

**Redefining Feminism- Going beyond ‘Waves’: A Study of
Select Indian Women Writers**

**A Thesis Submitted to the
Department of English and Foreign Languages
in the Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
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Doctor of Philosophy
In
English**

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DECLARATION

I, Shruti Jain, hereby declare that the Ph.D. research entitled “**Redefining Feminism- Going beyond ‘Waves’: A Study of Select Indian Women Writers**” has been completed by me under the supervision and able guidance of Dr. Bir Singh Yadav, Associate Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages. The work presented in this thesis is original and all the sources used in the course of this work have been duly acknowledged in the Works Cited and Select Bibliography. I hereby declare that the content of this thesis has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any degree or diploma in any other institution.

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CERTIFICATE

It is hereby certified that Ms. Shruti Jain (Registration Number: CUH/96/2011) has worked under my supervision for her Ph.D. thesis entitled **“Redefining Feminism- Going beyond ‘Waves’: A Study of Select Indian Women Writers”** for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. She has completed this work sincerely in the prescribed period. To the best of my knowledge it is the result of bonafide research work carried out by the researcher. This thesis has not been submitted so far in part or in full for the award of any Degree/Diploma of this University or any other institution. I deem the present research work fit for being evaluated for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Signature of the Supervisor

(Dr. Bir Singh Yadav)

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Introduction

Foreword

In the sixteenth century, Mirabai openly inscribed her love for the Lord Krishna:

I know only Krsna

no other,

I have nothing to do with

.....

That's all that's real for me

let what will be, be.

("I know only Krsna" 1-3, 26-27)

The challenging journey of the Indian women entering into the world, dominated by men, had begun ages before the term feminism was coined. The French philosopher, Charles Fourier coined the term *féminisme* in 1837 and Hubertine Auclert first introduced the term feminism in the English language in the 1890s. She drew the term to assert women's rights and liberation against male domination. But what is feminism? Among the many definitions proposed, feminism has been discussed by Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* to be a parasol that describes all those people who feel the need to speak, write and fight against the oppression of women on the social, economic and ideological grounds (*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 118-120).

In this chapter, I will trace the journey of Indian women's struggle from a point of articulating inner tumult and carving an individual identity to a point where the very notion of a permanent identity is debunked as it turns out to be in a state of flux, indefinable and having multiple dimensions. The chapter will also see the Indian women's journey for

the liberation from the clutches of patriarchy has largely been middle class and limited to the dominant classes, castes and religions till the late twentieth century.

The last section of the chapter will discuss that the taken works of the Indian women writers go beyond the dominant and homogenising features of the Indian feminist movements witnessed up till then, waves and diverse groups of Western feminism.

Indian Pictures of Unconsciously Appropriated Stands for Feminist Causes

“If I have never thought about any man but Rama, let the goddess Madhavi create a chasm for me (Valmiki 677)!” Looking for public approval, the Indian God Rama, ordained his wife, Sita, not once but twice, to prove her chastity. Sita first confronted Rama by addressing him a common man and then in an act of retaliation denies to becoming object of public desire. The embodiment of a *pativrata nari* born in *Treta Yuga*, neither proves her purity nor pleads with her husband. She, as also discussed by David Shulman in his essay “Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sita in Kampan’s *Iramavataram*”, acquires an agency in the act of self-immolation by not letting Rama become her superior and control her (92).

In *Dwapara Yuga*, when a woman’s dignity and honour was disgraced in public, her husbands sat as mute spectators, however, the woman, Draupadi herself not only reprimanded the entire Kuru clan for being the silent witness to her disgrace but also promised to wash her hair with Dushashana’s blood.

Where on the one hand, Draupadi swore vengeance on her privacy being violated, on the other hand, Satyawati, a fisherman’s daughter used her intelligence, body and sexuality to gain power. Comprehending the violent desire of Parashara, Satyawati counters his ferocious lust to satisfy him with an incredible reasoning. She first uses Parashara to purge herself from her repulsive body odour and turns musk-fragrant. Then,

Satyawati with her remarkable logic acquires a boon of getting her virgin status back even after a mutually enjoyable coitus. In this act of freedom, she not only breaks away from the authority of her father but as M. Esther Harding in *Woman's Mysteries* says, she attains “one-in-herselfness” (103). She further firmly refuses to become the mistress of the love-struck king of Hastinapura, Shantanu and agrees to marry him only on the promise of her son becoming the heir and succeeding the throne of Hastinapura instead of the crown prince Bhishma. Satyawati emerges out to be a real guru in the understanding of the politics of courtly men and their world.

In the second century B.C, outraged at the execution of her innocent husband, transformed into a fury, Kannaki in Ilanko Atikal's *Cilappatikaram* promises to appease her burning wrath by confronting the king who beheaded her husband without a proper trial. She burns his entire city and restores the order through the power of her chastity. Kannaki defies the unjust power of the king and wrenching her breasts, symbolic of sexual power, hurls them at his city, reducing it to ashes (196-199).

Many women saints of Bhakti movement, which began around the eighth century, denounced the stifling bounds of the society and religion to express and experience the mystic union with their love through *bhakti* and fearless devotion.

Antal's verses not only bravely delineate the pain of a woman's passion and despair but also reveal her audacious longing for sexual fulfilment. Lal Ded's poems blur the difference of gendered bodies by undressing. Mirabai's intense desire for her love, Krishna could not be even restrained by her royal in-laws. Not only women but even men saints like Basavanna describes love to be free of gender restraint. In the book *Speaking of Siva*, we hear him sweeping between the clothes of men and women in the hope of meeting his Lord (“The Vachanas of Basavanna” 703).

However, as discussed in Shruti Jain's dissertation, "[...] over the centuries unconscious feminism has developed into a stark and conscious one" (5).

Ancient Indian Women Writings

Indian women started to write in the sixth century B.C. *Therigatha* is one of the first Indian women writings which demands freedom from both sexual and physical bondage. For instance, Sumangalamata, in one of her poems brings out the frustrations of leading an oppressive domestic life. She expresses her desire to be free from the toil of household chores and domination of men ("A woman well set free! How free I am" 69).

Iliana Sen, in "A Space Within the Struggle" writes about the importance of understanding the various turns of the Indian women liberation movement to read new paths of their struggle (81). In this context, the picture sketched by Radha Kumar in *The History of Doing* (1993) also becomes significant. By placing the Indian women's liberation struggles in the larger context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' worldwide women movements, Kumar exposes the partial spaces in which the efforts for Indian women's liberation began. She discusses the reality of feminist consciousness that emerged throughout Europe and how women issues became the important core of the Russian reformation arguments. Against it, she has put the limited effort of few reformers of Bengal and Maharashtra to understand the evils hurled at the Indian women. These assertions make one keen to understand the difference between the Indian and Western history of women struggles and liberations (7).

Western Feminism: A Bird's-Eye View

The first modern Western voice raised for women's rights has been considered to be Mary Wollstonecraft's in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

Wollstonecraft, in the essay, champions that women's lack of education is the reason for men treating them like their slaves and thus women should try to attain the light of education. She confirms that women can fight against the institution of patriarchy by using the missile called right education. She believes that education can sculpt women's mind in the right frame of freedom (46).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the space for women was confined to the four walls of their houses and the code of conduct laid by the patriarchal family. They were considered subordinates, whose only role was to perform the household chores with unmatched artistry and be wives and mothers. Jane Austen's famous line in *Pride and Prejudice* (1796) is one apt proof of it, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3).

Liberal feminists, following Wollstonecraft, brought out the crushing effect of the patriarchal laws on women's individuality. John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) contends for both education and individuality for women. He writes about the need for women's autonomy and freedom. By using the utilitarian philosophy of greatest good for the greatest number, Mill rationalises that the liberation of women will be the liberation of half of the human race. The women's joy will bring the highest contentment to humankind.

The first wave of Western feminism is affirmed to flourish with Mill's work. Emerging in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the first wave of feminism continued from the late nineteenth century till the early twentieth century. The aim of the movement was to attain political power for women in addition to same contract and property rights as are reserved for men. It also demanded the right to vote that led to the the Representation of People Act 1918. The act secured the right to vote for women. However, initially the right was given to women who were above thirty years of age and

had their own houses but in 1928, this right was sanctioned for all women above the age of twenty-one.

Virginia Woolf's pioneering works, *A Room of One's Own* (1928) and *Three Guineas* (1939) are also imperative segments of feminist writings. Woolf champions for women's separate space where their creative potential can be explored. She explains feminism to be a fight against the male dictatorship in the patriarchal framework that belittles women. She, in *A Room of One's Own* strongly articulates her belief that women are treated inferior by men to assert their heroism, "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size" (35). The solution to this suppression is that the value system should be revolutionised. This can be done through women's education and by carving special personal spaces for them that is, recognising and augmenting their critical and creative powers.

Women's realisation and understanding of their oppression, the act of uniting together to raise their voice against the oppression and the effort to change their status quo also mark the first wave of feminism in the United Kingdom and the United States. The second wave feminists fought for social and political transformations. They worked harder for women, to help them attain their deserved position and rights in the society. The 1960s mark the commencement of the second wave of feminism. Women began decoding the cultural conditioning of the patriarchal institutions. The major aim was to negate the identity ordained on women by the patriarchal set-ups. Many new universities were build up for women. Conscious raising campaigns, abortion rights, notions about sex and marriage were discussed in the study circles of women. They poured their experiences in feminists' magazines and newspapers like "The Pedestal" and "The Velvet Fist". They read Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir and Juliet Mitchell.

“A woman is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (301), are the precious words stamped by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). They lay bare the cultural coding of women, how men have been objectifying women, constructing them as their other, devoid of individuality and subjectivity. The words also show how patriarchal ideologies have reduced women to insignificant objects. Beauvoir writes, that men and women who are fighting to amend the suppressed state of women are called feminists (Moi 91- 92) .

The publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 by Betty Friedan fired the American Society. In this book, Friedan discusses a problem that can not be named but exists in the life of every women. She discusses this problem to be existing always in the lives of American women though it is hard to be explained. She pictures it in various possible explanations like weird unexplainable throbbing or a sense of despair in some experiences or lived moments. She not only highlights women’s dissatisfaction with the various household tasks and domestic roles but also their fear to voice this despair (57). However, she eased all the women by stating the problem to be a common issue among American women.

This delineation at that time helped women realize their situation and identify their trap. It opened their eyes to the ulterior web working under the sense of accomplishment enjoyed by fulfilling the role of an untiring house-wife. Betty defines feminism for the women as a tool giving them the freedom to be what they desire and strive for, and anything and everything that is the right of a human being (Burt 37).

Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) is also a pioneering work. Millet exposes the sexual politics of and in the society. She discusses the term as “... the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extends its power over the subordinate sex” (Moi 26). Millet successfully argues that patriarchy has always been a means to dominate women; it is

a demonstration of 'sexual politics'. Her argument helps us to clearly see patriarchy being responsible for the refusal of human rights to women by laying codes of conduct which make them subservient to men.

By the 1970s, organisations like National Organisation for Women were established. Many colleges started courses which were drafted to study the images of women in literature. *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, a collection of essays discussing female stereotypes was taken out. Women also participated in the civil rights movement. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were approved. Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that women had started to make space for a firm identity in the world, unjustly dominated by men.

Meanwhile, in 1977, Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* suggests that the feminist criticism should be exclusively concerned about women's writing. She defines this idea as gynocriticism. She writes that women's writings should be charted out as a concrete literary movement. She in *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (1979), identifies three stages in the growth of women's writings. These stages are the feminine, the feminist and the female stage.

These stages are amazingly discussed in Margaret Atwood's poem "Spelling" (1981). The first segment is the feminine phase. It ranged from the 1840s to 1880s. During this time women had started to get frustrated by the patriarchal norms and in order to overcome this domination, some of them ventured into writing their fears, tortures, dilemmas and desires. However, unexposed to the outside world, they did not have the right strategies to carve out their identities and thus they appropriated male tools. This appropriation of male tradition engulfed them within its bounds. Atwood explains this stage to be the falling of language, where a woman silently agrees to all the rules and subjugation thrown at her. The next is the feminist stage. It extended from the 1880s to 1920s. Women

authors fought for their own tools and weapons. They demanded the space for their own culture. Atwood charts it to be the moments of uterus' hymn breaking. A woman shouts at the loudest possible pitch, this untamed shriek for Atwood, symbolises the second stage. The last stage is the female phase which began around the 1920s . Women questioned the constructs of their identity, trying to find their individual self in their own potential. They wanted to assert their worth. This phase, for Atwood is the stage of childbirth where the body takes the features of a mouth, voice, that speaks up and the child, acting symbol to a woman's identity, leaps from her depths (Jain 9, 28).

Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) establishes that women's writing can not be treated as a mere branch rather it is an inseparable part of the history of literature (Nayar 92).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) claim that women due to the patriarchal norms fail to create their own images in the literary movements. Different women images whether angel, monster, innocent heroine or the madwoman, are, unfortunately, the products of male fantasy. Creativity is considered to be men's possession. Gilbert and Gubar through their book achieve to create unity among women (Nayar 93).

When Elaine Showalter, Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar were contributing to feminist movements in one part of the world, the writings of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray among many others were guiding the revolution in France. French Feminism has been traced, to begin with May 1968 students' revolt in Paris. Women formed groups such as *Psychanalyse et Politique*. Freudian analysis became an important component of French feminist struggle. The struggle was further marked by the publication of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974.

Helen Cixous's works are also significant and many have been translated in English. Cixous believes that women working for social legitimization, are feminists. She shows that the underlying difference in the sets of the binary oppositions like active/passive, head/emotions, intelligible/sensitive are the differences of man and woman, where women is synonymous to all that is considered weak by the society. She writes about the term, *écriture féminine*, that is, feminine writing which gives the freedom to run away from the above binaries. She firmly believes that the labels like feminine and masculine affirm differences (Nayar 102-103).

In the 1970s, another feminist, Luce Irigaray, also a psychoanalyst rose to fame. She has published works like *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and *This Sex Which is not One* (1987). Irigaray speaks of women being different from men, she says that the two are not equal rather are different beings and thus women instead of fighting for equality, should fight for their distinct space in the society. She has also discussed *le parler femme*, which means women specific language or womanspeak. According to her, women can only change the existing stifling order by uniting together and declaring their feelings and desires outside the patriarchy. However, if Irigaray proposes a different language for women, Julia Kristeva declares the element of sexism in language (Nayar 98,99,106).

Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* speaks of language as a tool of males. She claims the English language is not only structured by men but till date remains under their influence. She is sure that language authority is the prime way of men to gain control over their women. It is the language of men that excludes women, making them invisible and the women by not understanding this tool of subjugation, are further engulfing themselves in this chasm created by men. They are regularly using the constructed language and this will not let them write what they want to assert (Moi 156). Irigaray is thus right in expressing that language becomes a weapon for oppression.

One thing, however, that clearly stands out in all the voices, from Wollstonecraft's to Irigaray, is the reflection of particular sets of studies, proposals and group-isms working in the battles of women liberation. Different individuals and the waves generalised the experiences and requirements of every single woman from the point of view of some. These some primarily constituted white middle-class women.

Diverse Groups of Feminism

The late twentieth century and afterward marked the beginning of a new phase of feminism. It was the emergence of diverse groups of feminism. Nonetheless, these diverse groups were though different from each other in their ways to achieve freedom for women, but individually they all wrote their own codes that discarded the alternative idea of distinct identities.

A group of radical feminists, consisting of people like Shulamith Firestone, Eva Figs, Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley came forward around 1970s. They believed sexual inequality to be the root cause for the discrimination between men and women. They in "The Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto" (1969) articulate that "... women's oppression is rooted primarily in psychological, not economic factors" (Donovan 143). The essay, "The Fourth World Manifesto" (1971), says that all the women are clubbed under a frame colonised by male imperialism. However, the essay suggests that women can be free only by uniting themselves as women. Barbara Burris notes down that "We identify with all women of all races, classes, and countries all over the world. The female culture is the Fourth World" (Donovan 144).

Nonetheless, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) laid the Radical feminist theory completely. The former accuses families as the the cradles of patriarchal subjugation.

The role, tasks and nature as dictated by a family for their respective women become an inseparable part of their upbringing and remain with them forever. Men thinking themselves to be the biologically more powerful, rule women. So the biological difference becomes the hammer to seal the gender difference. One of the solutions for women is to cut themselves away from the social institutions like marriage, as these institutions perpetuate dependence of women on men, thwarting the individual growth of the former. Therefore, we can say that radical feminism is about a journey towards women becoming, where women will be absolutely free from the clutches of the dragon called patriarchy. Mary Daly explains this power of a woman to liberate herself as gynergy, women's energy which gives understanding, control and liberty to live life the way one wants to (Nayar 88, 89, 106).

A bunch of women decided to fight for women beyond the word rights. Their aim was a big cultural transformation. These women are called Cultural feminists fighting for safeguarding the virtues of women. Cultural Feminism came into being with Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1843) in which Fuller expresses her belief that women should be self-reliant and champion female bonding. They should not take permissions or opinions of men in everything, be it little or big. They should not also be influenced by men rather, should try to understand their mind. They should struggle to probe and understand themselves till the time they understand their own uniqueness and once they do so they will be born again to a new world of self-worth (*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 161).

In the contemporary world, the Cultural feminists are working hard to counter the cultural injustices against women, whether by fighting against the issues of denying jobs and opportunities to women or punching them with terms like childish and dumb. They do not accept the differences between men and women, preached and practiced by the society as biological but consider it to be cultural. Elizabeth Cady Stanton explains that a being is a

blend of both feminine and masculine elements and hence, the way to re-unite them in society is by praying to a 'Heavenly Mother' along with the 'Heavenly Father'. The world will flourish and become heaven when all the people living in the world, that is, men and women together will aim to create the world where dominant patriarchal ideologies are not accepted (*Britannica*).

Radicalesbians, a New York group are among the first to openly talk about the contemporary Lesbian feminism. In their one of the articles, "The Woman Identified Woman" (1970) they define lesbian as the woman's rage. The rage has exploded and now this woman performs and enacts according to her will and desire which gives her space to be, what she wants to be. Lesbian feminists aim for the world without men, some of them even claim separatism and withdrawal to be the ultimate solutions possible from the bondage of men (Donovan 161).

Liberal feminism is an another group. This group champions the rights of equal opportunities and participation of women in all the fields of life and society. Women, according to them, are considered by the society to be born only to bear the burden of the household chores and duties. They are gazed as sex objects, curbed and not allowed to work as per their will and desire. Their intellectual faculties are limited by patriarchy. The motive of liberal feminists is to attain an independent status at all the fronts for women in this society so that they can be the decision- makers.

Apart from the Liberal feminists, the other group that emerged was the Socialist feminist group. They upheld the certainty that women can be free only by eradicating the class division. Women's bondage is ingrained in a society that is divided on the basis of class. They have to fight patriarchy and capitalism together. Women's household work has never been valued in the same manner as of men. Money is the ruler of the capitalist society and thus since ages men have been considered more powerful. Socialist feminists made

women comprehend this and understand their culture is rooted in their experience. They insisted women to demand their rights as carriers of the cultural values.

