Chapter One
Introduction

“I want to go bare foot along the red paths
That boils beneath the noonday sun,
I want to sleep my siesta beneath the mango trees,
I want to wake up.”
–Guy Tirolien, “A Prayer of a Black Boy”

Indian women’s writing in English and in other Indian languages, has extensively contributed to literature by opening out the experiences of Indian women from diverse cultures. The voices of women are recorded not only in the ways in which the women reclaim their identity in the context of oppression, but also in their ability to rise beyond context to explore their identity, and to be useful members of their communities. There has been a strong testimony to the near invisibility of women’s literary presence. In the literary genres, especially, in the short story, the women writers have rewritten the idealised old myths of women as weak beings. It shows the images of women has been generated and controlled by various power structures. The research has helped to understand oppressive discourses, particularly, ‘Colonialism and Patriarchy’ which damage the credibility of women by misrepresenting them in culture, history, and art. It has examined Colonialism and Patriarchy as strategies, representing women in ‘epistemological’ and ‘discursive formation’ as subjects of control and domination. The present study evaluates the voices of women as resistance to these ideologies.

Indian women writers extensively have written about the challenges of women amidst oppression by caste, class, and gender biases. Women’s writing can be perceived from two angles, “women writing as women and women writing about
women,” (Jain, 7) that interprets the experiences of women writers and of other women. The study examines a rethinking of Indian Feminism from a Postcolonial perspective to gain insight into the ways in which Indian women express their voice to reconstruct their images. The argument is, women are beyond the imaginary social construct, and are empowered human beings who face challenges with indomitable courage.

Contemporary Indian women writers have also written about women from the lower strata of society. Mahasweta Devi and Jhumpa Lahiri belong to this tradition of women writers who have spoken about the marginalisation of women in the traditional and the modern society. This study considers these two women as very important short story writers, strongly representing the subaltern voices and identities of Indian women. The study confines itself to read their select short stories, focusing on the women characters who assert their ‘self’ despite their position as the subaltern. To examine the struggles of the women for self-expression, the study proposes to discuss the meaning, definition, scope, and implication of the word, ‘subaltern’ in Philosophy, History, Postcolonial Theory, and Indian Feminism.

The simple meaning of the word ‘subaltern’ is defined by The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary as “any army officer below the rank of captain” (‘subaltern,’ def. 1). The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English provides many synonyms such as “junior”, “lowly”, “petty”, “subordinate”, and “inferior rank” (‘subaltern,’ def. 2). Literally, the term subaltern explained in the Oxford Dictionary comes from the Latin words, sub and alternus which means, “alter other” or “alternate” (‘subaltern,’ def. 3). It means an alternative or sub-ordinate position of an individual. While it is useful to note these denotative meanings of the expression, it is more worthwhile to
understand the connotative associations of the expression. It is invariably used derogatorily, with a negative connotation.

The word, ‘subaltern’ can be explained from the concept, ‘master-slave relationship’ of Michael Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, which elucidates the origin of psychological and physical oppression of the subordinate class as ‘subaltern’. Hegel’s “Lordship and Bondage” (*Phenomenology of Mind* 64), explained in “master self-consciousness and servant self-consciousness” (60), substantiates how it was a constant struggle for the slave groups as the ‘Other’ to free themselves from the clutches of the oppressor. Hegel explains that each “servant self” (60) had its own voice before another which gave one a unique identity. He elaborates that the slave group had an inferior identity which antagonised it to free itself from the higher self in which the former went away from the latter for liberation. The desire to seek freedom from external forces explained in Hegel’s phenomenon, the ‘Otherness’ can be taken to discuss how women as a gendered subordinate group in an Indian context tried to find their voice by liberating themselves from the exploitative group in order to exercise their individuality as human beings.

For a further understanding of the historical exploitation of the Indian women, it is essential to discuss the concept, ‘subaltern’ by Italian Marxist political activist, Antonio Gramsci. Etymologically, the Italian word, *subalterne* translated in his *Prison Notebooks* refers to the neglected sections of society created by the Italian ruling class. He states:

> The historical unity of the ruling classes is realised in the State, and their history is essentially the history of States and of groups of States. But it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply juridical and political (though such forms of unity do have their
importance too, and not in a purely formal sense); the fundamental historical unity, concretely results from the organic relations between State or political society and “civil society. The subaltern classes by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a “State”: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States.” (52)

On observation, Gramsci’s criticism indicates that he emphasised the role of the “rulings class” who ignored the existence, participation, and political contribution of the “rural peasantry” (52). Deriving his idea, it is based how the lower group was neglected and had an inferior status. Gramsci extended the semantic scope of this term, “subaltern” to include all the sections of Italian society who did not have any access to state power, and were sidelined as the rural working class. Arguably, Gramsci’s term, ‘subaltern’ can be taken to indicate the alternative position of women as oppressive and in need of liberation. In every civilisation, the disparity is significant and perpetuated through historical development. Universally a more powerful group tries to have control over the less powerful group. It can be supported from Gramsci’s theory when he worked for the rural peasants to be on par with the urban working class. From his concern, it is stated that caste, class, and gender inequality in Indian society is due to historical and political difference. It has marginalised the Indian women of different communities.

The ‘organic unity’ of which Gramsci spoke is only for historical and political powers. It is contested because the ‘organic unity’ of a society includes all the other aspects of its culture which he ignored. The socio-cultural, religious, economic, political, ethnic, and gender aspects of a society are crucial in its cosmic harmony. To assert this point, it can be discussed in terms of how it is re-interpreted by Indian Postcolonial intellectuals. Their interpretation of the term, ‘subaltern’ is initiated by
Ranajit Guha who analysed Gramsci’s term in his “Preface” to *Subaltern Studies IV* to locate subordination “in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (vii). Supporting his view, it is proved that a certain group in a society marked as subordinate by the dominant group on the basis of certain culturally constructed ideologies can create ‘difference’ in class, caste, ethnic, and gender identities. By examining Gramsci’s theory, Guha in Indian Postcolonial context applied it to retrieve the voices of the rural people in peasant insurgency during colonial India in order to record their real experiences. On observation of their struggle, he defined ‘subaltern’ as a historical and cultural struggle of the subjugated groups either under colonial powers or Indian cultural practices generated by Patriarchy. It reveals that their political insurgency was a struggle against colonial or cultural powers to assert their freedom. Applying Guha’s approach, the study examines to contextualise the cultural challenges of Indian women in Postcolonial context to foreground their issues of identity and to protest against oppressive structures.

The effort of the Postcolonial thinkers has helped to define and to re-define the cultural history of the marginalised communities, especially, of the discriminated women by retrieving their local and historical sources to form fresh perspectives. This was undertaken through the re-interpretation of their sexual political history, re-telling of their social condition, the re-constructing of customs and traditions in the oral narratives, folk tales, historical stories, and real experiences. Their efforts can be taken for discussion to state that the Postcolonial theoretical interpretation has extensively examined Indian oppressed groups, the women and their struggle for freedom by capturing success and unsuccessful stories in the recent past. The study examines the diverse experiences of the culturally exploited groups of women in which they try to assert their voice.
The aim of Postcolonial writers like Guha as stated in his Essay “The Small Voice of History”, in Subaltern Studies IX is to resist “an Indian historiography of India and to recover the small voices of history” (5). It meant the various culturally marginalised groups, and their experiences. It reflects that the Postcolonial theory has attempted to record the unspoken voices of these groups; re-interpreted their struggle in their respective environments to examine how it has brought them to a glorious victory. Guha supports it:

They try and relate to the past by listening to and conversing with the Myriad voices in civil society. They are small voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands. That is why we don’t hear them. It is upto us to make that extra effort, develop the special skills and above all cultivate the disposition to hear these voices and interact with them. For they have many stories to tell-stories which for their complexity are unequalled by statist discourse and indeed opposed to its abstract and over simplifying modes. (3)

Based on their concern, it is argued that Indian Postcolonial Discourse suggests concrete measures to bring the marginalised women to the ‘mainstream’ by exposing their challenges created by colonial or indigenous ideologies. It is useful to employ Michel Foucault’s idea of a Discourse as elaborated in his The Archaeology of Knowledge to identify the ‘standardisation’ and ‘cultural stereotyping’ involved in the category of the ‘woman’. Foucault emphasises that all concepts exist within ‘specific discourses’ and without examining the ‘woman’ as Discourse, it cannot possibly understand the other Discourses which have produced woman ideologically, sociologically, scientifically, imaginatively, and sexually. Similarly, Postcolonial Discourse examines the limitations of Patriarchy that has positioned woman as not a free subject of thought and action. An attempt is made to re-interpret the ‘discourse of woman’ to re-write experiences and to locate the root cause for oppression of Indian
women. The reading reveals that it has attempted to re-tell Indian history by re-interpreting the experience of the marginalised women in different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts. The study also explores how Indian Postcolonial theory has aimed at a re-evaluation of the authentic experiences of Indian women who try to free themselves from subordination and exploitation.

