoretical framework of Subaltern Studies and apply the same on the selected novels of Mahasweta Devi. Furthermore, as Mahasweta Devi has employed oral sources to rewrite history and make an informed subaltern history, the role of Orality in creating a subaltern history has also been analyzed in the thesis. In this respect, Orality as a means of communication, protest and preservation of identity has been substantially investigated in the selected novels of the author.

It is known that the emergence of Subaltern Studies as an interaction between elite and subaltern has moved beyond the Gramscian notion. Gramsci, according to many scholars, employed the word subaltern as a code word for proletariat and his foundation was based on class. While some critics argue that the term is embedded in the conception of race, religion ethnicity as is evident in his claim, “Often subaltern groups are originally of a different race (different religion and different culture) than the dominant groups, and they are often a mixture of different races” (“Race, Class and Religion” 116). In Subaltern Studies, the attempt is to emphasize on the latter claim by investigating the broader implications of the word subaltern in race, religion and in India as caste. In the light of David Ludden’s assertion that Subaltern Studies is re-inventing Indian subalternty, the agenda of Subaltern Studies and therefore of the thesis is to study two types of history, ‘one, a people’s history
The discourse of Subaltern Studies has been applied on Mahasweta’s selected fictional works to approach the polemical context of elite history. The attempt has been to forge a history that reclaims the past of the subalterns. In the thesis, the tenets of Subaltern Studies have been investigated in order to highlight the issues pivotal to Mahasweta Devi such as – representation, subaltern history, oral sources and caste. In the narrative of the Indian society with special reference to pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial era, the official history has conveniently excluded the record of indigenous communities. This official history in the discipline of Subaltern Studies is referred to as the elite history. In order to rectify the bankruptcy of elite history, and reclaim the past of the indigenous communities, the critics and scholars of Subaltern Studies have meticulously brought forth an authentic account of India’s past. This re-visioned history is called subaltern history. The attempt has been to revisit the official narratives, artifacts and historical documents of official historiography and render a voice to the forgotten and misrepresented tribes and low classes of India. The objective is to record the authentic and legitimate history of the ethnic communities who have been either grossly misrepresented or forgotten in the national history of India.

Gyan Prakarsh, a prominent Subaltern critic, has attempted to resolve the issue of mapping Indian history in the realm of post-Orientalist historiography. He claims that it is, “hazardous to pose let alone answer, the question as to how the third world writes it own post- Orientalist history” and his attempt has been to map the positions in which Indian history is written from the locus of post- Orientalist historiography (Mapping Subaltern Studies 164). Ranajit Guha in his critical inquiry has investigated the two elitist makings of Indian history. He was opposed to the view held by one school of critics that Indian nationalism was a bid of power and was also apprehensive of the view that it was an alliance of Indian elites with the British. According to him:
…both these views were elitist—the former representing a colonial elitism and the latter a national elitism. Both assumed that nationalism was wholly a product of elite action. Neither history had any place for the independent political actions of the subaltern classes.

(Empire and Nation)

Partha Chatterjee, similarly, claims that the agenda of Subaltern Studies hence became to rectify these two elitisms by firstly exploring the difference in the political objectives of colonial/nationalist elites and subaltern classes and secondly to emphasize on the autonomy of subaltern consciousness. In this issue of consciousness, Gayatri Spivak has brought forth a revisioned notion of subalternity. She has claimed, “Subaltern Studies does not deal only with subaltern consciousness and action; it is just as important to see how the subaltern are fixed in their subalternity by the elite” (Morris Reflecting on the History).

Dipesh Chakraborthy has explored the connection of subaltern past with the present. His objective is to assert that subaltern past includes a notion of contemporaneity and that the present is hence an indicator of the past and is not isloated from it. Dipesh claims that this is the basis of modern historiography. He utilizes the examples of medieval history and states that the modern Europe has elements of medieval history and it links the past with the present. In his words:

…writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself. Making visible the disjuncture is what subaltern pasts allow us to do. An argument such as this is at the heart of modern historiography. One could argue that the writing of medieval history for Europe depends on this assumed contemporaneity of the medieval, or what is the same thing, the noncontemporaneity of the present with
itself. The medieval in Europe is often strongly associated with the supernatural and the magical. But what makes the historicizing of it possible is the fact that its basic characteristics are not completely foreign to us as modern… (that is) historicizing the medieval (and) seeing it as contemporary with the present.

(Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference 109)

Sumit Sarkar in his analysis of the genesis of Subaltern Studies to its current form has asked for a return to the original implication of Subaltern Studies. In his view, the question of subalternity has become diluted in the contemporary plethora of criticism while the original emphasis has declined. He states, “The achievements of the early years of Subaltern Studies in terms of widening horizons and concrete historical research need to be rescued, perhaps from the recent condescension of recent adherents like Gyan Prakarsh who dismiss such works as ‘the familiar history from blow’ approach” (Reading 402). Sarkar emphasizes on the foundational theory of making a subaltern history which was given by Gramsci and was emphatically reiterated by Guha. It is his attempt to assert on the original tenets of Subaltern Studies that though were idealistic but are worth striving for. Guha had appropriated the six-point methodological criteria which Sarkar notes as:

1. The objective formation of the subaltern social groups, by the developments and transformation occurring in the sphere of economic production…
2. Their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own…
3. The birth of new parties of the dominant groups, intended to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character;
4. Those new formations which assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the old framework;
5. Those formations which assert the integral autonomy…etc.

(“The Decline of Subaltern in Subaltern Studies” 406)
In the purview of these important critics and more, the attempt of the thesis is to highlight the significance of subaltern history. The target is to analyze the credo of Subaltern Studies and apply the same on the selected novels of Mahasweta Devi. Mahasweta Devi, as discussed above, has been an indomitable advocator of reclaiming the past of the tribals and low castes of India. She has in her lifetime of activist writings avowed to empower the subaltern communities of India. As an author and a historian she has questioned the power structure that has inhibited and silenced the subalterns. Mahasweta Devi’s ethnographic activism which is premised on historical documentation is abundantly evocative in her works. As an author she weaves a piquant narrative about the culture of the tribals and as a historian, Mahasweta comes forth as a ‘subaltern historian and ‘becomes an arbiter of values’ (Reading 190). It’s her raison d’être to brazen out the polemics of subaltern historiography by the ‘novel use of historical sources as a prelude to establishing the subaltern as the agent of historical change’ (Reading 220).

In this spirit of situating a subaltern history, Mahasweta has time and again declared, “I have always been driven by a strong sense of history… (and) In all my writings I have tried to present the subaltern point of view (The Queen of Jhansi 321). The author has hence equipped the subaltern with an agency to articulate his voice. The objective of her works is to render the silenced community of subalterns with a voice. Mahasweta Devi is determined to reclaim a subaltern historiography that apprehends the racist portrayal of tribals, peasants, untouchables, and other low classes of India. She has revisited the polemics of subaltern history in the labyrinthine system of colonial and postcolonial history. Further, Devi has employed Orality to substantiate and corroborate the written texts in order to furnish a subaltern history.

Consequently, the target of the research is to examine the parameters of Subaltern Historiography in the selected novels of Mahasweta Devi. The research has been undertaken to analyze the novels from the perspective of a subaltern history and how this inclusive model of history serves as a voice for the marginalized communities of India. As a result, the research also addresses writer’s emphasis on an encompassing history and how sources from written to oral should be meticulously scrutinized to serve as records of history. The objective of this research has been to investigate the polemics of re-writing history, exposing the
discriminatory practices which distort history and to highlight the subaltern as a maker of his/her own history. These pertinent issues have been examined to envisage Mahasweta Devi as a subaltern historian and in the course of the research a new methodology has been undertaken which has not been dealt with to the best of researcher’s knowledge.

1.2.a. Objective of the Research


Further, the thesis attempts to rectify the misrepresentation of the subaltern communities and apprehends the official history of India. It aims at examining Subaltern History as envisaging an inclusive model of historiography; investigating the position of Mahasweta Devi as a subaltern historian; emphasizing on the importance of Orality and distinguish its types; focusing on the dichotomous relationship between the elite and subaltern and how to bridge the gap; and analyzing the theoretical grounds of Subaltern Studies in the selected fictional works of Mahasweta Devi.

In the aspect of representation, it is the foremost concern of the author to research authentic documentation about the marginalized communities. In order to attest to this endeavor, Mahasweta has actively analyzed the historical record available and unavailable. She has taken into consideration the feudal accounts, the colonial and bourgeoisie accounts of subalterns, and has rectified the same for an authentic making of subaltern history. In this meticulous procedure the role of the writer vis-a-vis the subaltern is also examined from a critical point of view. There have been many debates on this issue of authority of subaltern history. Hence, subaltern critics have deliberated on the subaltern as the maker of his history
and how a writer is a facilitator of this enterprise. Mahasweta Devi’s role as a writer and a spokesperson of the subaltern is investigated in the criticism rendered on her works.