Something Different: Black Feminism

In the 1980s, Radical feminists were criticized to be racists by the Black feminists. They condemned the white women's movement declaring it to be a movement launched for the benefits and interests of only the white women. The Black feminists highlight their experiences and problems to be quite different from the white women and this fact can not be disregarded. In fact, they claim that the objectification and victimisation of the black women have been much more grave and violent than the white women. They are triply marginalised because of their sex, race and class. It has been discussed at various places that the black women were suppressed to such an extent that even their existence was not recognised, as black signified only the black men and the women meant solely the bodies and experiences of the white women. This misery has been brought out by Sojourner Truth in "Ain't I A Woman," (1851) at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, in the most captivating words. She highlights the clever ways of men justifying their evil deeds. In her speech, the black men talk about the struggles that they have faced to make the black women feel comfortable. They crib about how they have to be servants to women in order to help them sit in the carriages. They further, complaint of nobody offering them such a royal treatment and finally, all these accusations are answered by a black woman. She claims that men are lying as they have never helped the women. She accuses men for placing women in the patriarchal muddle. She also exposes the laborious work of ploughing and planting that women do on the hard rock fields without the assistance of men. Her arms are the witness to this cruelty. She satirically questions that if she can work equal to men then why is she beaten by him, "And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and

seen most of them sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" (Phillips 324).

Black feminists have also launched organisations like Combahee River Collective which ensure the inclusion of the issues of race, ethnicity and other differences to combat the women oppression. They unlike the black men and the white women are not battling against a single aim rather they have pledged to achieve and establish equality at all the three fronts of class, race and gender. Matriarchal Myth has also been ruptured to expose the suppressing reality. Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* discloses that one should not believe that the Black woman are central to their families. She deconstructs the myth of matriarchal dominated black families. She says that neither the men nor the women in black families rule rather it is the slave position that stands as the starkest reality of their life (52).

Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* considers a need for the black women to trace and appreciate their heritage and culture, lived by their mothers. The lost identity of the black women can be regained by searching and asserting their ethnic roots. They have to know and affirm their self-worth. The "Black Women's Manifesto" (1970) reads the same: "Racism and capitalism have trampled the potential of black people in this country and thwarted their self-determination ... The black woman is demanding a new set of female definitions and recognition of herself of a citizen, companion and confidant, not a matriarchal villain or a step stool baby-maker" (42).

Feminism: Can't be a Binding Concept in India

Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* discusses feminism to be an umbrella term for all the beings who feel the need to fight for women liberation from the social, economic and ideological prejudices. Like everywhere, even in

India, feminism emerged with the need to stress equality between the genders. Then, the theory expounded that equality should be accepted with the realisation of the difference between men and women. None is inferior to the other and the implementation of this truth in and by all the facets of society became the prime aim of the Indian feminist struggles. The men should respect the individuality and difference of the women, rather seeing them slaves carved to serve them.

Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi in *Daughters of Independence* (1989) justly analyse that the Indian women movement is much older than the two Western Waves. They talk about the *Shakti* cult, that is, the believed inherent power of Indian women to be older than ten centuries (5).

However, today, in India, the raging journey of women against the male dominance is taking even bigger lunges. *Zenana*-meetings and the *aangan*-gossips are travelling beyond the household threshold, transforming themselves into difficult battles as women are realising their potential and power. Nevertheless, the Indian women's movement in order to cater varied marginalities has to tour beyond the social, political and economic confinements joining hands with women of other castes, classes and religions.

Mary E. John, while pointing to the history of the ill-treatment meted out to the women because they are born 'as' women or as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, they are men's other, the negative-other, in "Feminisms and Internationalisms" (1998) suggests that if there can not be one solution for all the women to gain liberty then their individual experiences and situation should become the opening point of their rebellion (23).

The women's movement in India has shifting issues and plans resulting from the plural perspectives, that survive within the circumference of the movement, and if the scholars like Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid also confirm different patriarchal actions, in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (2003) then, one can not negate the

requirement of the different routes and strategies to fight them. The two scholars, write that the aim of the women struggle in India has always been the same, that is, to safeguard the position of women or change it for the betterment of women. Nonetheless, now the movement probes into the the different ideological shades of patriarchy(1).

I will now trace the journey of the Indian women's struggle from being the reflection of the homogenising Indian feminism to the acceptance of the varied positionality of Indian women.

Indian Women's Struggles for Freedom

The fact, asserted by many writers that much of our India ancient history has been documented by the male writers and their words, is true. The stories like the abduction and exile of Sita's dignity, disrobing of Draupadi's integrity and honour, dismissing the desires and emotions of the courtesans like Matavi and Vasantasena and relegating Kannaki's rage to the power of a devoted wife, have never been revealed and recorded in the own voices of women. Thus it will not be wrong to state that the Indian written literature and texts which are witnesses to our history, do not read the minds of half of the Indian population.

It was in 1876, with Rassundari Devi's autobiographical work *Amar Jiban*, that the conscious and independent voice of an Indian woman was heard. Not allowed any formal education, she taught herself in the confines of her kitchen.

In her book, Devi discusses her plight at length. She writes about the never-ending time spent in the kitchen and doing all kinds of household tasks. Amidst all this work, Devi expresses her desire to study. She says that initially, the desire made her angry. She was upset with herself for wanting such space, "But somehow I could not accept" (Tharu 199) the shackles. Devi, in this book, not only states the her miseries but also

requests other women to analyse their own lives within the biased practices of the patriarchal society. She believed education to be a strong weapon for women's struggle.

Haimabati Sen, born in 1886, in her autobiography, *The Memoirs of Haimabati Sen*, wrote about the denial of education to the Indian women and the orthodox women's belief of inviting the terror of widowhood through education. However, the truth of being born in *zamindar* families, away from the socio-economic marginalities, can not be erased off the lives of Devi and Sen.

At the same time, the importance of education, as mentioned by Radha Kumar in *The History of Doing*, had already been championed by the Atmiya Sabha. It was formed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal during 1815. The first school for girls by the English missionaries and the first text on women's education in an Indian language, that is, Bengali were constructed in Bengal during the period of 1810-19. These schools were attended by the poor, lower class and Muslim girls. The threat of Christian influences forced the upper caste Hindus to open the gates of education to their women. In the context of the same, Sumanta Banerjee in his essay "Marginalisation of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal" (1989) reveals that the Bengali *bhadralok* patriarchal society, in the wish to ascend the social ladder, and prove themselves to be cultured like English men, unchained the territories of education for their women. Nevertheless, they altered the education system to suit the requirements of the Hindu patriarchal regime (167). It is lucid that till now the liberation movement of the Indian women primarily concerned the upper or middle class women, and rested on the grounds of education.

The desire of the Indian males to showcase themselves to be civilised, by redressing the traditional patriarchal lacks, barred the upper class Bengali women in the courtyards and *zenana* of their homes. It also thwarted their contact with their sisters from the lower social places of the society. They lost touch with their togetherness, with other

women and with nature. The occasions for women to come together near the village temple, a pond, some garden or at the bank of a river to share their emotions and feelings withered away. The exclusive women festivals, rituals like getting together in big number, giving flowers to each other, exchanging gifts and singing songs were suppressed. These little get-togethers actually served a larger purpose of allowing their psychic and emotional energy to let out through singing and sharing. This sharing was completely erased. The old rituals were ruptured but the new were not created and the *bhadralok* women ended up secluded, in a completely different social set-up. The life which was about the joy of sharing with the sisters of different classes, the wonders of existence that unfolded around them through nature, were now replaced by a completely alien education system. Nature has always been shaping women's environment with love and care. The tradition where women from all castes and classes helped each other to steal moments of happiness, in the male-dominated society, through the folklores narrating the nature-cycles including the phases of moon, cycles of seasons and other circadian rhythms, was barred. The suddenness of the new education system ripped the harmony, leading to the loss of touch of these new women information, with their deeper selves, "Her voice has ceased to rend the air like cuckoo, and has become instead the mew of pussy" (Banerjee 220). It is hard to say if it was the new agenda of the patriarchy or indeed a new patriarchy was in the formation. Nonetheless, the plight and deprivation of the lower-class women is not even highlighted in this new situation.

Though women's education has been placed as the major concern in the history of the Indian women's fight yet the depressing truth is that the 'National Policy on Education 1986' still reports that, "... 57 percent of the illiterate population, and 70 percent of the non-enrolled children of school stage are girls" (*Women Studies in India* 322). Smriti Irani, the former Union Human Resource Development minister, on twenty 9 March 2016

in *India Today* not only announced an extension of two years for women students to submit their research work but also proposed maternity break during the research to ensure that women do not have to abandon their dreams and wishes, post marriage. Gender even today plays the role of licence on the road of education and this license still holds cancel for many Indian women.

In 1815, Raja Ram Mohan Roy marshalled against *sati pratha*. Radha Kumar exposes the orthodox beliefs of the Hindu culture which sees *sati pratha* to be a way of achieving that holy knowledge which is otherwise barred to women and ironically, as the dying women can not keep the knowledge with them in this birth, they leave it for the family to possess it. Roy objected to this blind faith arguing, "... that women clearly possessed virtuous knowledge, for their lives showed that they were 'infinitely more self-sacrificing than men'" (*History of Doing* 14).

In 1829, Sati Abolition Act was passed. Needless to say, the abolition act itself was not an easy win yet the laborious victory could have been enjoyed if brutality like 'Roop Kanwar's immolation' was not performed and glorified in Rajasthan, 1987. Even the marches, campaigns, street plays, demonstrations, and newspapers articles have not been able to guarantee the abolition of this savagery. This further, puts into question the claim that first wave of Indian feminism spanned only between 1880-1940, as asserted by Geraldine Forbes in 1982. Can the tragedies like *Sati*, widow remarriage, child marriage, women's education among many other social issues can be put under the headings of the first wave or pre-independent India? Thus it can be said that there is no chronology or easy demarcation within the women's movement in India. The waves can not even sketch these vast struggles and hence freedom is a farfetched thing.

The violence of *Sati* makes it indispensable to discuss the cruelty and violence of rape. However, even after using the adjective, cruelty, I am not surprised, that neither

Radha Kumar in *The History of Doing* nor Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar in their essay “Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women’s Movement in India, 1970s-1990s” use any stark words to discuss rape. Kumar’s writing on rape begins with a casual tone, “Rape is one of the most common and heinous crimes against women in India ...” (128) and so does Agnihotri starts writing about it under a sub head like any other crime, “It was the widespread, national level campaign, in the course of 1979-80 ... two policemen involved in the rape of a minor tribal girl ...” (55). Be it Britain, United States of America, Latin America, Africa, and India, rape is the easiest crime committed against women. It does not need the setting of a pyre, wedding, clinic or medical apparatus to be violent against women. In fact, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has begun to record rapes in the table of “Incidence of Cognizable Crimes (IPC) Under Different Crime Heads” only from 1971, even when the tabulation of many other crimes had begun from 1953. The hike in the percentage of the crime of rape in last forty-three years is almost fifteen times, as there was a report of two thousand four hundred and eighty seven rape cases in 1971 and thirty six thousand seven hundred and thirty five rape cases have been reported in 2014 by NCRB. Nevertheless, the chances of many cases not being visible, reported or registered can always be discussed.

In the article entitled, “Are Women Safer in India or the U.S.?” published in *The Wall Street Journal*, New York City on 1 January 2013, Sudha Sundararaman, general secretary of the All India Democratic Women’s Association estimates that: “... from her field experience only about one in 10 rapes get recorded in India”. The article also claims that, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime “... shows 1.8 incidents of reported rape in India per 100,000 people in 2010 compared to 27.3 in the U.S”. Hence, it can not be denied that cultural matrix plays an important role in the reportage of such violent acts, alarming the misleading consequences of a generalised rape culture. In 2012, from many rape cases

reported, one stormed the State and its legal and judicial systems. A girl had been gang raped on the evening of 16 December, 2012 in the wakeful hustle and bustle of Delhi, the capital of India. Things had fallen apart and the entire Delhi was on the streets. It seemed that the violent night will not only alter the face of the Indian legal and judicial systems forever, but will even change the way, the State perceives this violence. However, though nothing has changed, the following questions stand loud:

- i) Did rape crimes stop?
- ii) Had the girl being a sex worker or a woman living separate from her husband, the State would have handled the situation with the same immediate concern?
- iii) Had the State shown any immediate concern if the case would not have been a saturation point for the public?
- iv) Had the State taken such a prompt action if it would have been any non-metropolitan city?
- v) Had the State acted at all if the case would not have been a rape case?

After reading the case of “Cycle Mechanic Held for Daughter’s Rape” reported in *The Times of India*, Hyderabad on 13 June 2016, the answer for the first posed question is crystal clear. The answer is that the crime of rape has not stopped.

The second question can be answered through 1978, Rameeza Bee’s rape case. Rameeza Bee was gang raped by some policemen and her husband was killed protecting her. The agitation of the thousands of *Hyderabadis* made it necessary for the politicians, police and army to step in. Even after curfews, killings and injuries, the case lies pending because one of the many fabricated facts sees Rameeza Bee to be a whore who offers herself willingly for sexual favours and so, she can not be raped. The December 2012 gang

rape, had definitely seen an extraordinary stir among the masses, it was a sight of unity working as strength, but even it was soon set aside by the State that analyses the tempo of the situation to plan strategies.

“Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat”, the December 2003 report by the International Initiative for Justice (IIJ) reads that Muslim women in the riots of 1990s were encouraged to be raped by the Hindu women of the right wings. Sadhvi Ritambhara claimed that this can re-masculinise the Hindu men.

Gujrat, in 1990 also saw an unprecedented churning like Delhi 2012, both were carried by the masses, yet the chasm is truly deep. One was ignited by the authority, and the other was addressed by it. This answers the question of the difference based on geographical places. However, what can be seen from all the above cases is the reality that it is not the act of rape which leads to the subordination of women but the false values attached to it.

In Manipur during the year 2004, a woman Thangjam Manorama was abducted by the Indian paramilitary unit, 17th Assam Rifles on an unsure allegation of being associated with People’s Liberation Army. She was found dead in a field and the post-mortem reports confirmed that she was being raped before being shot. Ironically, in December 2014 her family was decided to be paid a compensation of rupees ten lakhs. Finally, comes the question of why only the crime of rape becomes big, why is it always considered to be the most heinous form of controlling the women’s sexuality? Manorama has been at least identified as a victim but the Iron Lady of Manipur still goes unheard. She has been repeatedly remanded in judicial custody for trying to bring peace from massacre like Malom. Domestic violence, marital rape, wife beating, child abuse, female foeticide are still majorly subjected to the case studies. The violence of rape and its consequences, whether, the public protests, elaborative judicial discourse, compensations, State building

alliances with the dominant castes or defiling of the sacred female body being equated with the violation of religion; can be then understood to be framed through patriarchal lenses.

The menace of dowry, the exchange of money during a wedding, are equally alarming. Rajni was burnt alive after living a hell of constant harassment and a verdict was passed by Justice Markandey Katju in June 2009. He confessed that there are many cases where the bride burning have been defended as the cases of suicide. He questioned that in the country where women are regarded to be goddesses, how can they be brutally murdered? Laying bare the harsh truth of India, he not only explicitly mentioned the barbarity of the act but also refused to accept the unacceptable claims of suicide. He strongly refused to grant any mercy to the murderers in his court (*Pressreader*).

The grim reality is that even after numerous stringent outburst from the protectors of our country, the demand of dowry remains rampant. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 (amended in 1984 and 1986) banned dowry yet every decade, new organisations like Stri Shakti, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, Nari Raksha Samiti and laws and sections of Criminal Law Act 1983 and Section 498-A in the Indian Penal Code have to be formulated. The 1970s and 1980s are considered to be the bombing decades of the struggle against dowry yet this peril has always been rooted in the Indian soil and unfortunately, the grip is becoming stronger.

The roots which were sown by the Indian social structure and patriarchy are honestly nourishing their producers. Hypergamy is becoming a means to improve the social status of a family in exchange for cash and jewellery. Sanskritization is flourishing on the lower caste' desire for the abolition of caste division and the upper caste' patriarchal lust for material goods. But the common site on which the exchange gets materialised is the female body. The Muslim culture does not have the devil of dowry written in their books but they

have the custom of *mehr*, the sum to be given to the bride as a symbol of maintenance or respect.

The section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code reads, “A Common Civil Code will help the cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies” (“Uniform Civil Code” *Legal Service India*). This section was invoked during the historical case of a Muslim woman Shah Bano, fought in 1986. Shah Bano, an uneducated Muslim woman, after more than forty years of marriage was thrown out of her home by her husband. As per the Muslim customs, she was just given rupees two hundred per month by her husband, but soon it was stopped. The helpless Bano approached the Bhopal High Court. It was decided by the Court that she will be given rupees one hundred and seventy nine and twenty paise per month. But the crude husband did not accept the decision and divorced Bano. Shah Bano then knocked the doors of the Supreme Court under the Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code which gives shelter to all the Indian women. The Supreme Court passed the same verdict as the Bhopal High Court but the husband escaped giving money on the claims of the already paid maintenance.

The Supreme Court judgement met resistance from a bill seeking exclusion of the Muslim women, considering it to be a communal onslaught, as the case was linked to the Babri Masjid issue. Finally, in 1986, against the anticipation of a united future through the concept of the ‘Uniform Civil Code’, the Muslim Women’s Bill was passed which allowed the exploitation of Muslim women under the decision to lodge communalism. It pops up the fact of even law being handcuffed by caste and religion. These two define their status, both social and religious, through women’s place and possession in their framed structure. The women in India are merely treated as the sites on which these branches of Indian system rustle.

In 1887, M.G. Ranade had started the National Social Conference, which had women's betterment and liberation on its plan. However, it was not one of its own kind as there were Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Theosophical Society in the eastern, western, northern and southern parts of India, respectively. Liddle and Joshi in *Daughters of Independence* state that, the British people wrote nine big laws to ease out the legal position of the Indian women, "... including those forbidding female infanticide, Sati and child marriage, and those raising the age of consent, allowing widow remarriage and improving women's inheritance rights" (26). However, Liddle and Joshi also highlight the British cunningness of making and implementing these reforms only after being sure about their stability. The argument proves that the garb of guarding the women of India against the barbaric Indian patriarchal customs was adorned by the British rulers, to justify their civilized rule.

The 1880s and 90s were the dawn decades of women stepping outside their four bounded walls, "... one of the first attempts at public campaigning by women was ... in 1890s ... against *pardah* in Calcutta, groups of Brahma women walked through the city's streets singing, and when crowds collected, addressed them on the evils of *pardah*" (*Source Material* 95). Then in 1889 Congress session, there were "... no less than ten lady delegates graced the assembly ..." (*Source Material* 95). The hope was that the women of India are now all geared up to draw their vision of future rather than men deciding the changes for them. Their participation in the Indian freedom struggle is also seen in the same mirror, but the reality is not exactly the same, as reflected.

Pandita Ramabai was among the first of those women, who could sense the impending danger of the Hindu laws. In *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai*, Ramabai criticizes the thoughtful amendments done by the British government in the Hindu Laws. British colonisers were quite clear about the repercussions of interfering with some

personal laws of the Indian communities. However, in the interest to practice complete control, which could not be possible without penetrating into the hard walls of domestic space, where women were enslaved by the Indian men, the colonisers subtly manipulated the personal laws (257). Liddle and Joshi explain this process in the *Daughter of Independence*. The first step was to regulate the Indian Hindu system of marriage. The consequences were that the male control was made even more severe and in the process of universalising the customs and rituals of marriage, they even constrained the enjoyed rights of lower caste women (30-2).

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century saw women's engagement in "... revivalist and extremists activities in addition to their earlier involvement in social reform and moderate nationalism" (Kumar 38). Women associations like Mahila Samitis were formed to train and refine social skills so that women can get jobs. National associations of women like the Women's Indian Association (1917), which first lifted up the issue of women's suffrage, the National Council of Indian Women (1925) and the All-India Women's Conference (1927) were also constituted. The Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement from 1905-58, saw the biggest number of women standing together on a common platform. This mass scale participation is described by Geraldine Forbes in *Women in Modern India* (1996) as rejuvenated Indian womanhood. She describes that how women in this movement did not perform roles as dictated by men, rather they used their own skills and intelligence to act politically. They employed their traditional roles cleverly to achieve larger political aims of the movement and what they intended. They did not blur the definite categories of private and public, as marked by patriarchy, yet, redefined the characteristics and roles attached to these two spheres of their life, to inscribe new meanings (124) .