The women are marginalised by Indian social system through various divisions due to social stratification as high and low, rich and poor, men and women, high caste and low caste have created ‘difference’ among them. Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have located the marginality created for subaltern as the ‘Other’ category, ‘the master and the slave’, ‘the coloniser and the colonised’, ‘the independent and the dependent’, and ‘the West and the East’. These concepts are taken to argue that social fragmentation which has ostracised and denied women not only of their socio-economic, political, religious freedom, but also their identity, and mental freedom.

Ashis Nandy’s critique on the mental exploitation of the subaltern in his *The Intimate Enemy*, can be taken for discussion to see how cultural exploitation of women as a gendered group takes place. It can be supported by his discussion on the imperial hegemonic attitude of the ‘coloniser’, stating from his “Preface” to *The Intimate Enemy*:

> This colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonised societies to alter cultural priorities and for all. In the process, it helps to generalise the concept of the west from a geographical and temporal entity to a Psychological category. The west is now everywhere, within the west and outside; in structures and minds. (xi)
Nandy opines that ‘oppressor’ is not only the ‘White Man’ but includes all ideological and hegemonic practices. His explanation on colonisation as subaltern experience has a dual connotation which he calls “geographical” and “psychological” (xi). Arguably, subaltern exploitation has an unforgettable memory which Homi Bhabha in, *The Location and Culture* calls “memory of the history of race and racism” (63). Nandy’s “Politics of colonialism” (xi) and Bhabha’s “violent racial history” (63) as they argue have created painful experiences. They state that the mental disturbances created in all the colonial societies are either by imperial impact or hegemonic forces. It is supported by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, when such divisions are created, the subordinate groups are “denied access to the hegemonic power” (215). Nandy, Bhabha, and Ashcroft are discussed to examine how in Indian context the hegemonic and ideological structures have created ‘colonial experience’ (marginalisation) for Indian women of different social groups.

Women are subjected to different disparities. Trinh T. Minh-Ha in her *Essay “Woman, Native, Other: Postcoloniality and Feminism”*, states that “‘difference’ is essentially ‘division’ in the understanding of many. It is more than a tool of self-defense and conquest” (394). Minh-Ha asserts that the women who question this ‘Difference’ as “Separation” (394). The marginalisation of Indian women and the need for re-defining their identity were popularised in Postcolonial Studies by Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak, Leela Gandhi, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Toril Moi, Kumkum Sangari, Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan, and other literary critics. Their feminist thoughts on subaltern concept can be re-interpreted to examine the position of Indian women. The vulnerable condition of the subaltern is slowly vanishing due to their endurance and positive outlook. Arguably, it presents how Feminism in the Postcolonial context has re-constructed new cultural and linguistic paradigms by
recording the authentic voices of Indian women. The voices of the women re-captured in the Subaltern-consciousness can be taken to examine the lived experience of Indian women of the marginalised groups. It can be supported by what E.V. Ramakrishnan writes in his “Introduction: Fictionalising India”, as “the polyphony and plurality of Indian cultural life” (xv) of Indian women. It signifies that the Postcolonial theory has proved to be a powerful force that explores every aspect of Indian women by interpreting their life and experiences.

The subject matter of the subaltern issues of Indian women appears to have undergone a great revolution in Postcolonial literary feminist theory. It attempts to see how an Indian born American Marxist critic and Postcolonial feminist, Spivak has made genuine efforts in her literary critical interpretation of the subaltern. In her Essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” she focuses attention on the position of Indian women to assess their cultural and historical experiences. Her debate on the traditional and gender realities of Indian women can be taken to a wide variety of socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts to evaluate the identity of women, and to record their unheard voices. Women in India, as she opines in her “Preface” to Imaginary Maps, were “a colonised category” (xi). The cultural ‘difference’ has led them to be perpetually oppressed, exploited, discriminated, and marginalised in their diverse experiences. But modern women have asserted their freedom by questioning their subaltern position. Spivak’s question of women as “poor, black, and female” problematised by the challenging “authoritative imperialism” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 549) can be applied to raise the cultural issues of subaltern women in India. These women taken for this study are seen trying to re-define their individuality by a new approach to the patriarchal standards. The ‘authoritative imperialism’ in the Indian context means the women asserting their
voice against their stereotypes and socially constructed roles as weak, marginalised, and victims of sex.

The eloquent critique of Spivak on the subaltern question can be taken to see the experience of the Indian women in their painful experiences. Arguably, her critical discourse on the subaltern has raised different issues of women and their recent outlook on life. Her interrogation can be applied to examine not only the position and experience of Indian women in colonial history but also the dominant ideas of the oppressive patriarchal culture. The perspective of the ‘subaltern’ according to Spivak is an ideology created by the colonial powers and traditional Indian practices to suppress certain categories of the Indian social system. The oppression of women is based on caste, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and other issues. It can be reiterated with what Spivak terms, “identity is its difference” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 527). It signifies that this differentiated identity has created gendered inequality in Indian society. The research endeavours to see how Patriarchy as “identity in its difference” has exploited and marginalised Indian women.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” ‘historical and cultural dislocation’ spoken by Spivak, the experience of women what she calls ‘Sati’ (immolation of wife) according to her is a ‘colonial experience’. It means women are oppressed by exploitative local practices. As discussed earlier, although Colonialism and Patriarchy have caused painful experiences, yet women have challenged these ideologies by re-assessing their lives and re-construct their identity. In this context, the aim of the Postcolonial critics as supported by Jagadish Batra in his Essay “Postcolonialism and the Indian Literary Scenario”, he states:

It is a transhistorical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the World or another, so that everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later,
The Postcolonial writers as Spivak has stated in her Essay “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” has defined subaltern identity as a “process of dissolution” and “to change the order of the world” (270). Considering the statements of Batra and Spivak, it can be argued that in the present Postcolonial context, Indian Native and Diasporic women are making a mark by challenging the oppressive structures, and there is a change in their status. This empowered aspect of women is critically argued in the Chapters.

A unique use of the term ‘Subaltern-Consciousness’ in the study as taken to evaluate the oppressed condition of Indian women is changing. The ‘Subaltern-Consciousness’ represented in the title indicates the status of Indian women after seventy years of its independence. Undoubtedly, after analysing Indian Postcolonial feminists’ interpretation, it is posited that in the past few decades, the subaltern Indian women are taking the ‘centre’ position in the cultural history. It is signified in the hyphen between the capital letters ‘S’ in ‘Subaltern’ and ‘C’ in ‘Consciousness’ to re-interpret the status of Indian women in their diverse locations. It is also to contest the term “post-colonial” which Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have used in The Empire Writes Back who referred to “cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (2). After reading the short stories, the study debates how the term, ‘culture affected by the imperial process’ can no longer be applicable to Indian subaltern women. These women have challenged their exploitative experiences by re-asserting their identity and celebrating their selfhood. Their social challenges: discrimination, violence, oppression, and exploitation are endured and fought with indomitable courage. The literary and
critical feminist theories helped to see how they have extensively contributed to assess the status of women. To elaborate on the idea, Spivak’s *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* is apt to cite. Her argument clearly indicates that she wants to dismantle the dichotomy between the less privileged women and the ‘essentialism of western feminist’ thought. The aim of her theoretical interpretation is to create harmony among the women of divergent cultures.

Leela Gandhi’s *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* delineates various divergent cultures of the marginalised women. She looks at the subaltern situation as an “adequacy to conceptualise the complex condition which attends the aftermath of colonial occupation” (“After Colonialism” 4). In contemporary understanding, ‘the complex condition’ is explained as a situation that responds to life to recall one’s identity, history, language, and culture by countering hegemony. It is to regain one’s lost image through a pattern of thoughts which Gandhi calls “revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating colonial past experience” (4). Here patterns of thoughts can be direct or indirect depending on its proximity. Gandhi’s definition of subaltern in her Postcolonial literary theory can be defined as a pattern of thoughts that has redefined socio-cultural aspects of women by countering biased history. Her theoretical approach interpreted in the analysis can be retraced to study the Postcolonial concept, ‘subaltern’ in Indian cultural and historical development to identify that marginalised condition of Indian women as a positive response to combat exploitation.

Gandhi’s expression of subaltern as “an oppressed group” (1) shall be taken as positive interpretation of women who want to speak for ‘self’. She has expressed an authentic concern by supporting the views of Spivak on subaltern to represent their history and allow the “people to speak within the jealous pages of elitist
historiography and, in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, the truly oppressed” (2). From her interpretation, in Indian Postcolonial context ‘the oppressed subjects’ can be located in many disempowered sections of society which shall be discussed in the following Chapters. Gandhi also asserts that Postcolonial Discourse and Indian Feminism have a single aim of speaking ‘for’ the subaltern. She states that both the Disciplines examine the repressive Patriarchal structures that have created ‘binary opposition’ to marginalise the ‘Other’, the women. Undoubtedly, the term, ‘subaltern’ or the ‘Other’ spoken here is no doubt, a categorical term which is similar to Hélène Cixous’s “a two-term system” (“Sorties” 282). In the Indian context, ‘a two-term system’ has created hierarchies as the high caste and the low caste, the rich and the poor, the man and the woman, the Native and the Diasporic as superior and inferior groups. On the contrary, the Postcolonial Feminists reject the ‘binary position’ of women.