The sine qua non of the polemics of subaltern history is the relationship between subaltern and elite. The present study argues from the viewpoint of subaltern and postcolonial critics the cause and effect of racist prejudice between subaltern and elite. The root cause in regard to Indian society is caste and its effect is marginalization, polarization and commodification of subaltern communities. The intricate aspects of this kinship are discussed in detail to do justice to the facts and contemporary relevance of the issue. The author in her works has diligently exposed the gravity of the racial parochialism prevalent in Indian society. The aim will be to address this issue and seek in the works of Mahasweta Devi a resolution of this social problem.

Orality is the most authentic site of historical investigation. Mahasweta Devi has evaluated the written sources of subaltern history from the model of oral tradition. The author has explored the lives and livelihood of the tribals in order to know them and then in accordance of this knowledge write their history. The question is not of which medium of historical record is superior but the legitimacy of the medium. Her works have incorporated the written scripts and the oral lore as sources and evidence. In her dialogic approach, the result is the reclaiming of subaltern history than being an artifact of a monologue. In this interactive mode, the works are recognized for their veracity and realistic portrayal of subaltern. Due to the inclusion of the Orality, the subalterns have been armed to speak up about their traditions, rich folklore and identity without any hindrance of middlemen historians.

The study hence aims to explore Mahasweta Devi’s three-pronged attack on the Indian society. She apprehends the system and questions it, and her stance can be surmised as under:

- The objective of Mahasweta Devi is to rectify the criminal histories of the indigenous communities of India. She intends to reclaim their past thereby rehabilitating these
subalternized sections of our society. History has been her prime motivator as she has claimed herself and writing a subaltern history has been the cardinal focus of her activist writings.

- The purpose of her writings has been to question Indian nationalism which has united the masses irrespective of caste, then how come the subaltern masses are still criminalized and disenfranchised? It has been her motive to unequivocally arrest the scourge of caste-system in India that has been responsible for the mass discrimination of the subaltern communities be it by the feudal landlords or the colonialists. It is this bigotry which was shared by the native intellectuals as well as the British colonialists, that has rendered null and void the histories of the subalterns in India. And the author intends to challenge this status quo and re-write the official narrative to empower the voice of the subaltern.

- Mahasweta Devi wishes to resurrect the importance of Orality, wherein the existence of the tribal is preserved and continued in a legacy. The author has collected materials for her writings mainly from the medium of Orality, as the tribals do not have a script. It is her endeavor to preserve this tradition otherwise its loss can endanger the history of the aboriginals in India.

The discourse of Subaltern Studies shall be applied on Mahasweta’s selected fictional works to approach the polemical context of elite history. The attempt shall be to forge a history that reclaims the past of the subalterns. In the thesis, the tenets of Subaltern Studies shall be investigated in order to highlight the issues pivotal to Mahasweta Devi and to represent Mahasweta Devi as a subaltern historian.

It is in the purview of these rules and methods of Subaltern Studies, that the selected works of Mahasweta Devi will be appraised to rectify, reclaim and rehabilitate the subaltern history.

1.2. b. Scope and Limitation of the Research
Scope

The thesis attempts to highlight the implication of Subaltern History in the context of subaltern communities as in the aboriginals, the low castes and other disadvantaged classes of India. It addresses the need to reclaim subaltern history which apprehends the damaging social stratification of society that has empowered one community and has ostracized the other.

Further the focus of the research is to explore how Devi has revisited the polemics of re-writing history in the labyrinthine system of colonial and postcolonial era. The thesis in the purview of this analysis contextualizes eight novels of Mahasweta Devi by revisiting the parameters of subaltern historiography, and highlights how Devi as a champion of the subaltern provides an agency to the marginalized community not only of India but across the globe.

Limitation

As the research is based on the critical analysis of Mahasweta Devi’s selected novels, it did not require any field work. The thesis has incorporated the theoretical analysis of Subaltern Studies and applied the same on the chosen novels of Devi. So, the study is limited to the novels along with the issues of subaltern history in the context of elite-subaltern binarism.