The Congress also supported this mass participation of women. Radha Kumar reports that in 1931, Congress promised sexual equality in the Constitution of India. These ideas of women's freedom and equality were also advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. He, like many other male leaders, encouraged the Indian women to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the *Discovery of India* (1946) also appreciates the role of women in the freedom struggle.

However, this participation of women has also been studied from a different perspective. This picture made women's struggle insignificant by stressing an underlying politics. It could be clearly read that the women were given the license to step out of their households only on the condition of strict adherence to the stereotypical gendered conventions and rules.

Yet, by placing the two perspectives of women's mass participation together, we can not steal away from the truth that if on the one hand, the women's mass participation was the structural trap whereby producing an ideal image, the Indian men improvised women as useful resources thereafter again reducing them to the same silent position through a fresh tool of modernity or new woman, on the other hand, it also became a platform that enabled some women to deduce the meaning of the patriarchal call on their own. They decided to respond and participate against a threat, choosing to become the direct agents of liberty.

Padma Anagol also provides an excellent documentation of women like Pandita Ramabia and many who converted from Hinduism to Christianity, emerging as conscious agents of change in her essay "Indian Christian Women and Indigenous Feminism, c.1850-c.1920".

The All-India Women's Conference demanded some changes in the Hindu Codes. It wanted to amend some personal laws of marriage and inheritance. So, as

discussed by Jana Matson Everett in *Women and Social Change in India* that when these issues under the heading of the Hindu Code Bill were taken up, the Indian nationalist men to an extent agreed for equality on the matter of voting rights and employment as their enlarged political and economic independence was a threat to colonial power but the so-called private issues like marriage, divorce, polygamy, inter-caste marriages, inheritance faced strong oppositions (102-106). The State could not take any substantial measure to amend the personal laws and even decided not to include the following statement in the final draft of the Constitution, “The State shall endeavour to secure that marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and shall be maintained through mutual cooperation, with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis” (Kannabiran 369).

So, it can be reasoned that the issue of Indian women’s freedom was one of the strongest pillars of the colonial rule and Indian Nationalism, “In her exoticism and her misery, the Indian Woman has embodied the subcontinent itself: attracting and repelling at the same time, she is absent in the construction of her image as India has been...” (Liddle and Rai 497). However, I will add to the quoted statement that the Indian woman was showcased to be absent, as during the freedom struggle, she not only emerged as powerful but also constructed India to be an indestructible mother-land.

The miseries, exoticism and misconceived powerlessness of Indian women are also exploited by colonial feminists. Kumari Jayawardena discusses in *The White Woman’s Other Burden* (1995), that how the maternal feminists considered the Indian women to be their responsibilities (95-100). In the context to this point, I can not miss to mention Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s analysis in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, which reads that Western feminism does not pay attention to the diversities of the Third World countries based on different social, political, economical and religious grounds (335).

But unfortunately, the process of homogenization and systemization has not only been regulated by the Western feminist discourse. The practice of homogenising different women of India has been rampant in India also. The issues of women's rights, restriction, liberation, position and needs have not only existed but also registered. However, they are recorded under a common sub-head of Indian women, represented by a small group of women. This group basically constitutes of the Hindu middle class women. The recorded histories do not read much about the women other than this group. For instance, KumKum Roy in "Re-presenting the Courtesanal Tradition: An Exploration of Early Historical Texts" discusses the existence of courtesans in ancient India as different from the category of women (111-13). Therefore, ironically, the process of grouping all the women of India under a single label has limited the significance of many historical events in the Indian women's struggle during colonialism and partial fulfilment of the promises made to women during the national struggle by the Congress in the Constitution of India, and the "Towards Equality Report" (1974).

The Towards Equality Report Committee has been the first important move to study and comment on the statistics of the various facets of women's status in India. The review of the committee was published as the "Towards Equality Report" (1974) which covered the important captions of political, social, cultural, educational, employment, legal, health, welfare and development programmes existing for women. It proposed for an urgent abolition of many socio-cultural evils and stressed the required intervention of the State and community for establishing equality between the genders. Yet, even after the detailed submission, the 2002 report of the National Commission for Women, "Towards Equality: The Unfinished Agenda, the Status of Women in India" 2001 bemoans the delayed implementation of the proposed agendas of the 1974 report.

In India, the social and cultural structures dominate and frame the concept of a woman which is expected to be followed by all the women. It first produces an ideal woman image and then enacts it in a particular manner to make it the perfect possible, in every Indian eye. In this post-modern-structural world, we breathe in the constructed reality of languages, so, even when the world exists outside the domain of language, the reality can be endowed with meaning only through languages and its representations. This construction, articulation, understanding and the acceptance of the meanings carried in the language or representations, helps the patriarchal culture practice its hegemony.

However, the ideologies that work in the construction of the woman image, not only varies in the different class, caste, communities and religion but also their bond with the material reality lived and experienced by women is not quite straight.

In Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916), we see how the *bhadralok* aggression against the colonial master, ironically emerges out to be the conservative ideology making Bengali middle-class woman its targets. The novel depicts the Bengali *bhadralok* patriarchal decision to fight the colonial rulers by creating a fearful and ferocious image of the motherland in the cast of the Hindu Goddesses battling the evil forces. The onus of representing and enacting this image of the ruthless goddess who is also the symbol of purity and renunciation is put on the ideal Bengali *bhadralok* woman, Bimala. Bimala is married to the rich aristocratic man, Nikhil who wants to liberate her in his own manner. On experiencing the cracks in her age-old internalisation of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, she first laments her mother's time when the boundaries and divisions between the outer and inner realm were clearly defined to women and then in turn, falls an easy prey to the glazing image of *shakti* perpetuated by a *swadeshi* enthusiast, Sandip. Bimala is completely overcome by the feeling of modernity and new education. Thinking that, she is going to be the herald of the new-woman, she wants to act but unaware

of the fantasy enveloping it and forgetting that her new role has no basis in reality, ends up enacting the patriarchal script. The long-awaited desire for freedom is easily cut down by the emotional popularisation of a new image, this time, the cult of the mother-goddess. Bimala in the end knows that she would be punished.

Post-Independent India witnessed a new consciousness. It was the consciousness of educated and economically independent women who, unlike Bimala, were in full knowledge of their marginalities.

Some autonomous organisations were also set up, which were neither patterned on the traditional structures nor were following the conventional concept of leadership. Yet, women were not accepted as the agents of desire and even the attempt to challenge the dominant patriarchal construction of meaning ended in a conventional stance. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah while discussing an autonomous group in “The Question of Autonomy” write about one of the women of that group. This woman did the maximum of the work of the organisation and as the rest professional women did not have time and experience like her, she became the supreme leader rejecting the points of views different from her (74).

Post Independence Feminist and Women Writings

The post-independence Indian writings, chiefly marked the awakened awareness of the middle class educated woman longing to fulfil her wants and desires.

These are the works of women writers like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander’s which brought out women’s loneliness and longing for their husbands, the excitement in their liaisons with other lovers and also the ensuing guilt and self-disgust because of them. Das in her relationships with other men seems to be an assertive, dominant figure, whereas, in her

relationship with her husband, she is almost pleading for his affection and love. The excess of emotion in Das' poetry is replaced by economy and control in the novel of Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence* (1989), through Jaya, pours out a confessional work. It is full of contradictory emotions and thus multilayered and complex. She delineates the feelings within the self, tussling with one another, and do not delve into other aspects of love or sex. Jaya sees her father and husband as the symbols of patriarchy.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) is a middle class raging rebellion against the middle class respectability and its thoughts. Dimple like many other girls is brought in a fairy land that is replete with the stories of the princesses and the handsome knights. She marries with the hopes and expectations of these stories coming true. However, her dreams and desires are soon broken and she is faced with a monotonous life. She is neither able to build harmony with her husband nor is able to bridge the fissure between her wishes and married life and family. She finally protests by murdering her husband.

Eunice De Souza's writing mainly deals with the middle class, Goan Christian community, although she does raise questions on the issues of wider relevance. Her childhood, contrary to Das' childhood, seems to have been a hell, and her poetry is often a satire against church, marriage, Catholic motherhood, sexual prudery and hypocrisy. She also writes in the confessional strain, following the tradition set by Kamala Das. Both de Souza and Melanie Silgado are preoccupied with the relationship with their fathers, as they delve into their own fears, insecurities, self hate and depression which have been caused as a result of their inability to fit within patriarchal norms. Like her teacher, Eunice de Souza, Silgado too writes about her own Goan childhood and family, and the conflict they caused within her.

These works continued the trend of expressing the reality of a single woman's life, depicting the frustrations, demands and tensions of middle class women living with unconcerned families or the ones who live alone in cities.

Anita Desai in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) explores the anxieties of a single woman's life. Tara Patel and Mukta Sambrani look at the complications of living without the securities of husband and family.

Anjum Hasan, Arundhati Subramaniam and Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) explore, and usually celebrate, the experience of living alone.

My Work/s

The works that I have selected to study, show that the issues being addressed by the Indian women, have now gone beyond the domestic violence, confinement of middle class women and their rage against patriarchy, as was the trend earlier.

Through Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006), Bama Faustina Soosairaj's *Karukku* (1992), Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* (1974), Nabina Das's *Footprints at the Bajra* (2010), Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (1984) and Thrity Umrigar's *The Space between Us* (2006), I will study that Indian feminisms have become more democratic and inclusive as they attempt to narrate the lives of marginalised women such as Dalit women, maid-servants, Naxalite women in wartime and women who are considered to be ferocious by religion.

The subversion of the historical records and myths in these works and their retelling of the stories, from the perspectives of the Indian women, whose voices are often silenced in the official versions of written records, serve to establish these work within a traditional framework while simultaneously puncturing and questioning it. This is one of the techniques they employ to address subaltern issues.

The feminist movement in India has largely been limited to the upper caste and upper class Hindus. Gail Omvedt in “Socialist-feminist Organization and the Women’s Movement” writes that in the recent times, a need is being felt for taking the women’s movement beyond these confines to the women of other castes, classes and religions. The women’s movement must now be seen as a socialist-feminist one (62-67). Sharmila Rege in “Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Dalit Women’s Testimonies” highlights that women’s studies in the academia have also ignored the questions of marginalised women, so far preferring to focus on the canonical (452-57).

These works also trace relationships as journeys of discoveries between two equals where neither dominates but the power play continually shifts from one to the other. The works engage with the sexuality of subaltern women, depicting them as active agents and desiring subjects. This treatment of love is startling in a country where the mainstream culture, as Shohini Ghosh in “The Troubled Existence of Sex and Sexuality: Feminists Engage with Censorship” shows in the context of Bollywood films, continues to equate the display of women’s sexuality as a form of women objectification. Women here are still not accepted as the agents of desire, and a film such as Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* which explores same sex relationships between women ultimately takes a conventional stance (566-73).

The works also attempt to break the humanist idea of a stable, unified speaking subject. Deconstructing the notion of identity, they show multiplicity of identities, constantly in the process of changing, becoming, and discovering. The older idea of women’s writing voicing a reality specific to women is now undercut as the idea of a stable identity is itself challenged.

Following the theorists like Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, one can question whether educated, upper class women can ever, adequately represent the marginalised, and can writing in an elite language such as English actually give voice to the more democratic

feminisms. Meena Kandasamy however, argues that she deliberately and consciously writes in English as she believes that wider, international support is necessary for addressing the issues of Dalits (*Poetry International Web*).

We can also question the extent that this writing remains a part of the diasporic literature, at what point it ceases to be so and becomes American or British and so on, when we study writers like Thrity Umrigar. A voice different from all is that of Thrity Umrigar's in its conscious social commitment. Although she is a diasporic writer, Umrigar's novel *The Space Between Us* has been placed in the social reality of India. It has gone beyond expressing the doubts within her mind.

Feminism can not be read as a binding concept with particular characteristics or features that one has to follow. The picked Indian women writings are creating a space of freedom where voices choose to observe, construe and practise feminisms in their own ways, enabling an interaction between the various perspectives of feminist issues.

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Chapter - 1

Words and Silences: Women's Probe into the Inscribed Constructs

Foreword

I have grown up with the internal assumption that being an Indian woman, the self is defined by dharma. This means that in one way, what roots me is dharma. The dharma that has already been written by some other. However, the grand narrative of dharma is very differing and contradictory as it has various definitions and enactments that have to be remembered and learnt. But as human beings, in our hasty paced lives, we even forget places and folks and so the big performances of dharma can not be our crux. Then what lies at the core, what roots us? Aren't they the small practices like a daily prayer at a particular time, a daily awaited talk with a friend. Tiny small errands that we do every day, it might be performing something big or it could be as effortless as draping a sari. Little practices, wishes and feelings that we do not need to reflect on, that are not incompatible, that do not overwhelm us, that we do not misplace because they lie within the daily routine of our lives and then, in turn, our words become those little things, the details of being, abandoning all the grand narratives and their 'isms' for the patriarchy, communities, religion, epics, media and academicians to pact with. We can then also say that the daily unwritten words lie at the core. They are the words which speak the inner silence and desires, words which we rehears every day, as we chant a daily prayer. These are the words which release Draupadi, Bama and every woman.

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*

There is a deep cleft between beginning and finish, yet *Yajnaseni* begins with 'finis'. We are used to seeing a novel beginning with a beginning but here it begins with the

end of a letter addressed to the closest relationship of life, that is, a friend. It reads a desire to retreat within one-self instead of holding to the outside world of disorder and confusion. We have all read Draupadi as a figure of authority, but what if the truth is something different. Pratibha Ray through *Draupadi* helps us revisit and question mythology from a perspective that is not bound by a patriarchal bias. Placed in the age old *Mahabharata*, we meet a Draupadi who is not the iconic figure but a common woman whom we can easily reach out to. The story begins with the rearrangement of Draupadi's desire to read and express her life in her own words and language. It begins with a conflict between what is recorded about Draupadi and what is her felt desire.

Through the close analysis of the available evidence in the form of manuscripts, the scholars claim the composition of the *Mahabharata* in the period of 400 B.C. This epic has been translated into all the major languages of the world and have different versions in almost all the Indian *bhashas*. This one story through its widespread circulation has become an essential material in the construction of Indian consciousness. It constantly revolves in the Indian society in various ways like *shlokas* and prayers in temples, ethical lessons in classes, selected arguments in the judicial courts, moral teachings to diverse roles working in the society. Then considering its indispensability in the Indian life, it can be said that the *Mahabharata* is not about the episodes of a distant time but is a lived experience. Ray through *Draupadi* lays bare this important truth. Draupadi first releases the happenings of the *Mahabharata* from the dominance of past and places them in the easily accessible present. She says that even after everything has been written and engraved in the inexorable memory of time, she is left with a lot that is unspoken, "... it seems as though I have not been able to write anything at all" (1). Draupadi further discusses life to be a continuous process, which has no end and beginning, in turn placing her life in the postmodern world we are living in. Pramod K. Nayar in *Literary Theory Today* points out that there can be no

binding theory in today's world as every individual world is different (23). She plucks away her life from the one binding truth of primeval knowledge and places it amidst the constant flux of poststructuralist world where meaning comes out only through differences, "The skies have no beginnings and no end ... Even after relating everything, fulfilment is left" (1). It brings out the poststructuralist claims of language working as a system of signifier and signified where the signifier exists because of its difference from another signifier and thus, the difference has to be acknowledged. As language itself is a man-made construction the already written words about Draupadi can not be taken as her truth.

Draupadi repeatedly stresses the intact imprint of her narrated story, "... on the breast of the inexorable time" (1). It can not be denied that consciousness and experience together become the repertoire of knowledge. It can be looked as a production site for knowledge. The *Mahabharata* being the oldest primary text also serves a source of Indian identity. This identity is not merely a source to justify the individual being but to understand and see I as grand because of its omnipotent existence and reality and therefore, its revisions have to be viewed as the reflection of collective aspirations of societies or communities. The collective aspirations of a group of people code them into a structure. Ray points out the truth of these structures being created by some people. Draupadi agrees that two structures can fight with each other. But she questions, "... one who asks for nothing- with her such toying" (2)! She is furious at proclaiming her to be the reason of the most furious battle of Kurukshetra. At the same time, she expresses her helplessness to mend it highlighting her denial from these dominant structures of Purushottam, the supreme male power. She blames the Pandavas for leaving her alone at Mount Meru. She cries over her abandonment, "Not once did any of them look back" (1-2). She questions the rivalry between the Pandavas and Kauravas forcing the reader to trace its origin. Can the dragging of Draupadi in the assembly hall be the only reason or the origin of that ferocious battle?

She employs rhetoric to answer it. If she is not the reason then why has she been denied life, “... leaving me thus at death’s door” (2). Ray demonstrates Draupadi’s words emerging from her denial. This shows that the literature that has written Draupadi has emerged in relation to the dominant structure. This, in turn, puts in scrutiny the society that has been produced by the same literature. The investigation becomes even important as the society is understood to be the mirror to the cultural, social and symbolic wealth of that capital structure. Draupadi voices that today she will lay bare all the hurt that this literature has given to her.

Ray offers a different trajectory of the grand narrative to reveal the beginning of subversion. The most important contribution of this grand narrative to Indian life is dharma. Draupadi begins by questioning it. She believed in it and she adhered to it as dictated but when she fell off from the foothills none of her five husbands stopped to take her to the heaven along with them. She is more pained because the epitome of dharma commanded the rest of his brothers to continue their journey, leaving her behind alone to die. She makes the reader question the permanence of the concept of dharma.

From the *Rigveda* to the *Brahmanas*, that are the post-Vedic collections, to the *Upanishads* to the *Dharmasutras* to the *Mahabharata*, the discourse has been changing and evolving. From the world of rituals to uphold the cosmic and social order, dharma became synonymous to law upholding the social and political justice. Then *Upanishads* made dharma the governing principle encompassing the values like truth and justice and then we got *Grhyasutras*, *Saurtyasutras* and *Dharmasutras*, 500 B.C. books to explain the working of different types of dharma in the domestic and professional life. Finally as Adam Bowel in *Dharma, Disorder and the Political in Ancient India: The Apaddharmaparvan of the Mahabharata* says dharma emerged to be the scale of every action of human (87). The various *parvas* of the *Mahabharata* can be seen as performative search of the intricacies

and struggles involved in the concept of dharma. However, these acts always had men in the seats of authority, they had the power to decide or loose. It was the world of dharma, the dharma decided, laid and fought over by men and the women became its prey.

Draupadi is worried about her fate in Kaliyuga. The people of Kaliyuga will mock her, they will question her chastity being the wife of five husbands. But who decided it? It was not Draupadi. Her body becomes a site of dharmic conflict, the dharma of sons to obey their mother, the dharma of a wife to obey her husband. She also exposes the multilayered silence, "... the heroine of Hastinapur, Draupadi, will become a condemned soul" (3). History has idealised Draupadi by labelling her the heroine of the *Mahabharata* but only to present her cruel and she also knows that some in Kaliyuga will idolise her to raise her to the status of divinity to silence any attempt against her fate. Draupadi then finally questions her friend, Vasudev, the almighty, the male creator about the fate that she did not choose at her will. Neither the supreme creator nor her protectors shared her human agony and pain and today from the same space of deprivation the courageous woman Draupadi who has also faced immense sufferings will write her literature from her blood, "Do not destroy my memory, do not give it into the hands of death. Only let me tell my story..." (5). The *Mahabharata* will now not be the story of Arjun, Yudhishtir, Kauravas, Pandavas, Kurus or dharma, it will be the tale of Draupadi's becoming.

