Chapter Two
Female Aggression

“Remember me, I am the one you hid
In your walls of stone, while you roamed
Free as the breeze, not knowing
That my voice cannot be smothered by stones,”
- Kishwar Naheed, “I am Not That Woman”

Traditionally, Indian society has denied women any expression of their emotion, reason, and intellect. Total self-control was the accepted norm. The customary acceptance of such behaviour has led them to a life of subjugation. This Chapter argues on how this image of subservience is resisted by Indian women. After defining the word, ‘aggression’ in the feminists’ interpretation, an attempt is made to study how Postcolonial depiction of Indian Native and Diasporic women has replaced such subdued, confined, distorted, and submissive images of women. It uncovers Patriarchal negation of women’s freedom, and the reason for aggression in Indian subaltern subject. The study examines the expression of freedom in the short stories of Mahasweta Devi and Jhumpa Lahiri. It has analysed how they have portrayed women as courageous individuals and confronters of oppressive social environment. The study critically examines how Devi and Lahiri have devised various literary strategies as subaltern expressions of self.

The woman in the contemporary poem cited above, “I am not that Woman” moves from docility to assertiveness and overtly defines herself. The above example is taken to argue the subaltern representation of the explicit expression of Indian women in a contemporary feminists’ critique of Indian hegemony in the areas of cultural practices and religious ethos. The women characters of Devi and Lahiri articulate their voice for subjectivity in their respective cultural society. These
expressive outbursts for assertion witnessed by them help to understand the way Indian women counter traditional concepts of womanhood. The focus is Indian Postcolonial Feminism dismantles distorted concepts on aggression by arguing that the male prerogative of aggression has created a gender imbalance and has generated an Indian social hierarchy based on cultural discrimination. Devi and Lahiri have studied various cultural contexts and historical and geographical locations in which the Indian women are subject to exploitation as the ‘Other’. Their short stories reveal that aggression is an explicit in women to confront all barriers that are obstacles to their individuality and to articulating their voices in their own context.

In “Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis”, Juliet Mitchell argues that Patriarchy has distorted “women’s voice”, and they are forced to express their ideas in the male hegemony which she calls, “hysteric’s voice” (155). She deconstructs its meaning and argues that women were not allowed to express an authentic “woman’s voice” but were forced to speak in a culturally enforced voice, “woman’s masculine language” (155). By “woman’s masculine language” or “hysteric’s voice”, she explains how women were forbidden to portray their inner feelings in literature. Mitchell states “We have to know where women are, why women have to write the novel, the story of their own domesticity, the story of their own seclusion within home and the possibilities and impossibilities by that” (155). Mitchell’s argument is in favour of women and to make them speak from their own experiences. Thus, aggression is an outlet of every woman to speak for herself in all circumstances and to convey her personal needs and aspirations.

Vijaylakshmi Sheshadri in her “Introduction” to The New Woman in Indian-English Women Writes Since the 1970s, states various prerogative synonyms for “hysteric’s voice” as “‘entrapment’, ‘hysteria’, ‘madness’, ‘exile’, and ‘isolation” (xi).
Sheshadri opines that male prerogative ‘aggression’ is cohesive and means to control the freedom of women. According to Mitchell and Sheshadri, women are forced to behave in such a manner in a socially constrained situation. They reconstruct aggression as an inner voice of women which speaks for their subjectivity directly by defying gender constructs. Considering the viewpoint of Mitchell and Sheshadri, the derogatory expressions: ‘madness’, ‘hysteria’, and ‘exile’ are distortions and they emphasise the need for the authentic voice of women that reformulates a sense of self. In patriarchal constructions, women who express their freedom are considered trespassers of traditions. They are ostracised through bizarre names and considered as violent individuals. To understand the context of aggression in women, this Chapter defines the term aggression from different perspectives to locate the need in Indian women for self-expression.

Aggression can be examined from the psychoanalytical perspective of Jacques Lacan. In his dominant ‘phallogocentric notion’, a Patriarchal “Symbolic order”, explained in the “mirror-stage” (Barry, 109), the phenomena of oppression of women had indoctrinated women as feeble and gullible, the “Other”. It is debated by Julia Kristeva in her ‘Discourse of the Hysteric’ which is explained by Toril Moi in, “Marginality and Subversion” stating, “sex difference in language is not only a theoretical impossibility, but a political error” (152). It signifies that gendered marginality is indoctrinated not only in theoretical construction but also in cultural hegemony. From their viewpoints, it is stated that aggression is a language which is different from usual speech belonging to the ‘unconscious mind’ and is caused by the fundamental exclusion of women from the linguistic order and cultural difference. The Chapter makes a survey on how Indian women were excluded from society by imposing a silent behaviour on them. It analyses aggression in Indian women has
caused by socio-economic, cultural, and political factors based on caste, class, ethnic, and gendered discrimination.

To understand the inner struggles of Indian women for freedom, it is essential to define the meaning of aggression to see how they express it from different angles. Etymologically, the term aggression comes from the Latin words, *ad* and *gradi* or *aggression* meaning ‘sudden attack’. It is derogatorily related to the Greek word *Uterus* for hysteria or *hysterikos* means ‘womb or suffering of the womb’ or *hyteros* or *hysteria* means ‘old malady’. Aggression is referred to denote how Indian women express their “old malady” as age-old problems to define their identity. *The Cambridge English Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines aggression as, “the state of understanding and realising something” (‘Aggression,’ def.1). The modern psychologists, John D. DeLamater and Daniel J. Myers define it “as an effective means of obtaining what one wants” (229). Therefore, aggression is a deep human cry for existence and a struggle against oppression caused by various social factors.

An aggression is a state of awakening to counter the existing societal oppressive norms. It is a means to acquire one’s needs. It is an unconscious mind that is expressed consciously. An aggression is an inner suffering of a person that finds expression in a sudden occurrence. It signifies that one tries to get alerted to rationalise about the happenings of one’s surrounding in an explicit awakening. The explicit awakening ‘of the womb’ (women) can be positive or negative depending on the external responses to a condition. Negative responses can be frustration, indifference, angst, anger, depression, and hostility. The positive is re-inventing of identity by confronting challenges. The study attempts to locate reasons for aggression in Indian women in their diverse cultural contexts.
Aggression can be explained by examining the psychological term introduced by Sigmund Freud. In his *Behavioral Psychology*, Freud has defined aggression as “energy derived from the Eros or life instinct to create or to destroy” (Barry, 93). Freud calls this instinct as ‘an aggression’ which occurs either in retaliation or without provocation. Freud’s concept is applied to explore how Indian women express these dual emotions: “retaliation or without provocation” (93) as positive response or ‘life instinct’ to break free from gendered barriers and historical cultural dislocations that have suppressed their self-expression. As stated earlier, Indian women had retaliated against gendered discrimination created by cultural practices in order to express their freedom. To understand the concept more clearly the Freudian concept of the “Otherness” (94) (woman as mere object) can also be taken to examine how it is different from the feminists’ understanding on the aggression of women.

To disagree on the “Otherness” of Freud, the two *Essays* invoked here, Luce Irigaray’s “Speculum of the Other Women” and “This Sex Which Is Not One” can be reproduced as ideological contours to define aggression in women. Irigaray’s examination of woman’s submissiveness defined in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics phenomena as the ‘Other’ can be supported to analyse how it has generated pain and anxiety in women. Irigaray explains that the “Otherness” of woman is not constructively formulated. It “has been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters” and woman is considered mere substance or “nature or matter” (“This Sex Which Is Not One” 23). Toril Moi in “Patriarchal Reflections: Luce Irigaray’s Looking-glass” supports Irigaray’s debate, that sexual difference between man and woman does not exist. Man and woman can achieve freedom only if woman is the ‘Other’ of that subject-man as co-equal entity. It signifies that woman is as strong and capable as man and together they can create a strong force of unity as complementary
beings. The argument of Irigaray in “Speculum of the Other Women” as recorded by Moi is woman is not “absence, negativity, the dark continent” and she asserts Irigaray that “patriarchal discourse situates woman outside representation” (Moi, “Patriarchal Reflection” 133). Irigaray and Moi argue that woman has her individuality, is equal to man in all respects, and is the accomplice of her counterpart. From Irigaray and Moi’s viewpoint, aggression in women is a result of identification of women as the ‘Other’. Their concepts are taken to analyse how Indian feminists have examined the reason for the aggression of women and assert that an imposed submissive role on women has intensified their discomfort.

Shoshana Felman in, “Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy”, examines aggression is not a “female complaint” (117). It is an inner cry of women to fight a distorted image on womanhood. The theoretical analysis of Felman is supported to see how the image of Indian woman is silenced and has left them in a victim position. A potent argument of Felman is that this cultural conditioning has prevented them from self-affirmation and denied them their authentic voice to communicate their inner feelings. Taking into consideration, her debate on the concept of ‘female complaint’, it is stated women have expressed their discontentment through overt expressions. The aggression of women as ‘madness’ according to Felman is stated:

‘Madness’ is the very ‘absence of womanhood’. The woman is ‘madness’ to the extent that she is other, different from man. But ‘madness’ is the ‘absence of womanhood’ to the extent that ‘womanhood’ is what precisely resembles the Masculine universal equivalent, in the polar division of sexual roles. If so, the woman is ‘madness’ since the woman is difference; but ‘madness’ is ‘non-woman’ since madness is the lack of resemblance. (128)
A woman is a constructed dichotomous opposite of man in ‘logocentric logic’ concepts of Derrida, Lacan, and Freud. This dichotomy Felman believes has forced woman to communicate in an overt behavior about what has been ‘excluded’, ‘considered abnormal’, ‘unacceptable and nonsense’. This belittling aspect on the position of women has created distress in them. When they have been assertive, women have been considered mad and lacking in womanhood. Therefore, aggression in women is due to the ‘difference’ created in the cultural ideologies and perpetuated gendered reasoning. Irigaray, Moi, and Felman are taken to evaluate how Indian Feminism under Postcolonial context examines subaltern women as the ‘Other’ who are trying to reclaim their identity. The study also examines how the “Otherness” has created difference in Indian regional, ethnic, historical, geographical, and cultural contexts of subaltern women.

In Postcolonial Discourse, Homi Bhabha defines aggression as the “struggle of identification” (43). He describes it as a “process of subversion of the cultural milieu of the colonizer” (44). It means aggression is a person's knowledge of his subjectivity and a struggle to define it. The Postcolonial writers have created a culture that represents the un-presented, recognises the un-recognised, and voices the un-voiced. Indian feminists have expressed the defiant voice through the representation of their age-old ‘social maladies’ like purdah, sati, child-labour, and women trafficking. Aggression according to them is freedom from illiteracy, ignorance, socio-economic marginalisation, and political exploitation. Nahal Chaman, a critic calls aggression “a mode of existence in which the woman is free of dependence” (17). Women become free to experience their independence only when they are freed from the clutches of gendered subjugation. Aggression revealed in the literary
representation is a means to acquire dignity and respect of women in all cultural contexts.

In “Marginality in the Teaching Machine”, Spivak defines aggression as a means of dismantling “cultural identity” (59), which she opines has divided identities: “African-American”, “Asian-Indian” and “first world-third world” (60). The ‘cultural identity’ of women has socially and economically marginalised them by creating a biased attitude towards them. Spivak proposes for individual identity in a cultural context. An individual identity is according to Chandra Talpade Mohanty a “universal sisterhood” (5). For Spivak it is not “a voice from the margin” (“Teaching Machine” 61). Rather, a voice that speaks for self. The feminists record the voice of the women to examine how the cultural marginality has brought misery to women. It is conveyed through the interpretation of their experiences by recording their voice in their own cultural contexts.