The ‘binary position’ of women is interpreted by Postcolonial Feminist writers in different terms. Anita Singh, in her article, “Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism”, states that it “is often used interchangeably with the term third world feminism” and asserts that the “field of postcolonial feminism arose from the gendered history” (192). It examines how Indian feminism has re-interpreted the ‘subaltern gendered history’ of women. It means Postcolonial Feminism speaks not only about the frustrations, fears, anxieties, and struggles of women but about the agency they use to subvert them. The argument is that the Postcolonial Feminism has re-located the challenges of Indian women subjected to Indian hegemonies and to evaluate how they counter them with positive outlook.

The empowered status of Indian women can be explained from the context of Patricia Hill Collins’s Essay, “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination”.
She defines “women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression” (553). It can be applied to the Postcolonial Feminist thought put forth by Spivak who has tried to examine the identity of subaltern woman. Thus, her theoretical interpretation examines various unpleasant experiences of Indian women residing either in India or abroad, and ways in which they subvert them. It can be contended that due to Colonial and Patriarchal oppression, like African women, Indian women also are trapped in a three-fold discrimination namely, class and gender but in Indian context it includes caste as well.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s subaltern concept in her Essay, “Under Western Eyes”, can be taken to see how she has re-interpreted the identity of women in ‘third world countries’ and re-located different cultural locations under which women have become victims of hegemonic oppression. Mohanty holds the view that women in the third world countries are categorised as subaltern by “discursive homogenization of the systematization of the oppression” (54). It means women are oppressed due to some ideological concepts which are perpetuated in all societies. The universally categorised presuppositions contended by Mohanty are taken for discussion that women are not biologically weak but are subjected to various cultural exploitation. The “third world women” are universally categorised as ‘poor, illiterate, victims of exploitation and oppression’ due to colonisation which she calls “ethnocentric universalism” (55). It means differences are created because of diverse ethnic identity. Mohanty opines that women are marginalised under socio-cultural, ethnic, economic, religious, and political domination. She contends that ‘collective categorisation’ of women as ‘third world’ (subaltern) is inappropriate. Mohanty’s views are taken to support Indian women as victims of diverse cultural construct.
The study on the issues of the marginalised women in India has formed an integral part of the cultural struggle of Indian women for the assertion of their position. Vidyut Bhagwat has also condemned the condescending outlook on women, and has expressed her dissatisfaction on the imposed images of women. Some of the common gendered issues related to women in the western feminists’ theories are seriously considered by Bhagat to measure the intensity and diversity of the exploitation of Indian women. Her theoretical argument is similar to the western feminists’ thinking that is examined in *Feminist Social Thought*, where she states, “that there is no emotional, intellectual or physical difference between men and women. All differences are a reflection of socially imposed values.” (29) The argument aids to examine the Indian Feminists who challenge such social environment that has curtailed the freedom of women and has marginalised them.

In the last few decades of Postcolonial Feminist writing there have been different thoughts to subvert the cultural images of subaltern women. It means that a host of patriarchal manipulations are re-examined in the respective contexts of the subaltern. In the past, the women’s role was debated and discussed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. They state that the effort of feminism is towards “assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature” (76). Their literary effort has enabled the Postcolonial Feminists to look at Indian women as valiant and courageous human beings. Indian Feminists have supported the arguments of Simone de Beauvoir who has debated in her *Essay “Woman and the Other”*, that in male dominated ideology women are immemorially categorised as the “Other” which she calls “primordial as consciousness itself. In the primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality - one of the Self and the Other” (281). Considering Beauvoir, the study makes
a research on the views of Indian Feminism to see how it has contextualised the age-old problems concealed in the Indian myths regarding women.

The study reveals that there is a similar point in all the arguments of Indian Feminists that cultural ideologies have caused the oppression of women. Thus, the theory has deconstructed oppressive patriarchal ideologies and has suggested alternative agency through the medium of literary theory. It has defined that subordinated Indian women either in domestic or immigrant situations are constantly trying to reconstruct their image by self-assertion. The diverse experience of these women can be viewed from what Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan writes in her Real and Imagined Women, that the manipulative structures are “made of multiple societies which have varied forms of social stratification and patriarchal domination in its class, caste and racial structure” (308). Indian Feminist Theory has focused on oppression of various systems in which all feminists have explored different cultural contexts to articulate the humiliating experiences of the subaltern in terms of representation in the literary language. Judith Butler calls representation a “normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (2). Language as an epistemological underpinning of cultural history of women represents new images of Indian women. Their literary theory formulates its unique theoretical modes that see the way Indian women have freed themselves from destructive cultural conditioning. They have analysed different roles of women represented in myths, epics, and paradoxical literary narratives. The narratives have exposed such distortions as “misconceptions” (Showalter, 327). The study has discovered various distortions and indoctrinated ‘misconceptions’ to evaluate marginalised condition of women.
Postcolonial Indian feminists support what Fanon and Bhabha call “decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world” (*Wretched of the Earth* 360) and “homogenises the history of the present” (*Location and Culture* 94). This belief of Postcolonial thinkers has enabled them to contribute towards a harmonious society by changing stereotypical notions of gender disparities and by recognising men and women as equal human beings. It has helped to examine the problems created by traditional norms and its impact on subaltern women. Their awareness of the various ideologies has also enabled them to delineate various problems created by Indian social structures. By understanding the subaltern experience of women, the critics have seen the way subaltern women have become self-sufficient to confront all forms of gendered oppression.

The study examines the real experiences of women which are re-written through contextualising their lives. In *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha have critically evaluated the untiring efforts of Indian women to record their unpleasant experiences. It has helped study Indian women writers who are well known but have been misunderstood and have no freedom to express their individuality. The literary representation of Indian Feminism also has depicted the subordination of women as deep rooted in classical myths, legends, traditions, cultures, and religions. Jasbir Jain comments on the subaltern image of Indian women in myth and history in *Writing Women Across*, that both, myth and history are ‘hegemonic structures and have gendered dimension’. ‘If myth has marginalised women, history has excluded them’. Jain asserts that traditionally women are treated as ‘ahistoric’ or insignificant because they live through the perception created by men. The study examines this relegated identity of Indian women as social construct. It focuses on the concepts of motherhood, womanhood, woman’s body, sensuality, and
other aspects of women to show how the cultural contexts in which they live have distorted their human desires for self. The study argues such concepts in the subaltern experiences as visible forces in vital areas of human endeavours.

The interpretation of Spivak on the stories of Mahasweta Devi who protests the abuse of motherhood, gendered discrimination, and caste biases by breaking the myth about the commercialisation of the ‘woman body’ is appropriately studied. Spivak has posited in her Essay “A Literary Representation of the Subaltern”, that Devi’s subversion of patriarchal hierarchies is to examine the experience of the marginalised women from their own perspectives. It is to study how Indian women are writing on the concept of ‘woman body’ to locate the patriarchal domination over anatomy, exploitation, and abuse of women for sexual gratification. It has enabled the study of the causes for the subaltern oppression of women by analysing history, ideology, languages, and women-centred narratives on womanhood. In this connection, Vidyut Bhagwat has analysed the western feminists influencing Indian writers to look into their contexts to explore their experience and states, “de Beauvior’s analysis of the women problem is divided into three parts, viz., destiny, history and myth” (69). Her examination of the condition of Indian women is also from three angles: destiny, history, and myth, led the Indian women to a life of poverty, hunger, and misery. Supporting this argument, conclusion can be drawn, that history, cultural ideologies, and misinterpretation of language has caused the subaltern condition of women.

A critical area of the research is to study the way the Indian women depict the demanding roles of mother, wife, daughter, and sister in literature. The Postcolonial concepts which Pramod K. Nayar has discussed in his Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction, can be re-evaluated in the Indian context. He comments that one of the
tasks of Indian writing in Postcolonial literature is to evaluate ‘feminism: womanism, femalism, motherism, and maternity’. It signifies that the women writers have formed their own concepts on the images of women based on their experience and knowledge. A critical reading on these aspects reveals that Indian women have moved beyond the ideal lives and assert their self.

The study explores different aspects of Feminism to evaluate the way Indian mothers awaken their subaltern-consciousness in diverse cultural communities (dalit, tribal, and immigrant). Indian literary theoreticians have asserted that it has been a long battle to recapture the image of the lower caste women. In her Essay “Dalit Feminism: A Quest to Redefine the ‘Self’ and ‘Identity’ of Women”, Beena Agarwal states that “The idea of dalit consciousness was not directed towards the propaganda of social transformation only but it has emerged as a method to register the voice of protest and proclamation of self realisation” (166). It depicts that the lower caste women despite being victims of poverty, caste, class, religion, and tradition have made earnest efforts to move to the ‘centre’. Supporting the statement of Agarwal, the study on the lower caste women as the subaltern reveals that they are awakened from their brokenness to counter misconceptions created by the Indian hierarchal social system, and proved themselves as the women who assert their own rights. In this context, it would be helpful to study how in the Indian social system, the tribal and the dalit women, despite being the marginalised section of the society, have made a remarkable progress in their social, cultural, and economic spheres.