Her text begins with the birth of Draupadi, unlike the great epic beginning with the narration of Kuru clan and its warriors. Draupadi is born from the altar of sacrifice. Her father has to take vengeance from Drona, a man has to defeat man and thus he needs a son, but Draupadi is also born along with her brother Dhrishtadyumna. She is not asked for from the sacrificial fire but is born from the altar and thus named 'Yajnaseni'. Instead of describing the dharmic purpose of Draupadi's birth, Ray first gives an elaborative description of Draupadi's' beauty. The lines expressing her physical charm are induced with

more passion than the prophecy at the birth of Draupadi revealing her purpose of the birth, that is, to avenge her father's insult. Ray's shift from Draupadi's beauty to the description of her birth presents a contrast between beauty and destruction. Then these two contrasting images fuse into one questioning the role of this beautiful Draupadi in safeguarding the dharma and this makes the reader all the more aware of the destructive forces of the dharma Draupadi is born to preserve. Draupadi trembles hearing the prophecy and it again highlights the emotional response of Draupadi set against the hard political agenda of the dharmic father. Helpless, Draupadi has to accept the verdict. Ray subverts the dominant reading of *Mahabharata* in two ways, one by contrasting life described as beautiful and dharma describes as something leading to destruction. Second, she locates Draupadi amidst the common Indian girls. Soon after her birth, Drupad offers Draupadi to the omnipotent lord, the Krishna, naming her on his name, Krishnaa. This definitely highlights the patriarchal authority practiced by fathers but Draupadi's joyful acceptance of this relation invokes romantic rendezvous enjoyed by every human being and thus seating the grand narrative in the line of popular culture. Ray uses one complete chapter to narrate the pain of love struck Draupadi. The internal conflict produced from the love for Krishna interestingly summons the many kings of the grand epic immersed in the heavenly promises of love forgetting their dharma. This juxtaposition not only belittles the glories of war but also questions the dharma of the kings. The Kuru king Shantanu was spellbound by the beauty of woman not once but twice. He even agreed to fulfil their conditions in the erotic lust neglecting the dharma of a king. This negligence also marks his desire to be carnal whereas Draupadi's love has a radiating innocence. She completely lost in the thoughts of Krishna, neither bothers about his family nor ancestry.

The Draupadi who is always remembered storming the assembly hall of Kurus is seen completely possessed by the beauty of love, she uses the images of nature to

describe her love. Unlike Shantanu, she has no lust to possess Krishna rather lying in a grove, she like an imaginative child tries to picture him through the different images of nature, ‘tamal tree’, ‘blue-black clouds’, ‘peacock feathers’ and ‘agastya flowers’. She and the nature imagery constantly collide, becoming one with each other. These passages uncover the deep rift between the world of arrows and this mesmerising fragrant world of greenery, innocence and light where an upper caste woman is happily playing and talking with her *dasi*, a woman placed lower in the social ladder. She does not have any want of the golden world of Hastinapur, she is just absorbed in the poetry-weaved fairy tale world of her prince.

Draupadi is also well read. She enthusiastically reads all the books given to her by her teachers. Poetry and various other sessions are organised for her. She loves discussing different subjects with scholars, “Attempts were made to quench my thirst for knowledge. But the thirst was limitless” (14). Draupadi is a learned woman. She is a perfect combination of life and intellectual ability required in the developing world. She understands that thirst for knowledge can never be quenched, she knows the quenching of thirst will make life stagnant, the true foundation of knowledge is from multiple vantage points. It stands in opposition the ‘Sabha Parva’ of the primary epic, where the entire Kuru clan sits dumb on the riddle of dharma.

Today is the day when Krishna is coming to the court of Drupad. Draupadi is glowing with passion and beauty, Ray delineates her youth through the images of nature. She uses poetical overtones to free the relation of Draupadi and Krishna from the bondage of dharma and what is lived by both Draupadi and the readers is pure delight. The freedom that emerges from the streams of pools transcends the pangs of the fate-bound patriarchal battles of the great epic. Draupadi’s desire and eagerness to meet Krishna is fed through her conversations with her sakhi, “Not me, it is this bird Nilmani, who is reciting his name! I

was just rebuking it” (17)! The inner and the outer landscape mingle into each other to reflect her intense longing. Amidst this colourful description, when Krishna enters, he first mentions the reason for Draupadi’s birth. He tells Draupadi that she is born to destroy the veil from this world and to establish dharma through her divine qualities. He breaks all the hopes that were springing from Draupadi’s heart. All of a sudden the raining clouds turn into ferocious voices of destruction. Ray does not even spare the Krishna. His grand motive is made to stand like a colourless giant overpowering the luxuriant bloom of Draupadi. Drupad agrees to Krishna and is happy hearing about Draupadi’s dharma from him. He is now sure of his revenge and requests Krishna to marry his daughter. There is a clear marker of subdued patriarchal violence in their conversation. Draupadi’s brimming heart is turned into the river whose waters can be harnessed to irrigate selfish purposes. The river has to be controlled and its course is regulated according to the requirement of the father and the lord Krishna to become the benefactor of humanity. Drupad wants Krishna to marry her so that his revenge can be assured and Krishna like a true politician suggested a ‘svayamvar’ for Draupadi, “I realised that Krishna was the dharma protector” (24). Like a plaything, her feelings are crushed in a second by the same person she had been longing for. She will be now won over in a ‘svayamvar’. A woman’s body that originated from the creative fire is turned into a battlefield to question the sanctity of such rituals like ‘svayamvar’. The selfish father is content knowing that the Draupadi’s husband will definitely fulfil his purpose.

Krishna makes it clear that Draupadi is born to bring complete annihilation of evil, but ironically through his *lila* hunts down Draupadi’s love. He tells her that he and Arjun are one. They share everything and Arjun does not relish anything without first offering it to him. His description of their bond makes fall Draupadi into an image of a body which can be pleased by both Arjun and Krishna. But Draupadi is not happy with this decision. She overturns this fate by accepting Arjun only as a part of Krishna.

Draupadi is excited about the Svayamvar, accepting Arjun to be Krishna, she is now happily prepared to get married to Arjun. Ray charts out extensive details of Draupadi's preparations. She does not give the details of the svayamvar challenge but describes the decoration of the hall extensively belittling the confront. Drupad has arranged for a tough challenge. Yet there is no description of the struggle that the warriors have to go through in order to win rather it is the inner anxiety of Draupadi to get married has been fascinatingly projected. The grandeur of the svayamvar is undercut by her worry at the chances of not being getting married at all. Her concern, "... should I remain unwed for ever, helping him in his religious duties, and safeguarding dharma" (29). Frustrated with her father, she blows off the entire discourse of dharma like a cigarette puff. Already aggravated, she dismisses the emotional sentiments expressed by her brother on their separation, "So what is there to weep about" (31). She overthrows all those emotionally over-loaded *bidai* scenes of the *Mahabharata* deeply rooted in the mind of every Indian girl. The *bidai* scenes which proclaimed not the promises of bright future as much the snapping away of blood bonds. Even after being rebuked, the brave Drishtadyumna born out of the sacrificial fire to fulfil the revenge of his father behaves like a comic jester and sits down with Draupadi. In a grief-stricken voice he starts explaining about Pandavas to her sister, Draupadi and Ray amazingly garnishes the scene with the tones of any Bollywood movie where a crying mother is worried about her daughter's fate at the new in-laws house. He briefs Draupadi about everyone: "... The blind king Dhritarashtra had no option but to declare Yudhishtir the Crown Prince" (31). His description of Kuru kingdom turns the legendary clan into an Indian family where the members fight for the head chair of their dining table.

Drishtadyumna, finally discloses the reason behind all this discussion. Like the nineties Bollywood neighbour uncle or aunty trying to reveal the news of the death of the

groom to his newly bride, the brother breaks the news of Pandavas demise in the fire of the house of lac, built by the Kauravas to kill the Pandavas through a trick. Draupadi instead of bursting into tears gets tensed about her marriage, whom will she marry now turning the entire event of age-old rivalry into a mere farce. She does not sob on Arjun's death rather gets worried about her marriage and prospective groom. She rejects the notion of marriage being an eternal bond. If Krishna could turn marriage into a pact so has Draupadi rejected it to make it her identity. She confesses the fear of remaining, "unwed virgin" (34). This completely washes out the dharmic concept of chastity, which denies the women to even talk about their sexuality and desires even till today.

A physical environment becomes a place only when mutual encounters and viewpoints get attached to it. It is the part of social relations, where communities of individuals exist together. Nonetheless, the inner space alters our insight of the outer reality. By the Talo Pali Lake in Thane was born Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a male. To prevent hurting her parents, while living with them, she could not express her desired sexuality openly. She had to dress like a man. But today she is Laxmi and everyone knows this woman celebrity. However, this state of being where she decides to exercise her pick of gender role is very hard earned. In an interview, she recalls that how she had once forgotten about her breasts implants and sat in her balcony. It created a mass frenzy in the neighbourhood. This shows a desire for freedom from the chains of gender, for inner space coexisting with the desire for belonging and being attached to a place. The incident also brings out the plethora of realities and gender spaces, existing together, side by side. The gendered private and the public cannot be kept separate but infiltrate into each other. The same places, after all, are the site where life happens, and that invariably involves both public, legitimate knowledge, and the private that is repressed, suppressed, and needs to be whispered.

On the same lines, Draupadi questions her father and Krishna that if anyone else wins her in the svayamvar, will her dharma as a chaste wife will remain intact? In Hindu mythology, Savitri is considered to be the epitome of a chaste wife, the one who followed the dharma of a wife even when her husband died by taking care of his parents and nursing his dead-body. This earned her the life of her husband back from the lord of death, Yama. Therefore, it can be said that chastity in the Indian culture is a sacred power which is beyond carnal discussions and here the supreme lord has himself declared the marriage of Arjun and Draupadi. This means if they now choose to marry Draupadi to someone else, then the breaching of dharma will not be her fault but will be decided by the male authority. Ray surfaces the fact that these features of dharma like chastity are not only constructed by patriarchy but can be moulded according to their conveniences. Ironically, it is Draupadi who request to stop the svayamvar in order to safeguard chastity but Drupad does not agree to that and the svayamvar is organised as planned.

Draupadi stubbornly questions her public display. She expresses her resentment against this ritual. However, she does not leave the space to highlight the irresistible charm she possesses for the suitors. The svayamvar begins and Draupadi is waiting endlessly for someone to win the challenge but to her disappointment it a Brahmin youth who finally wins her. She does not shy away showing her dejection. She is not the conventional princess. She neither walks coyly towards her husband to garland him nor does cry at her *bidai* rather casually flings away the advice of her father. She leaves Drupad without any tears. During the forest journey with her husband and his four brothers, Draupadi never misses a chance to enjoy the romantic moments with her husband defying the taboos of shame posed on an Indian woman, “Without hesitation I placed my hand in his arm” (51). Ray had induced colourless overtones when Drishtadyumna was mentioning the laurels of Pandavas but she gives many colours to the romantic adventures of Arjun, the garbed young

Brahmin and Draupadi. On reaching his home, the mother of five brothers commands them to share the offering they have got today. Ray uses this famous legend of Kunti dividing Draupadi among five Pandavas to highlight the darkness hidden behind the different interpretations of dharma which can even disrupt the 'normative' order of the world, ironically created by men themselves. It also reasons out the rationale of dharma, " But a woman going to the bed at the same time with more than one man- how shameful and painful it was" (65)! Draupadi talks about various women of Kuru clan like Amba, Ambika, Ambalika. Bhishm, the elder son of Shantanu had vowed celibacy but then in order to fulfil his Kshatriya dharma, he won the three daughters of the king of Kashi for his old step-brother, Vichitravirya. The same dharma allowed him to get Vichitravirya married to both Ambika and Ambalika. He was not married to Amba as she was promised to another man. However, the king dies without producing the heir to the throne of Hastinapur and thus his two wives were forced to beget children by another man. These women have been abducted, married to the same person, forced to cohabit with a stranger. Sisters became wives to a same husband. Husbands left them in terrible situations without giving them children. These stories are narrated to highlight the power of male control to turn women bodies into ghettos of control and violence. Their bodies and identities are curbed by structures of male governance and thought. These structures do not only become the part of their everyday life but a base for their survival itself. It is only the women who are impacted by the customs, rituals, requirements and honour of the clan. However, the intimate connection that women have with these structures is crisscrossed with various factors, "Intimacy, separation, love and hate in married life are not guided by laws and rules" (99).

Ray then shows Draupadi performing the trivial conjugal duty mocking the larger purpose she was born to serve. She positions the elaborative report of the famous Kauravas and Pandavas' rivalry in the bed chamber of Draupadi and Yudhishtir on their

first night, not only making the grand exploits sound boring but also presenting Yudhishtir to be an obsessed and lustful man, “The joy of having obtained you have stolen my sleep” (74). Like the eldest, all the other four brothers are equally charmed by her beauty, blurring the elaborative unique qualities they are born with. However, the most difficult phases of Draupadi’s life are also written. Draupadi had to give birth to the sons of all the husbands despite denial of many rights. It is always a woman body which becomes the site for sketching traditions and reforming them.

Soon after the marriage, Arjun leaves for Dvaraka and Bhim goes to live with his other wife Hidimba. Draupadi voices the feeling of jealous at Bhim’s visit to Hidimba. This presents a direct distinction to the heroine of an another epic, Atikal’s *Cilappatikaram*, Kannaki. She is one of the most respectable woman characters of the Indian epics. It is because even when her husband abandons her for another woman, she not only patiently waits for his return but takes an even better care of his parents. She understands the abandonment to be her lack without ever blaming her husband and these roles and norms written in these epics are still cherished by many in our society. Nabaneeta Dev Sen in “Alternative Interpretations of the Ramayana: Views from Below” also stresses the same point. She talks about how the great lord Rama is a construction to expound the ideal features of an Indian male and similarly Sita is constructed to make the Indian woman docile to its system. Nevertheless, Draupadi is not the one who will sit back to wait for her husband’s return. She is an educated woman who has a different mindscape. She leaves for Hastinapur with Krishna. After reaching Hastinapur, Draupadi proudly writes Karna’s fixation on her. She also tells how all the Kauravas are waiting for her with flowers in their hands. Her description registers the difference from the traditional setting of the warriors standing with bow and arrow waiting to frown at their enemies. Draupadi even being Pandavas’ wife is received with a lot of love. Karna was completely mesmerised by

Draupadi. While getting down her carriage, a thorn is stuck in her foot, the helpless Karna seeks forgiveness for it. This makes the text stand as the harbinger of even far-reaching changes in the Indian society. It also sketches how changes in the gendered spaces play a major role in the construction new cultural values. In the great epic, women were restricted to the roles of mothers, wives and sisters. The epic advertised this image of women to be the ideal image but in *Yajnaseni*, Ray shows that if a woman tries to claim space out of the domestic confines there can be a change in the ways of social structure. There is a vast difference between the gendered spaces written in the *Mahabharata* and *Yajnaseni*.

Draupadi of the *Mahabharata* was not asked about her wish in her marriage, she was not allowed to decide if she wants to be wife to five husbands. She faced all sorts of discrimination and was treated terribly by all the patriarchal figures, be it her father, friend, husband. But this Draupadi on reaching Hastinapur devices ways to live her life on her own terms, she seeks choices. She is initially apprehensive of the part of Hastinapur given to Pandavas, “There is not even a livable hut in Khnadav” (113). Khandav was the part of Hastinapur given to the Pandavas. She expresses the desire to be accepted and moreover treated like royal daughter-in-law, “Contentment could not be found even in the hut of Khandavprasth. I would find fulfilment” (113). She does not have any guilt of what she wants. She wants Krishna to transfer Khandavprasth into the lavish palace Indraprasth, as soon as possible.

During the construction of the assembly hall, Kunti one day asks Draupadi to visit her friend Radha. Radha is the wife of a chariator. Draupadi curiously questions about this bond between a queen and a *dasi*. Kunti answers her and Ray use the language of a whisper, conventionally associated with women to frame the answer. This gossip becomes more interesting for the readers than the construction of Indraprasth. What has always been revealed in the *Mahabharata* is the truth of Kunti and Karna’s relation, but in *Yajnaseni*

what is more fascinating is the way this reality is exposed. The description of Kunti announcing the truth to Draupadi rebuked the dominant ideology of shame interiorised in a woman. Had Kunti felt it to be her shame, she would have never revealed this truth to Draupadi. This also shows that Kunti has a soft corner for her son. She loves Karna the way she loves her other five sons. She breaks the norms of a queen to express the love of a mother, however lacking the courage of Draupadi she soon twists the fact saying that Karna is her dharma-putra. The sharing of this fact by a mother-in-law with her daughter-in-law makes the reader see the commonality of such instances. Ray also depicts the helplessness of woman who wants to claim and love her son but is not allowed to do so. She writes an episode in which Bhim mocks Karna, knowing this Kunti is angered at Bhim. But Karna, who has been presented to be stubborn in the Mahabharata, calms her down. Ray subverts the binary hierarchies of Kauravas and Pandavas to make the reader see if there is any difference between the two patriarchs. Ray releases women from the domestic fences of motherhood, the angered Kunti not only accepts Karna as her son from that day but also curses Bhim. She shares with Karna that how Bhim arrogance has been hurting her throughout her life. The adjectives of the *Mahabharata* have been shown swapping their places. Arrogance has been understood to be the trait of bad Duryodhana but here Bhim's own mother addresses him so. However, none is spared by Ray, the same Karna on getting the opportunity does not miss to make fun of Draupadi: "Karna's sarcasm pierced like an arrow. My heart began bleeding" (128).

The assembly hall gets ready and a big feast is being organised. Like the good daughter-in-law, Draupadi, serves the guest. Duhshasan mistreats her, he forcefully holds her hand a couple of times. This is another form of patriarchal violence unleashed on a defenseless female, however, it also questions the character of the people who fight for the highest throne of Hastinapur. It is not only Duhshasan who exploits her during the feast but

Duryodhan also. He is the eldest brother of the Kauravas. Draupadi could not do anything. She gulps this insult. Her condition has parallels to Karna's, who even after being invited to the feast is not eating the food with others. Kunti feels bad for her eldest son and asks Draupadi to take food for him in the guest house. However, here again, Karna insults her calling her an unchaste woman being the wife of five husbands. He refuses to take food from her hands. Draupadi's fate has been decided by the powerful agents of patriarchy yet why is she rebuked. She does not take this insult and satirizes his insult to be his lust towards her. She approaches Arjun for the help but he refuses to help her as during this period, Yudhishtir is her husband, so it is only his duty to safeguard the honour of Draupadi. Draupadi is treated as an object by both Karna and Arjun, blurring all their distinctions laid in the different versions of the Mahabharata. In contrast to Karna, Draupadi's marginalisation comes out to be starker. Ray pictures the violent faces concealed under the seemingly moral people. If Duhshasan and Duryodhan try to exploit her physically, Karna and Arjun suppresses her under their male ego. Draupadi is sure that even Yudhishtir will not rescue her, she can easily predict him, "He was a god and therefore, in one sense, like stone" (135). Draupadi slogs herself for everyone but she does not get sympathy from anyone. It also exposes the complexities of relationships but Draupadi's relation with Arjun and Yudhishtir seems to be having no roots. There is no hint of any hope in future also. Both of them seems to be dead against their relationship with Draupadi. The only time we can see the bond between them is during the nights. It is only the body of the Draupadi that is desired, her desires are not given any space. Kumkum Roy in "Unravelling the Kamasutra" talks about the legitimacy of sexual relationships between a male and female. She points out how women were always understood to be the objects of desire in the socio-sexual relations. The man could have relations with various women but how he accessed a particular woman became the yardstick of his social status.