III
I.3. Literature Review

The literature review for the present study was examined to ascertain the critical context of the Mahasweta Devi’s works. The review shall provide the information on the analysis that has been carried out on Mahasweta Devi. Based on this premise, the present study focused on the aspects of Mahasweta’s work which have not been identified or were cursorily
approached in previous studies. The review also stresses on the methods employed by others and why a new methodology was adopted in the present study.

Proma Tagore in her book *Shapes of Silence: Writing by Women of Colour and the Politics of Testimony* (2009) *The Shapes of Silence* examines fiction, memoir, and autobiographical writing by marginalized women whose stories give voice to the gendered dimensions of colonial violence. It draws insights from subaltern studies and postcolonial feminisms, and brings together the work of a diverse group of writers - Toni Morrison, Shani Mootoo, Louise Erdrich, M.K. Indira, Rashsundari Debi, and Mahasweta Devi. Tagore focuses on the visceral, affective nature of their narratives and explores the way that personal and historical trauma, initially silenced, may be recorded across generations, as well as across complex national, racial, gender, and sexual lines. In emphasizing situations that cannot be summed up by clearly nameable, bounded moments of trauma, *The Shapes of Silence* identifies important shifts in how testimonial literature is theorized, arguing for an understanding of writing and storytelling by women of colour as crucial counter-narratives to what official colonial historicizing has left out.

Sen and Yadav in their collaborative book *Mahasweta Devi: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (2008) attempt to examine the major works of Mahasweta Devi, recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1986) and the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award (1996). The essays in this volume critique Mahasweta Devi's literary representations of the exploitation of the marginal and dispossessed groups by the dominant caste and class hierarchies, aided and abetted by greedy government officials and political manipulators. They also unfold how she essentializes the aesthetics of literature as a weapon against such multiple oppressions, and inscribes the courage and resilience of several of her victim-protagonists in a crippling milieu. In larger perspective, the essays situate Mahasweta Devi in appropriate spaces of Postcolonial Writing, Translation Studies and Women's Writing, and reaffirm her status as an icon of Third World Literature in the First World Academia. Since critical readings, especially on her works in English translation, though ample, are scattered and piecemeal, this book-length study brings together several of the major critical interventions on her oeuvre.

Reshmi Mukherjee in her doctoral thesis titled “Who Speaks for, with and to Me?” (2013) studies how the gendered subaltern subjects of the global South are represented in the fictional works of three writers: Mahasweta Devi, Bessie Head, and Assia Djebar. Devi, Head, and Djebar write about disenfranchised groups of people whose ontological existences are marginalized and silenced by mainstream social and national discourses of postcolonial nation-states such as India, South Africa, and Algeria. The three chapters demonstrate the retrieval of subaltern agency by Devi, Head, and Djebar through their strategic and rhetorical shifting of attention from the spoken words of the gendered subaltern to the female subaltern’s body-in-pain, their experiences of living as social and political outcastes, and their relationships with lived spaces (home, nation, harem, prison). Devi represents female subaltern bodies as spaces exploited for the exertion of power and also as sites for resistance against gendered, class, and caste violence. Mukherjee reads Mahasweta’s use of pain as a narrative strategy to regard the female subject-in-pain as a dynamic being and not a passive victim. Bessie Head’s representations of subaltern agency relate subalternity to social and political conditions of living in exile. Mukherjee in this context contends that it is this lived experience that leads Head to articulate a completely new perspective for examining the elite-subaltern relationship, namely the subaltern’s inability to understand the elite. She turns the question — “can the subaltern speak?” — around to ask if the elite can speak (to the subaltern)? Mukherjee has explored the issue of lived experience further in Assia Djebar’s works. She has focused on Djebar’s representations of subaltern agency through the marginalized space of the harem in postcolonial Algeria. Effectively, this dissertation problematizes Gayatri Spivak’s assertion that the subaltern cannot be authentically represented.

Rajinder Kumar Dhawan in his book, *Three Indian Playwrights: Tagore, Badal Sircar and Mahashweta Devi: A Critical Response* (2005), has presented a detailed study of Tagore, Badal Sircar, Mahashweta Devi as playwrights. He has shown how their works are the
symbols of the new resurgence in Indian literature, society and culture, and have given new shape to modern Indian drama.