For further reading, the meaning of ‘dalit’ is defined to evaluate the subaltern position of the lower caste women in India. In the Nineteenth Century, the word, dalit was an expression coined by Baba Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule to define the people of the lower castes as ‘the oppressed people’ or ‘the broken people’. Ambedkar and
Phule were in defiance against Mahatma Gandhi’s patronising the term, *Harijan* (people of God). Postcolonial writing on ‘dalits’ rebels against such valorisations and distortions created by the upper caste society. This aspect can be supported by Sasikanth Reddy who emphasises that Arjun Dangle has deconstructed the historical construction on ‘dalit’. Reddy clarifies that the concept of ‘dalit’ is not about the subaltern image of the lower caste people, ‘dalit is not a caste but a realisation and is related to the experiences, joys, and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society’. Considering this, subaltern-consciousness of the lower caste women discussed in the study is not just about their agonising experiences. Rather it aims at celebrating their unique subjectivity and psychic struggle to avenge culturally imposed images. This consciousness explored in the study is a new awakening to realise the state of deprivation in order to affirm their identity. Examining the life of the lower caste women, the study attempts to locate the rural women of the marginalised section to see how they free themselves from the hegemonic hold of the Indian upper caste society. The main focus of the study is to locate the lower caste, the peasant, and the tribal women; their social concerns. The study examines that these women were in the subaltern category as they were exploited by their own caste and the upper castes.

V. Geetha, an Indian feminist and critic has also affirmed the identity of ‘dalit’ women in her *Gender: Theorizing Feminism* by critically examining the causes for their social conditioning. Her observation has revealed that the lower caste women as subalterns have led difficult lives. She asserts that ‘dalit’ women have suffered discrimination, injustice, and unequal rights due to caste and gendered history. Her effort is to exhort their freedom, equality, and autonomy. Her argument is that as a result of their culturally constructed difference ‘women cannot do what men do and
men cannot do what women do’. She asserts the ‘dalit’ women despite being of subaltern category have proved to be stronger than their counterparts, and it has helped them to realise their individual worth. This aspect is discussed in the subsequent Chapters. The question posed by Geetha is taken to suggest that women are not subservient to men. Rather, they are co-workers who can accomplish a task that is impossible to their counterparts. The biological uniqueness cannot create difference. Rather, women are on par with men to work like men in all fields. This aspect of gender equality and validation of women’s power is explored in each woman character.

The study also explores ‘Indian Diaspora’, an important phenomenon of Postcolonial Indian literary feminism to see how women critics have looked into the lives of Indian women settled abroad to examine their marginality. The study locates several factors responsible for the displacement of Indian women. As N. Jayaram discusses in *The Indian Diaspora*, there are several reasons for Indian immigration. Considering his thoughts on Indian Diaspora, it is stated that Indian women may have gone out of the country either in search of better economical status, higher studies or were forcefully taken as wives, slaves, maidservants, and refugees due to war, trade, and commerce. The study examines how Indian Diaspora as a Cultural Discourse in Postcolonial Feminists’ Studies has helped to study various aspects of Indian Diasporic women from the subaltern perspective. It also studies the problems of Indian Partition, refugee struggles, alienation, and other forms of dislocation created for Indian women.

To examine the problems of Indian women abroad, it is essential to define the meaning of ‘Diaspora’ to understand how in the Indian context Diaspora has the identity of the marginalised women. It has helped critically to explore the intersection
of women’s identity of Indian immigrants. There are varied attempts of Indian Diasporic women to define their self by expressing their unheard voices. The subaltern-consciousness examined in the Diasporic context reveals Indian women have attempted to create their own space in the different locations. Jewish expression, ‘diaspora’ derived from the Greek word dia and speirein meaning ‘to scatter’, ‘to spread’, or ‘to disperse’, can be used to analyse various causes for the fragmentation and scattered experience of Indian women. The experience in their host country has created a ‘categorical difference’ which Edward Said has similarly discussed in his Orientalism as ‘race and empire’, ‘whites and blacks’, ‘rich and poor’, ‘master and slave’, and ‘learned and ignorant’. It is that experience which Salman Rushdie affirms as “Imaginary Homelands” (17). It signifies that the Diasporic people have tried to create their own images by remembering their past experiences. Taking the views of Said and Rushdie into consideration, the discussion explores how Indian women have examined their experiences to cope with their challenges in the Diasporic living.

The study analyses that Indian Feminism has looked into Diasporic challenges: ‘alienation’, ‘estrangement’, ‘memory’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘displacement’; and how they have suggested remedies to assert their identity in their ‘divided location’. In this connection Homi Bhabha’s concepts ‘mimicry’, hybridity, ‘liminality’, and ‘ambivalence’ are applied to examine the diverse experiences of Indian women in Diasporic living. Shashi Despande’s Essay “Writing from the Margin” explains that “the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfil herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her” (83). Deshpande supports the social freedom of women to lead independent lives. The identity of Indian Diasporic women abroad is conditioned either by traditional practices or western cultural hegemonies. The women have found
it difficult to live in these two locations. From Deshpande’s statement, it is posited that the focal point in the Diasporic theoretical framework is to examine how Indian women have established their identity in the different cultures despite their confused and bewildering experiences within their Diasporic families. The study explores how in an unfamiliar surroundings, Indian women strive to reclaim their autonomy, freedom, and social mobility.

By discussing Native and Diasporic concerns of Indian Postcolonial Feminism, it is noted that Indian women have suffered from various kinds of oppression in different cultural contexts. Spivak as a Bengali born Diasporic writer, has also examined the causes for the exploitation of Native and Diasporic subaltern women in her literary theory and translated works on Indian women writers. Spivak has emphasised that subordination of women in India and abroad has a long history and she has uncovered the causes for the marginalisation of women in her translations. In her translation of Indian regional stories, she has traced the historical suffering of the subaltern in myths, epics, and other narratives. Her Essay, “The Politics of Translation” states “Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries.” (177) Here her argument is language has different connotations. It constructs different meanings depending on its context. This insight has helped to evaluate the broken images of Indian women. As an Indian woman living abroad, she has understood the contexts in which women can be exploited. This is taken to argue Indian women have felt the need to record the authentic image of women.

Spivak suggests that ‘the third world women’ and their oppression as subaltern in Native and Diasporic Indian is similar but is culture specific. This aspect can be analysed to see the marginality of Indian women in domestic and diasporic
contexts. As a woman, an Asian, and an immigrant, the experience of Spivak has been recorded by Jasbir Jain in her Essay, “Towards the 21st century; The Writing of the 1990’s”, indicates “in the Third World population, the women are exploited and suppressed in a double bondage in the colonial and patriarchal system” (11). Even though women in Diasporic existence are exploited, they still struggle to re-define their identity. From the above observations, a conclusion could be drawn that if Indian Native women suffer from caste discrimination; the Diasporic women are victims of ethnic diversity. Class and gender struggles can be examined as similar experiences of all women. Arguably, the efforts of Indian women critics have questioned the status of Indian women in their diverse locations. It shows women have reconstructed their identity by voicing their concerns.

The key aspect of the research is to explore how Postcolonial Native and Diasporic women writing address the colonial or contemporary challenges faced by indigenous and immigrant women. The portrayal of their writing is examined to see women resist marginality, isolated experience, and their identity crisis in the divided limitations. Some of the glaring problems Indian women face are they are marginalised as refugees, bonded labourers, sex workers, widows, victims of violence, separated from their loved ones, and humiliated by their families. It is a universal phenomenon that in all communities and societies, the oppression of women is imposed by certain set of ideologies which get portrayed in literary criticism as well as in literature, especially, in the short story.

In the following pages a brief survey of the development of Indian short story is presented to examine its relevance in literarture. Indian women writers have presented this genre in their unique literary language. A short story by Indian women writers is different from those narrated by men writers. The study also shows that
Indian short story has delineated the Native and the Diasporic subaltern experiences of women. It traces the struggles of Indian women portrayed by Indian male and women writers to see how their views are different in understanding the experiences of Indian women. Supported by the views of Ramakrishnan in *Indian Short Stories*, the Indian short story developed in the Thirties in prose form published in Periodicals of regional languages spoke about the Indian freedom struggle. A variety of Indian cultural life of women is found in ancient folk tales and myths. Although, the Indian short story, as Ramakrishanan has stated it is written on the model of Kipling, O’ Henry, Chekov, Poe, Hawthorne, Hemingway and Maugham yet, it responds to the socio-cultural and political changes in Indian society. A short story is the ‘only voice’, as he points out in his “Introduction: Fictionalising India” that “makes it an ideal medium for recovering the voice of the marginalised, the oppressed and the dispossessed” (xvi). It can be affirmed that Indian short story on women recovers the voices of the marginalised by using all the elements of a short story: a single character, a creative narrative style, a single plot, a single structure, and a single motif. These elements of a short story are studied to locate subaltern struggles of Indian women.