She specifically discusses it as elucidated in *Manusmriti* and primarily points out two things. The men were permitted to enter into a relationship with any women, the offspring born out of such intercourse was considered legitimate, however, there is a condition of, “... more or less legitimate” (540) child. Thus, any woman could be easily subjected to sexual approaches at any time or activity. Considering this argument, Karna and Duryodhan are equally justified in exploiting Draupadi. Then the same concept of dharma that justifies the most devastating battle of Kurukshetra blurs all the differences between the Kauravas, Karna and the Pandavas.

In the following chapter, Draupadi questions, “... with five husbands and insulted by the Kauravas all through life, would I be able to lead a healthy life” (140)? Through this, Draupadi questions the appreciated relevance of bearing insults and accepting subjugation by Pandavas. One after another, Pandavas keep accepting the suppression at the hands of Kauravas, but does it make their condition better. The Indian consciousness has always sided with the silence of Pandavas. It has been praised since time immemorial but what good did it serve. Draupadi voices her fear of staying with such husbands. Ray brings out the pain of a woman who never decides such a life for herself and now neither the man who decided her fate nor the men who pledged to be her protectors are bothered about her life and honour. She has already revealed the intentions of Duryodhan to Arjun, but he does not act. Ironically, she is the chief queen of Pandavas but comes out to be the most unsafe of all. Bhim leaves no opportunity to give her pain narrating his and Hidimba's, his second wife, love episodes. Sahadev sleeps unbothered about her, Nakul is always immersed in his dance and music and Arjun in his scriptures, Draupadi is completely alone even after having five husbands. History and memory at times call her whore but the reality is she does not have the companionship of even one of her husband, “I was standing alone. On the corridor running along the closed bed-chambers of five husbands ...” (149).

But she still retains the innocence she was born with waiting for the years with Yudhishtir and Bhim to get over. Draupadi is not biased towards Arjun in her duties of a wife, she longs for him because he is the only one of the Pandavas who does not have a second wife. Ray delineates the pangs of Draupadi's separation from this husband, how helpless Draupadi felt the day when Arjun had come to Yudhishtir's chamber. Yudhishtir was lying in Draupadi's lap. Arjun came in to take a weapon, he did not even raise his eyes towards Draupadi and Yudhishtir yet Draupadi was left embarrassed to be found in another's arms by the man she loved. Arjun breaks the rule by entering into the chamber of his brother when he is in the company of Draupadi. Kumkum Roy in "Unravelling the Kamasutra", writes that a king had free space to cohabit with any woman but he had to be careful about not to enter into another man's house or letting another man capturing their woman (537). He punishes himself by proclaiming a twelve-year exile but because of four other husbands, Draupadi could not go with him. Nevertheless, even the same Arjun does not spare Draupadi from hurting, "If Krishnaa had married me alone then she would not have become Maharani ..." (168). She is tortured by all the five husbands in their own ways. In the absence of Arjun, Bhim forces her to spend Arjun's turn with him. Draupadi firmly refuses to obey his wish, however, the alternative is not flowery. She stays like a *brahmacharini* in a hut devoid of any luxuries for that one year. Ironically, when Draupadi is going through these tribulations during Arjun's absence, the latter marries more women presenting a direct contrast between the fate of a wife and husband.

Draupadi introduces us to Harita, Dronacharya's second wife whom he married to raise his son from the first wife. In fact, this woman is never treated as a wife by her husband. Even of being a devoted wife she is clear that Dronacharya is wrong in supporting the Kauravas. Ray not only questions the rules on the basis of which sides were chosen but also shows the sense of the futility of the virtues of a wife.

It is the time for Arjun to return, Draupadi is all excited. She dresses in the best possible jewels and attire and at this moment of happiness, Draupadi comes to know about his marriage to Subhadra, Krishna's sister. She is heartbroken to know that it is Krishna who devised this marriage. The only pure bond of Draupadi's life also finally gives her hurt. It was that one year that Draupadi has to spend with Arjun, she has been longing for this one year. But Arjun decides to spend the night in Subhadra's chamber. He tells Draupadi that is the revenge that he always wanted to take. The revenge of Draupadi going to the chambers of his brother again raising the question of Draupadi's fault.

Ray does not spare anyone not even the lord himself. Amusingly, in expressing Draupadi's anger, Ray makes her experience all those emotions and feelings that different Kuru princes have experienced towards her thus subverting the rules of desire as explained by Kumkum Roy. She is jealous of the beauty of Subhadra, she expressed anger towards Krishna. Ray uses Arjun to explain the difference between Draupadi and rest of his wives. He tells Draupadi that his other wives can never compete her in any of her virtues and thus she will always be the most loved of his, however, this also once again affirm the status of women to be nothing more than objects. Draupadi is shown intelligent enough to understand this tactic to be a political strategy.

Draupadi is shown preparing Subhadra for the first night of hers with Arjun. This subverts the conventional notion of jealous being the attribute of women only. If the five Pandavas can stay in peace with one wife then Draupadi also accepts Subhadra. She tells how seeing Subhadra made all her anger vanish in moments. Ray shows a kind of sisterhood developing between Draupadi and Subhadra. The way Ray describe Draupadi's fascination towards Subhadra's big eyes, make me recall the relation of the two sister-in-laws in the Deepa Mehta's movie *Fire*. Ruth Vanita in the "Same Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History", talks about homosexuality and the floating

boundaries of sex ingrained in Puranas. Mohini, the beautiful girl that Shiva becomes in order to charm Vishnu is not the only example of such relations. Shiva is attracted to Vishnu and the union of the two most powerful forces of the world results in the birth of Hariharaputra. Ray uses the Hindu mythology to show the floating boundaries of sex and gender.

Definitely, Ray brings out the firm selfhood that Draupadi has. Amidst the patriarchal society, she confesses her enticement towards Subhadra. However, Draupadi's fascination towards Subhadra, makes her realise her love for Krishna. She sees Krishna in the eyes of Subhadra and with all the power Draupadi confesses her love for Krishna. However, unlike the Bhakti tradition, this love does not remain at the level of mind and heart but is expressed in physical terms. The Bhakti tradition expounds intense suffering before the beloved can be one with the lover, however, every pore of Draupadi's body longs for Krishna. She has always been told by her father about the oneness with Krishna, it is she who failed to acknowledge its true significance, thus overturning the patriarchal judgement by its acceptance. She tells that how after leaving Subhadra in Arjun's chamber, she did not long for Arjun but just remembered Krishna thus altering the man- woman relation of a subject and object. She openly confesses this state of mind in front of Krishna. Ray sketches a romantic scene situation it at the backdrop of the same night which Arjun was spending with Subhadra. Draupadi uses clever arguments in front of Krishna to justify her feelings saying that as Krishna is Arjun's friend, loving Krishna will draw Arjun nearer to her. She uses the same skills of manipulation that Arjun had used to make understand her superiority over other co-wives to reveal her love for Krishna. She succeeds in doing so to such an extent that Krishna, the lord expresses his gratitude for accepting Subhadra as her sister. At the same time, she uses the same tactic to ignite Arjun's suspicion about her love for him, "For winning love what is there in this world that the beloved can not do" (215)? Draupadi

is finally very happy knowing that how many wives Arjun has, she will always remain the most important for him. She writes how happy and elated she was on knowing that Abhimanyu, despite being Subhadra's son, named her to be her mother when asked so by his teacher. Draupadi has now firmly become the centre of this narrative.

Chapter twenty-five of this text begins with the description of *Rajasuya yajna*. This *yajna* will be performed by Yudhishtir to legitimize his authority as a king. Krishna suggests Yudhishtir to perform this *yajna* so that he claims separate sovereignty from Hastinapur and will also mark the "establishment of dharma" (219). Ray shows that how Kunti's counsel could not help Yudhishtir to decide if the *yajna* should be performed or not. Yudhishtir already had doubts that the *yajna* could become the reason of a big war. Hastinapur is still the prime kingdom of Kurus and now by performing the *Rajasuya yajna*, Yudhishtir will be directly contending for another kingdom. It definitely will ignite Hastinapur. Yet on the advice of Krishna, he agreed to perform it.

After the *yajna*, Pandavas are invited for a game of dice by the Kauravas. Duryodhan is extremely jealous seeing Yudhishtir rising to the position of king. In the lust of overthrowing Yudhishtir he devises a game of dice with the help of his maternal uncle Shakuni. All the males are on their own ego trips. Everyone is selfishly running after their own happiness. He asks for the permission from his father and the ruler of Hastinapur, Dhrtarastra. Dhrtarastra refuses to give his permission but after much persuading from his son, he agrees to the game. It clearly shows the presence of all and only male figures in this decision. But all these scholar minds together could not see the complete disintegration of the Kuru clan in this game.

It is not about the matter of good over evil. Draupadi could already sense doom in it and therefore, she requested Yudhishtir to reject the proposal of the dice game. Yudhishtir also knows the dangers of this game. Yudhishtir does not want to go for the

game but his dharma binds him. He can not refuse to obey the command of his uncle and the king of Hastinapur. Interestingly, Hindu creation is in itself understood as *lila* or a game. This game is set up to decide on something that could have been otherwise decided by a war, the game will decide the rulers of the Kuru clan.

The Pandavas reach Hastinapur. Ray does not give the account of the game of dice rather when the game was going on in the assembly hall she devotes pages praising the beautiful hair of Draupadi. However, at the game Yudhishtir constantly losses. He first gambles away all the wealth, then the kingdom and his people, his brothers and finally after himself becoming the slave of Kauravas he gambles and loses Draupadi.

Draupadi is asked to bring in the court, she is now the wealth of Kauravas. A messenger comes and tells Maya that Draupadi has been asked to come to the court. Draupadi is in her month. A woman is prohibited to see even her own husband during this time yet Draupadi is asked to report in the court in front of the entire Kuru clan. Instead of the conventional reporting of Draupadi being dragged to the assembly hall, Ray writes about Draupadi's anger. She wanted to confront Yudhishtir. She refuses to be treated like a piece of property. She voices agony. Readers can witness the anger of revolt. She protests against the male hegemony.

The menstruating Draupadi is pulled by her hair and is violently dragged in front of the Kuru elders by Dushasan. Heroism has always understood to be a male's courage to stand against the wrong and fight against human sufferings. However, Draupadi rebukes the entire Kuru clan openly for sitting silently on her insult. Ray draws attention to Kuru's inability to help safeguard the honour of their own family member. The elders of the clan sit patiently watching her disrobing. Draupadi alone fights for justice. She uses the dominant conventional weapons of the patriarchal society to fight against it. She questions the elders if it is right to expose a woman to the public during her menstruation. Women

during their periods are considered to be corrupted and contaminated objects. This myth is negated by the patriarchy itself.

None of her five husbands could do anything to save her from this humiliation. The most Bhim could do was again to take a vow of tearing apart Duhshasan's chest. Since time immemorial, the main reason for the difference between men and women is understood to be actions. Adam was given the punishment of work and Eve of labour. The first modern Western say put forth in the favour of women is counted to be by Mary Wollstonecraft in her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). In this essay, Wollstonecraft writes about women's subjugation in the name of ignorance and innocence. She mentions about how men have used the mantra of women born weaker to be the tool for showing her to be intellectually weaker also. Patriarchy has cemented the biological variation into social differences. But Wollstonecraft firmly believes that enslavement of women springs from the lack of education. Therefore, she suggests and strongly recommends education for women to place them at the centre of knowledge, in turn making them the kernel of it. She champions education to be the strongest warhead of women to fight any and every battle against male governed ideologies (46).

Draupadi emerges out to be the perfect reflection of Wollstonecraft's words. When no one comes to her rescue, she acts, raising a clever question. The question revolved around the concept of dharma and legitimacy. It challenges her stake. She questions Yudhishtir whether he staked her before or after losing himself. Even the wisest sitting in the assembly could not answer this question. The biggest patriarchal weapon of being more learned is finally defeated by Draupadi. Her action eventually stops the disastrous game. It is because of her question and interruption that the so-called intellectual men of the hall understand various inauspicious omens. Dhrtarastra grants her three boons and Draupadi frees her husband through these boons. Draupadi's disrobing and violation help us see the

difference between the way Draupadi and Pandavas reacted. The most bravest five Pandavas could not save one woman with all their intelligence, physical prowess and dharma but one woman standing in the most humiliated state saved all five of them with just one question. It questions the relevance of dharma which leaves a chaste and sacrificing women like Draupadi humiliated by her own protectors.

Ray does not dismiss the existence of dharma but she carves the space where dharma can be defined in a variety of ways. Dharma can be seen as the device which maintains the order in the world but one can not negate the multiple different sides it exists with. The five Pandavas struggle to base their lives on the dictates of dharma but Draupadi raises the important question of merging self-integrity with the dharmic rules of society.

After Bhim's vow, Draupadi also pledges to keep her hair untied till she washes them with Duhshasan's blood. This vow asserts the equal importance of human beings in front of dharma, thus, bringing out the importance of self- survival along with the collective right. Through Draupadi, Ray tries to locate the space where human beings follow the righteous path but without sacrificing the right of the self to exist.

Yudhishtir and his other four brothers in the treatment of Draupadi have always applied the theory of *niskama* dharma, that is, where one does not enact or perform the duties in accordance to his individual desires. However, Draupadi's question further interrogates the entangled workings of this dharma. By asking who was betted first, she questions the firm hierarchical constitutions regulated by the *niskama* dharma. Nevertheless, She uses these same structures to pave her own freedom. Hierarchy does not allow anyone to budge beyond his location and thus a slave does not have the right to enslave anyone. Ironically she uses the same dharma to negate her subjugation that it justifies. Her explanation of dharma in the assembly hall also marks the inability of the Kuru elders to interpret the dharma they themselves have written. Considering the plight of

sacrificing Draupadi, Yajnaseni hints at the fissures located in the definition of dharma that promises eternal contentment.

Jasbir Jain in “Positioning the ‘Post’ in Post” argues that women freedom is a sum total of many stages and characteristics. It involves a thorough understanding of how our past has been paved, how historical interpolations have strengthened and weakened this delineation, how the power structures reflect this past and historical understandings of the patriarchy and then eventually all this reading has to be used to alter the present oppressive situations. However, the critical journey should though uncover the oppression but only to find freedom (83). Ray practices the same. Her Draupadi actively participates in the present ongoings of the assembly hall to overthrow these structures of women subjugation.

She also questions the feature of compassion that the great epic lays. War always brings destruction. This is the highest truth of every battle. Whether the battle of Troy or the battle of Kurukshetra, the history has witnessed the immense horror of bloodshed and dead bodies. Staking Draupadi in the game of dice which is no less than a battlefield interrogates the notion of compassion exposing the severity of patriarchal rules that considered women nothing but a piece of land. Ray implies that dharma can not be written or read from somewhere. It has to be put to test before being performed.

The Pandavas are set free to leave for Indraprastha. However, they are given exile for twelve years and invited back for one last throw. Yudhishtir accepts the invitation. Ray’s Draupadi becomes a trail breaking woman. She defies the stifling bounds that her husbands and society imposed on her being a woman. She questions the dharmic patriarchal authority and transcends the difference constructed in terms of gender, nonetheless, Yudhishtir by again accepting the invitation of dice game stakes her honour. Howsoever hard Draupadi struggles to come out of the slime, she is forced back into the mire of inflexible dharma. Yudhishtir says that because of his dharma he can not refute to

accept the invitation. He seems content with the freedom of Pandavas but he does not recognise the bondage he is chaining Draupadi into. The Pandavas do not realise that they are practicing what has been inflicted on them by Kauravas. Ray uses lord Krishna to justify the anger of Draupadi on it.

The Pandavas with Draupadi are ready to venture into the forests as the part of their exile. Kunti is still worried about the survival of her sons. Ray also shows how Kunti makes her sons acknowledge the humiliation that Draupadi had to go through in the assembly hall. She praises Draupadi for her stand but her main concern is the protection of her sons. Here she portrays all those women who try to achieve their social identities only through a perfect nursing of the domestic roles ordained on them by the society. She asks Draupadi not bear any hatred against her son, Karna. Draupadi promises to do so. Yet ages see her the culprit of the entire war who forces her husbands to wage war.

The Kamyak forest again marks the difference between the green natural world and the constructed world of the assembly hall. Draupadi dwells on the immemorial existence of mountains and rivers pointing a contrast between the artificial structures of codes maintained by the kings and these god created mountains and other natural features. The forest comes out to be the reality that is untainted by the brutality of wrath practiced in the courts. She talks about the difference between the sea and a river, and river, unlike sea, is not any culmination, its keeps running. This river is then compared to the throne which is fixed and unmoving. An unmoving throne can not irrigate the emotions of its kingdoms. Draupadi's imagination stands poles apart from the harsh throne of Hastinapur. It is only the river that can cultivate not the sea. This otherness of Draupadi is not the other rather it reveals the truth of the survival of the universe. The world of nature here symbolizes a promise, a promise of eternal beauty and life.

Ironically, The Pandavas are busy in the discussion of *kirtas*, these devils have always been residing in the Kamyak forest where the Pandavas will be staying from now onwards. Draupadi in the laps of nature is trying to regain life but the Pandavas are sure that they will not be able to befriend the *kirtas*. Their dharma of *kshatriya* has made them enemies to *kirtas*. Draupadi is also shown to be the image of ‘Annapoorna’, the goddess of food. She used to eat in the forest only after feeding her husbands. Ray makes think that who really believes in war.

Draupadi is the one who surrenders herself to the demands that have their causes outside oneself. She can not forget the birthday of her ‘sakha’, Krishna. She is all immersed in her imagination, trying to read the festivities that must be taking place at Dvaraka. On seeing her entrenched in thoughts, Arjun comes and questions her love for Krishna. His concern for Draupadi at this moment comes out to be nothing more than a sentimental display to access her love. Draupadi answers that she loves Krishna the way he himself loves Krishna, thus leaving him silent. At this place, Ray talks about Karna’s vow to kill Arjun and also guru Dvaipayana promising to teach Yudhishtir the skills to defeat Kauravas. The guru questions Draupadi if she is satisfied with it as if putting the entire blame of the revenge on her.

We never see Draupadi asking for revenge, what she desires to witness is Yudhishtir’s concern for her honour. It reveals the pain existing in the life of Indian women who from their childhood are understood to be protected by patriarchy, Draupadi by questioning Yudhishtir, is not trying to gain any individual rights. Her desire for Yudhishtir to act again questions the already written dictates of the society which makes the male counterparts to be the only support of a woman. Draupadi can now clearly see herself being reduced to the level of an object by Yudhishtir. She was never an equal in their marriage. For Yudhishtir, the concept of a wife is only attached to her body. Is it only

the duty of a wife to silently stand by her husband fulfil the cultural role of making sure that he has been fed. Like a responsible wife, Draupadi has always been there for all her husbands. Even after all the insults, she has experienced because of her husbands, she is standing with them to face all the miseries. However, her silent agreement to the guru's question somewhere hints at the severe realisation of losing her selfhood in playing the role of an ideal wife. Yet her mind is roving and noticing everything through the dense dark forests, uncovering from the trees, trying to read every single thought and working of the dominant society.

Draupadi still possesses the beauty and purity of nature. Arjun has to go to the Himalayas to get the divine weapons. Draupadi is distressed, she does not want Arjun to go. In his absence, she spends sleepless nights. The insult in the assembly hall could not stop her from experiencing the beauty of the forests but nights without Arjun still makes her restless, marking her holiness. She still experiences the threat of Arjun falling in love with the *apsaras*. She still stands human amidst the battles of wrong and right, devils and gods. Arjun's touch uplifted her courage and this is the Draupadi who has been blamed for the greatest war of humanity.