Umme Sadat Nazmun Nahar Al-wazedi in his published doctoral thesis *Hearing 'subaltern' voices of resistance in the works of Mahasweta Devi, Taslima Nasrin and Monica Ali* (2008) has attempted to show how Mahasweta Devi (1926- ), Taslima Nasrin (1962- ), and Monica Ali (1967- ), three writers of South Asian descent belonging to different generations, make it possible for the voices of these marginal characters or Subalterns to be heard. In his first chapter while exploring five short stories of Devi, he shows that these women take recourse to the use of their bodies as they are the only available revenue they have for resistance. In the second chapter of his dissertation, which is on *Mother of 1084* (1998), he shows how the Naxalite movement brings two subaltern mothers closer in spite of class barrier. This fate of being a subaltern links Devi’s women characters to those of Nasrin and Ali as they struggle with the oppression of patriarchy, religion and immigrant life. While discussing the works (poems, novel, autobiography and critical writing) of Nasrin in chapter three, he focuses on the female body and sexuality, and how being a Muslim woman portraying Muslim women’s sexuality poses a problem for her. Ali’s women characters in *Break Lane* (2003) present a different dimension as they are displaced from their homes. Thus, in his fourth chapter he argues that in addition to being displaced they have to learn to assimilate and adopt the foreign society as their own and at the same time they struggle with the rules of family life and religion.

While explicating the themes, examining the plot structures and exploring the characters of these writers he has argued that they have been successful in representing the subaltern women. He defends his statement by using Feminist theory according to which every writer’s social location gives them the capability to write about their own society. While his reading of the texts makes it evident that these writers are careful not to speak for the Subaltern, but rather use the art of literature to let them speak for themselves.

Swati Ganguly and Sarmistha Dutta Gupta in their collaborative book, *The Stream within: Short Stories by contemporary Bengali Women* (1999), explore a direct link between
women's writing, from India and some from Bangladesh, and explore how the turbulent milieu inspired them. The editors present thirteen writers: Sabitri Roy, Purabi Basu, Jahanara Imam, Mahasweta Devi, Sulekha Sanyal, Bani Basu, Nasreen Jahan, Ashapurna Devi, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Anita Agnihotri, Chhabi Basu, Selina Hossein And Rajlakshmi Devi.

Radha Chakravarty, in her book *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers: Rethinking Subjectivity* attempts to deal with the problem of literary subjectivity in theory and practice. The works of six contemporary women writers — Doris Lessing, Anita Desai, Mahasweta Devi, Buchi Emecheta, Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison — are discussed as potential ways of testing and expanding the theoretical debate. A brief history of subjectivity and subject formation is reviewed in the light of the works of thinkers such as Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Raymond Williams and Stephen Greenblatt, and the work of leading feminists is also seen contributing to the debate substantially.

Karuppiah Rajendra Athista in his work *Tribes in Mahasweta Devi’s Short Dramas: Aajir, Bayen and Water* (2010) has analyzed the social scenario of the tribal population in India as depicted by Devi. His analysis focuses on the selected short dramas of Devi. He has attempted to highlight the profound humanism imbued with a deep-rooted love for the suffering humanity as the core of Devi’s philosophy of life. He has highlighted how Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Imaginary Maps* has stated that Devi characterizes these communities as the "Suffering spectators of India ... traveling towards the twenty-first century". Devi’s works are popular in English translations among the readers both in India and abroad. Further, he has noted that although Devi’s literary output in terms of quality and quantity is outstanding, she has not received the critical attention she deserves. The significance of his work is to show how Devi wields her pen for the downtrodden who try to come up in rebellion but meet with either violent death or inglorious defeat.

E. Satyanarayana in her book, *The Plays of Mahasweta Devi* (2000) while making a close study of the thematic concerns in Mahasweta Devi’s five plays, attempts to show the uniqueness of her dramatic vision and her artistic excellence in the treatment of unusual
themes that bring home to us the different modes of exploitation prevalent in both urban and rural world.