The suppressed voice of Indian women can be traced back as early as Bankim Chandra Chaterjee who recorded the anguish of women as wives and mothers silenced by Patriarchy. Women in India as socio-cultural victims waited patiently with new expectations to confront their challenges created by a biased culture. Undoubtedly, in the Postcolonial period a great revolution was afoot in the history of women writers to record the issues created in the ancient and the colonial period. On the contrary, Postcolonial women writers reflect modern familial and social issues of women in their writing. Some of them are quest for identity, estranged relations
within the families, sexual harassment, economic deprivation, ill-effects of materialism, and the psychological anguish of women. The women writers have depicted that women face their challenges by subverting the distorted images of women. They portray that modern women are assertive to express their self.

The pioneering effort of representing the subaltern women voice in Indian regional or English languages in the Postcolonial period can be attributed to men short story writers. Their socio-realistic mode refers to the lived reality of the depressed women of Indian society. The humane concerns with which they have portrayed mothers, daughters, wives, and widows can be examined in the stories. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K Narayan, and Raja Rao as the forerunners of Postcolonial Indian short story writers have articulated the challenges of women: hunger, poverty, illiteracy, dowry, widowhood, sati, and the other oppressive nature of Indian society. They have narrated the Indian subaltern experience by portraying inhuman divisions of caste, class, and gender. It can be taken to see how Indian male writers narrated the subaltern stories to uphold the dignity of the marginalised women and to expose their exploitative structures. But these men writers have focused more on the dignity and the idealistic impression they have of women. They have failed to give an appropriate description to women’s identity, because they studied the issues of women as on-lookers. Thus, they have not portrayed the experiences of the women as women writers do. Besides, emotions, and experiences of women are unknown to men.

Having discussed the subaltern themes in the short story by men writers, it is necessary to understand the efforts of Postcolonial Indian women writers who have used the genre to depict the authentic voices of Indian women. The aim of their writing as stated in the “Preface” to Woman in Indian Short Story by Usha Bande and Atma Ram is to depict “the social and psychological reality of women’s life in
motivational terms” (10). It signifies that women have narrated not only the challenges of women but also have given a new awakening to see how they have subverted their oppression. Undoubtedly, a short story with women writers has continuously evolved to portray the experiences of Indian women. The Postcolonial short story inspired by Indian novels written by women has taken a new direction in the study of Indian women and their lives.

The study undertakes to examine the thematic concerns in the Indian novels by women writers to see how it has inspired Indian women writers of short stories to express their discontentment against the cultural practices and to see how they reform their identity in order to emerge as responsible individual beings. The expression for the inner struggle and quest for identity of Indian women emerged in the earlier writing by women. A desire to portray the personal and the public spheres of Indian women was initiated by early women writers like Lakshmi Debi, Krupabai Satthianadhan, Swarnakumari Debi Ghoshal, Pandith Ramabai Ranade, Cornelia Sorabji, Nirupama Devi, and Ashapurna Devi and yet, Indian women are not free from social prejudices. The women-centred novels also have recorded the writers’ personal lives amidst social, political, and historical complexities. The thread of their stories reflects Indian cultural practices and their impact on women. There is an overt expression of women who are subjected to socio-cultural inequalities. The fight of their women is for self-assertion and freedom from joint family system, sati, dowry, imposed restrictions of widowhood, child marriage, and other inhuman Indian practices within their communities. In tracing the struggle for identity of women, it is easy to understand how in Postcolonial writing there is a different outlook in modern women. It signifies that Indian women writers have gone beyond the path of their predecessors in reconstructing the identity of Indian women. Their effort can be seen
in the depiction of women who have either expressed rebellion or subversion, to accept or reject their traditional, religious, and cultural images.

The research makes a study of how women writers have re-interpreted distortions as male prerogatives and critically examined mythical or epic women in the subaltern interpretation. The analysis of the works of Indian women writers like Atukuri Molla explained by Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha can be examined to see how her simple translation of *Molla Ramayanam* in her native language has reconstructed ancient writing to assert the identity of the lower caste and illiterate women. This shows that the contemporary writing by women has enormously developed from that of the earlier women writers. It is examined that women’s writing in the Postcolonial period has moved beyond the derogatory traditions, and reconstructed a feminist point of view to portray the authentic identity of Indian women.

The study also makes a brief survey of regional writing by women to examine how women’s writing in the regional languages has recorded the authentic voice of women by interrogating patriarchal codes. One of the ways in which women writers examine authentic women characters is by making them speak the local dialect. Here, language becomes an important agency to the characters. It is similar to “Phaniyamma”, a story by M. K. Indira which speaks about subaltern subjugation in the upper caste Brahminical system. Prodigiously caught in Patriarchy, the widow in the story never complains but subverts by questioning in silence irrational Brahminical demands on women. It can be taken to understand how Indian women are marginalised even in the Indian upper caste social system, and exposed to prostitution, sati, child-marriage, polygamy, rape, widowhood, and other inhuman social institutions. Mohanty who shares Elizabeth Cowie’s opinion on women in family, states, “it is in the family, as an effect of kinship structures, that women as
women are *constructed*, defined within and by the group” (61). Here, Mohanty’s argument on the discrimination of women under various cultural contexts is taken to show how women in diverse cultures are exploited. On the contrary, they do not comply with traditional standards but challenge the existing hierarchies.

The traditional roles of Indian women were constructed through various hegemonic practices and family traditions. It reveals the truth of the Patriarchal Indian family, and the harsh treatment meted out to them due to existing social hierarchal structures. It is observed, how, with greater awareness and growing sensibility, women writers have presented various aspects of Patriarchal exploitation of women of different communities. Arguably, it has enabled women writers to deconstruct the hierarchal order and restore the image of Indian women. Hélèn Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, argues that it is not only men who denigrate women, women also are critical of women because they see themselves through the indoctrinated images created by men. This aspect is discussed in the following Chapters to see how Indian women have deconstructed it to bring about greater equity.

The Postcolonial writing by women speaks beyond women which enables them to see other women through the eyes of men. It aids them to accept their many challenges with positive attitude. Their voices express that they resist traditional portrayals of submissive women. Rather, they are women in search of their identity. It can be asserted that women have expressed social deviance through resistance by interrogating traditional roles, and forging their own sensibilities. It is reconstructed by emphasising that women are no longer stereotyped and identified in terms of their gender-marked status. In contrast to traditional narratives, portrayal of women characters in the Postcolonialism has subverted cultural distortion that has humiliating the women. It is argued that Indian women writers have defied traditional depiction of
women as mere pleasure objects and narrated their authentic experiences. The diverse voices of the women recorded in short story by these writers are heard in their local, real, present, and daily experiences. The women are placed within their families or outside in contrast to the earlier depiction where they were within their homes as submissive wives.

To support the above view point, an example can be cited from Shashi Deshpande’s novellas, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*. The women characters, Saru and Jaya speak for Indian women who confidently walk out of their traditional roles to empowered women in search of their freedom. Among the indigenous women writers, it is Deshpande who speaks for Indian middle-class women who transcend traditional barriers and walk out of their homes to seek independence. It can be useful to see how Deshpande pays close attention to the subaltern condition of the middle-class women in Indian families. In the words of Ejya Yadav in his article, “Feminism and Indian Women Novelists in English”, it is asserted that “the protagonists present themselves as women who are in quest of self, trying hard in search of their own identity in the male-dominated society” (181). Indian women had always been in search of their identity and self respect. Saru and Jaya express resistance and discontentment towards traditional concepts of family and marriage that have generated subjugation, exploitation, and sexual domination which has forced them to go out of their traditional drudgery. This aspect is examined to see how Indian women writers have re-evaluated the subaltern role of women in Indian patriarchal society and have given voice to their suppressed emotions and imposed silent existence. The study explores women belonging to different communities, from different social backgrounds, of different age-groups, and with different social status.
It must be mentioned here that Indian women writers have recorded the suppressed voices through the creative use of myths, legends, epics, and other oral local lore to depict that distorted images of women existed in the ancient period. It shows women writers narrate the Indian social system in a broader dimension to represent social and emotional realities of women. Their narration includes self-representation, allegorical narration, re-making of myths, and other motifs to counter traditional narratives and distortion of women. The writers record the voice of these women to assert what bell Hooks writes in her Essay “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression”, that women writers have “encouraged to focus on giving voice to personal experience” (52) and have protested against inhuman atrocities created by such assumptions. The creativity in re-writing allegories and myths to expose the distorted ‘identification’ of women is to question the status of Indian women. It shows traditionally women were exploited and marginalised due to some mythical fabrication by patriarchal powers. Lalithambika Antarajanam, Sunitha Namjoshi, Namita Ghokale, and other women short story writers re-wrote myths and epics to record the struggles of women. It means a short story in the form of legends, myths, allegories, and epics represent the life of Indian subaltern women. The study examines how these parabolic expressions are still common modes of literary expressions in the Indian Postcolonial literature, particularly, in short story.