Indian Postcolonial short story by women has responded to a similar quest of Indian women for autonomy by expressing their voice. The writers have portrayed the voice of the marginalised women, to assert their socio-economic and cultural freedom in a caste, class, and gender biased social relations. The women writers use aggression a “common mode for expressing the suppressed/ repressed voice” (Mukherjee, 71), of women. It indicates that short story as a feminist literary expression has explored regional, ethnic, community, and cultural stereotype causing the ‘Otherness’ to Indian marginalised women. The Indian Native and Diasporic short story, as Narayan K. Pramod observes, speaks for these marginalised women to retrieve their silenced voice that speaks of untold drudgery. The story has given a significant importance to women of the lower range of the society and the Diasporic to analyse their mode of expressing injustice. Sonali Das states that ‘the plight of the colonised and the
subaltern is a favourite subject with Postcolonial writers. It signifies that the writers have probed the exploitative realities of women and have delineated their painful experiences. The Chapter examines the thematic concerns of Devi and Lahiri to understand the way women writers define the meaning of aggression. Their short stories represent a defiant voice of women as aggression to speak against injustice.

Ann Russo in “We Cannot Live Without Our Lives” states, “there is a greater need to analyse the women and their relationship to race, ethnicity, class and sexuality” (299). The complexities caused by these elements constantly have driven the Indian women to a discriminatory, cruel, inhuman, and degrading identity. The short stories of Devi and Lahiri have evaluated the hidden voices of the tribal outcaste and the Diasporic women for self-expression. A. K. Mukharjee who also exalts their writings in her article “Interpreter of Maladies: A Critical Response” states, “their engagement is with life: to address the unconventional, the unacknowledged, the deviant; to map histories, human relations and meanings; to weave strands of submerged narratives into the texture of literature” (97). Taking Russo and Mukharjee’s views into consideration, it can be argued that Devi and Lahiri as Indian Native and Diasporic women writers have moved from traditional depiction of women as submissive women to potent individuals asserting their autonomy and social mobility to create harmony by empowering self and others. The writers have deviated from the conventional mode of presenting women as mere house-wives. Rather, speak for the women who are ostracised and ignored who confront existing cultural distortions.

The representation of myths and archetypes are commonly used by them as significant metaphors for ‘overt expressions’ to resist oppressive traditional practices and construct a history for subaltern women by recording their authentic experiences.
in their own context. Rajni Dwivedi in “Archetypal Deconstruction in Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi” states, “Myth can be understood as a story or a complex of story elements, expressing the deeper aspects of the human experience and as a perspective, which is an activity of the mind that synthesises received knowledge” (240). Dwivedi explains that Devi has extensively has used mythical representations, folksongs, and tribal stories to question male prerogative on the concept of aggression and to examine their experiences from the subaltern perspective. Lahiri has used archetype women who express the ‘Othering’ experience in the Diasporic existence. In Devi and Lahiri’s stories, the mythical or the archetypal characters belonging to the lower middle class or the weaker sections of the society are depicted either as grotesque or vulnerable to the culturally constructed ethos yet through pretended submissiveness or repudiating womanhood assert their social status. Devi and Lahiri have captured the daily movements of the women in order to eliminate cultural stereotypes popularised by patriarchal, colonial, and cultural discourses. In each of Devi and Lahiri’s five stories examine women characters to evaluate how Indian women have challenged their marginality.

A strong subaltern representative voice that expresses discontentment is in Devi’s “Mother of 1084”. At the outset it is necessary to clarify that all of Devi’s short stories taken for discussion are English translated works. The following stories, “Mother of 1084”, “Douloti the Bountiful”, and “The Hunt” are taken as a longer form of a short story due to various reasons. Firstly, the stories have all the aspects of a short story and have interpreted subaltern-consciousness. They are structurally closer to a short story and do not have multiple plots. The three stories have a single plot, a single issue that revolves round a single character, and their protagonists are culturally marginalised women. As the study discusses the issue of subaltern-
consciousness, it has been noted that these stories potently express the voice of the Native women and are taken to examine their experiences that challenged them to define their identity.

The “Mother of 1084” or “Hajar Churashir Ma” is Devi’s authentic effort to represent mourning as a confronting voice of a subaltern mother when her son, Brati Chatterjee dies in a political agitation. The story is examined as a historical representation, an event that occurred in 1970-71 in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal, a rural revolt of the landless labourers, and the tribals against their landlords, and the moneylenders. The resistance is against feudal land system which “is anti-women, anti-poor people, against toiling people” (Devi, “Telling History” xiv). The exploitation has silenced them and when they revolted they are branded as naxalites (revolutionary) by the state machinery and caused violent massacres. In “Cartographies of Struggle”, Mohanty states that “questioning of political consciousness and self-identity are crucial aspects of defining third-world women’s engagement with feminism” (33). Devi questions ‘political consciousnesses’ by placing a Naxalite mother, Sujata Chatterjee to use her tears as agency to annihilate tyranny and violence. The narrative of “Mother of 1084” as Kiran Shukla states is “the psychological, emotional and spiritual struggle and trauma of a mother whose beloved son dies in a Naxalite movement” (142). It signifies, that Sujata’s bereavement is a righteous anger against ‘old malady’ or “an awakening of an apolitical mother” (Bandyopadhyay, xii) to avenge the murderer of her son. It is a subaltern means of ‘aggression’ to define self. Sujata’s aggression is a subaltern defiance to reject violence and bloodshed caused by the state machinery which is instrumental in killing one thousand eighty-four tribal victims. The exploitation of these people, who die as martyrs, becomes the title of Devi’s story as Mother of 1084.
It is through the mourning voice of Sujata that the socio-political and economic systems of India are interrogated to see how the State government has marginalised the tribals, the peasants, and the landless labourers as the outlaws (subaltern). Sujata’s mourning is a form of resistance against the irrationality of the state government and other exploitative forces. She is not a revolutionary. Rather, an authentic voice of the rural proletariat who asserts her basic rights and the rights of her community.

The story examines that every aspect of the aggression (a struggle for freedom) is articulated by a naxalite woman who is awakened to rebel on the occasion of the second death anniversary of her son. Here ‘aggression’ of Sujata is her state of awakening to counter existing unjust social systems. She expresses her consciousness by recalling the atrocities which were borne for “twenty two years” (Devi, “Mother of 1084” 1) in her unconscious mind. Sujata’s aggression is a ‘positive retaliation’ to express the un-expressed and to bring to light the gruesome reality of violence and massacre of the subaltern. The unconsciousness of Sujata in her past life where the narrator records a “subservient, silent, faithful wife yet independent in her own way” (4), it is delineated in her desire to stick to her job. It portrays how traditionally Indian women have suffered as submissive wives and yet have expressed their desire for freedom. Sujata’s defiance is also against her careless, perverted, and hypocritical husband, Dibyanath which she articulates after the state machinery kills her son with a bullet shot. Sujata’s resistance after twenty years reflects how Indian women have walked a long way from oppression and marginalisation within the family. It can be taken to argue that Sujata’s tears are ‘not hysteric’ but inner emotions to resist two kinds of oppressors: her husband as well as the murderers of her son. Her ‘positive retaliation’ is measured in her pain, suffering, and an expressive voice against violence.
In two-fold exploitations Sujata emerges victorious by expressing her discontentment. It is revealed in the Patriarchal negation that Sujata expresses her ‘aggression’ for freedom and accepts her ‘life instinct’ as the mother of the ‘corpse number 1084’. As a courageous woman, she questions the status of rural peasant women who are neglected, suppressed, ill-treated, and marginalised. Thus she dismantles the images of women as objects of sex, bearers of children, and home-bound. It is delineated through the negligence of her husband and the apathy of the Government officials. Primarily, she is encircled by her dominant, immoral, and negligent husband. Devi records defiance of Sujata against her oppressor, stating “the day Brati was born her husband was nowhere near, he never appeared in her dreams” (4). It supports that Sujata’s resistance is towards her ‘secluded domesticity’ that has subdued her individuality and caused exploitation by ignoring her needs. The authentic voice of Sujata in her anxiety and grief substantiates how political structures can oppress women who are forced to live on the margins of society.

The story reveals that from the beginning Sujata had expressed her freedom by becoming conscious of her own importance and existence. Devi does not only evaluate the grief of a subaltern mother and her son, but also writes how they raise their voice against dominance and exploitation. Brati’s martyrdom and Sujata’s tears are symbols for the subaltern overt expressions to assert their identity. Devi’s nuance in representing the voice of the subaltern is to rewrite Sujata’s historical past which is delineated in her daily experiences. The grief-stricken mother recalls the birth, life, and death of her beloved son to analyse her continuous struggles to defend her people from subalternity. Devi writes Sujata’s past to represent it in the present reality to examine how women try to define their identity. Devi’s subaltern story is unique because it revolves around a peasant woman who is struggling to form her identity in
a turbulent historical event. The story records every aspect of a grieving mother for familial, social, and economic freedom.

Devi’s representation of subaltern woman can be further noted to see how she introduces an officer’s voice on the phone to examine Sujata’s imposed identity as the mother of corpse number 1084 as subaltern. The intention is to count Sujata amongst the thousands of mourning peasant mothers who question basic rights for their survival. This is how Devi rewrites the struggles of the Native women to speak about their unheard voices. Sujata’s mourning depicts her determined struggle for self-assertion and independence, which gathers strength and courage from her son’s death. At the end, Sujata and other women: Somu’s mother, Somu’s sister and Brati’s friend Nandini together bond as grieving mothers. It is how Sujata gathers other women for a common cause to fight for their survival and to eliminate cruelty, bloodshed, and inhuman acts. The redeeming act of Sujata can be counted as an empowered tool to defend her society for harmony and fellowship. These women in the story, collectively come together to express their discontentment. Despite these women belonging to different linguistic backgrounds; there is a strong kinship which breaks barriers. Madhumitha Chakraborty, in *Living on the Edge* speaks about the women of Devi stating, “Her women characters are strong; they have tremendous sense of self-respect and are prepared to fight their battle to the end, even if the end is death” (195). The collective ‘aggressive’ voice of these women is their unified effort to break free from the burden of social and political tyranny on women. The women are ready for death in saving their fellow beings. This can be supported in the argument that Sujata is a confident and self-respecting woman who is ready to battle for peace and harmony in her death caused by appendicitis. It shows that even though her appendicitis bursts, her voice could not be smothered and no one could suppress her
tears and bereavement. Sujata’s ‘aggression’ could crush the powers of the state machinery and the corrupt officials by exposing their limitations. Her tears bring her total transformation into a morally assertive, politically rebellious, and socially defiant person to die a martyr’s death. Thus, the argument supports that Sujata’s defiance is for a peaceful co-existence and harmony of her community and society.

The ‘subaltern aggression’ in “Douloti the Bountiful” and “The Hunt” predominantly revolve around the lower caste and the tribal women who assert their basic rights through ‘aggression’. Devi in an “Interview” with Spivak about her book, Chotti Munda and His Arrow, speaks about different forms of aggression of the tribals, especially, the women. She explains that ‘the tribal resistance is a form of solidarity and harmonious living between the upper caste and the lower caste’ which she observes in a Munda village in Ulgulan during their festivals, puja performances, and other celebrations. Devi states “that this solidarity is resistance” (Devi, “History Telling” xiv). According to her, subaltern resistance is for a harmonious living yet “is a continuing struggle” (ix). A reformed tribal tradition which she observes in “Sabars cultivating their field” and she states: “this challengefulness is a resistance against globalization” (xv). Devi keenly evaluates the ‘aggression’ of the tribal women who “do not do it all the time by going to the battlefield and raising their machetes. The uncanny silence, that resonant silence which is its own kind of resistance” (xvii-xviii). Supporting the statement, the study examines that ‘aggression’ represented in Devi’s stories is a silent ‘form of resistance’ of the women. In each story, Devi examines the realities of Indian women caught under ostracism, injustice, and exploitation who battle for their survival.