Clare Marie in her doctoral thesis *Protest and Proximity: The World Revolution of 1968 in Philip Roth’s American Pastoral and Mahasweta Devi’s Mother of 1084* (2009) examines social justice issues obliquely, through the eye of the literary, as represented in two novels, Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral* and Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084*. Each novel narrates a moment in the world revolution of 1968, and through that moment, unfolds themes of revolution, terrorism, and the variety of aftermaths such events called forth within the larger geopolitical landscape. In comparing the particular locales of Newark, New Jersey, as Roth describes it, and Kolkata, India, as Devi portrays it, she has probed some of the multiple experiential confluences and divergences within the core-periphery geoculture of 1968. To do so, she has employed Immanuel Wallerstein’s model of world-system analysis. Through his perspective, she has attempted to draw near a description of the ways in which proximity to social injustice informs and shapes experiences of protest, specifically in terms of the actual geocultural realities configured, as they are, by our capitalist world-system. A question this thesis asks, then, is how do bourgeois culture and revolutionary culture mutually constitute one another.

In response to Roth’s and Devi’s choice to explore radical Marxist politics within the bourgeois family structure, she has engaged the way in which emotions—in particular, grief—collide with and are shaped by political rhetoric and reality at the nation-state and, later, global level. Finally, this comparison has led her to ask, what place does concern about human rights and, more generally, global asymmetric power relations occupy in the ordinary everydayness of our lives, when history, as Roth puts it, comes into our living room? Or, when language, in Devi’s formulation, becomes weapon?

Sonali Perera in her work *No Country: Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization* intends to question - Can there be a novel of the international working class despite the conditions and constraints of economic globalization? What does it mean to invoke working-class writing as an ethical intervention in an age of comparative advantage
and outsourcing? In the work, Perera has argued for a rethinking of the genre of working-class literature. Sonali Perera expands the understanding of working-class fiction by considering a range of international texts, identifying textual, political, and historical linkages often overlooked by Eurocentric and postcolonial scholarship. Her readings connect the literary radicalism of the 1930s to the feminist recovery projects of the 1970s, and the anticolonial and postcolonial fiction of the 1960s to today's counterglobalist struggles, building a new portrait of the twentieth century's global economy and the experiences of the working class within it.

Perera considers novels by the Indian anticolonial writer Mulk Raj Anand; the American proletarian writer Tillie Olsen; Sri Lankan Tamil/Black British writer and political journalist Ambalavaner Sivanandan; Indian writer and bonded-labor activist Mahasweta Devi; South African-born Botswanan Bessie Head; and the fiction and poetry published under the collective signature Dabindu, a group of free-trade-zone garment factory workers and feminist activists in contemporary Sri Lanka. The book has articulated connections across the global North-South divide, thereby creating a new genealogy of working-class writing as world literature and transforming the ideological underpinnings casting literature as cultural practice.

A brief glimpse so far indicates that ample research has been conducted on the plays and short stories of Mahasweta Devi particularly from Feminist and Marxist perspective. Nevertheless, there exists a gaping hole in studying Mahasweta Devi and her novels as an endeavor to rewrite official history and create subaltern history. The present research attempts to project Mahasweta Devi as a formidable advocate who highlights the demand for an ethnic historiography. The present research revisits the social malaise of discrimination which is the root cause of subalternization in India. The thesis also highlights how the author as an activist historian and writer has returned the bastion of epistemology to Orality. Her works are a proof of the indispensable importance of oral tradition which is not just language but a history of power.
The need for this research can hence be established as entailing contemporary relevance. After analyzing the latest developments on the works of Mahasweta Devi, the aspect of subaltern history has been researched in the thesis.

1.4. Chapterization

The present study projects the analyses of Subaltern History in the selected novels of Mahasweta Devi from the perspective of Subaltern Studies. The thesis has been divided into four main chapters. The chapters have been titled as: Revisiting Subalternized Historic Figures vis-à-vis Orality: Queen of Jhansi (2000) and Titu Mir (2000); Revisiting Subaltern History vis-a-vis Myths, Folklores and Memory in Book of Hunters (2002) and Mother of 1084 (1997); Revisiting Caste-bound Bharat vis-à-vis Orality in The Glory of Sree Sree Ganesh (2003) and Chotti Munda and His Arrow (2002); Revisiting Oral Narratives of Outcastes in Bedanabala Her Life. Her Times (2005) and The Armenian Champa Tree (1998).