Indian women short story writers also reinterpret the lives of Indian women through counter-narratives or self-reflexive stories. It is to subvert the traditional depiction of women and to express their freedom of thought and feeling. Ismat Chughtai’s “The Quilt” and Lalithambika Antharjanam’s “Admission of Guilt” are compelling stories which as counter-narratives deal with the question of women’s sexuality in the upper caste Patriarchal society. Ramakrishanan comments on these
narratives as resistance, stating “when patriarchal society regulates the sexuality of women, it will find expression in “deviant” ways.” (xxvi) The women characters in the stories enjoy their sexual freedom by expressing their social ‘deviance’. It delineates that Postcolonial women are confident in questioning their status in their respective contexts. It is asserted by Usha Bande and Atma Ram in their “Introduction” to *Women in Short Stories*, state “the woman is no longer a myth. She is standing up, asking discomforting, unconventional, unnerving questions; she is exploding the myth of motherhood, subverting the myth of purity and virginity” (29). The women have not remained in the distorted domain of Patriarchy but have asserted their individual freedom through subversive narratives.

While on the one hand, regional women writers counter the traditional roles of women, on the other hand, Indian Diasporic women writers focus on the subaltern experience of immigrant women and explore the emotional constrains on their freedom. From the above study of Indian women writers in English and other Indian languages, it can be stated that Indian women writing is a potent voice of the subaltern either of the upper or the lower caste, the Native or the Diasporic women of Indian society. The earlier women writers expressed their discontent with traditional practices that forced women to leave their homeland due to repressive issues: marriage, violence, war, forced or arranged marriages, and economic constraints. Whereas, in recent women’s writing, a number of Indian women short story writers have made their debut in the depiction of the subaltern, especially after Independence, speaking about their authenticity in revealing their hidden voice. Their depiction is on the socio-economic and Partition problems in Diasporic existence forcing women to opt out of their adopted countries. This indicates that the experience has marginalised them to be in ‘in-between’ position in different cultures. The thematic concern of their
writing on motherhood, cultural identity crisis, gender discrimination, ethnic humiliation, rape in and outside marriage, the problems of refugees, the culture-shock of western cultural impact, and other subaltern concerns of women can be analysed to examine that Indian women in their Diasporic experience have asserted their identity. By undertaking a study on these issues, the research aims at locating the challenges of Indian women and their search for self.

Indian Diasporic writers, as Samantha Naidu in her article “South Asian Diasporic Women’s Short Fiction: The South African Contribution”, states Diaspora is “grappling with two main thematic areas: the oppression of women within patriarchy; and the dislocated diasporic identity” (49). Naidu explores it in the Indian context that every woman in a culturally different location is confronted by her home culture and Diasporic identity. The study explores these two aspects of the Diasporic Indian women as causes for marginalisation and examines that women find their means to assert their freedom. It shows women writers record their Diasporic stories in order to create an identity that is not imposed by patriarchal or western society. The themes also delineate the crisis in the personal experience caused by the social institutions: marriage and family, and their efforts to cope with them. Their fiction reveals self-representing, politicised experience, and aims at liberation and self-empowerment. Most of the Diasporic short stories narrate the daily experiences of the women protagonists who often recall the past as Jasbir Jain discusses in her Essay, “The new Parochialism: Homeland in the writing of the Indian Diaspora”, that it is “open to two epistemologies, two histories and two social realities” (80). It means Diasporic stories revolve around poignant instances of suppression of women caused by cultural discrimination, alienation, and separation. The writers posit that these
experiences are diverse depending upon their contexts. It is supported by Gauri Shankar Jha’s statement:

Diaspora fiction lingers over alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, questioning, protest and assertions and quest of identity; it also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures, discriminating margins of two different social milieus, internalising nostalgia and suffering a forced amnesia - we may call it a literary/cultural phenomenon with a distinct melting pot syndrome or a Salad bowl where identity of each ingredient is under question. (96-97)

In these conditions, the sociological process of acceptance and assimilation are cumbersome for Indian women. In such subaltern experiences, women tend to look back to their ancestral roots to reconcile with their anxious moments in the new location. Their identity in two entities as cultural and linguistic constantly humiliates them as outsiders. The study makes a survey of these aspects to learn the subaltern experiences of Indian Diasporic women. In these situations women feel what Abha Pandey in her book, Indian Diasporic Literature states “Cultural travel takes root or get dislocated and individuals internalise nostalgia or experience amnesia” (127). It implies that, in the cultural conflicts, women take control over their challenges to define self. The narratives speak about the subaltern feelings of isolation and emotional vulnerability by awakening their consciousness to make adjustments. Most of the Postcolonial women writers showcase parallel experience of women in immigration.

Indian Diasporic short story also examines ‘hybridity’, ‘liminality’ ‘mimicry’, and ‘ambivalence’ to see how women recognise their individual identity. The depiction is of the socio-cultural experiences of women in India and abroad. They consciously orient their short stories to discover immigrant women in search of their
emotional stability and social mobility. Many Diasporic writers have centred their stories on Indian women as refugees, emotionally disturbed housewives, victims of sex and struggling with extra-marital relations, professional women caught in the prisons of alienation, gender marginalisation, and class discrimination. The study finds that Diasporic women gather tremendous strength to discover their hidden potential in order to counter their challenges in their diversity. The stories also focus on the struggles of Indian women to adapt to the ways of the Diasporic world like America. There is a constant ‘memory’ and ‘knowledge’ of their homeland that gives them resilience and courage to accept challenges. It also discovers despite physical and emotional distance from their home culture, the women have braved their difficulties.

An important aspect of the study is to examine the experience of second generation Indian women immigrants in the divided contexts. There is a constant quest for identity in search of a materially better life, immigration to the West, and consequently facing tensions of assimilation. Experiencing western culture in the USA, Canada, Britain, and other parts of the world, the Diasporic women of second generation portray similar experiences of women being caught between two cultures. The study explores how a permanent shift to the west has also created a lack of awareness of actual facts and cultural knowledge of their home. Yet, they present what Geetanjali Singh Chanda states in her *Indian Women in House Fiction*, that “diaspora Indians are thrice alienated-from the India they left behind, from their new host country and from their children” (256). It signifies that the women in Diasporic existence are victims of western culture, suffer from alienation, and exploited in their family constrains. Chanda presents the domestic space of Indian women in Diasporic living. The statement signifies that the marginalisation of the second generation
Indians is three-fold and yet in an unknown experience of their ancestral homes they try to learn and express their desire for their ‘space’. They identify their self as potentially empowered women in their domestic sphere by coping with their restricted space. Their exploration of key aspects: alienation, isolation, loneliness, and separation are major issues of women to examine their expression of freedom for identity, language, nationality, family, and community.

The challenges of the lower sections of society in Diasporic experience, is examined in the study from a Diasporic perspective as unique fictional narration. Through their literary skills, the women writers realistically present the contemporary world issues of the subaltern women. Some of the issues are common to the problems portrayed by the regional Indian writers. Among them are Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss*, and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* that have won international accolades. Depiction of the realities of the disadvantaged and the marginalised categories is the motif in Slum Dwellers of *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Despande and the staircase sweeper of “Real Durwan” by Jhumpa Lahiri. Through the narration of the subaltern, it is found that the writers have re-written the history of the lesser groups and recorded their authentic voice in Indian context. Kamala Markandaya, Bharti Mukherjee, Shashi Despande, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gita Hariharan, Mahashweta Devi, and other women writers are the crusaders of subaltern feminist literary movement in India and Diaspora. They have explored subaltern voice of women by recording their inhuman conditions either in Native or Diasporic location. Irony, metaphor, parody, allegory, myth-making, and symbolic representations are the literary strategies of these writers to define subaltern-consciousness of Indian women. Speaking about the aim of creative language in Indian women’s writing, Sasikanth T. Reddy in his article, “Voicing for Space” comments,
“revisionist myth-making has been one of the strategies for emancipation employed in the cause of women’s liberation. Subversion, parody and pastiche are preferred techniques in feminist re-writing of the old texts.” (139) It signifies women move towards freedom surmounting all the difficulties of their lives.

The studies on several Postcolonial short stories by Indian Native and Diasporic women writers examined above portray that Indian women are exposed to exploitative and powerful agencies which are dangerous. In all these struggles, the aim of the subaltern is to move towards freedom, liberation, and empowerment, thus, employing various strategies to overcome their difficulties. Their writing provides a medium of subaltern expression to re-write their history in Native and Diasporic existences. Arundhati Roy and Lalithambika Anthrajanam present their state, Kerala to see how discrimination is meted out to women of both the lower and the upper castes. The short stories of Anita Nair and Kamala Das present the image of suffering women suppressed by traditional and cultural subjugation, their frustration, and the existential crisis in a male-dominated society. Through these subaltern women, the writers evolve a better and a fairer world for exploited women by defying patriarchal norms.