In “Douloti the Bountiful”, the ‘resonant silence’ of Ganori Nagesia’s daughter, Douloti is a form of ‘aggression’ for her basic survival. Her subaltern status
as a bonded labourer is imposed on her by the Chandela Rajputs, her oppressors, and it is a form of ‘colonial experience’ for Douloti. Hence, her silent endurance is a form of subversive defiance to work in her master’s house after the disability of her father caused by the Chandelas. In silence she expresses her aggression and questions her exploitation and deprivation of her rights. Jaidev in his article “Douloti as a National Allegory”, states that “its protagonists are innumerable Doulotis and Ganoris spread all over India” (86). Jaidev states how in the single story Devi enumerates the struggles of hundreds of indigenous women for freedom, dignity, and individuality. Devi’s interest for the Subaltern-Consciousness can be elaborated from his statement. The story records the authentic experiences of the bonded labourers belonging to different states. Devi lists them in the following:

In Andhra the people like Matangi, Jaggali, Malajangam, Mahar and other castes become Gothi. In Bihar Chamar, Nagesia, Parhaiya, Dusad become Kamiya or Seokiya. In Gujarat the Chalwaris, Naliyas, Thoris and others become Halpati. In Karnataka the low of birth become Jeetho, in Madhya Pradesh Haroyaha. In Orissa Gothi and in Rajasthan Sagri. The Chetty rayats of Tamil Nadu keep Bhumidases. In Uttar Pradesh the Bhumidas is called Maat or Khandit-Mundit or Sanjayat. The Bhumidases of the Laccadive Islands are Nadapu. (“Douloti the Bountiful” 61-62)

In the vicious circle of bonded labour system, the sexually-assaulted and the poverty-stricken Munda (outcaste) woman, Douloti from Palamau village resists her subaltern position. It is against caste, class, and gender biases that she is forced to assert her freedom. The narration depicts how Douloti born in the pre-independence India becomes a victim of bonded labour system and woman-trafficking to her Brahmin brothel owner who in turn sells her to Latis Sahib, followed by a number of other predators. Devi portrays the agonies and sufferings of Indian women caught in
the social evils: prostitution and bonded labour system. It can be supported by what Vasugi Kailasam in his article “Veiled and Commodified Bodies” states while interrogating the position of subaltern women, “if decolonized space is a site of privilege, where does the postcolonial nation state place the woman’s body?” (110). In Devi’s vision, ‘decolonisation’ is possible only if Indian rural women are empowered. Devi records subaltern reality in “The Author in Conversation” in *Imaginary Maps*:

As long as eighty per cent of the Indian population lives below poverty lines, this cannot stop. Decolonisation has not reached the poor. That is why these things happen. Women are just merchandise, commodities. In the boarder district of West Bengal there are women from Bangladesh being sold in the name of marriage in the bridegroom’s house. (xx)

The observation on the conditions of the underprivileged rural and the tribal women can be used to support the evaluation of the miserable lives of Indian women to locate how they express their defiance to come out of their deplorable conditions. Sexual exploitation and prostitution of the tribal women are often the topic of Devi’s literary focus through which she tries to examine the silenced voices of the subaltern women. M. Asaduddin in his “Interview” with Devi records about the literary intention of Devi stating there is a unique “combination of an activist and a writer who has been leading a spirited crusade against social injustice meted out to the disenfranchised and the dispossessed” (12). Devi uses the short story to describe the age-old suffering of the lower caste women and its implications in the Postcolonial period.

The subaltern realisation for dignity in “Douloti the Bountiful” narrated by Devi is a platform to expose exploitation and gendered discrimination of women. It is also a method of expressing the silent voice of protest to re-construct the human
dignity of the neglected, the humiliated, and the deprived women. Devi’s literary presentation is a means to represent the empowerment of these women and to make them know their rights and to fight for them. Thus, she awakens these exploited women to be self-conscious, re-active, defiant, and assertive. The subaltern-consciousness awakens women to set them free from the multiple oppressions and raise a voice of individual freedom and self-identity. Douloti’s life connotes that in an exploitative society, a woman cannot be silenced and her silent-story becomes an agency to counter the oppressors. The women like Douloti in their struggles are called for a life of self-realisation. Devi asserts the statement in her Interview, “Telling History”, that subaltern have decided that they will survive from the margin despite their disillusionment. The women like Douloti learn to cope with life and neither will they accept defeat nor will they be crushed. It is how subaltern resistance is expressed by her women.

In “The Hunt”, the subaltern aggression is overtly expressed. It is to portray that Indian postcolonial women articulate their discontentment through different means in their diverse contexts. In the story, an illegitimate tribal girl, Mary Oraon protests the patriarchal standards, cultural codes, and sadist attitudes of the upper caste ‘mainstream’ in search of her social mobility and economic freedom. Her desire to seek an outlet for suppressed consciousness is expressed in an act of countering the upper caste, the economically rich, and the politically strong agency namely Tehsildar Singh (her oppressor) and his community. The reason for Mary’s defiance can be portrayed in what Devi in her conversation with Spivak comments in her “Translator’s Preface” in Imaginary Maps, stating, “When the system fails, an individual has a right to take to violence or any other means to get justice. An individual cannot go on suffering in silence.” (xviii) Spivak supports Devi’s
reconstructive theory in Mary to give an identity to the tribal woman of the Kuruda community who defines ‘self’ by revolting against the religious and cultural customs of the village. Through her caste, creed, community, and gendered determined role as the daughter of an Oraon (an outcaste), it depicts how Mary recognises her identity and resolves to give up her oppressive community by questioning its standards and marrying Jalim, a Muslim vendor. She emerges from her socio-culturally determined status as an empowered woman to define her identity. It signifies that despite the status of being born out of wedlock, for an outcast woman like Mary, no one can crush the power of her inner freedom for self-expression. The statement shows that she is a voice of the marginalised who longs to realise her subjectivity by expressing her rebellion against the exploiters. Even though she is ostracised as subaltern she has her individual status which is observed in the following:

Mary has countless admirers at Tohri market. She gets down at the station like a queen. She sits in her own rightful place at the market. She gets smokes from the other marketers, drinks tea and chews betel leaf at their expense, but encourages no one. Jalim the leader of the marketers and a sharp lad is her chosen mate. They will marry when either’s savings reach a hundred rupees. (Devi, “The Hunt”3)

Mary’s desire for identity can be argued from various dimensions. Mary aspires for economic freedom by saving ‘a hundred rupees’ before the marriage and she asserts her political freedom by setting up a shop in Tohri, the local market. Although, she is stigmatised as an Oraon (lower caste) woman, she never compromises on her pursuit for freedom and mobility. Mary earns trust of her employers, the Prasads and asserts her freedom in their household by preparing a cup of coffee for herself and advising them in the decision making about their house and property. When she is sexually intimidated by the villagers, she displays her indomitable spirit by raising machete
against them. Mary’s machete is a symbol that counters the existing oppressive structures of the society.

Devi portrays the story of Mary as a metaphor for many subaltern-concerns. It questions native Indian traditions: festivals, folklores, ballads, and myths as social constructs that suppress women. The issues like exploitation, injustice, discrimination, isolation, and gendered violence are also depicted to examine how women resist these evils. Mary born to a white man and a tribal mother as Radha Chakravarty in her article, “Reading Mahasweta: Shifting Frames” states a “collusion of colonialism and patriarchy” (107) potently questions the colonial violence in which her mother becomes a victim of rape, violence, discrimination, and abuse. Through this argument, it can be stated in the words of Spivak in her “Literary Representation” that the story is a “subaltern representation of colonial and patriarchal violence” (221). In Mary’s assertion of her parentage she defines her identity.

Devi’s re-writing of Jani Parab, a spring festival in “The Hunt” performed once every twelfth year by the women of Kuruda community is to depict women resistance to stereotypical traditions and customs. Mary hacking Tehsildar to death and throwing his corpse into the ravine shows her aggression against her oppressor. It is a dramatic reversal where the hunter becomes the prey. Mary’s ‘overt expression’ becomes the epitome of aggression. Here her aggression is significant as she avenges her sexual tormentor, Tehsildar by killing him. Aggression as a subaltern expression for social justice is seen in the tribal festivals as recorded in “The Author in Conversation”:

The tribals have this animal hunting festival in Bihar. It used to be the festival of Justice. After the hunt, the elders would bring offenders to justice. They would not go
to the police. In Santali language it was the Law-bir. Law is the law, and *bir* is forest. And every twelfth year it is Jani Parab, the women’s hunting festival in Bihar. Every event narrated within that story is true. What Mary did that day has been done in that area again and again. (xviii)

The ‘animal hunting festival’ can be considered as an allegory that reckons with some of the main questions disturbing the Native women. Through the character of a tribal woman, Devi describes socio-religious, and traditional practices of the hunting festival, and other inhuman practices that have caused the ‘Othering’ experience for the Indian tribal women. Mary is examined as a confident woman who expresses social deviancy as aggression to rebel against her tormentors. It can be witnessed that she revolts against ‘annual animal hunting festival’ by demanding justice for a sexual crime committed against the entire tribal women. The ‘aggression’ of Mary can be observed as avenging the sexual assaulters. By confronting the evil instincts of her pervert-oppressors, she expresses her vengeance to redeem her society. It is an example for the woman of the lower caste in the rural community who asserts her individuality and also that of women in similar challenges. It is an act of aggression that Mary employs to empower other women of her caste and community group. It illustrates how Mary represents a native voice of an eternal myth of *Durga* as the defender of the exploited in the animal hunting festival. Devi ends the story with the triumph of Mary in the following:

A few million moons pass. Mary stands up. Blood? On her clothes? She’ll wash in the cut. With great deftness she takes the *wallet* from Tehsildar’s *pocket*. A lot of money. She undoes the fold in the cloth at her waist and puts the money with her own savings. The spring festival fires are scattered in the distance. Mary is not afraid, she fears no animal as she walks, watching the *railway line* in the dark, by starlight.
Today all the mundane blood-conditioned fears of the wild quadruped are gone because she has killed the biggest beast. (Devi, “The Hunt” 16-17)

From the above passage, it is noted that Devi’s tribal women struggle against sexual exploitation by expressing their rebellion. Their experience is similar to what Spivak states in her Essay “More on Power/ Knowledge” about Mary stating she “is the child of the violation of a tribal Christian servant-woman by the white planter who leaves the plantation on Independence. Child of violation, Mary Oraon is the very figure of postcoloniality, displaced to the subaltern level.” (55) To contest Spivak, it can be noted how Mary Oraon is not displaced subaltern. Rather, gathers her inner strength to subdue her oppressors with aggression. It can be seen how aggression is common in all the stories and Mary expresses similar emotion to overcome her marginality within Indian caste-ridden society. Devi attempts to foster a language of protest of the tribal and the dalit women in her stories. Her use of repetitive and ungrammatical sentences: “A lot of money. A lot of money” (Devi, “The Hunt” 55) is to counter conventional literary language and to portray the magnitude of violence often inflicted on the tribal women and to make them express their discontentment. Similar themes of aggression and retaliation can be examined in “The Witch”.

“The Witch” defines subaltern-consciousness and evaluates how Devi documents caste, class, and gender exploitation of the lower caste women of Ganju, Dushad, Bhobi, Oraon, Tura, and Munda communities. The aim is to support what Devi emphasises in her “Introduction” to Bitter Soil stating: “After reading my work, the reader should face the truth of facts, and feel duly ashamed of the true face of India” (vii). The story is about how a tribal woman trapped in the web of social ostracism and injustice expresses her discontent in silence by delineating that her status in society is determined by Patriarchy. The woman becomes the target of the
inhuman social and superstitious practices of Indian tribals. Like “The Witch”, most of Devi’s stories are set in Palamau, from where she mobilises her characters from local to general to contextualise the common challenges of the native women. She sets her stories around Palamau and states that it is “indeed a national crime” (*Bitter Soil* vii), as it is socio-economically and politically the most backward place in India. Devi also centralises Indian reality in a small village, Palamau from where she evaluates the struggles of the subaltern to locate similar issues of women of the other parts of India to reconstruct the history of the Indian subaltern living in the villages.