Chapter One Introduction: The Polemics of Subaltern Historiography and Mahasweta Devi as a Subaltern Historian

The introduction gives an outline of the advance of subaltern historiography, and how it has progressed from being an isolated representation of the elite into an encompassing reflection of the subaltern as a whole. The chapter addresses the disconnection of subaltern history from the official accounts, which renders the subaltern susceptible to misrepresentation, and consequential suppression. From Marxist to Subaltern discourse, history has transited from being a homogenous report of the elite to an innumerable account of the subalterns. Notable critics as Hegel, Marx, Althusser and Sartre have been analyzed to critique on the homogenous model of history and Subaltern critics as Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakraborthy, and Gyan Prakash have been highlighted to engender the need of a subaltern history. It is further emphasized, how if History is taken at its face value, especially if formulated by the elite authority, the subalterns who are misrepresented by the
elite remain a scapegoat. It is in consideration of these putative reasons, the chapter underlines the need to rectify official records and reclaim subaltern history which is paramount.

Further, as Mahasweta Devi has employed oral sources in addition to written sources in her works, the chapter underlies the need to signify and preserve oral narratives and also attests to its indispensable role in the correction of official history. In doing so, the attempt of the chapter has been to highlight the writer as a subaltern historian who is vehement in her stance to rewrite official history and create a space for the subaltern.


The chapter II juxtaposes two powerful novels of Mahasweta Devi to revisit the life narratives of India’s historic figures - Rani Laxmi Bai and Titu Mir who have been subalternized in the historical records of official history. The chapter focuses how these two figures have been subjected to a lopsided representation which grossly underplays their pioneering role in India’s struggle for independence. It is in this respect, the chapter aims to depict Mahasweta Devi as a chronicler of marginalized voices such as Laxmi Bai and Titu Mir who would have remained underrepresented and misrepresented in the absence of a ‘humble biography’ by the writer. The chapter hence emphasizes how due to the writer’s meticulous research, Laxmi Bai has been noted as a harbinger of India’s freedom struggle and similarly Titu Mir, a peasant rebel, is acknowledged as a significant contributor to India’s independence.
Chapter Three  
Revisiting Subaltern History vis-a-vis Myths, Folklores and Memory in *Book of Hunters* (2002) and *Mother of 1084* (1997)

The chapter III highlights Mahasweta Devi’s diligent forays into the life of tribals and their demand for tribal sovereignty. The aspects which have been analyzed in the novels firstly highlight the contentious relationship between the elite and subaltern and secondly, the study explores the ramifications of this discordant relationship and its impact on the representation or misrepresentation of the subaltern in the mainstream.

The objective in the chapter has been to expose how the history of the tribals and their marginalization is unknown to the masses. The chapter highlights Devi’s attempt to write a subaltern history which rectifies the slanderous obstructions and fabrications of elitist history. It has been shown how in *Book of Hunters*, Devi has documented the tribal folklores and myths to rewrite the official records in an authentic light. Similarly, in *Mother of 1084* Mahasweta Devi has revisited the official records of tribal insurgency and its repercussions on the society at large - the tribal rebellion, the youth, the political parties, the police, the bourgeois society and other factors which find a holistic depiction in Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084*. With this objective, the chapter has juxtaposed these two novels to collectively address Mahasweta Devi’s rewriting of past to empower the tribals and to sensitize the mainstream society.

Chapter Four  

The chapter IV highlights the author’s role in attacking the dogmatism of caste-system. She has exposed its polluting presence in the pre-colonial to post-colonial era. In the
novels taken, the author has asserted that caste-system has been the constant source of discrimination against the tribals and the low classes and such a system has been accorded a divine justification to validate it. Mahasweta Devi in the novel *Glory of Sree Sree Ganesh*, highlights this grim reality by portraying a North Indian village as a microcosm of rural villages of India. The novel serves as an exposition on the societies beset by caste system and feudalism and shows how Mahasweta Devi has through her realistic depiction attacked such oppressive systems and its purveyors of discrimination. The novel also attests to the significance of Orality as it has been observed how marginalized communities in the novel compose songs and through it attack the violence of the high castes.

If caste system has been attacked by Mahasweta Devi in *Glory of Sree Sree Ganesh*, the author has in the similar vein attacked the ignominious weeds of caste in the novel *Chotti Munda and his Arrow*. The peasants, the adivasis, and low castes of India embody a travesty which Mahasweta Devi has vehemently exposed, and actively attempted to rectify. The milieu of the novel sketched around the village of Chotti is a symbol of ‘tribal aspiration’ in the face of overwhelming odds of prejudice and disenfranchisement. In the novel, the endeavour has been to recognize and protest the inhuman manners of oppression dealt to the tribal and other subalternized masses. Similarly, the significant role of Orality as evidenced in the previous novel is also highlighted which serves as a voice of the masses. In both novels, hence the attempt has been to firstly highlight the discriminatory practices of caste and secondly reinforce the need to preserve oral lore. It has also been emphasized that the system of social hierarchy needs to be subverted due to which the natives are ostracized and excluded.