The following some chapters not only gives us the glimpse into the vast repository of nature but also in the forlorn heart of Draupadi. The scenes present a beautiful vision of life and love. Draupadi's' pangs have a close association with the images of nature which highlights the unbreakable dependence of human beings and nature thwarting the requirements of social systems to seat people in the position of the 'self ' and the 'other'. Draupadi's' paining heart gets recluse only in the natural splendour of Badarika. She experiences solace here because this is the place where Arjun began his journey for *swarg* from. Nature for Draupadi then becomes a living entity which responds to her condition. There is a coexistence of mutual respect and recognition between Draupadi and nature

standing stark in contrast to the hatred the cousins were experiencing in the assembly hall. This actually a moment of reversal. Draupadi can witness the wonders of nature which rein the agony of life and in this way she is able to turn round the harsh route of events by the merit of her emotional clarity. These hills reveal even the love of Bhim to Draupadi. He instead of tormenting Draupadi assures all the luxuries for her. The unity that is not achieved in the gilded courts has been found here. This world of Draupadi and Bhim is radically different from the world of Hastinapur.

Arjun returns to Draupadi. She is elated to see him, happy that he has returned from the mesmerising *apsaras* of the heaven. They move to Dvaita forest which has a dreamlike quality. Here are no demarcation of places and time. In the serene atmosphere, the conversation of Pandavas makes a sudden interruption. Yudhishtir is talking about Karna's vow to kill Arjun. The hallucinatory world is again overpowered by bloodshed.

Ray then shows Draupadi pouring her heart out to Satyabhama, Krishna's second queen. Nabneeta Dev Sen in "Alternative Interpretations of the Ramayana: Views from Below" talks about how in the oral tradition of India, women have been sharing their sorrows as sisters. Draupadi is highly critical about Yudhishtir and points out his lack of efficiency at times. She tells Satyabhama that there are chances when she has explained Bhim's statements to Yudhishtir. This shows that how a feminine say can also put things in the set of order. Satyabhama is left amazed at it. Ray helps the women readers to come together to understand 'woman-connection' with nature and her other sisters. Subhadra fascinatingly tries to study the success of Draupadi's complex married life.

The history of the *Mahabharata* has always laid importance on the life and battles of the male warriors. Their adventures, tribulations, doubts and success have been delineated at great lengths. The world sprang from their activities and performances, however, Ray in this chapter shows all these achievements to be dull in front of the

domestic quarters of Draupadi. She is a rare and happy wife of five husbands. Satyabhama is also the wife of a husband who has eight chief queens and many other wives but she is amazed at the intelligence and love of Draupadi which binds her with all her five husbands in one bond.

Draupadi in the assembly hall had challenged the existing concepts of authority and here in the forests while sharing her secret of binding all her husbands in one thread she assumes the same authority. However, she binds the new emerging features of authority that they do not come out to be new ideologies but draws a sense of belief. For instance, she says, one of the mantras to achieve this harmony is to take an extreme interest in the likes and dislikes of all her husbands. She uplifts and recreates the simple role of wife. She has a spirit of perseverance unlike Dhrtarastra, she is active unlike Sahdev, she values herself unlike Karna, she fasts unlike Bhim to maintain the balance of her body, she is intellectual, she has the emotions to understand another's plight, she has the courage to fight against wrong and all these characteristics together are fit to be the new ruler. But she does not want to be one. Ray turns the table, so it is Draupadi alone who can save the world from the impending war whereas Pandavas and Kauravas are the ones who want war at any cost. Arjun has vowed that he will not touch Draupadi till the time till he kills Karna.

Draupadi then narrates the incident of Karna coming to the Dvaita forest to kill the man-eater. During the killing he is bitten by a poisonous snake, Draupadi without knowing who has been hissed reaches for his help. On seeing Karna, she goes through various thoughts. She wants to save him but the second moment she remembers his vow of slaying Arjun. If he is killed, half of Duryodhan's strength will be ended and Indraprasth will belong to Pandavas. If he is not being saved today, Arjun will not have to hurt Kunti by killing him. However, irrespective of all these lucrative possibilities of the death of Karna,

Draupadi saves him. This shows that Draupadi is not only a strong woman but also knows the intricacies of what is right.

Now comes the last year of exile and according to the verdict of the assembly court, the Pandavas along with Draupadi have to spend this year in exile and if during this one year Kauravas will recognise them then the former will have to continue their exile for another twelve years. The four brothers go to fetch water and when they did not return even after a long while, Yudhishtir along with Draupadi goes to find them. The four brothers are lying dead near the lake of Yaksh as they tried drinking water without answering Yaksh's queries. Seeing all the four husbands dead, Draupadi is not able to control herself, however, she mourns the death of Arjun more than the other three. Yaksh, on the other hand, gives Yudhishtir an option to bring back one of his brothers to life. Draupadi prays in her heart for Arjun. This highlights her transgression of the patriarchal norms and also brings into light her firm and honest character.

Draupadi and the five Pandavas start serving at the court of Virat. Draupadi serves the queen disguised as a maidservant. The brother of the queen starts throwing advances to Draupadi. Draupadi complains Yudhishtir, but he asks her to keep herself away from the lust of the brother, Keechak. This again questions the role of the so-called male protectors. During a celebration the queen orders Draupadi to get wine from Keechak's room, Draupadi firmly refuses to do so reasoning Keechak's drunkenness at that time. But on a severe direction from the queen, Draupadi is left with no choice but to get wine from his room. She knows the consequences of it but in order to protect her unconcerned husbands from an exile of another twelve years, she enters into his room. Her doubts soon become reality, Keechak has been waiting for her. She manages to flee from his clutches and reaches the place where the king Virat and Yudhishtir are playing the game of dice. Yudhishtir keeps on playing the game even after seeing Draupadi in such a

state. This marks the utter helplessness a wife faces. However, Draupadi courageously speaks about Virat's failure as a king.

Even after the successful completion of the terms of exile, the selfish Kauravas are not ready to give Pandavas their deserved and therefore, a war is decided. Surprisingly, the Pandavas who were never bothered about the various insults and tribulations their women had to go through because of the Kauravas, today made those same insults the reason for the war. Ray points to the coward attitude of the Pandavas.

Ray in the mean time does not give us the proceedings of the war. Instead, there is featuring of the close feminine experiences of Draupadi and Kunti. In Chapter fifty-two, the night before the beginning of the battle, the Pandavas, Krishna and Draupadi sit together to discuss each other's weakness. Krishna and all the Pandavas confess their weaknesses. At this night Draupadi presents the bravest possible picture of a woman, however, she is not out for fighting the battle on the field of Kurukshetra. She, rather battles all that she has been bottling up since the day of her birth. She confesses her three weaknesses, the prime being the lord Krishna, the second is Kunti's sons and the third is Arjun. Ray, here subverts the conventional image of Draupadi in two ways; one she presents a woman who can speak at the conferences dominated by men and second she makes Draupadi transcend the boundaries of sexuality and religion which do not permit a woman to live life to the fullest. There is a sense of not being afraid of the reactions of patriarchy, of being free from the fear of the unknown, of embracing the right as well as the wrong, and of placing oneself uncovered and released without the steady want for protection and security. Sensuousness is also witnessed in its broadest sense. Romantic allusions marked between Draupadi and Krishna, and Draupadi and Arjun are not undercut. This treatment of handling the theme of love is revolutionary in a culture where sexuality has to be hidden in all spheres of life and even in the mirror reflecting it, that is, art. Ray does not give any account of the war and

rather writes those days in the same tone of any other day. The fight was taking place and here Draupadi is dreaming about her childhood life, her marriage, romantic rendezvous, playfulness. Ray writes about the fears and feelings experienced by the wives and mothers of Kuru clan. Amidst the horrible war, they are still standing one. Draupadi has lost all her sons. The enemies are dead. The revenge has been taken. The future curses have been hurled. No one is spared, neither the lord nor the common man. The dead bodies are being cremated yet no one is happy.

Parikshit is anointed the king of Hastinapur. The Kuru elders have already left for the forests to spend their last days. The Pandavas assigning the responsibility of Hastinapur to Subhadra leave for the Himalayas with Draupadi. It is Yudhishtir's wish to take Draupadi along with them. But Draupadi questions how the desire for heaven is different from any other desire. While following her husbands, Draupadi tries to read the significance of her life and then at this very moment, she suddenly slips off the mountain but the Pandavas do not stop to save her. Bhim tries to save her, but Yudhishtir does not allow Bhim to do so. Even after sacrificing everything for the Pandavas, Draupadi is blamed for being biased towards Arjun. The dharma bound brother, Bhim obeys his elder and leaving behind his mace followed his brother. This mace has become the symbol of the journey of Pandavas to heaven. Left alone, Draupadi could hear her *sakha*, her Krishna and she asks for five promises from him. In the first four promises she asks for different boons for women and humanity but in the fifth, she asks Krishna to promise her a rebirth. She does not want to go to heaven. She still desires and she desires to be born again. Draupadi asserts her identity of a human being by locating herself in the pattern of death and birth yet in separateness from the dictates of dharma. Draupadi highlights the multiplicity within the self. She proclaims that the real self is indefinable and can never be captured by one birth

or one identity. She says that no memory and no story can actually sum up an identity. This is the beginning. Draupadi has just been born.

Bama Faustina Soosairaj's *Karukku*

Karukku is a mirror of the life of a Christian Dalit woman trying to unravel the paradoxes and questions, that riddles her community and self. This is the community and self which are barred from the centres and looked down by the people placed in the upper levels of the society. However, what interests me first about the book is its name itself. *Karukku*, the noun means a leaf. It is a palmyra leaf. Both the sides of this leaf have saw-like edges, cutting and dangerous to touch. Lakshmi Holstrom in the "Introduction" to *Karukku* mentions that this noun also means a kernel. Whether the cutting leaf or the kernel, both have their existence in nature. Nature has always been a rich source of our identity and by naming her autobiography, *Karukku*, Bama proclaims a journey to explore her life, culture and history that are recorded by the inexorable nature.

Autobiographies are the ways through which one not only tries to read the own-self but also introduce this self to the others. However, the first line of Bama's autobiography reverses the fact that identity can be named, for she has no nouns to introduce herself or her village. She just uses the most appropriate adjective to describe the Indian rural villages and that is, beautiful. Her village is invoked engulfed in one spirit of holy beauty but soon this serenity is undercut by the mention of various communities living there. The beautiful village has the reality of slavery and alienation. There is a clear juxtaposition of the undivided nature, and the demarcated communities and their activities. Nevertheless, Bama uses the same natural world to call upon the constructed world of differences based on culture, food, religion, rituals, history, legends, myths and practices.

Bama's nostalgia for her undivided village emerges in the description of *ghats* and the mountain range that surround her village. This mountain range seems to her like a mass of paddy, the most common site to an Indian eye. In the common past, the places were not demarcated by any human being rather derived their name from the different actions of the village. Marakkaa puucchi malai has been named so because of its semblance to stacked paddy. Vannaan paara has a tank and the Vannaan boys used to wash their clothes in that tank and therefore it has been named Vannaan paara. In fact, Bama points out how these different peaks encircled their village into oneness. But things have changed now, for instance, Vannaan boys do not go to the tank to wash their clothes. The unbroken past soon merges with the divided present symbolising the fissures creeping in the united self. On one of the peaks of the mountain, a temple has been constructed by the higher caste, Naicker community. Only the Naicker community worships in this temple. This temple has been named Perumaal Saami temple. This temple freezes a sense of division, suggesting a separation of the Dalits and their habitations.

The journey of Bama begins with the Dalit experience of problems that are never faced by the 'better-off castes'. Her people have to climb up on the mountains to collect the firewood. They make money by selling them. Whereas the people of the other caste have proper fields and wells and thus they can work comfortably on them all round the year. These people do not even face water problems as there are many ponds in their areas. The differences point to the fact of Dalits placed in separate settlements which do not share the confines with the upper castes. There is a Dalit self-assertion in the language of Bama when she uses the word 'our' to address the people of her community. She again brings the difference of Dalit location and their chronicles of pain and sufferings through nature. It also works as a metaphoric and symbolic language to not only highlight the constructed differences but also to picture the clever mind of the upper caste people to

preserve their economic superiority. During the rainy seasons, Bama's village becomes even more beautiful. There is no dearth of water as nature is benign enough to the people of this village. However, this generosity of nature is exploited by the upper castes for their own benefits making it a reason for the poverty of the Dalit people. As a natural course, the rain water accumulates in the ponds which lie only in the upper-caste areas and throughout the year helps them in their agriculture. In the rainy season, because of the heavy water flow, people could catch fishes in the earthen pots. A varied variety of fish flows in abundance, but because of the demarcated geography, the Dalits can afford to buy only the cheapest fish whereas the upper caste ate the best. Nature is generous enough to treat everyone equal, but the upper caste people do not even allow her community to bait fishes as the ponds rights are reserved with them. It also forms the understanding of the myth of the Muniyaandi shrine which has the story of theft attached to it.

In *Yajnaseni*, we have seen that mythology is constructed primarily on the lines of dominant ideologies. Bama rationally deconstructs these myths. She refers to the myth of Muniyaandi shrine where once a year, a grand festival is held. People donate large offerings on this day. On one such festive day, a man named Bondan who belonged to Bama's community not only stole the money from the shrine but also took the bells of the shrine. Reading this incident in context to the hunger that upper caste people subject the Dalits to, one can understand the reason of the theft. However, the people constructed a story of Muniyaandi walking down the street asking for his offerings to be returned. Bama does not write the source of this fabrication but the upper and lower class' people, together forcing Bondan to return the offerings reveal the Dalit consciousness to be completely immersed in the structures of these myths. Bama's use of this myth not only breaks the stereotype of Dalits to be born thieves but also exposes the upper castes' intentions of perpetuating myths to deny various opportunities of upliftment to the Dalits. Bondan is one of the oldest

members of the Dalit community and his fine robbery skills made him famous as *Bondan-maama* amongst the children of this community. He could do anything and everything. He was a brave man who could not only steal from the temple but also from the gardens of the landowners. He stole different fruits and vegetables from their groves for his livelihood. But he was afraid of ghosts. One night while trying to steal coconuts from a garden, he was tormented by a ghost. However, he was brave enough to cheat him and ran to another grove. *Bondan-maama* had learnt to survive. It was not easy to defeat him. Bama overturns the conventional line of the myths by giving Dalits the faces of human and animals are sketched in the images of the ruthless upper castes. One night in order to escape the caretaker, *Bondan-maama* had to jump into the boiling water and the moment he fell into the well created by the upper caste people for the Dalits, a cobra spread his hood to bite him. But the brave *Bondan-maama* not only kept the cobra at bay but returned singing happily. There were times when he was bitten by the same cobra, but that did not stop him. He just cut away that toe with the sickle and completed his raid. By narrating various myths attached to evil *Bondan*, Bama also questions the engagement of history in the construction of Dalit self in the image of evil. However, Bama cleverly uses the resurrection of this evil to puncture the old suppressed Dalit and constructs a new Dalit self which knows how to survive, she not only discusses the pleasure involved in stealing the food in such a manner but also praises *Bondan*, “Such a sharp fellow he was” (6).

The other interesting fact that Bama brings on the surface is the missing women. Whether they are the *Vannaan* boys or the little boys of Bama’s community waiting for the upper caste owner of the pond to leave, so that they can catch some few good fishes, women are never read. Thus Bama’s reading of the fissures between the Dalits and the upper castes challenges the non-representation of Dalit women in this history. Bama, a woman is successfully carving spaces for recognition and self-respect.

Bama talks about the divided and limited space available to their caste. The small bus-stand which stands at the village entrance is their end. She says that the bus does not take them outside that stand. It has both literal and figurative meaning attached to it. Their limitation to this stand shows that the formal State spaces and the respect attached to these spaces are not available to the Dalits. They are forcefully ghettoized so that they not only recognise their seclusion but also experience a sense of shame attached to their low-birth. There runs a stream beyond that bus-stand which fills with water only when it rains, highlighting their deprivation. This stream when is not filled with water, smells like a shit-field. It highlights the inhuman tortures that the Dalit body has to experience.

They stay in these filthy places. From here, Bama highlights the differences existing between the Dalit community itself. All of them do not share the same marginal spaces, some are located even below in the hierarchy. The Paraya caste lives near the cemetery and Bama's just next to them. Bama soon collapses the separation between the various low-castes and homogenises them against the upper-caste communities by showing the difference between the concrete clean progressive buildings like post-office, the church and the school standing firmly against the palmyra-thatched roofs. Definitely the image of the low-caste community that springs from this picture is a deprived entity but Bama has an understanding of the basis of this difference. She is quick to see the social system that helps to keep the caste system intact. She points the big school as the biggest difference between them and the Naicker's.

Bama knows that the lack of education contributes to the discrimination of the Dalits but by doing so she takes hold of the same agency that sanctions the discrimination. Through this agency, Bama places the community's powerlessness within the framework of the larger socio-political and economic actuality of the country. However, while giving the account of the in-community daily fights over water while standing in long queues, Bama

paints a lively picture of the community that lurks in the darkness of discrimination. The Dalit here is neither presented a hero nor a victim but there is a sense of identity which goes beyond the written and subverted identities. It is the strangeness of their names. The black faces of these un-plastered houses swarm the pages of the book. This space taken up by Bama makes the reader gain insight into the daily routine affairs of a Dalit life which shows their affairs to be as normal as ours. Someone is short tempered, the other is cooking, an aunty is grinding some exotic *masala*, Murugun is dark skinned but the friend is white, a girl is crying to swim in the well and the woman is chasing her cows. Through this detailed painting, Bama not only helps the dominant ideologies peep into the everyday life of the Dalits but the emotions of love, fight, anger, jealous are given a Dalit point of view.

Bama discusses her twenty-five years old neighbour whose nick name is Kaaman. He is always called so even when his real name is Maria- Lourdes. Kaaman does not have any work, however, he never refuses any one for doing their work. His nick name means 'jack of all trades' and he justifies it. Then one day suddenly he gets a job, and there are a lot of other regular and interesting thing about him. Bama claims that one can write an entire book on him, making him as normal or strange as anyone. This asserts that the Dalits do not have to be brought to the mainstream, rather they are already present there.

Bama narrates the tale of Nallathangaal. Nallathangaal and his elder brother lost their parents quite early in their life. The brother looked after her younger sister very well and married her in Maanaamarutai. Soon after the sister's wedding, the brother married himself but his wife was not a good woman. Nallathangaal bore seven children after her marriage and at the birth of each child, she used to write a letter to her brother describing her troubles. But her sister-in-law never let the letters reach to her brother. One terrible day, Maanaamarutai got hit by a severe famine and now the loving brother himself went to rescue her sister and her children from the disaster. On returning to his village, the brother

asked her sister to go to his house and he himself went to the market to get some goods. On seeing the younger sister returning, the brother's wife closed the doors on her. When the door did not even open after knocking several times, Nallathangaal claimed that doors will open to prove her chastity. The door did open and the hungry children on entering the house pounced on everything they could find to eat. Seeing the pitiable condition of her children and the scornful attitude of her sister-in-law, Nallathangaal decided to commit suicide after killing her children. She brought the children out of the house and one by one started throwing them into the well, the little one tried to escape to a shepherd standing nearby. However, Nallathangaal caught hold of him and after throwing him into the well, drowned herself. The brother when got to know the incident from the shepherd, threw his wife into the burning kiln. Then he made the idols of her sister and her seven children, placed them on a shrine near the well along with the statue of the same shepherd and died himself. Till today, they all stand there in that temple. This episode discusses several facts about the Dalit community and identity.