In “The Witch” the aggression of Somri is against her socially constructed identity as a dumb and a mute woman. She is marginalised by her sexual-assaulters by social-ostracism as witch or *Daini*—a patriarchal concept of ‘hysterical’. She is denied of her freedom of speech and banished into the forest. It signifies that the lower caste women are victims of double marginalisation caused by cultural exploitation which Devi documents in Munda, an agricultural Indian village. Through the conversational style, Devi uses as a narrative technique to record subaltern aggression, she gives voice to the oppressed by exposing the ‘Otherness’ between the village men, the *Mundas* (the oppressor) and the woman protagonist, Sombri (the oppressed). It can be taken to argue how the upper caste, a Hindu Brahmin of *Tahar* community- Hanuman Mishra and the lower caste *Tura* (tribal) men have equal share in restricting a woman’s space by exploiting her as a cause during the famine and ostracising her from her community. Devi records the Patriarchal ‘hysterical voice’ of Somri:

> A terrifying, naked woman uttered the words, ‘I am famine’, before floating away on a bloodsoaked cloud. According to the *panjika*, she is a *daini*. This *daini* has to be found and driven away. She is wounded, if she bleeds, or if she is burnt to death, a terrible calamity will visit upon them. (Devi, “Witch” 59)
Devi’s mode of bringing alive the ‘drought situation’ and its impact on Kuruda women can be taken to show how a woman can be driven to a scary situation. The fabricated tales by the superstitious tribal men in the story entrap the woman as a witch who ‘roams in the forest and brings misfortune’. It suits the vicious social practice of Tura men and the sexual gratification of Hanuman Mishra to consider a normal woman as a witch. Devi comments on how men are watchful in oppressing their women as can be seen from the story, “All husbands-fathers-sons were compelled to keep watch upon the women... It’s not easy to hunt a daini. Everyone, everywhere, has to suspect everyone else, all the time” (60-61) resulting in satisfying the vested interest of men. It delineates that women are targeted at all times and by everyone.

The narrative can be studied to see how the aggression of the subaltern is against the glaring social problems: illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition that have an adverse effect on the Indian rural women. Devi argues that these issues lead them to a life of destitution, beggary, prostitution, and poverty. The most common form of victimisation depicted in Devi’s stories is that of women succumbing to socio-cultural evils rampant in rural areas. “The Witch” can be evaluated to see that Devi intends to speak for a silenced voice of the socio-cultural and psychologically tormented women by re-constructing the repressive Indian religious ethos of the Tura and the exploitative political powers of the Tahar communities. The suffering endured by the protagonist also testifies to the cultural and religious conditioning of women, which, Devi narrates in the folktales- a form of aggression of the Bengali tribals. The dialect, daini as gendered word explains the struggles of the marginalised women to express themselves as women. Devi’s mode of addressing her protagonist through a local lingo, daini is to expose a culture that entraps women of the tribal community.
Because as Spivak records the words of Devi in “Translator’s Forward” that “dialect can be dignified” (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow* viii). By exposing Patriarchal culture through dialect, Devi gives dignity to women by raising the subaltern-consciousness of Sombri. The ‘female complaint’ of Somri is the result of ostracism and sexual abuse. Devi identifies the need for Somri’s self-expression. Thus, Somri’s voice is not ‘marginal’ but speaks for her ‘self’.

Devi’s representative voice becomes the voice of the collective-consciousness to raise a voice for the subaltern-consciousness of the lower caste women. Devi strives to free these women from sexual abuse by portraying their inhumanity and violence. A woman like Somri is doubly marginalised as a victim of her own tribe as well as that of the upper caste men. The socially ostracised life of a woman in “The Witch” becomes a recurrent metaphor for women battling for social acceptance and recognition. Beena Agarwal states, “they are ‘dalit of dalits’ because their humanity is crushed under the burden of patriarchy as well as under the burden of caste prejudice” (166). The woman, who is the victim of inhuman treatment and cruelty, becomes an instrument with Devi to speak for the subaltern. More often, it is significant that Devi uses a muted character to represent the subaltern voice through which she deconstructs tribal silenced histories.

Devi’s story deals with tribal de-construction and her basic interest is to re-construct tribal history from the subaltern viewpoint. She does it by representing the tribal stories often told from the viewpoint of tribal characters. In “The Witch” the tribal history is narrated by depicting the struggles of a woman, Sombri. From time immemorial, women in India have been objects of sex and victims of cultural construct. Patriarchy has silenced their point of view. As a Native writer, Devi tries to re-construct the nation’s struggle for freedom with the much needed freedom of
women and their social mobility. It can be seen how Devi feels that a nation’s independence depends on the socio-economic and political freedom of all people irrespective of caste, class, and gender. She locates the nation’s struggle for freedom in a small village, Palamau, where all the people are divided and discriminated.

Devi’s interest for the nation can be supported by Nandini Sen in her “In Conversation with Mahasweta Devi” where comments:

She is a keen interpreter of mass histories which the mainstream tries to marginalise. She does not see herself speaking on behalf of the marginalised. According to her, the poor, the downtrodden and the subaltern have always been speaking. It is just their voices are muted and subsumed in the mainstream discourse. She merely decodes and brings these voices to the fore. Not only can the subaltern speak, they have been speaking through the ages. (62)

From the above statement, it is supported that Devi is an authentic interpreter of Indian tribal and the dalit communities. Her stories are examples of the subaltern remaking of history whose voice speak for their empowerment.

In her article “Agency and Motherhood: A study of Mahasweta Devi’s In the Name of the Mother”, Swati Chikkala examines how Devi uses various strategies in her short stories to define subaltern motherhood. Chikkala argues that the “portrayal of deification of motherhood” (164) has created oppression of women. Taking the views of Chikkala on deconstruction of motherhood, it is noted that Devi’s views on the image of a mother from the subaltern perspective has evaluated various concerns of Indian tribal women. Devi primarily uses the tribal and the low caste mothers to question diverse complexities that have silenced them. Radha Chakravarty comments in her Introduction to In the Name of the Mother, “Devi’s stories expose in particular, the intersecting forms of exploitation to which women in certain underprivileged
sections of Indian society are subjected to suffer” (x). To evaluate the enforced role of a mother in “Ma, from Dusk to Dawn”, the drudgery of the marginalised woman, Jati Thakurni is taken to study how she re-constructs her identity as a responsible mother. The story is about the lower caste woman forced to take an artificial divine mother as Goddess Jateshwari and denied her maternal love towards her son, Sadhan Kandori. The binary opposition can be seen as between the divine mother and the real mother. By contrasting the ideal and the real mother, it is argued that the socio-religious, political, and economical oppression in India is an agency to exploit the mothers of tribal community.

In “Ma, from Dusk to Dawn” it is portrayed that the subaltern mothers rise above their challenges to articulate their discontentment. It is supported by the viewpoint of Radha Chakravarty in her “Introduction: In the Name of the Mother” where she opines that the “stories also describe the strategies often involved by women to survive and circumvent the forms of containment inflicted by society” (x). Jati Thakurni, the woman protagonist is awakened through a painful experience of motherhood to a deeper awareness of social injustice she ought to resist. Devi discovers a theory of resistance to argue that motherhood is a cultural construct. The story evaluates how Patriarchy has marginalised the tribal and the lower caste mothers into ill-fitting moulds and socially prescribed roles as divine mothers. These traditionally idealised roles of mothers have denied them the right to articulate their individual needs and desires as real mothers. Devi has “rejected the traditional use of myth as mystification of motherhood” (viii). It signifies that the representation of a nomadic tribal mother, Jati is to critique the traditional and religious oppressive cultures that violate the identity of women. It can be further supported by what Adrienne Rich in her Of Woman Born states: “Institutionalised motherhood that
demands of women’s maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realisation, relation to others rather than the creation of self” (42). It reflects how women are denied of their freedom and dignity. But Jati asserts herself as a human mother with ‘intelligence’ and dismantles the role of an idealised divine mother as Jateshwari. Jati’s act is against the ‘Institutionalised motherhood’ and by defying it she re-constructs her ‘self’.

Devi’s literary interpretation on the aggression of woman is seen in the story which begins with a conversion between a bed-ridden mother, Jati and her son. It is how she expresses the magnitude of suffering of the subaltern caused by poverty and hunger. Jati’s aggression is portrayed in her refusal to go to the hospital. This can be asserted by Jati’s words to her son, “don’t go, the dom tears up entrails, rips out the heart. Doctors keep hearts in bottles.” (Devi, “Ma, From Dusk to Dawn” 2) During the conversation, the mother cautions her son about the evils of the social system: ‘flesh trade, organ-selling, scams of the doctors, and other illegal medical practices’. The maternal voice in the story alerts her poverty-stricken son not to become a corpse for the ‘Medical Agency’ namely ‘the local doctors’, ‘the midwives’, and other ‘medical practitioners’ who sell the subaltern bodies for their gain. The voice of a subaltern mother is authentically recorded by the writer to unfold the hidden agenda of the upper caste oppressors. The mother and son duo in the story are exploited and marginalised, yet, their search for freedom is uplifting.

The other oppressive agency which is dismantled in the story is the social and the divine stereotype role imposed on motherhood. Devi critiques the divine role of Jati stating: “From sunrise to sunset, the thought of Thakurni as a mother-wife-sister was forbidden” (3). The role of Jati as divine mother is stereotyped and idealised as Shanjh-Shokaler Ma or a mother from dusk to dawn. The dialect, Shanjh-Shokaler Ma
indicates her power to reconstruct the subaltern motherhood and its argument is about a low caste mother and her child who is denied maternal love, subverts social systems. The voice in the story speaks of how the poor and the downtrodden lead a life of misery without compromising on their quest for identity. The misery of these people can be supported from the following:

Sadhan Kandori knows of nothing other than his mother. An idiot boy. His brain remained underdeveloped even at 30. Built like a bull, his body contains nothing other than the stomach. No lungs, no heart, red like hibiscus petals, no intestines, slippery, snake-like, no genitals...his body contains none of these. There’s only the stomach. And there’s hunger. Just by tempting him with food, his master’s young wife gets him to split firewood, draw water from the tube-well, break up mounds of coal. (Devi, “Ma from Dusk to Dawn” 3)

The aggression of Jati in the imposed divine mother’s role is vindictive and counters the prosperity of Anadi-daktar, the physician who victimises the tribals by selling corpses, conducting foeticides, abortions, and giving fake certificates to them. The subversion can be noticed in how the doctor is made to pay obeisance at Jati’s feet with offerings of oil, coconut, rice, and salt as absolution. During the day there are many other devotees for Jati and she makes use of her cultural role to gain her economic freedom. It substantiates that aggression in Jati is submissive through manipulative divine role to subvert her predators.

Devi records similar characters in “Rudali” and “Breast-Giver” who also make use of their circumstances to assert their dignity which are discussed in the next Chapter. All these women revolt against oppressive forces to define their identity. Anjum Katyal in his “The Metamorphosis of Rudali”, calls this act of subversion as “consciousness-raising and the focus of the fictional characters of Devi is for
conscientising” (Devi, “Rudali” 27). It means a marginalised person after realising his/her subaltern status emerges for freedom and awakens other subalterns for individual space by collectively fighting for a cause. Jati is a ‘consciousness-raising’ person who expresses her freedom by alerting her son for an independent life. She does it by using her divine role and by circumventing her predators.