**Chapter Five**


The chapter V highlights Mahasweta Devi’s attempt to put forth a corrigendum on the official narration of history in the novels *Bedanabala. Her Life. Her Times* and *Armenium*
Champa Tree. The chapter highlights oral lore as a means of resurrecting the buried history of the marginalized and how it also serves as a means of empowerment. In the former novel, the wretched state of the victimized women as prostitutes is exposed with stress on their continuous misrepresentation by the mainstream society. While in the latter, Mahasweta’s advocacy of Orality is highlighted in her assertion that history progresses due to rumors. The objective in investigating these two novels has been to break the trivialized significance of Orality and put it across as a legitimate source of history. In the chapter the target has been to expose the gaping errors of official history and to rewrite it ensuring inclusion of the subalterns.

Chapter Six Conclusion

The conclusion serves as a succinct and critical recapitulation of the preceding chapters and presents to the readers a cumulative view of Mahasweta Devi as a subaltern historian as evident in her selected novels taken in the thesis. It further revisits the development of subaltern historiography and stresses upon the parameters which aid in the writing and rewriting of history.

The conclusion serves to emphasize Mahasweta Devi’s three-pronged attack on the Indian society. She apprehends the system and questions it, and the target of the chapter can be surmised as under:

1. The objective has been to highlight how history has been the prime motivator of Mahasweta Devi and why writing a subaltern history has been her cardinal focus.

2. The chapter exposes the doubly oppressed predicament of the subaltern as they faced bigotry perpetrated by the native intellectuals as well as the British colonialists. The chapter highlights this discrimination as the reason why the histories of the subaltern have been time and again rendered null and void.

3. The chapter addresses how the author endeavors to preserve oral tradition otherwise its loss can endanger the history of the aboriginals in India.
Furthermore, the chapter reiterates the immutability of elitist histories, and highlights how some records are exclusive and some engender inclusivity. That is, the chapter in recognizing history as a witness of past, has aimed to expose firstly: how this witness is either threatened to commit perjury or intentionally forsweares itself for elitist agendas; secondly how if it’s given protection against the interference of the elite, it can subvert these fabrications; thirdly how this record of past should include the subaltern voices than exclude them; and finally history should not claim itself to be a gospel truth, or the only record which is legitimate as this self-ennobling of history discourages any correction that it might call for. The chapter in this regard hence attacks the homogenizing of history which eclipses other histories and disallows rectification.

1.4.a. Major Findings

The Indian past is the collection of histories which subaltern critics have explored and exposed and the same discourse has been applied to the selected works of Mahasweta Devi to envision her as an unflinching subaltern historian.

Ranajit Guha, Gyan Prakash, Sumit Sarkar, Gayatri Spivak and other prominent subaltern critics have attempted to create a subaltern history and their unanimous attempt is to become, “an original site for a new kind of history of below, a people’s history free of national constraints, a post-nationalist reimagining of the Indian nation on the underside, at the margins, outside nationalism…to reimagine history itself” (Reading 12-13). The present research work hence has attempted to highlight rewriting of official history, usage of oral sources, bridging the gap between the elite and subaltern, attacking bigoted social hierarchies, and examining Mahasweta Devi as a subaltern historian. The target is to reinstate the subaltern as the maker of his/her own history.

1.4. b. Scope for further Study

The study may serve as a platform for further research related areas. Works of various writers can be analyzed from the critical context of subaltern history. It being an encompassing and ever-growing field, a further study into it will invariably emphasize on the
importance of empowering the subalterns, their culture and identity. To add more, it will ensure the prejudiced practices as caste-system, racism and other systems of discrimination are apprehended which distort life stories of the subalterns due to which they are abused as outcastes and untouchables. The relevance of the present study can address these issues from local to global level as marginalization is a global phenomenon that needs immediate rectification.

1.4.c. Select Bibliography

The select bibliography reflects the primary and secondary sources separately used in the writing of the thesis. The primary sources constitute the works of the author included in the study, and secondary sources is be made up of different critical source materials drawn from various critics.

REFERENCES

Primary Texts

Secondary Texts


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