It first summons the famous Tamil epic, Ilanko Atikal's *Cilappatikaram*. The epic narrates the story of a chaste wife Kannaki, who through the power of her chastity turns into an avenging goddess and purges a city from all the sins. The renowned king Cenkuttuvan installs the stone for the goddess Kannaki and institutionalises her cult. The story of Kannaki is set in contrast to the tale of Nallathangaal. The chaste woman of the Brahmin origin is transformed into a goddess by the gods themselves. Kannaki, is taken up into the heaven in front of the people. She is revered by all but Bama herself sarcastically writes that people do not even know if the tale of Nallathangaal is real thereby questioning the Brahmin spaces which deny the Dalit cultural structures.

The tale definitely is an instance of the Dalit economic tragedy. If the brother had sufficient resources, the accident would not have happened. It also brings out the third

misfortune that the Dalit body has to go through in this incident. This is the body of Dalit women. The sister-in-law is also a victim of the caste oppression. They do not have the money to feed her husband's sister along with the seven children. The financial crunch justifies her behaviour. Nevertheless, it is Nallathangaal's body which becomes the site of caste cruelty. Both the women become objects of the Dalit circumstances. They meet the harsh truth of the Dalit existence.

This incident also marks a stark beginning of the understanding of the concept of untouchability in the little girl, Bama. Such exposure to consciousness is also narrated by Ismat Chughtai in her famous short story, "Touch-Me-Not". Chughtai, in fact, shows how the courage of an lower class woman can instil the awareness of gendered roles in a little upper-class girl.

"Touch-Me-Not" is a story about the impact that stereotyping of gender roles have on a woman's sense of individuality. It deals with a woman suffering because of the version of patriarchal margins that are prescriptive and prejudiced. But Chughtai also shows how women can shatter the cast of gender stereotypes of their self. There are four women figures working in the narrative. Bhabhijaan, is born and brought up in the conventional patriarchal set-up where a husband is the head of the family and the wife is the subordinate. She is born to be humble and submissive towards her husband. Married in the defined space of a rich Muslim family, she has to embellish herself and follow certain decorum. Firmly located within a patriarchal context, her husband's desire and the requirement for a male child burdens her with repeated failed pregnancies and the final miscarriage ultimately denies every kind of identity and existence to her. Bi Mughlani represents the women in whom the power of the normative codes are permeated and rooted in the subconscious and the conscious self. They are not only the models of self-effacement and self-denial but become complicit in the victimization of another woman. The narrator of the story, who is

also the third woman figure, is a young girl through whom the reader not only interrogates patriarchal authority but also peeps into the determined surrender of women to it. The story hints at the beginnings of such a consciousness in her. Through her comments, the story asserts that the self-image of women has to modify from one of vulnerability to the critical examination of their subjectivity. An image of a tough, bright, meticulous, and ready to take on tasks woman, coming from a poor background emerges in the story through the pregnant peasant woman. She redefines the gender roles. She discards the patriarchal hypothesis and fractures the cast of domestic space by taking on the customary masculine role of being the provider rather than a receiver. She is self-assured and does not cry in self-pity, rather bravely gives birth to her child in the open boggy of a fast running train. Her critical assessment of the patriarchal system materializes from her lived experience. The story also hints of the class stratification within the women issue. It points to the fissures within the women issue. It seems to take a leap towards the formulation of a feminism that would be truly third world and not one that is limited to the dominant sections. The problems tackled here have moved outside the borders of household aggression and detention of middle class women anger against patriarchy. An autonomous space is seen budding where the welfare of women of diverse ethnicities are existing together.

Bama comprehends the most violent actuality of her life when she is in third class. She has been experiencing untouchability in various forms but yet has to know the term. She is going to her school, the walk from her home to school is hardly ten minutes, but because of watching various 'oddities', it took her half an hour. Bama is witty in using the term 'oddities' to enlist her daily sights. By doing so she questions the readers if Pongal offerings, merry go round, performing monkeys can be termed as oddities.

The displayed oddities of the lower-class' markets work as objects of curiosity. This episode ensures lower-caste slavery by highlighting the concept of the construction of

the other which seems to result from the mixed urge of exploring and exploiting the unknown. However, we can say that Bama uses regular things to present the other in an unusual different manner for and by an upper-caste eye. Every Indian has grown up seeing these sights then, how all of a sudden, these activities be regarded to be a part of one particular caste. These performances of the open space are inseparable from the Indian past that is now moving into ghettos. It is quite clear then, that being shudra is a state and not a caste as such. Amusingly, amidst these oddities, Bama places the campaigns of various political parties trying to get the votes of these lower caste people. She highlights the dubiousness working in the discrimination practices.

Bama writes that her enlightenment began from this day. Immanuel Kant in an answer to the question 'What is Enlightenment?' suggests that the valour to use our own comprehension is enlightenment. The most significant aspect, according to Kant, is that our understanding, familiarity and ruling should assist us in conquering our immaturity and thus converting our surroundings into meanings. To desire this enlightenment, is to accept the fact that we reason out everything we confront. It hones our understanding of our own-self and the reality we face in daily routine. It also improves our humanitarian understanding of fellow beings.

Bama notices an elderly man of her caste and street walking with an oil- stained small packet. The man was holding the packet with its string and trying his best to avoid touching it. The man then politely handed over the packet to a Naicker who began eating from it the moment he got it. Bama first bursts into laughter seeing the way the man was handling the packet. All laughing, she narrates the episode to her brother and soon the laughter changes into annoyance because her brother reveals her the concept of untouchability practiced by the upper-caste Naicker against the Parayas. The Naickers will not let Parayas touch them or their food and that is why elderly man was carrying the packet

in that odd way. The incident plays an important role in producing the 'other' in respect to the normative Naicker. The 'other' who is the negative- other. It exists only in relation to the positive 'self' and therefore has to be ruled.

Markets scenes are the source to know the traditional as well as the popular culture of a place. Hence, for the high-caste readers they become the assembly point of the reflection of their existing wants and desires, and for the lower-caste reader, the unfulfilled wants and desires which can be questioned by the reader.

Bama inscribes many such occasions when the elders of her community are badly exploited by the Naicker class. Her elders treat even the Naickers' children with respect but these children call them by their names. The left-over that Naickers give to the lower-caste is considered as god's nectar by the elders of her community. Bama questions such disgraceful acceptance but her grandmother's answer highlights the materialistic obstacles encountered by the untouchables. She tells Bama that they can not survive without the alms given by the upper-caste. The dialogue articulates those silences which have browbeaten the Dalits since a long time. The conversation does not only show the Dalit within a realistic situation but also highlights the fractures. The fracture of Dalit acceptance of subjugation. However, Bama is intelligent enough to place this conversation outside the historical realm as by questioning the grandmother, she defies the usual Dalit feature of being all accepting.

The Dalit-self of Bama experiences a desire to fight against these dominant affairs and her brother shows her the first tool to start her struggle with. It is education, he recounts many lived occasions to show the strength of education. It has helped him carve out his self in the cast of fearlessness. It can help them live with equal dignity. He strongly asserts the significance of education to break free of unawareness. The Dalits have to

believe in their own self-worth and if they do that then transcending their streets will not be difficult.

Through education, the Dalits can build a healthier life for themselves and gain self-respect. From that day, Bama studies hard and stands first in her class. She here uses the device of first person narrative as a powerful tool. This device does not merely establish a sense of identification with Bama as contemporary as well as modern and post modern readers but also helps to undergo the pain and misery of the suppressed Bama, the educated girl who has to bear the inhuman atrocities of the dominant caste ideologies. Every insult that Bama has to experience transforms her body and gives a sight of that dominated land whose every inch of rooted traditions, conventions, rituals, thoughts, feelings and understanding is chained by the burden of raising its consciousness to the realization of its savagery and in turn, the need to civilize it.

She also points out the fact of violence that the Dalits like her have to face to obtain the basic right to education. When anything goes wrong in the class, Dalits are held in suspicion. The warden of her hostel reprimands them even when they are not at fault. She renders them unfit to race with the high-caste. Bama remembers the pain of being singled out as the first Dalit ever to get the best score. There is a strong upper-caste resistance to the Dalit education. Bama is also accused of theft and even the priest does not spare her from the hurt of her lower-caste status. Nevertheless, it is education which makes her see the discrimination and speak the truth, “We too paid our fees like everyone, yet... “ (20).

Bama learns the ways to answer back. She boldly carves out to be an individual who is not an extension of a Dalit male. Even the Dalit discourse of gender power refuses to include women voices. This comes well through the nuns whom Bama meets at her job after the completion of her studies. Like the Naickers these nuns are insulting towards Bama, they do not grant the female Dalit self any independence and agency. They suppress

both the Dalit teachers and the students. But Bama refuses to accept this subjugation and emerges out to be the favourite teacher of her students. She also takes stand against the authorities for their injustice.

There are now a handful of days for Bama to become a full-fledge nun but in one of her lectures, she is informed by her teacher-Sister that they do not consider *harijan* women to be prospective nuns, marking the unequal status that religion gives to Dalits. The religious norms are used to ostracise the lower-castes, "... we have a separate order ... " (25) for *harijan* women to become nuns. The Dalit women's powerlessness in terms of social, political and economic reality is the result of prejudices sanctioned by religion. Bama exposes these religious discriminations.

Bama constantly presents the Dalit self through the images of animals, for instance, she counters the nuns saying that she is not a cobra. Bama humanises the Dalits self through this tool of animal imagery as every instance reflects the Dalits to be more human than the upper-castes. On the one hand, the animal body used by the Dalit writer is to represent vigour and intelligence and on the other hand, the Dalit mind of Bama comes out to be critical and rational. She promises to bring a change where everyone is equally treated.

Bama also talks about the inter-caste troubles. There is a massive inter-caste fight between the Pallar and the Parayar. They both want to kill each other because of a ripe banana. It surfaces the truth of a strong self existing inside the body of the Dalit. The Dalit experiences inferiority complex and lack of courage only in front of the upper castes. The internalization of a negative self-image and the ensuing weakness is enacted only in front of the high castes but the same bowing self does not agree to the perspective of the other like him. This definitely shows that the self and the other are not permanent and constant identities. It still remains a fact that knowledge is power but this account of Dalit via a Dalit

gaze will open up the route to think if these fights are the symbol of hopeless, irrational, depraved, decadent, inhuman man or may be implying that Dalit has the power to save the dignity of his existence.

Bama regrets that they never had anything recreational to spend their free time, all they did was to keep repeating their monotonous activities. Among these dull daily task, Bama enlists a performance of married life by these children. They pick a special situation of a drunk husband returning home and beating up his wife. However, he is not spared for his act as police come and beat him up. This brings out the hidden reality of a helpless Dalit woman. The statement symbolically speaks of her a dependent housewife. The Dalit men tortures his wife the same way as he is in the web of power relations.

Bama further elucidated the never ending poignancy of the life of a Dalit woman. They fight the toughest battles, the battles of seclusion with-in their own caste also. The lower caste grown up girls are not allowed to play on the streets. It is doubly hard for them to set free from the orthodox, valueless standards and imprisonment of isolation because of the fear of the society. Their economic condition do not permit them to immerse themselves in the sanctioned pastimes of a girl however, like the grandmother understanding the left-over to be the nectar of the gods, lower caste strictly adhere to the restrictions of the upper caste patriarchy.

This also reveals that Bama is not only speaking from the base of authority. Her licence to comment comes from the lived reality. Bama presents a range of incidents to compare the boundaries of the two genders of their community, where the boys are free to run and laugh, the girls of her society make themselves content with the gossips at the water taps.

She writes about Uudan, one of her community member beating his wife daily near the community hall like an animal, "... as if she were an animal ..." (61). As discussed

Bama has abundantly used the animal images to bring out the Dalit experience, nonetheless, this incident of Uudan treating his wife equal to an animal dismantles the theory of Dalit community existing as a whole. Uudan never wanted to marry this woman who is his wife now, he was forced to do so by her father and uncles. Bama through Uudan presents the stark reality of diversity. Uudan could play flute very well and he also enrolls himself in a school at an elderly age. Ironically, in doing so he is satirised by his own wife.

There is another incident where a man named Pavulu used to sing well. He and his son used to perform, dance and earn money with a women's troupe. The two instances create a space for multi-sensory experiences and also show that homogenizing women and forcing them to strictly hold to the doctrines of being a conventional feminist can be a self-defeating task. This can also be seen in relation to Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.

The novel is a story of an Indian middle-class woman, Jaya. She is an educated wife. As the novel opens we find Jaya analysing her life. This life has chained her into the patriarchal ordained roles of a wife and mother. She has spent her life fulfilling the wants and needs of her husband. One sudden day, Jaya starts feeling curbed by these roles and finally comes out of the confines of patriarchy finding a self existing in opposition to the roles of wife and mother. She affirms that she will not let this self be wounded, however, she does not leave her prescribed duties. She could never gather the courage to see life outside the structure of marriage, even when she decodes her individuality.

This is something that Bama negates in the picturisation of Uudan's wife rebuking him and women troupe performing with a man to earn money. The entire point of feminism, she argues is for a woman to be free, to be who she is and who she wants to be, thereby, also differentiating between women's and feminist writings.

M.K. Gandhi in "Ethical Religion" gives details about the laws of ethics. He says that whether one follows a religion or not, one has to adhere to the laws of ethics to be

good to himself and others. He also questions the features of ethics. He says that ethics help an individual to act in accordance to right and wrong. This right and wrong can be understood through the co-existence of the present existing self and what it ideally should be.

Bama shows how even the religious authorities fail to achieve this. The entire village after the festivities of *Pusai*, goes to the priest of the church with big offerings. However, these people return dejected at the merciless behaviour of the priest who does not share anything from the offerings. He just makes a mark on their forehead. They also have to give offerings to the Mother Superior. She is equally revered by the people of Bama's community. Nevertheless, she not only imitates the priest but also rebukes them for not bringing bags to carry the gifts. The disheartened people are shown to discuss these insults. Communication among people is necessary to strengthen a society. Bama also understands the truth of the Dalit's depravity.

Bama secures a good score in the public examination of eleventh year. But her parents do not want her to study further because of two reasons. One is the financial crunch and the second reason is that it is hard to find a match for an educated girl in their community. Ironically, we see in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* that the middle-class woman Sujata is made to study to get a good groom. However, education plays an important role in unchaining Sujata from the bondages. Bama starkly highlights the difference between the two women. Yet, it is not wrong to say that whether education or no education, both are the ways of patriarchy to chain women.

However, Bama is sure to study further.

Noor Zaheer in *My God is a Woman* brings out the invaluable role of education in women's liberty. Safia is a Muslim girl who is always kept secluded in the veil of *pardah*. However, admission in Allahabad University channelizes the hidden store of

Safia's energies. The courageous spirit of individuality chained by the *purdah* gets a chance to breathe and do wonders through education. She comes across various opportunities to further strengthen her mind, for instance she attends many seminars on progressive and women writers. However, like Bama, she also faces hard struggles in the form of people like Sadaqat Rehmani who are strict believers of women inferior. He is sure that even education can not uplift women as they lack the natural capability of understanding. However, Safai dismisses such false claims by making him aware of different achievements that women are claiming. Education not only helps her to understand the true meaning of equality and liberty but also helps her attain it.

Once enrolled in the Allahabad University, Safai never looks back. She not only refuses to submit to patriarchal dominations but also throw away the deep rooted patriarchal norms.

Bama also has the full realisation of the potential of education, though she states the problems her parents had to face sending her to the college. After finishing her public examinations she along with her mother once goes to meet the nun who taught her. The nun on the onset, expresses her concern and sympathies on the financial crunch of Bama's parents but then instead of helping them, asks her mother to sell her earrings for Bama's education.

The nun becomes the face of the same upper caste people who try to subjugate Bama and her community. Even on being refused to study further by her parents, she fights for her right. She does not have the right social accessories for the college, yet Bama is not embarrassed at any point in time. She confidently takes admission in the college and walks to the class in her ragged clothes.

Bama has the discerning consciousness of born equal. This societal knowledge or rather the understanding of the grim reality of the anti-woman society, along with her

will power, helps her act like a karukku and she releases herself from the roasting enclosures of patriarchy. Bama faces horrible experiences of depravity. She being teased by the upper-caste because of her tattered clothes and satirised for not having a silk sari for the College Day yet. she successfully completes her B.Ed. and takes a sharp step to cut through the hardships and subjugation.

Bama exposes the sham of the nun convent. The nun convents are understood to be the recluse of everyone who is deprived according to the 'normative' codes of wealth, caste, gender. But on entering the convent Bama gets to see a completely different reality. She sees that, instead of practicing equality between different classes and castes, the authorities are just concerned about the children of the wealthy people. The church, that has been asking for big offerings all over these years from the poor people of Bama's community, is flowing with all kinds of luxuries.

Bama feels cheated in two ways; one because her people have been fooled since years and second, the convent does not fulfil the promise of taking care of deprived people and children. Like the Brahmin codes, the church also applies the Christian ethics on the untouchables. In midst of this chaos, Bama describes a young girl who is conscious of this suppressed state. The girl chooses to be exploited at her home rather here in the convent, that is, she opts for the conventional ways that subjugate women. She knows where she comes from and what is expected out of her. Bama is wonderful expressing these falsities present in the garbs of religion. By doing so she highlights a common face lurking behind every religion.

Noor Zaher in *My God is a Woman* talks about the repercussions of the *pardah* system working in Islam- the Muslim religion.

In a Muslim society women have always been kept in *pardah* believing that it is a protection against the unwanted attention from unknown men thereby keeping them

safe from sexual harassment. However, the irony is that this *pardah* between men and women gradually becomes a device to segregate them and ensure the continuation of the subordinated role assigned to women as it confines the entire world of women to *aangan* or courtyard. In the guise of protecting women from the dangers of the outside world, the *pardah* serves as a cover to prevent the light of enlightenment and learning from entering into their mind. It secludes women from the experience which is derived through the exposure to the outside world.

The reality of the convent takes Bama to a nostalgic travelogue. Travel is departure from one place to another, going from place to place. It is a movement from one space to a new one and in the process of going from one place to another Bama charts huge gaps between what she has seen and what was taught to her by the Church. She remembers coming consistently first in the test of Christian scriptures. On one such occasion, the priest gave her a five paisa coin and Bama was overwhelmed to the limit of heaven. She wanted to show the coin as the symbol of some big achievement. Her trip is a measurement of ideological spatial dialogue. Ironically, the same prejudices have been voiced by William Blake.

William Blake wrote "The Little Black Boy" (1787) when the Christian missionaries started to teach their gospels to the blacks. The poem is an effort to free the country from racial prejudices. The innocent black boy is a victim of society's racial discrimination. The black child sits underneath a tree with his mother who gives him hope of being loved by both the God and the white boy one day. Blake in the poem attacks the institutionalized Christianity, those Christian missionaries who try to justify their own cruelties based on racial discrimination by defining them as a form of love inflicted upon poor black people by the God (69-70).

Blake in an another poem “The Lamb” talks about how Christianity is an all-embracing force in this world giving hope, leading to joy, protecting the children against viciousness. Yet, the lamb is vulnerable and can be easily devoured by lion, symbolised by the priest of the churches (64).