The argument of Jati’s story is that as long as social evils exist, the challenges of Indian native mothers can never have a panacea unless the subalterns find their own way of empowerment. Devi defines the name of the social disease as ‘starvation’ as she states “Eating nothing, starving” (Devi, “Ma, from Dusk to Dawn” 10). Indian tribal women fight the battle against poverty, hunger, and starvation till death. Due to poverty, Jati succumbs to death. The lineage of Jati’s struggles is traced from the legend of Jaara, the hunter. It signifies how Devi tries to retrieve and represent the historical and cultural suffering of the subaltern through the mythical representation. It illustrates that in Postcolonial period, there is a similar manifestation of the suppression of subaltern woman as in mythical times. The legendary representation explains the struggles of Pakhmaras, the nomadic and the hunting communities of India and the curse of their starvation caused by cultural construct. This mythical story is narrated to rewrite the lives of the nomads. It is associated with Sadhan but the difference is he gives up imposed traditional practices of ‘appeasing gods with elephant, horse, rice, cloth, land, gold and silver’ after the death of his mother. In re-making of Sadhan’s story, Devi shows how he fights with the priest as an act of resistance. Instead of offering to appease the gods, Sadhan eats the shradha, the ritual rice. This unconventional act of Sadhan is an example for subaltern defiance and aggression in the tribal reality.
Re-structuring an authentic motherhood in Devi’s stories as acts of aggression is interpreted in multiple ways. Rooted firmly in her Native land, Devi is familiar with local histories, rituals, epics, and myths constructed around the subaltern mother. The purpose of abundant use of myths and legends is to represent the exploitation by the upper caste with their class power structures. It is an act of re-constructing feminist tradition by defying cultural constructs. It is a subaltern act of subversion. Vandana Gupta in her book *Mahasweta Devi: A Critical Reading* acclaims about Devi that her subversion is of the cultural politics of mainstream history. Devi intervenes into the Brahaminical history by appropriating and re-deploying the mythical narratives. The stories convey the message to build alternative social structures for the better survival of subaltern mothers. Devi uses the defied voice of the subaltern mothers as chronicles of the Native women attempting a change in the social stratification of Indian rural society. Having discussed ‘Female Aggression’ as a positive response to define individual identity in Devi’s women, the next part of this Chapter goes on to highlight Lahiri’s women and their response to challenges in Diasporic life.

Lahiri’s exploration of her women characters is contextualised either in the historical cultural identity or in the adopted country. A quest for an authentic womanhood to establish their self in Diasporic familial existence is studied in “A Temporary Matter”, “Interpreter of Maladies”, “A Real Durwan”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “Sexy”. It is in dispersion, diffusion and heterogeneity of American culture, the women attempt to exercise their social power by establishing their sense of identity and cultural affiliation. Irma Ratiani calls this a ‘liminal experience’. Ratiani explores Arnold Van Gennep’s term ‘Liminality’ as a ‘coordinating role in the process of seasonal change.’ Liminality is applied to see how in the diverse cultural locations the women reclaim their self by means of
‘reinvention’, ‘memory’ and ‘self-knowledge’. Hence, Diaspora of Indian women is not a ‘scattering experience’. Rather, an existence that helps to recognise their potential for social responsibilities.

Experience of diffusion is common in a culturally diverse society. The women experience these conflicting moments in different contexts and their response is diverse depending on the context in which they live. Ranu Uniyal in her article, "Associating Difference with Diversity: Writers from the Indian Diaspora", states “Women in particular situations face dislocation at multiple levels. Their identity as a wife and a mother within the private sphere and as brown, non-working, tradition-bound Indian in the public sphere is a constant site of struggle.” (46) It signifies that the ‘Otherness’ of Indian Diasporic women between the ‘man and the woman’, the ‘American and the Indian’, the ‘white and the brown’, the ‘working and the non-working’, the ‘independent and the dependent’, and the ‘traditional and the modern’ has created a cultural dislocation for them. Yet, they surmount their challenges with courage and patience. Lahiri’s representation of these ‘binary oppositions’ is to make them speak in their own context and find remedy for their challenges.

The exploration reveals that Indian women in Diasporic existence are confronted with two-fold locations, inside their home as mothers or wives and outside as working women yet they discover their own space as individuals. It explains how there is a constant struggle for women in the ‘hybrid’ context to confront their daily experiences of marginalisation and suppression. Lahiri’s two-fold experience in two cultures can be seen in her identity as a second generation Indian Diasporic woman in America who recalls her past memory of her ancestral home, Calcutta. It has helped her to examine the difficulties of Indian women in different Diasporic cultural locations. It reflects also her experience of the host country portraying the experiences
of Indian women in her short stories. Lahiri records not only their angst, dreams, and challenges but depicts the way they construct and re-construct their identity in their everyday life. She is an authentic ‘interpreter of maladies’ of Indian women in their familial and social relations. Her women characters are given a voice to confront their divergent and heterogeneous cultures in search of self. The subaltern women she depicts are the women who do not succumb to the difficulties of life. Rather, they sustain their autonomy of self and survive in the spaces that are beyond the domain of their cultural and familial constraints.

The socio-cultural change due to globalisation has made Indian women conscious of the need to define their self. There is a re-formulation of cultural discourse by questioning the exploitative social norms and opposing dominant cultures that marginalise women. The conjugal constraints, ethnic struggles, gender discrimination, unexpressed quest for sensual drives, and lack of distinctive identity are depicted as scattering experiences of Lahiri’s women. “A Temporary Matter” can be read to examine the clash in marital relations resolving for harmony between the Diasporic couple, Shoba and Shukumar. “The Real Durwan” is about the ability of the elderly woman, Boori Ma to confront class, creed, ethnic, and gender discrimination by expressing her inner voice for existence. “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” speaks about assimilation through the retrospection of memory by Lilia’s mother. “Interpreter of Maladies” is about a woman’s realisation of familial commitment and “Sexy” is positive acceptance in the face of conjugal conflicts.

Lahiri portrays archetypal women Shoba, Mrs. Das, Boori Ma, Lila’s mother, and Laxmi, who speak about their ability to cope with their struggles. As R.V. Jayanth Kasyap and A. Rama Krishna Rao opine that Lahiri’s exploration of women’s life is to depict ‘the ills of modern society and the ill-treatment meted out to the weak,
underprivileged and ill-fated women’. Lahiri’s presentation of these challenges of women is to raise subaltern-consciousness by evaluating their struggles for freedom, dignity, stability, conjugal peace, and self-esteem. Even though her women are led to conjugal unfaithfulness by their counterparts, experience social ostracism, gender marginalisation, cultural alienation, and ethnic discrimination, yet, there is an earnest effort to define their identity in Diasporic existence by defying them.

The voice of the women in these five stories helps to stress how Diasporic issues have created glaring problems for women and forced them to forge their identity. Lahiri largely writes about the daily activities of Indian women in diverse cultures to examine their nostalgic experiences that compel them to overcome cultural issues created within their Diasporic social institutions: marriage, family, and community. Through retrospection, the women speak about the distant memories of their home and their struggles in coping with familial misunderstandings in Diasporic existence. It is in this two-fold location, the women face many challenges. Edward Said in his book The Culture of Location calls this two-fold location a “discourse of mimicry- an ironic compromise”. Mimicry he states “constructed around an ambivalence. A sign of a double articulation”. (122) In the ‘double articulation’ namely historical-cultural identity and host country, Lahiri’s women have re-defined their identity to live as responsible individuals. It shows Lahiri’s literary ability to portray the entire lives of the women in Diasporic existence. It is posited by Judith Caesar:

Lahiri imagines an American world not just through American eyes but through eyes that have seen other cultures and a mind that has understood other ways of thought. Because of this, perhaps, she can offer fresh insight into the causes of the maladies of
contemporary American culture, new metaphors for new experience of the world, reworking of old themes, and subversion of old clichés. (52)

Lahiri examines the ‘double location’ of these women to record their voice that helps them cope with difference.

The voice of a financially independent middle class woman, Shoba in “A Temporary Matter”, is taken to examine to see how she expresses her ‘aggression as positive response’ to reconcile with her husband, Shukumar. Here aggression is an unexpressed emotional need for conjugal love and understanding. The ‘power cut’ announced by the electricity board gives an opportunity for Shoba to express her unexpressed consciousness by sharing her hidden life with her husband in the nights. She recollects her identity in India at her grandparent’s place, the way they would recite a small poem, crack a joke, tell facts about the world, and other interesting information about her friends in America. It is supported with the reference to the ‘continuous load shedding in India’ in the context of a long power cut in her Diasporic house for “five days their electricity would be cut off for one hour; beginning at eight P.M.” (Lahiri, 1). Her unpleasant memory is caused in her new location due to the sad demise of her still-born child and due to her unfaithful husband leading to a drifted relationship with him. The image of the darkness of her house is metaphorically compared to the darkness of her mind, an unconscious memory which she consciously expresses to Shukumar in their game play during those power cut nights. Her challenge of isolation after the death of her baby is re-told after many months. In moments of challenge she feels victimised by loneliness, isolation, mental trauma, and anxiety. It shows a Diasporic woman who aspires to go beyond the scattering experiences to express her ‘self’. In the opening lines, Lahiri potently starts her story to see how Shoba’s mind responds to the notice left by the repairmen to
evaluate her life in dispersion. Aggression as a means of self realisation in Shoba, finds expression in a sudden occurrence after seeing the notice board.

Shoba introspects by reflecting about her distanced relationship with her husband and her displaced experience in the new environment, yet her desire to express self is seen in the way she uses her memory in the ‘game play’ by recalling her “mother’s visits” (9), cooking on Sundays”, going for “long drives”, “shopping and visiting a maze of stalls” (7), and going to bookstores” (15). Shoba speaks about her childhood days “playing game play at her granny’s” (12) and her conjugal discord with Shukumar. It is her appearance with a “navy blue poplin raincoat”, “gray sweatpants”, “white sneakers”, “cranberry lipstick which is visible only on the outer reaches of her mouth and her “eyeliner leaving charcoal patches beneath her lower lashes” (1), that make her realise for a dignified life. As an Indian woman, Shoba’s acceptance of her Diasporic identity helps her move towards self-realisation despite the shattered experiences of “avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house”, “spending as much time on separate floors as possible” (4), the “dead baby” (3), Shukumar cheating in his “Oriental Civilization exam in college”, “fifteen years of sorrow” (17), and not letting her know the “sex of their child” (21). The discontentment expressed in the above slated memories of Shoba explains the enduring capabilities of an Indian woman in the Diasporic ambit. Her confessional interchange with her husband during ‘the game play’ in those nights gives her knowledge of the past, a realisation of self, and helps her to reconcile with Shukumar.

A rift in the relationship between Shoba and her husband post marriage for three years has kept her melancholic, and it shows how she copes with her spiritless marital life. Shoba’s struggle for reconciliation can be metaphorically compared to the darkness of her house. Lahiri’s creative imagination helps to decipher the mind of an
Indian woman in a splintered marital relationship and her struggle to cover up the cracks. The exploration reveals that in the ‘ambivalence’ Shoba is able to express her freedom despite being lonely and disillusioned with her family life. In her self-esteem, Shoba feels “I’ve been looking for an apartment and I’ve found one. She had money saved up for a security deposit. (21) The Apartment was on Beacon Hill, so she could walk to work. In times of anxieties, Shoba contemplates making alternative plans for her life. It shows Shoba has not become the victim of her Diasporic family. Despite being independent her quest for reconciliation and a desire for familial harmony can be gauged from the way she handles her husband reminding him about the appointment with his dentist. Shazia Siddiqui Khan in her article “Representation of Human Relationship in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Short Story” acclaims Shoba:

Shoba is presented as a thoroughly methodical person, a near perfectionist who always plans things in advance. Her house is very efficiently run, always well-stocked with groceries and other articles of use. She is the sort of a person who is always prepared for surprises. But the loss of her child was something she had never anticipated. (102)

It signifies that in ‘dispersion’ Shoba values the essence of motherhood. Lahiri outlines that subaltern aggression is positive and Shoba battles to get what she wants.

In Shoba’s challenges, it is seen she is not a vulnerable woman. Rather she resists the image of a woman as helpless and dependent wife, which is observed in the relationship between Shoba and her husband. Shoba lends a helping hand to her husband to build up his career and financially supports the family in the hour of need. Her very language speaks of the diverse forms of endurance and her inner struggles to combat familial adversities. She is economically stable, has a dignified job, and has invested in her Apartment. She has kept the bonuses from her job in a separate bank
account in her name. She is spirited and courageous. Subaltern-consciousness is seen in Shoba that she is neither a suffering wife nor a victim of loneliness. Rather, she finds a way to assert her identity to enable her to cope with her conjugal rift. The ‘Otherness’ of Shoba is mitigated and she becomes a co-equal partner to her husband.

Shoba’s aggression as a means of reinventing her ‘self’ can be supported from her varied experiences. Nostalgically, Shoba looks into her past recollecting moments of happiness, which now, not only brings her sustenance and hope but lifts her depression. There is a contrast between her past and present that gives an insight into how a woman can survive traumatic situations in ‘ambivalence.’ Shoba re-constructs the past in her memory and it gives her realisation of self and reconciliation with her husband.