Having discussed Postcolonial women’s writing, the reading makes a specific study of Mahasweta Devi to locate how as a regional writer of Bengal, she has portrayed the subaltern struggles of the tribal and scheduled caste women. Her portrayal of the lives of these women is seen in the numerous short stories written for more than five decades. Devi’s short stories prove that she is one of the best Indian regional woman writers in articulating the struggles of the subaltern, especially, the tribal women. Devi’s distinctive representation of the subaltern is seen in the depiction of their daily experiences. The voice of protest against the exploitation of
women which she represents through the re-making of Indian myths, parodies, epics, historical narratives, and other forms of narratives are traced in *Breast Stories, After Kurukshetra, In the Name of the Mother, Old Women, Outcast, Bitter Soil,* and other women-centred stories. The study makes detailed examination on her subaltern women characters, to see how they defy traditional and cultural portrayals as subjects of sexual and economical exploitation caused by caste, class, and gender discrimination.

The stories of Devi revolve around marginalised and innumerable disempowered Indian Native women. As social outcasts, they express a radical change in their movement in an oppressed world. They are, as Devi comments, “victims of class and caste oppression” (*Bitter Soil* viii). Although they are oppressed, yet they use subversion, passive aggression, womanly wiles, and outward repression to counter their exploiters. These features explored in the study is taken to state that Devi is a ubiquitous regional writer. The sex-workers in “Rudali”, the witch in “The Hunt”, the outcaste women in “Giribala”, “Sindhubala”, and the tribal woman in “Draupadi” are the collective stories on subaltern-consciousness. These women belonging to the different marginalised communities represent Patriarchal reality in a caste-ridden society through their subversion. Radha Chakravarty in her “Introduction” to *In the Name of Mother* comments, Devi’s “fiction offers an array of maternal figures, as well as diverse figurative constructions of the maternal idea” (vii). It means that the women use their voice to question subaltern suffering and the callousness of Patriarchy which they introspect in their lives through different angles of their social roles. Devi’s use of colloquial Bengali, tribal dialect, folk songs, folk allusions, English grammatical presentation, and the use of punctuation is a contemporary representation of the subaltern in a variety of languages that do not lend
themselves to translation into English. It is this aspect of her unique presentation that makes her stand above other Indian women short story writers, and shall be analysed from the subaltern perspective.

To brave the wrath of caste, class, and gender exploitation with unwavering devotion to freedom is examined from the perspective of feminist-consciousness. The women as confident individuals go beyond the culturally constructed norms of their community amid hunger, poverty, isolation, alienation, exploitation, and suppression to bring social transformation. The hard life of the women in the stories portrays how Native women suffer from marginality caused by the impact of Patriarchy and cultural ethos like caste system, institutional practices, gender suppression, class exploitation, and religious hypocrisy. The research examines that the subaltern women represented by Devi are the embodiment of raw courage who cannot be defeated by Patriarchal culture. Devi also makes the woman’s body in Breast Stories a unique subject that affirms the idea of Moira Gatens in her Essay “Power, Bodies and Difference”, in which she argues:

Writing itself is a political issue and a political practice for many contemporary feminists. For this reason it is inappropriate to reduce the project of écriture féminine to an essentialist strategy. The ‘difference’ which this form of writing seeks to promote is a difference rooted not in biology but rather in discourse-including biological discourse. The project of écriture feminine involves challenging the masculine monopoly on the construction of femininity, the female body and woman, for this would be to accept that woman is some (one) thing. (133)

The above statement can be applied to study the women protagonists wherein Devi exercises an active role in empowering the tribals, the dalits, the brick-kiln workers, the widows, the prostitutes, and the migrant labourers of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa through the agency of writing. It is to counter the patriarchal point of view and to
explore the real experiences of Native women. This aspect shall be taken for discussion in the next Chapter.

Devi’s historical narratives on subaltern, *Jhansir Rani*, and *Rudali* are based on the ‘deconstructive theory’ of Indian tribal poverty-stricken women which are examined as an act of ‘decolonising’ the poor. Devi wants to promote ‘decolonisation’ by means of empowerment, social mobility, and freedom of women from Patriarchal domination. Devi does it by recording the subaltern voices to represent their exploitative history and their desire to move towards empowered status. The women characters discussed in the stories reveal that they are daring women who defy cultural images of women as subaltern. It is examined to see how Devi’s literary language is to counter oppressive patriarchal and cultural realities of Indian society. The stories delineate tyranny and injustice which her fictional women protagonists undergo due to social exploitation, ostracism, institutionalised violence, and sexual abuse. The women represented in her short stories question the negligence of the government and the bureaucrats.

The epic narration portrayed by Devi is also examined to see how the dominant traditional prototype creation of women as chaste, patient, and self denying wives like Kunti, Shakuntala, Subhadra, Draupathi, and Gandhari is deconstructed. Devi’s counter narratives, *After Kurukshetra* defy the images of women expressed by patriarchal fantasies. Devi dismantles male-centred narratives that perpetuate the distorted image of women as the silent spectators of patriarchal hegemony. In, “The Five Women” the conversation between Abhimanyu’s wife and the five women of the lower castes is an instance where subaltern perspective for awakening to life is narrated. It can be noticed here that in traditional narratives, silence is considered as a symbol of suppression and a characteristic of the subaltern condition, but that belief is
undermined by Devi in exploring how speech, a means of self-expression and liberation is denied to women. The theme is examined in “Draupadi” where Devi represents a potent subaltern voice of a tribal woman and makes a parody of Draupadi of *Mahabharata* to deconstruct traditional narratives on women. A historical narrative, “The Mother of 1084” is analysed to see how women can stand against the corrupt bureaucrats and government officials to empower their community, the subaltern.

The focal point of Devi’s allegorical representations is to re-assert the dignity of the Native women by searching for the root cause for its loss. Hence, her short stories question social structures responsible for subaltern suffering. The intensity with which she portrays her women characters, exhibit the power of women to reject century’s old traditions and cultural binds. Jancy James in her article, “Empowering Vengefully” calls the “rare variety of open and direct retaliation that the woman character has dared in different environments, cutting across linguistic and regional boundary within the Indian milieus reflected in women’s writings” (481). It is how Devi subverts an unethical social system that has caused exploitation of women. It is a way of exposing the horror of inhumanity and subverting an unjust system. Devi is more concerned with fighting the archetype images of women, the subaltern through the ideas that have come down from the mythical times of *Mahabharatha*. This aspect of women in the short stories of Devi has not been sufficiently explored. The study aims to gain further insight into the subaltern-consciousness of marginalised women in her select short stories. It attempts to see how Devi sees the tribal and the lower caste women as individuals and not as social constructs. On the one hand, Devi narrates the exploitative stories of tribal women, on the other hand, Jhumpa Lahiri
portrays the subaltern challenges of Indian Diasporic women. The reading also looks at the subaltern issues raised by Lahiri.

There is a comparative study on Devi and Lahiri as Bengali women writers but their contexts are different. Lahiri as an Indian Diasporic Bengali writer portrays the countless miseries of Indian women in their diverse locations. In her “Interview” with Ombretta Frau on her latest book, *The Low Land* conveys that Lahiri is truly an Indian Diasporic writer with a heart for the subaltern women. Recalling the Naxalite violence depicted in the novel, she states that as a small girl she recalled everything that took place in her neighbourhood in Calcutta. Her longing for her family, community, and nationality has inspired her to record the real experiences of the subaltern. Her concern for the Indian Diasporic women searching for their identity is made manifest in *The Namesake* through a woman character, Ashima. Lahiri’s search for subaltern identity is portrayed in the historical narration on partition stories, refugees, traditional barriers of Indian women, religious beliefs generating gender conflict, and isolation. Speaking about her subaltern concern, Rupam Gogoi in her *Essay, “Subalterns in the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri”*, states “Jhumpa Lahiri appears arguably to be a representative voice” (176) of the Diaspora. Her *Interpreter of Maladies* which has nine short stories centred on Indian Diasporic women focuses on their subaltern aspect.

A brief reading of the stories of Lahiri, gives a clear insight into how the subaltern aspect of these stories is analysed in the study. The first short story, “A Temporary Matter” is a reflection on a Bengali middle class woman, Shoba trying to resolve her family conflict arising from gendered struggle and individual differences. The second story, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” speaks about the problems of Indian Partition disrupting the Indian women for geographical separation and cultural
displacement. Lahiri records a girl’s voice to interpret the nostalgic experience of the victims of Indian Partition, especially the women. “Interpreter of Maladies”, “A Real Durwan”, and “Sexy” revolve around the challenges of women in Diaspora and speak for women who are victims of deprivation, poverty, sexual abuse, and emotional disturbance. Lahiri’s creative use of Bengali expressions represents the emotional longing of her women. The difficulties of Mrs. Das, Bibi Haldar’s longing for motherhood, and the resisting voice of Boori Ma, a refugee is examined to see how Lahiri has interpreted the stories. In “The Blessed House”, “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”, and “The Third and Final Continent” the Diasporic issues of women are analysed to see the way Indian women in different contexts face challenges.