Lahiri’s story on the subaltern experience of her woman protagonist also leads her to question herself in order to come into her own. Shoba, thus defines her own individuality. It is supported by what Simmi Gurwara in her article “Jhumpa Lahiri’s Unaccustomed of the Earth: A Critique” states, “New land demands compromises and adjustment, life-skills and a fighting spirit to overcome the challenges that loom large” (9). It signifies that Shoba is a woman who fights maladjustments created in Diasporic conjugal life and overcomes challenges in search of happiness.

Shoba’s challenges and her struggles to cope with them can be analysed when her child dies. As an authentic mother, she had treasured her still-born child in her womb. Lahiri unravels the subaltern experience in Shoba, a grieving mother in a vivid manner:

The baby had been born dead. Shoba was lying on a bed, asleep, in a private room so small there was barely enough space to stand beside her, in a wing of the hospital
they hadn’t been to on the tour for expectant parents. Her placenta had weakened and
she’d had a caesarean, though not quickly enough. The doctor explained that these
things happen. (Lahiri, 3-4)

Shoba’s struggle to cope with the loss of her baby and a caesarean is examined to see
how she resolves them in stoic endurance. Lahiri looks into the emotional vortex of
Shoba to see how an Indian mother who is depressed, empty, and lonely can negotiate
with her daily struggles. As Jaydeep Chakrabarty in his article “Diasporic Dynamism
in Representing India: The Narrative World of Jhumpa Lahiri” states, the story is “a
representation of the Diasporic predicament of an Indians abroad- to be more specific,
Indian Bengalis in the USA” (24). It shows that even though Bengali women like
Shoba are exposed to complexities and diversities in Diasporic living, yet they are
confident and courageous.

Shoba faces pain, loss, angst, isolation, alienation, separation, and
displacement in the thinning relationship with her husband and yet surfaces to fight
for air, and that is her triumph. The narrative style of the story is focused on the image
of a mother and her movements in an estranged familial situation. Thus, Lahiri
deviates from the traditional narrative mode of using plot and characterisation.
Instead, she represents a woman’s memory that recalls her past in the game play
wherein Shoba fights to recapture her entire life with her husband. It is revealed in the
story how there is an oscillation between the past and the present experiences of
Shoba as she recalls her past throughout the story. It is how Shoba reconstructs her
identity as an Indian Diaporic woman. Shoba’s acceptance of human vulnerability
gives her realisation and peace. Shoba is represented as an Indian woman who has the
power to overcome struggles. While expressing her independent status by informing
Shukumar about an Apartment for herself and her plans to move out makes her a
courageous woman on par with her counterpart. Lahiri substantiates it in her description of Shoba who is “always gone by the time Shukumar wakes up” and she is abreast at “pinpointing the typographical errors in the text books. Shukumar envies her for the perfect commitment which he sees absent in his life” (Lahiri, 4). The craftsmanship of Lahiri lies in the portrayal of a wife and the mother who has the power of creating her own space. Shukumar “longs for her and recalls how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions” (4). The story is a recording of the past of a grieving mother to probe her anxiety about the present and to reconcile with her pain for a peaceful marital life in the future. The analysis of Shoba reveals that she is a woman who remains assertive, confident, self-fulfilled, committed, harmonious, enduring, and independent. In times of adversities she does not yield to the subaltern status, rather, she acknowledges her womanhood reassured and secured in her future.

Mrs. Das in “Interpreter of Maladies” is an Indian Diasporic woman, despite her devastating experiences of loneliness, extra-marital relationship, and mental pain, is not crushed. Rather, she finds a way out to express her unspoken voice. Lahiri gives voice to a married woman by portraying the turbulence of passion and pain, happiness and sorrow, guilt and frustration of a woman in a single plot, in a single theme, and in a single character in her story revolving around Mrs. Das. It is explored to show how Lahiri reveals the unconscious mind of a woman who copes with her personal demons on a family trip to the “Sun temple at Konarak” (43) in India. Lahiri situates the story in Odisha to show Diasporic women can feel displacement at different points in time and necessarily in the host country.

The predicament of Mrs. Das is about her secret love-affair that awakens her to realise that her third son, Bobby was fathered by her husband’s Punjabi-Indian
friend. It is confided to the interpreter of maladies (car driver) namely Mr. Kapasi, “for eight years I haven’t been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. He doesn’t even suspect it.” (65) The subaltern-consciousness of Mrs. Das is that she wants to cope with self by sharing her concealed life. Thus aggression in Mrs. Das is to vent out her trauma and be free from inner disturbances. Lahiri records the subaltern experiences of an Indian woman in a dialogic exchange between Mrs. Das and Mr. Kapasi who shares her personal life in the car. The marginalised condition of Mrs. Das can be examined due to her marital disharmony caused in the diverse cultural location. She is no doubt a victim of a Diasporic culture exposed to extra-marital relations, yet she reconciles it by sharing it with Mr. Kapasi.

Tejindra Kaur in his article, “Portrayal of Diaspora Experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies” states “their stay in the new country and in interaction with the representative culture the subjectivities and modes of thinking of diasporas also change” (193). It signifies even though women are victims of marital discord and ethnic diversity, they discover their fuller selves. Mrs. Das in her culturally diversified context falls in love with a man causing outside of marriage, thus causing estrangement between her and her husband. As a wife and the mother of three children, she is unable to express her mind, the secret affair which she represses for eight years. Lahiri’s perception of the struggles of the mentally disturbed women is depicted through Mrs. Das in order to see how she comes to terms with herself. Thus, the subaltern aggression in Mrs. Das is the expression of her troubled mindscape- a deep human cry for existence and peaceful co-existence.

The ability of Mrs. Das to cope with her challenging experiences of Diasporic life can be discussed from the beginning of the plot. The story begins at an Indian tea stall with Mr. and Mrs. Das, the second generation Indian couple from New Jersey
who are on their way to the Sun Temple at Konarak, an Indian pilgrim centre. Lahiri’s craft of locating Indian Diasporic woman like Mrs. Das in different locations: New Jersey and India is to see how she copes with her life in different cultural locations. Her holiday in India with her three children reveals that she has a strained relationship. Two incidents are taken to support, at the tea stall when Mr. and Mrs. Das bicker about who should take Tina their daughter to the toilet and at Khandagiri hills their children are attacked by monkeys, where they stop for a break. Mrs. Das is least concerned about her son Bobby when he disappears and is attacked by monkeys as she feels that he is not her son. Lahiri delineates the feminist-consciousness in an unconventional male voice, Mr. Kapasi, their tourist guide from whose viewpoint the short story is narrated. He observes the “Hybridity” (Habib, 166) of the family, they looked like Indians but dressed as foreigners.

In a conversation with Mr. Kapasi, Mrs. Das reveals her “in-between” identity in her married life. It depicts how she expresses her voice to resolve her emotional and psychological trauma. Lahiri’s repeated use of the expression, ‘eight years’, explains how a woman in her Diasporic experiences, makes an effort to overcome her inner struggles by articulating it. Lahiri records the silenced voice, which breaks out, involuntarily. Mrs. Das confesses to Mr. Kapasi her ‘eight long years’ secret affair with her husband’s friend. In her struggle Mrs. Das feels utterly helpless and vents out her discontentment saying, “One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything” (65). Mr. Kapasi wonders if Mr. and Mrs. Das was a bad match, just as he and his wife were. Perhaps they, too, had little in common apart from three children and a decade of their lives. The signs he recognised from his own marriage were similar: the bickering, the indifference, and protracted silences.
When Mrs. Das comes to India on a tour, she feels at home in the home country and with her countrymen. In this connection she frees her mind from all shackles of life. Jaya Srivastava’s article, “Jhumpa Lahiri as Interpreter of Indian Americans in Interpreter of Maladies” states, “Home is not simply where one lives. It is one’s identity –national, cultural and spiritual. Home is security, exile is the loss of home; it is uprooting” (230). Considering the statement, it is viewed that Mrs. Das after confessing her secrets to Mr. Kapasi, heaves a sigh of relief and exclaims how she felt so terrible all the time to face such frustrating moments. Her voice expresses her honesty that she was not happy with her husband and is forced to be with her family. Lahiri records it by narrating her as a ‘woman who loved neither her husband nor her children’. The analysis reveals that Mrs. Das is an example of an Indian Diasporic woman who expresses her authentic emotions and confesses her inner desires for an independent life away from familial bonds. Himadri Lahiri in her article, “Family as Space in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Short Stories” points out that it is in the moments of self-knowledge that Mrs. Das fights her way back to her family and is able to interact with others freely. It signifies that Mrs. Das is a liberated person and is able to shed the heavy oppressive forces weighing her down.

The subaltern-consciousness expressed in “The Real Durwan” is about the struggles of Boori Ma, an East Bengali refugee after the Partition to cope with herself as a sweeper and the guard of the stairwell, the Durwan. The ambivalence of Boori Ma is between her pre-partition affluence and her present life as a refugee. Lahiri uses an un-translated word, Durwan to evaluate the subaltern quest for individual identity. The un-translated words “are interface signs –a successful way to foreground cultural distinctions” such devices are used to “illustrate the importance of discourse in interpreting cultural concepts” (Ashcroftet al., 63). Lahiri’s use of the local lingo, the
Bengali expression, *Durwan* is to resist cultural constructed identity of an elderly woman. It is to show how despite alienation, economic constrains, and personal identity crisis, the women try to discover their lives. Thus *Durwan* as a subaltern aggression dismantles cultural identity and fights against the distorted images of women in a diversified culture.

The marginality of Boori can be traced in this un-translated word, *Durwan* that separates her from others in the Apartment building. The denotative word, *Durwan* signifies how women are subjected to exploitation in all cultures. Tejindra Kaur states the Diasporic meet this humiliating and discriminatory treatment in every dominant culture and in other nations. On the contrary, it can be examined how Boori Ma confronts these experiences of humiliation and ill-treatment as a real *Durwan*. Lahiri’s concern for the marginalised goes beyond their victim state and portrays them as individuals who can overcome cultural marginality. Raji Narasimhan points out that Lahiri’s language is sharper, trickier weapon and is used with care. Narasimhan quotes from the story about the voice of Boori Ma as ‘brittle with sorrows, as tart as curds and shrill enough to grate meat from a coconut’ to define a character whose voice can go beyond her subaltern status. It reflects Lahiri’s linguistic and narrative skills portray not only pain, loss, longing, and anxiety of the refugee women but also their ability to cope with marginality. Thus aggression is an outlet of Boori Ma to speak for self in all circumstances.

Boori Ma is marginalised in every aspect as a deported woman and yet she moves beyond her struggles and is able to express her freedom. Her subaltern position is constructed by the Apartment dwellers. They discriminate her as a woman, “sixty-four-year old” (Lahiri, 70) born to a low caste Bengali family as “the accent in her Bengali made that clear” (72). She is a “political refugee deported to Calcutta through
the East Bengal border,” (70) after the Partition. Her stay in the stairwell of a building for many years in Calcutta has reduced her to a “skeleton” (72). Her gendered subaltern story reveals that as an elderly woman who made to work as a charwoman and to guard the building daily without any recompence. Boori Ma’s social position in the flat-building is stereotyped as a “sweeper”, “inferior”, “poor”, “guard of the stairwell”, “exploited with long hours of work to sweep the staircase”, and “humiliated and scorned for stealing the basin” (82). It is against this imposed submissive role, Boori Ma defines her identity. Lahiri narrates Boori Ma’s subaltern struggle and gives her a voice stating:

In fact, the only thing that appeared three-dimensional about Boori Ma was her voice: brittle with sorrows, as tart as curds, and shrill enough to grate meat from a coconut. It was with this voice that she enumerated, twice a day as she swept the stairwell, the details of her plight and losses suffered since her deportation to Calcutta after Partition. At that time, she maintained, the turmoil had separated her from a husband, four daughters, a two-story brick house, a rosewood almari, and a number of coffer boxes whose skeleton keys she still wore, along with her life savings, tied to the free end of her sari. (70)

The story projects how Boori Ma is marginalised in social-psychological, ethnic, economic, and political contexts as a refugee woman and how she resists by establishing her sense of identity. Mr. Dalal and the residents in the flats are her oppressors who accuse her for the “stolen basin on the stairwell” (81) of the Apartment. Boori Ma’s cultural identity is examined as “a refugee,” “a victim of changing times,” “an outsider” and a “real durwan” (72-73). It delineates that although she is a victim of double-marginalisation as a refugee and a woman belonging to a lower caste, yet her personal struggles are a means of resistance for
freedom. Like Lahiri, Spivak also examines the dichotomy created by the caste system in India which is similar to American racism stating, “Racism” in America is “bad, but in different ways as in India” ("Postmarked Calcutta, India” 81). Spivak opines that Indian caste system and American racism as equal agency that exploit people in different countries. Lahiri’s argument on behalf of subaltern aggression is to confront these cultural oppressions.

It is by resisting the exploitative agency that Boori Ma defines her identity as a woman. The agency used by Boori Ma to counter her discrimination can be examined from the way she recalls her prosperous past by narrating it to the people in the Apartments about “mustard prawns”, “luxurious daughter’s wedding”, “eating goat twice a week”, “marble” house and “pond on property, full of fish” (Lahiri, 71). She copes with her present life: “skeleton keys”, “scraped lime” “steeper stairs”, and “life a ladder than a staircase” (72). Her memory lingers over happier times by recalling her home identity and it gives strength to her present subaltern state of beggary, starvation, and alienation. Lahiri raises the subaltern-consciousness of Boori Ma by questioning society about the social respect for marginalised women when the residents murmur about “her exaggerated past and agreed that she was a superb entertainer” (73). Boori Ma’s aggression is against selfishness, apathy, callousness, and indifference of the people in the Apartments as the ‘imperialistic attitude’ that has caused her a ‘colonial experience’. Lahiri records their callousness stating, “the residents tossed her bucket and rags, her baskets and reed broom, down the stairwell, past the letter boxes, through the collapsible gate, and into the alley. Then they tossed out Boori Ma” (82). Yet the enduring power of Boori Ma compels her to define her identity and to move towards empowerment.
“A Real Durwa” as a Postcolonial allegory of the refugees in a Diasporic experience can be examined to see how women express their aggression. Displacement, discrimination, hunger, starvation, poverty, and alienation experienced by Boori Ma is taken to elaborate the trauma felt by refugee-women in displaced cultures. In Boori Ma, Lahiri records the positive response of women to reclaim their identity in the host cultures. It can be supported with Buddhadeb Roychoudhury’s “Metaphor of Pain in Interpreter of Maladies”:

Boori Ma desperately makes efforts to reconcile her past to her present. In her attempt to come to terms with her present drudgery, she invents stories that speak of a world far more affluent than her present predicament and in this sense puts in an effort to create a utopia for herself through imagination. (88)

Lahiri’s literary art has explored the divided location of Boori Ma to examine how as subaltern her women can be freed and work towards their social mobility. All her women including Boori Ma are placed in two different geographical and cultural situations. Despite the struggles, she expresses her voice to confront the people in the Apartment complex.

Diaspora as a Postcolonial concept has problematised the concept of national identity of Indian women. It has established ‘metaphysical’ links with a particular geographic location with a particular community that lives within those borders. It is not only an ethnic affiliation and cultural movement but cutting across the national boundaries, the dispersion, the spreading out, the diffusion through space. The representation of socio-cultural and political alienation, and their effort to reconstruct an indigenous national identity is a focal point of the subaltern women in Diaspora. Lahiri powerfully represents it in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” the war situation during Partition struggle that led to a cultural and geographical longing in Diasporic
displacement. It is the story of two families in ‘hybridity’ who resist their existence of cultural marginality which is presented through the unspoken voice of Lilia’s mother who recollects her past during the Bangladesh War of Independence: “the curfews”, “riots”, “power failures”, “the light of kerosene lamps”, “the pressures”, “the English tutors”, “the constant examinations” (Lahiri, 26-27), and the security of her daughter’s life in the US. The story is narrated to achieve a ‘stream of consciousness’ effect in representing a variety of subaltern experiences of Indian women. Through the few expressions cited above, Lahiri outlines the poignant longing and nostalgia of Indian women for their Bengali roots. It signifies that Lahiri is sensitive to the needs of the displaced women. Her quest for identity is a conscious search of the Bengali immigrants, the exiles, the refugees, and the Indian women for their self as united Indian ethnic groups in Diasporic life.

The story in the feminist-consciousness delineated by a ten-year old girl, Lilia can be taken to argue how Lahiri portrays a child’s view of the adult world to expose the ‘Otherness’ between her parents and Mr. Pirzada, a Bengali Muslim belonging to Pakistan after Partition. It is evaluated by her father when he states: “Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian, Not since Partition. Our country was divided in 1947. Dacca no longer belongs to us. It is a different country and different color.” (25-26) Lilia is curious to discover the identity of Mr. Pirzada who looks like an enigmatic personality and comments “At first I knew nothing of the reason for his visits. I was ten years old, and was not surprised that my parents, who were from India, should ask Mr. Pirzada to share our meal” (24). Mr. Pirzada’s visit is a mystery to the little girl, because he often comes to her house ingrained with secrets and to find consolation. Lilia states “They discussed intrigues I did not know, a catastrophe I could not comprehend” (31). Mr. Pirzada always surprised Lilia by his curious rituals with a
wash before meals or removing shoes before entering their home. She takes them to be one of the things which make him different.

Lahiri writes about the isolation and alienation of these people, the driving need for a cultural bond and for a harmonious life and hence aggression as represented by Lahiri is to dismantle regional, linguistic, and national binary oppositions between them as the Asian and the Indian, the Pakistani and the Indian, the Bengali and the Bangladeshi the Hindus and the Muslims, and the East Bengal and the West Bengal. The complexity and dimensions evident in such citizenship alone, plays an important role in the story, especially when set against the linguistic and cultural oneness of the Bengali community. Lilia perceives how she is marginalised as a minority in the US by decerning her struggle to have access to the Bengali part of her culture and realises the pain caused by separation from one’s family. She is caught between the traditions of Bengal and the modern ways of America. Her fertile and conscious mind reveals various other facets in the Diasporic context. A memory of Lilia’s mother, fidelity to Mr. Pirzada, memory serving as a source of narration to Lilia’s father, and a sense of realisation of Lilia can be taken to support that Lahiri is an Indian Diasporic writer who narrates stories of Indian women that is evocative of many plains and plateaus in their lives.

A ‘female aggression’ is presented through the historical narrative. Lahiri discovers the chaotic period of civil war and the demands of Dacca for Independence leave its indelible impact on her women. In the long opening narrative, there is the plight of the people of Dacca. Historical memories of women are very distinct and related from a girl’s perspective. Lilia’s mother recalls, “In March, Dacca had been invaded, torched, and shelled by the Pakistani army. Teachers were dragged onto streets and shot, women dragged into barrackers and raped. By the end of the summer,
three hundred people were said to have been dead” (23). Lahiri does not have a lengthy description of the traumas of her victims. The stark line, ‘women dragged into barrackers and raped’, defines that Lahiri can resurrect the historical wrongs with a graphic image of inhuman acts of cruelty, violence, and rape of women. The precision and brevity of the story illustrates women survive in the worst conditions.

“When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” depicts the Diasporic subaltern problems of India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan wherein the refugees, the women, and the children become subject of violence, rape, and bloodshed. The war during India’s Partition makes Lilia and her mother to voice their struggle for life, even after becoming economically rich, their desire for cultural and geographical identity is evident. She mitigates the issue of political and cultural alienation through their constant family gatherings and discussion about their past lives. Lilia recalls it how the three of them come together after dinner as if they were ‘a single person, sharing meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear’. Lilia also traces the cultural affinity between Mr. Pirzada and her parents. For both the families, memory serves as a source of a recording the experiences of the past. Lilia’s mother longs for cultural and historical bond by revisiting her Indian identity. Analysing the character of Lilia’s mother, it can be supported that Indian Diasporic women are constantly in search of their historical and cultural identity as Indians and Bengalis. They discover it in their day-today activities, in family gatherings, and by organising dinners for their community people. Woman like Lilia’s mother discovers her identity by recalling and sharing her past experiences with Mr. Pirzada.

The subaltern longing for human existence, marital adjustment and conjugal betrayal are examined in “Sexy” revealed through the first person narrator, Laxmi. It is the extra-marital affair of her cousin’s husband that infuriates Laxmi. She expresses
her fury without knowing about her own destiny. Lahiri explores the traumas of Indian women with an ironical observation made by Laxmi, “If I were her I’d fly straight to London and shoot them both” (97). It is seen how Indian family life in Diasporic living “after nine years of marriage” (83) has degenerated in hybrid locations and has created marginality for Indian women like Laxmi and her cousin. Through the story, Lahiri portrays the lives of the Indians caught between the paradox of Indian traditional life and modern American life. In experiencing unfaithfulness from their husbands, Laxmi and her cousin as sexually victimised women go beyond their sorrows by accepting familial challenges. It is how they express their aggression through a positive response.

In the story, the marital disloyalty is initiated by the young Caucasian woman, Miranda, whose name is Indian in part. It contains the name of the “mystic devotee-cum-lover of Lord Krishna, Mira” (87). Her love-affair with Devajit Mitra, a married Bengali investment banker and the spouse of Laxmi, begins at a Departmental store, Filene’s when Laxmi is away in Calcutta. Dev’s unfaithfulness results in cheating his wife. The story reaches its climax when Rohin, the young boy and the son of Laxmi’s cousin awakens Miranda with a sharp realisation when he asks her to wear the silver cock-tail dress that once she wore while going with Dev to a restaurant and “had called her sexy” (92) and again the words “you’re sexy” (107) were repeated by the little boy saying, “It means loving someone you don’t know. That’s what my father did…He sat next to someone he didn’t know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother” (108). Lahiri uses the little boy to bring realisation to Miranda and free herself from her unhealthy affair with Dev. Miranda realises the suffering of Rohin and his mother. Hence, she decides to give up her clandestine affair with Dev
and make him rejoin his family. Miranda feels discomfort about her entanglement with Dev and the pain caused to Laxmi.

Lahiri records the aggression of her women through the voice of the little boy, Rohin. He states, “My mother has puffiness. She says it’s cold, but really she cries, sometimes for hours. Sometimes straight through dinner. Sometimes she cries so hard her eyes puff up like bullfrogs” (104). It reflects how Indian women in their subaltern contexts emotionally suffer. The women resolve it through a shared feminist-consciousness which is seen through the conversation between Miranda and Laxmi that examines how despite trauma and anxiety, Indian woman like Laxmi’s cousin is able to reconcile with her unfaithful husband. The Indian women: Laxmi and her cousin are individuals trying to cope with the America ethos on marriage. Both are faithful to their husbands and do not sacrilege their marriage. Therefore aggression for these women is a positive response to accept challenges.