Analysing the thematic concerns in Lahiri’s stories, a similarity is perceived in the short stories of Devi who also speaks of the lived experiences of Indian subaltern women beset with traditional issues though Lahiri focuses on the issues specific to Diasporic Indian women. Lahiri delineates the cultural estrangement of Indian women and their effort to cope with the American culture. The women characters experience victimisation through the historical struggle between the dichotomies that Edward Said has popularised in his Orientalism: colonised/ coloniser, Indian/ American, coloured/ non-coloured, Native/ Diasporic, American white women/ Indian women. These aspects shall be taken up in the following Chapters.

In the eight short stories in Unaccustomed Earth, Lahiri recounts the alien and nostalgic experiences of women. The first story, “Unaccustomed Earth” narrates the Diasporic problems faced by Ruma’s father which are viewed through Ruma, a woman’s voice recorded by Lahiri to represent the hidden voice of Indian women. “Hell-Heaven”, “Only Goodness”, “Nobody’s Business”, “Once in a Lifetime”, and “Going Ashore” are about the personal conflicts of Indian women in the hybrid
experience. The conflicting conditions are negated by her women in order to express their individuality and assertion of self as women. Lahiri discovers the lives of Indian women as subjected to tension, humiliation, abuse, agony, oppression, violence, and anxiety created by the cultural location. Amidst the struggles, the women prove to be authentic to express their views, to come out of those challenges for a fuller life. The new voice recorded by Lahiri in her short stories echo in the American continent for a life of individuality, and dignity.

Lahiri’s writing in English convey the hidden and unpleasant experience of women who have left India for economic gain in *Unaccustomed Earth*. The stories speak about Bengali women trying to cope with familial problems by recalling their collective memory, vision, and experiences of their homeland. Therefore, she represents different categories of women: the women belong to the lower strata of society, refugee women, Indian immigrant women to America, the middle class rich women, the highly educated Indian women, and the professional women. Like most of the Indian Diasporic writers, Lahiri too exhibits her skill by exploring the personal experiences of her women characters. The use of Bengali expressions in Lahiri’s stories is used to see how women reinvent their identity in the local lingo.

A comparative study of Devi and Lahiri reveals that both are Bengali writers who speak for Indian marginalised women but their contexts are different. While Devi lived all through her life in India and has written about Indian tribal women of colonial and Postcolonial period in English and Bengali, whereas, Lahiri of recent times has written only in English about the cultural estrangement of Indian women and their effort to cope with dislocated culture. Devi and Lahiri have written about the subaltern reality in a unique manner. Their women experience different forms of oppression, yet, they seek empowerment through different survival strategies:
subversion, womanly wile, and other overt expressions. The writers have represented these techniques in their stories. Mary Ellmann calls these survival strategies as “rashness, daring, mockery, ‘sudden alterations of the reckless and sly, the wildly voluble and the laconic’ as stylistic devices” (Eagleton, 285) of women writing. But the study attempts to see if the women go beyond mere survival.

The Chapters titled: **Female Aggression, Re-defining Female Identity, and Female Resistance to Stereotyping** shall be discussed highlighting the aspects of women as responsible beings in Native and Diasporic existence and their subversion of oppressive traditional issues created by caste, class, ethnic, and gender discrimination. Each of the terms: ‘Aggression’, ‘Identity’, and ‘Resistance’ shall be interpreted in each Chapter separately through the feminist framework to examine how the ‘Subaltern-Consciousness’ of the women in the stories is expressed to reconstruct their subjectivity. The woman protagonists of Devi and Lahiri are studied in the subaltern reality to see the way they realise their full potential in contributing to the general social well-being in different contexts by harmonising their relationship with self and others. The stories of the women are discussed from diverse cultural background to locate similar concerns of women in postcolonialism. The creative language of the writers is examined to see how they explore the subaltern experience in the stories to discover the voice of Indian women either in Native or Diasporic situations. By recording the actual experiences of women, it is posited that women have rejected the cultural stereotypes by asserting their selves as conscientious individuals who contribute to a harmonious society. The thesis is divided into five Chapters including the **Introduction** and the **Conclusion**.

The **Second Chapter** is titled **Female Aggression**. It is an attempt to see how Devi and Lahiri as Indian short story tellers re-cover the unspoken voice of
women in their own experience. The Chapter has five short stories of Devi: “Mother of 1084”, “The Hunt”, “Douloti the Bountiful”, “The Witch”, and “Ma, From Dusk to Dawn”; Lahiri’s five stories: “A Temporary Matter”, “Interpreter of Maladies”, “A Real Durwan”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “Sexy” are taken for study. The voice of the women is recorded from their daily experiences with a fragmented psyche in a constant quest for self and its integrity. The argument of the thesis is carried out by examining the women characters to locate their struggles and challenges in the Feminist and Postcolonial framework.

After defining the term “Aggression” from a feminists’ perspective, the reading examines how the male prerogative of aggression is deconstructed in the stories of Devi and Lahiri. It is also observed how aggression as a positive response has contributed towards the subject formation by challenging the exploitative traditional practices. It also analyses how the women protagonists express freedom from different contexts to re-define their identity by confronting their challenges. The Chapter chronicles the subaltern women as attempting a change in the social stratification in Indian society. Lahiri’s short stories similarly examine the challenges: isolation, alienation, gender disparity, poverty, deprivation, hunger, and discrimination to see how Indian women deconstruct their images in their Diasporic context. In local and Diasporic cultures, the various issues of the women are a common phenomenon. Placing women in these circumstances, the study attempts to see how the women despite their imposed subaltern status strive towards freedom and empowerment.

The Third Chapter, Re-defining Female Identity, examines the need for subaltern women for self empowerment. It also examines the cultural problems afflicting women in different cultural context. The five short stories of Devi:
“Draupadi”, “Breast-Giver”, “The Five Women”, “Dhouli”, and “Shanichari” give an account of the suffering women expressing a constant effort to create a new paradigm by challenging exploitation, marginalisation, and oppression as an act of subversion. The woman protagonists, Dopdi in “Draupadi”, and Jashoda in “Breast-Giver” resist culturally enforced image of a woman’s body to demonstrate their attempts not only to rise above social evils specific to India but also to find fulfilment in being contributory members of their social contexts. The five lower caste women in “The Five Women” are portrayed in the myth-remaking mode of Devi to question the ethos of the upper caste women, so as to see how powerful a subaltern can be to empower the other women. “Dhouli” and “Shanichari” speak for the Indian lower caste, poverty-stricken women, and their distorted image of womanhood in the traditional and cultural construct. These short stories are compared with the other select short stories, “Mrs. Sen”, “This Blessed House”; “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”, “The Third and Final Continent”, and “Unaccustomed Earth” to contextualise the subaltern challenges.

It is discovered that like Devi, Lahiri also narrates the struggles of the refugees, the exploited, the marginalised, and the ethnic discriminated Indian women in the Diasporic experiences. Her insight into the lives of Indian Diasporic women is so accurate that she goes beyond their sorrows and their personal fulfilment. The stories revolving around women chronicle how despite the multiple challenges, they progress and evolve for a better living. The stories are read to examine how Lahiri goes from specific to general to locate similar Diasporic challenges oppressing Indian women abroad.

The Fourth Chapter, Female Resistance to Stereotyping is devoted to study how Devi and Lahiri adopt the direct mode to express resistance of women to the
traditional distortions on their image. The translated short stories of Devi: “Rudali: From Fiction to Performance”, “Bayen”, “Statue”, “Bedanabala: Her Life, Her Times”, and “Giribala”; Lahiri’s five stories: “Hell-Heaven”, “Only Goodness”, “Nobody’s Business”, “Once in a Lifetime”, and “Going Ashore” examine the women’s resistance for social mobility and acceptability. The analysis brings to the fore the concept of resistance to evaluate it as a means to assert their identity. Devi and Lahiri have given voice to their women to see how they resist their cultural moulds to define their identity in the oppressive social environment. The language of the writers, study the struggles of these women to transcend caste, class, and gender disparities for self assertion and empowerment.

The **Last Chapter, Conclusion** attempts to link the various subaltern aspects of Native and Diasporic women who define their integrated self within their societies. It compares the common elements of the short stories of Devi and Lahiri and their attempt to portray the identities of subaltern women in their respective cultures, similar and yet dissimilar. The writers attempt to see the problems of their women to depict how in Native and Diasporic situations, the women construct their lost identities is examined. An attempt is made to see how Devi’s women re-examine their roles to reclaim their silenced voice. The women defy their caste, class, and gender oppositions, and go beyond male stereotypes. Lahiri’s women: the refugees, the deprived, the degraded, the emotionally derailed, and the cultural outcasts face ethnic discrimination and gender differences in a challenging way.
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