R. K Kaul in his article “Twinkling Interpretations of Bengali characters” states “Whether the settings is in Bengal or in the US, she creates a probable world where human relations are all that matter” (3). It signifies that Laxmi and her cousin find themselves crushed under infidelity and betrayal from their husbands yet they have endurance and able to survive. They manifest the courageous women who despite their pain, agony, and desolation are in search of their self. There is a parallel between Laxmi’s cousin’s husband and Laxmi’s life with her husband. Both have deserted their wives and are unfaithful. It reflects how Indian women have suffered from gendered marginalisation and conjugal unfaithfulness in different cultural location.
It is through Laxmi that Miranda learns of the problems of her cousin who has been deserted by her husband. Laxmi’s husband also shares a secret affair with Miranda. Lahiri uses a unique feature to narrate the marital and the familial issues of Indian women in Diasporic living. It begins with Laxmi’s voice that reveals to Miranda that her cousin’s husband had fallen in love with another woman who sat next to her on a plane from Delhi to Montreal. He had called his wife to tell her that he wanted to break up with her. It is through Laxmi’s cousin, that Lahiri shows how an Indian woman always has a sense of duty towards her family. Laxmi expresses her anger and states:

Imagine, An English girl, half his age. Laxmi was only a few years older than Miranda, but she was already married, and kept a photo of her husband, seated on a white stone bench in front of the Taj Mahal, tacked to the inside of her cubicle, which was next to Miranda’s. (Lahiri, 83)

“Sexy” depicts the discontentment of these Indian women at different levels in their lives. It allows them to awaken their consciousness to their conjugal reality to accept its challenges in diverse cultures. Distressed cousin of Laxmi, returns with her little son, Rohin to her parents’ house in California, to try to recuperate. Laxmi’s cousin’s husband does not come to his senses. He returns to Montreal, argues bitterly with his wife for two weeks; after packing two suitcases he goes back to London often demanding for a divorce. Lahiri’s perception of the American ethos and its impact on Indian Diasporic family is vividly portrayed in the story to examine how her women find alternate means to counter their oppression. It also delineates how in the western culture, although Indian women succumb to sexual abuse, gendered discrimination, mental anguish, divorce, fragmentation, and separation but find different ways to combat them. Laxmi expresses her ability to move forward to help in asserting her
cousin’s individuality. Laxmi’s life is a symbol of subaltern ‘collective-consciousness’ who empowers her cousin to accept the challenges of life. It reflects how women power can validate to bring harmony and peace.

Analysing the women characters in these five stories, it is seen that Lahiri has a wide range of subaltern themes and subject matters revolving around Indian Diasporic women who are not subaltern victims. Rather, they discover novel methods to define their identity. Lahiri’s love for the Native world has inspired her to write of the challenges of Indian women in her short stories. There is similarity and dissimilarity between the stories of Devi and Lahiri. Devi has narrated the challenges of the rural tribal and the *dalit* women. In this aspect, Lahiri and Devi deal with subaltern Indian Native and Diasporic issues of women. Short stories as distinctive narrative forms are flexible with Devi and Lahiri to portray the world of Indian women in their own contexts who counter their oppressive powers. Speaking about their short stories Samantha Naidu in her article writes:

The women writers of the South Asian diaspora are grappling with two main thematic areas: the oppression of women within patriarchy; and the dislocated diasporic identity. Both these themes have intensely personal significance for the writers who often incorporate lived experience into their fictional accounts of gender discrimination and diasporic tensions. Their writing is therefore self-represented, politicized and often aimed at liberation and self-empowering through a hard-hitting form. (49)

Keeping the above said statement, Devi and Lahiri have examined the identity of the subaltern women in their own context to examine the reasons for their aggression and discontentment. Their short stories have similar grounding in depicting the Indian women who discover their identity by mitigating their struggles. The struggles of their women are universalised by raising caste, class, ethnic, and gender issues as common
factors of marginalisation. The protagonists in their short stories are the women who define their space in the Native and Diasporic reality of their respective cultural contexts. As the products of the multiple socio-economic, political, and cultural conditioning, the women have expressed their righteous anger. Devi and Lahiri portray them as women who positively break the barriers of Patriarchal or cultural moulds in the Native and Diasporic diversity.

In the short stories of Devi and Lahiri there is a striking similarity in tone, substance, and thematic concern of the subaltern women who are caught in the riddles of Postcolonial dilemmas and yet have discovered their identity. Their women persistently express an act of defiance to challenge the cultural disparity. The refugees, the marginalised, the poverty-stricken, and the dispossessed women discussed in the above short stories search for new possibilities of life by countering their oppressive forces. The writers also have recorded women narratives in the form of representation to position the women in the different direction from the traditional narrative techniques. The aggression as a form of representation of the women characters is for their self-empowerment in a displaced world. Through the characters, they establish that women in the divergent contexts are not victims of oppression. Rather they are confident women who try to express their inner conflicts that are caused by external structures. The survival of the women depends on their ability to use their inner resources to go against the dominant and oppressive cultures.

Despite the diversity of subject matter, characters, plots, and complex dynamics of oppression, Devi and Lahiri have a common intention of raising the subaltern identity into empowered individuals. In their short stories, they suggest solution to the women caught in similar challenges by recording their actual voice that speaks for freedom and mobility. Both have championed the cause of subaltern
women and have given a clarion call for the empowerment of the unprivileged women. Murali Manohar in his book *Contemporary Indian Women Novelists in English* acclaims Lahiri in the following words “call it feminist consciousness or sensibility of Lahiri, the concern for the suffering and struggle of the women is apparent in some of her works” (86-87). If Devi’s aim is to empower the Indian Native subaltern women, Lahiri concentrates on the Indian Diasporic women. Their short stories define the lives of Indian women. However, the consistent depiction is to represent their struggles and portray their ability to cope with the conflicting situations.

The subaltern experiences are evocatively brought out in Devi’s stories which can be supported with Tuntun Mukherjee’s statement that she “inscribes those fiery moments of subaltern rebellion for space” (97). It signifies that Devi does not sympathise with the subaltern. Rather, she makes a positive way out for them to realise their worth. Lahiri similarly concentrates on Indian women who express their aggression to fight their adversities in hybridity. The focus of Lahiri is as Nigamananda Das in her “Introduction” to *Jhumpa Lahiri: Critical Perspectives* states is on “diasporic alienation, nostalgia, cultural figuration, refigurations of human existence, modes of living” (20), isolation and separation of Indian women in diverse cultures. Lahiri’s portrayal of women characters can be taken to study that caste, class, ethnicity, and gender as social agency have marginalised Indian Diasporic women and in turn the women express their alienation and isolation. The short stories narrate social, emotional, and cultural struggles of Indian Diasporic women and their efforts to re-define their identity in American culture. Like Devi, Lahiri too argues the impact of ethnic factors responsible for the marginalisation of subaltern women.
By studying the women characters, it is examined that there is a closer affinity between the short stories of Devi and Lahiri who powerfully depict the voice of the Bengali women in different locations. The popular Bengali slangs, allegories, epics, dialect, local expressions are used to articulate the aggression of subaltern women. Spivak states in her “Afterward” to *Imaginary Maps* that it is “to communicate the agony of the tribals” (197). It delineates that Devi and Lahiri are authentic interpreters of subaltern aggression to expose the personal struggles of their women characters.

Devi and Lahiri as Indian women writers have located Bengal as the focal point to explore the struggles of the subaltern women. From Bengal, they go to the other parts of the world to study the impact of Colonialism and Patriarchy on subalterns. Devi locates Palamau, a small village as a reflection of tribal India to represent the subaltern struggle, while, Lahiri places them in different countries to analyse their cultural experiences. Having presented this, the writers have exhibited their literary excellence for which they now have gained international fame and won prestigious awards. Their outstanding literary recognition has acknowledged their substantial skill in expressing the voice of the Diasporic, the refugees, the tribal poor, and the other culturally marginalised women. By depicting subaltern Indian reality through the voice of these women, they speak for the empowerment of Indian women. The Chapter has made analyses on the ‘subaltern female aggression’ of the women to examine their common concern which is articulated by Postcolonial writers like Ranajit Guha who also in his *Subaltern Studies IV* makes an effort to record the subaltern-consciousness that is hidden in the history of the marginalised rural and tribal poor.
The primary aspect of the subaltern-consciousness in their short stories speaks for the women who are victimised by poverty, destitution, deprivation, vulnerability, degradation, humiliation, alienation, suppression, and discrimination. Their stories evaluate how the women have surpassed inhuman conditions for their survival and expressed the same need for the survival of other beings. Poverty has led women for worse human challenges and yet their struggle for survival is redeeming. In India, poverty has become a worse form of exploitation caused by various factors. Nandita Dutta and Sumitra Jha observe poverty as the highest form of marginalisation and state:

Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increasing morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environment; and social discrimination and exclusion. (212)

It means poverty is caused by discrimination which has become the root cause for all other ills. The writers represent it in different literary tools to see how subaltern women can make a space for them to survive in deplorable conditions. It is in the form of representation, they have awakened their characters to the realisation of their identity; enrich them to break away from traditional image; make them realise their relation with Patriarchy and cultural biases. Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjan state “Suddenly ‘women’ are everywhere. Development experts cite; gender bias as the cause of poverty in the third world; population planners declare their commitment to the empowerment of Indian women; economists speak of the feminization of the Indian labour force” (232). It shows how the rural women and their empowerment is the prime importance in the Postcolonial Feminists thought.
Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana examine that aggression of the Indian women is spoken through various historical events to defy age-old practices of Indian society. It means how women in Colonial and Patriarchal milieu expressed subaltern experience and are able to surpass them. Devi and Lahiri’s expression of the subaltern need for aggression is portrayed from literary point of view. The task of history and literature is to speak for women who are affected by social reality. Similarly, Spivak comments that the difference in history and literature is to affect the reality. She asserts:

That history deals with real events and literature with imagined ones may now be seen as a difference in degree rather than in kind. The difference between cases of historical and literary event will always be there as a differential moment in terms of what is called ‘the effect of the real.’ What is called history will always seem more real to us than what is called literature. (Subaltern Studies VI 94)

The historical, the real, and the imaginary worlds of the subaltern women delineated by Devi and Lahiri can be taken to illustrate that every act of women aggression is a struggle for self-definition against the pressures of Patriarchal suppression which Susie Tharu and Lalita. K. opine as ‘victimization of social ideologies.’ Therefore, subaltern women in their stories are placed in different cultures, classes, castes, and societies, yet, the oppression is universal. Devi examines it by re-interpreting the language of the tribal and the dalit Indian women through folklore and through their expressions; Lahiri by emphasising on the conflicting situations of the Indian Diasporic women in the American Continent. The writers record same mindset, attitude, and human concern for the downtrodden women.

Devi’s rehabilitation of the tribal women compels her to write about their social challenges. This aspect of Devi’s literary skill is examined to see how she is
unique in representing the aggression of Indian women. It can be critically evaluated to see how Devi’s subaltern women can be strong and powerful in an oppressive environment. Mary Oraon and Douloti are examples of subaltern women who interrogate traditional image of women as victims of oppression. Devi argues in her writing that an allegory is the only literary weapon to depict the subaltern reality for self-expression. This aspect of Devi can be further supported from Vandana Gupta’s assertion that Devi’s stories are not ‘fantasy nor they are pastoral romances’. Devi’s fiction is a crucible in which history, ideology, realism, allegory coalesces into narratives which are discursive, allegorical, real, and historically verifiable at the same time. It shows that Devi amalgamates history, mythology, and allegory to express the subaltern aggression.

The study has revealed that their stories articulate the liberal women’s voices that are silent, loud, defiant, obstinate, and proud in an alien country where they strive for assimilation and integration. It signifies Devi and Lahiri as Native and Diaporic writers who represent the resistance of subaltern women for freedom. Similarly, Brinda Bose in her Translating Desire writes about the task of women writers:

Our (feminist) academic task today is still concerned with mapping the conversion of submission into resentment, resentment into resistance, and resistance into representation, with analyzing the translation- as also the translating- of each of these states of being into others, with scrutinizing the reception/ reading of such representations in the arena of Indian... subjectivities. (xiv)

The representation is the common mode that women writers use to express the grievances of the deprived women. Devi and Lahiri as women writers respectively have reviewed and reassessed the experiences of the marginalised by representing their trials and tribulations. In their stories, the profound portrayal of aggression can
be seen in combating the haunting experiences of the downtrodden women and the plight of their survival. Having discussed the aggression of women, in the following Chapter, it shall be discussed to explore how the subaltern women are moving towards social, economic, and cultural mobility by asserting their individual identity.

The next Chapter discusses the meaning of identity in the feminist understanding to evaluate the need for Indian women for their authentic self. The next Chapter follows a similar framework to discuss Postcolonial Feminist theory as an empowering concept that locates the challenges of Indian Native and Diasporic women in another set of five short stories of both Devi and Lahiri.
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