Such stories are also weaved to Bama and her people. If they dare to do anything against the dictates of the church preached by the nuns and the priests there, then the Devil will enlist their name and show it to the God. These false tails have strongly chained the people of her community in fear. In order to avoid entering into the bad books of the Devil, they can do everything, good and demeaning told by the sisters and the priest. In the name of the God, the nuns and the priest unleashes physical abuses also. If anyone dares to commit any mistake, he ends up getting being knocked by the church authorities. Bama, is once knocked very hard on the forehead for forgetting a line of the prayer. It is a custom being slapped by the priest on the day of confirmation service. Bama now laughs recollecting such events. Thus one can say this trip or nostalgic travel is a kind of metaphorical journey with a symbolic significance that defines the writer’s view and relationship to the existing and the new spaces.

The will to knowledge is at times tied up with the will to power. Bama clearly reads the nuns’ and the priests’ exploitation of the knowledge of the caste discrimination as a necessary constituent for subjugation. They fill each moment of the lower caste life with their preaching and activities. Morning prayers, the way to eat, what to say, how to sleep, the right books to read, everything is monitored in the life of the lower-caste people, “Everything became a matter of routine drudgery” (102). But deception could not work on Bama for a long time. Every lack paves a way of hope and Bama questions the lack of a direct communication channel with the God. She realises that the God can be met through

inner peace and nature. This realisation fails the teachings of the nuns and the priests and for a brief period she gives away the desire to be a nun.

Bama has already explained the important role of education in the life of the Dalit women, but this very education coming from the authority is revealed to be flawed. Bama joins a boarding school which works for destitute children, however, she soon comes across the fact that instead of knowing about the world, the Dalit children get to learn about their lacks. They are taught that the Dalit-self can never overcome these lacks.

Mills and Gale in “Researching Social Inequalities in Education: Towards a Bourdieuan Methodology” give a detail explanation of the same. They say that education is a repertoire of comprehending life. However, the values that this repertoire contains are announced by one particular class. By class, they mean a group propounding a particular set of ideas. Bama overcomes such education by understanding the importance of lived and floating experiences.

Bama starts reading the scriptures carefully. They give her the understanding of a loving God, who never oppresses rather cares for the oppressed. She realises that they have been listening to a false God, created by the priest and nuns who are selfish, materialistic, corrupt, pessimistic, and restrict the desires of the poor. The noble God advocates selflessness, humanitarian spirit, meekness, kindness, innocence and tenderness.

Stuck in the world of hatred, Bama begins reading various women writers. She understands that progression can be achieved only by inculcating the values of kindness, imagination, humanitarian love and passion. These values give you strength to fight against every kind of oppression. They give you the awareness required to defeat the false reasoning of the nuns and the priests, and strength to forge a new world of self respect.

Bama’s condition also summons Derek Walcott’s “Names” and “The Sea is History”. In the first poem, he rebukes the colonised for being indifferent in recording their

history and then in the second, ironically questions and reprimand the coloniser for taking advantage of this inexperience (108-9, 111-3). The convent authorities did the same with Bama's community. Bama emerges into the symbol of the purging rage of the Christ by breaking the chain of thoughts imposed by the convent authorities to forge a meaningful humanitarian world.

The tribulations are not only limited to the world of convent. Bama finally leaves the convent, and enters into a new world. This world is different from the earlier two, the world of her divided streets and the world of the high-caste convent. Nonetheless, the difference is only in the terms of new geography. Bama gets a call for an interview and she answers it. This is a call from a school by high-caste Nadars. In this expensive world, they offer her four hundred rupees leaving Bama with no other option but to leave the job. She discovers the other practiced ways of secluding her community. Being a woman she faces other problems also, if in her world women are subjugated by the household work, in this, "... all sorts of men gather around her ..." (119).

This world makes Bama understand the importance of will and physical strength. No one to depend on, Bama has to handle everything on her own.

After Bama becomes a nun, the Provincial troubles her a lot. She is forced to transfer from one place to another. And where ever she goes, she faces her old enemy, discrimination. If one place is not ready to accept her as a teacher because of her caste, the second is not ready to talk to her because of the same reason. Finally, she decides to run away forever. However, it is not an escape but a beginning of "... a life that is useful to society" (131).

Bama finally asserts the importance of both love and experience. One should have the experience and reasoning to be aware of the evil and corrupt forces enclosing the selves but there should also be a heart which can stand for everyone, appreciating the truth

of individuality. Bama "... stands firm with a fierce anger that wants to break down everything that obstructs the creation of an equal and just society..." (138). A Dalit woman on her own will, understanding and strength, is sure to fulfil her resolution.

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Chapter 2

Awakening: Women's Journey Beyond the Boxes of Packaged Images

Foreword

What does one do with the seething desire which obstinately refuses to go away? It is the desire of a mother in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*, to understand the reason of her son's sudden death. It is also the desire of autonomy of mobility of an orphan girl, Muskaan in Nabina Das's *Footprint in the Bajra* who is brought up by the leader of a Naxalite group. This heaving desire creates spaces. These spaces, in turn, leave Sujata, Muskaan and the readers with time to explore the blank spaces between the inner and the outer world, between the peripheries and the centre by individually intervening in the establishments of the patriarchal society.

Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*

Mahasweta Devi in a firm structure of exposition, development, reversal and denouncement writes Sujata confronting the ultimate realities of time, death and isolation in *Mother of 1084*. *Mother of 1084* is a work which is not devoid of historical and social context yet it begins by showing women as cosmic orphans, "Dibyanath never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time" (3). There are images of entropy in which Sujata is slowly but inexorably running down.

The novel begins in a dream, taking the reader into a journey along with Sujata. We together pass through a dark tunnel to a bright, "... morning of twenty two years ago" (1). Often Sujata lurks into this morning. This is a different land, but of reality where there is a strong existence of time and private history running parallel. Sujata, pregnant with her child Brati, is packing her bag and then suddenly we are informed that she is fifty-three at

present. The past comes into the present private consciousness, there is a constant shift from time to timelessness and again time. The shift makes visible the impossibility to accumulate those twenty-two years into the ill-fitting compartments of time. This sudden realisation of the passage of the twenty-two years of lived life through the masculine measurements of time also highlights a space where the reconstruction of her inner experiences has begun happening out of the mechanical time. In the same dream we see Sujata writhing in pain and she, "...clamped her teeth on her lips to check the cry, the Sujata of the dreams waiting for Brati to be born" (1). This shows Sujata travelling beyond the limits of her mind to a place where there are no borders. A place that gives her opportunity to observe and understand the truth by connecting and recovering all those moments which she has carried in her mind for years as reality.

Placed in the coalescing of mechanical time and societal mechanism, Sujata is witnessed a cog rather than an individual. Like most of the Indian girls, Sujata was born and brought up in the patriarchal set-up in which a father is the head of the family, the bread-earner who lays down the rules and the code of conduct in the family; the mother and the children are dependent financially and emotionally on the father. Sujata was made to do her graduation but only as a part of her marriage preparation. The woman of the house always at the end has to be subordinated as she is understood to be the inferior sex and Sujata had a no different destiny. She was born to be humble and submissive as she had to serve her husband whether by confining herself to the kitchen or taking up a job to substitute the loss of her husband's two important accounts. Even when she was working, she had to follow decorum and behave like a woman in society. She had to learn to listen and accept whatever her mother-in-law said, satisfying her ego. She initially goes on waiting for what will never come but, "When she saw her husband in the bed beside her, her long brows twitched into a frown. Why should her husband be in the bed next to hers? She shook her head" (4),

declining into old age and serenity which has made her helpless and dependent. She has been living in a reality constructed by others.

The class location of her family in the hierarchical social structure ascends to higher reaches, where there is a tension of conflicting values between the conventional firm structure and changing requirements for social stability. Sujata becomes the victim of this relentless warfare and routine oppression also. This violent social order initially does not let Sujata work but when Dibyanath starts too loose out on his business, Sujata is asked to work. Intriguingly, in doing so she is reduced to an actor who could not completely identify herself with the new role. For her, the hierarchical fetters of socio-economic positions could never constitute personal identity. There is an instability, a lack of fixed identity in Sujata's life that stands out in opposition to a defined way represented through a sense of institutional conformity and discipline practiced by her husband and three children, Jyoti, Neepa and Tuli. Ironically, this opposition surfaces the absence of unity that we have always understood existing behind the constructed concealment of a woman. It also shows the cultural arbitrariness of such prejudiced constructions. Jyoti, Sujata's elder son removes that telephone from Sujata's room which broke the most devastating news of Brati, Sujata's beloved younger son's death. Sujata did not stop Jyoti but found it funny which humorously comments on the emptiness of the house, "Sujata knew very well that nothing like that would ever happen in the house again. And that was why she found funny that Jyoti should have the telephone removed to his home" (8). She knew very well that there will never be such calls again, no one will be Brati again in the house, a paradoxical symbol of change and stability and she also knew that no one will be ever able to wipe Brati from her body and mind as "... Dibyanath had wiped away" (8). This event in its multiplicity serves as an indicator of indirectly saying and functioning as the representation of the essential textuality of the collective consciousness which is morally male oriented.

This upsurge of domination starts torturing Sujata when her family tries to put her back into the normative life after the traumatic death of her son Brati. Amidst all the torture, what was fascinating for Sujata was one of the most beautiful things to happen in life, that is, the creation of the bond of unconditional love between her and her youngest son Brati. He was the only one who used to miss Sujata when she was out for work, “Ma, don’t go to office today, just this one day, why can’t you stay with me” (10)? Triggering had already happened before the death of Brati but a new consciousness begins to emerge when Sujata starts reading Brati’s consciousness after seeing her son’s name in the long list of people who were declared dead.

Brati’s death becomes a centre which leads Sujata towards self-knowledge, “... may be indirectly, she had been responsible for the killing of Brati” (15). “The questions remained: Was Brati’s death futile” (20)? Being the most emotionally connected to Brati, his death leaves space and time for Sujata to explore the bare spaces between him and the world and thus to intrude in the structures of his meanings. His death marks a voyage for Sujata into many consciousnesses and helps her unearth their various facets comfortably seated in them. They are different people, of various professions, gender, age and class. A closer analysis reveals that whereas women at Dibyanath’s house are supposed to be the carriers of cultural norms, Sujata’s indescribable pause after Brati’s killing subverts and inverts the laid social order. Her brief suspense lays bare the power politics in the patriarchal family structure, rejects all forms of authority and the stereotypical notion of women practiced at Dibyanath’s place. It offers an alternate vision of perception. Devi through Sujata questions and re-examines the modes of perception proffered to the reader which are governed by patriarchal dominance. She does so by imposing the shape of a story onto the recording of a family. The minds of the main characters of this story are

accessible to the readers through Sujata. But the minds are neither read by Sujata as a complete outsider nor an insider, she dissects them and her knife lies outside.

Soon after the novel opens, the fifty-three years old Sujata is seen remembering re-evaluating her life and relationship with Dibyanath. It is almost two decades back that Sujata wanted to break free from her troubled marriage and the life after it. She definitely did not have the courage to announce divorce but after the birth of her third child Tuli, she tried to protest against her bent towards acceptance and passivity. She was sure she will not yield to her husband's part of the definition of a wife: to produce children. But the internalization of the patriarchal values was strong enough to make her grow to be her own jail and she conceived Brati six years after Tuli's birth. Sujata struggled against Dibyanath's imposed intrapersonal alienation during the nine months of her pregnancy. She could not feel herself anything more than a walking womb. It was only at the night of Sixteenth January, Nineteen forty-eight, Brati's painful delivery that Sujata could bond with her baby and there emerged a space of care. Her youngest child Brati was born with the first ray of sun on Seventeenth January, Nineteen forty-eight. This date becomes a moment of permanence in Sujata's life. It acts the locus where past, present and future become inseparable for Sujata and from here what becomes important is not the measuring of the clock time but a journey of self.

Sujata's memories of the day when Brati was born were interrupted by a flashback of the ringing telephone. The telephone also rang on Seventeenth January, eighteen years after Brati's birth. It is again Seventeenth January today, twenty years have passed, making us question that these memories and dreams are not just chance but a probing insight into the nature of Brati's death.

Two years before the day on which the novel is set, the telephone broke the news of Brati's death to Sujata. She recalls those years before Bari's death to be the "...

safest years ... (5) of her life. The restricted gender role has problematised her self-understanding by now. She doesn't have a meaningful identity and is content with the gender role of a good wife imposed by the patriarchal society. She was settled with her space restricted to the home where performing the household tasks, taking care of the children and being obedient to her husband became her only duty. She was pleased seeing her children playing the conventional roles and practicing the morals and ethics laid down by the society. The conformist order of men ruling, wooing and women obeying has been perfectly reinstated in her first three children. Her elder daughter took up the conventional role of a wife and the second has also already made her choice. The eldest son was adept in all the manly skills. Sujata wrestled hard for freedom but Dibyanath confined her again. Nevertheless, there is someone who infuriates Dibyanath. He is Brati. Dibyanath always wanted to send Brati abroad for studies but "Brati was dead" (20). "Everything seemed so well organised, orderly, neat and beautiful. And it was right then that the telephone rang" (20) and broke the news of Brati Chatterjee's death to her mother Sujata. It was a call of the complete breakdown of Sujata. Chaos overtakes her world, "... with a violence that did not fit in any pattern" (6). Sujata was called to Kantapukur. She had to identify the dead body. Dibyanath did not accompany her to identify the body as he was busy wrapping up the news of his son dying "... such a scandalous death" (7). In the fear of the discovery of Brati's disgraceful death, Dibyanath did not even allow Sujata to travel Kantapukur by his car. Sujata could not verbally confront her husband but her inarticulacy exposed the denotative and symbolic functions of language as unstable modes of communication. Her presence was asserted by her very verbal absence, "That day, with Brati's death, Brati's father had also died for Sujata. The way he had behaved that day, that moment, had shattered numberless illusions for her" (7).

Mahasweta Devi loudly reads, "... Dibyanath had wiped Brati away" (8). Brati could never die for Sujata, what made his death unreal for her was his nature of consciousness. She gradually understands that Brati's sense of self, separated him from this world. Brati was definitely a part of the corporeal world and yet, somehow, was liberated from its casual obviousness and materiality. As is explained in *Vedanta for the Western World*, in this material world of class, caste and religion one starts to recognise itself inextricably linked to all those things that he is not born with (Datta *JSTOR*). Brati was himself, he could detach his self from the other, thus not letting the other exert control over his self. Therefore, he was the only child of Sujata who could understand her becoming a victim.

Brati as a child was haunted by many fears. He is addressed to be an "imaginative child", his dreams and nightmares used to take him to the world which though offers a flight from the human world but at the same time helps to grab what goes on around him in his familiar world, "... the street performer masquerading as a bandit ..." (13). Here a child can be easily compared to a woman who is cut out from the outer world. Both live in the present and have very blurred and incomplete views of their future. They attempt to grasp the meanings of life but their conscious familiarity is too limited to make them completely comprehend what life is all about. When they read a story, a more profound significance of life is suggested to it, as these tales convey noteworthy messages to its unconscious mind. The same was happening with Sujata. Interestingly, this has been symbolically stated by Devi. During Brati's birth, Sujata was throughout experiencing severe pain, "... from consciousness to unconsciousness and back again ..." (4) and today when she is still struggling to bring the dead Brati back, it involves a movement from conscious world to the unconscious. This movement is also filled with the same pain, in fact, Devi so subtly integrates these two different phases laying at a stretch of twenty long

years that they can only be understood as pieces of total reality. In the first paragraph she is describing the labour pain experienced by Sujata on the night of Sixteenth January, nineteen forty-eight and the moment this paragraph slips into the second, there is a sudden realisation that the pain discussed is the one Sujata is experiencing because of Brati's death in her dreams. On the same page, just a couple of paragraphs after there is another kind of pain that has been described being experienced by Sujata on the same date, two years before the day of the dream. This is the pain of the, "... violence that did not fit into any pattern" (6). She was informed about Brati's death. This call knocked Sujata to question and reconceptualise Brati's self. Sujata has begun to read Brati's story, ironically this twitches her conscience and raises her self-consciousness. It is a story which was located in different time and space rather was not tied up by time or space.

Brati was soon grown up enough to perceive and comprehend the world in which he lived. He was no more afraid now as he was in his childhood. Quite early in the story, there is an awareness of difference between Brati and others in his family. He is introduced through the emotions of love that he feels towards his mother. He used to love reading books with Sujata, going to the zoo with her, spending hours with his friends. His imagination and sensitivity made him see things with a layer of unfamiliarity. He was not a blind follower but reasoned things. Sujata remembers him dissimilar to all the others in her house.

Dibyanath, Jyoti, Neepa, Tuli, Bini and Tuli's fiancé, Tony Kapadia meet us as plodding bodies placed heavily in the materiality of socio-economic space. They are represented as identities in terms of hierarchy and social relationships.

Dibyanath is a chartered accountant, he owns his own firm which has a British name. If one sees it in the framework of Indian national identity and class structure, Devi attacks the so-called new consciousness of the economically independent middle-class.

There was hunger of power hidden. Dibyanath's daily engagements for all time dealt with the issue of placing his children up in the social hierarchy. For him, patriarchal customs were more important than human emotions of love and care. Dibyanath's attitude towards Sujata had also been always unreasonable. He exploited her commitment and submissive attitude for his own mean gains. He could not even successfully rationalise his problem with Brati to constructively counsel him rather silently laid the blame on Sujata. However, if this situation is unravelled, one can see Sujata emerging stronger than Dibyanath because she makes his existence possible. Her apparent servility and inadequacy provide the crutch on which Dibyanath constantly leans in order to proclaim his sense of authority. Ironically it was Dibyanath who consciously bound their relation in an essential power relationship, nevertheless, himself falling prey to his entrap, "Dibyanath never knew that his behaviour on that day had taken him far away from Sujata, that he was dead for Sujata from that day onwards" (8).

Jyoti, representing the new generation of Dibyanath's ideals easily accepts the legacy. He is dependent on his father and works in his firm. He is also a beneficiary of his father-in-law living in Britain. His wife, Bini is pictured as attractive and willing to take on responsibilities. After the demise of Brati, she takes on the responsibility to run the house. In spite of this, she was not aspiring and never even realised the trap of gender stereotype of herself. Tuli being the daughter of the house acknowledges it as her natural liability to look after her family and eventually conforms herself to the image of a meek woman who effortlessly accepts boy's advances and slams out her sense of self-respect. She is strongly lured towards normative companionship disclosing the power of normative system on women. She behaves like her grandmother in the house, in effect she is Dibyanath's favourite. She knows her father visits women and even indirectly tells her. Like her grandmother in the fear of losing the support of the male-protector, she becomes a partner

in the victimisation of her own mother to an extent that she honestly takes all the messages of these women for her father in his absence. Bini and Tuli never tried to delineate their individuality, they are the submissive recipients of the paradigm that patriarchy has envisioned for them. They could never see their bondage through the delusion of love, blissful domesticity and social security.

Neepa in contrast to them desire for a kind of agency, she does not accept duties or responsibilities. She has an extra-marital affair with Balai. He is a womanizer who did not even spare his own aunt from making her a pray of his lust. Neepa and Balai's relation is known to everyone and never revolted by anyone. In this relationship, Balai presents the image of a middle-class man steeped in backward patriarchal values. The girl, Neepa on the other hand projects two different positions. Neepa openly flirts with Balai without being concerned about her husband or family. She doesn't share the bedroom with her husband rather has her room on the different floor beside Balai's. The husband and the son sleep in his bedroom. This reads that Neepa uses her charm to meet her physical needs thereby challenging patriarchal codes. She at least complicates and destabilises the understanding of woman as a victim through her wilful participation in this relationship. On the other hand, she can also be seen as the woman who crosses certain gender restrictions yet remains firmly rooted in gender nexus of hunter and prey.

The two son-in-laws of the house are also placed well in the hierarchical structures of human relationships. Amit, Neepa's husband is a custom officer who powerfully believes in maintaining social dignity at any cost. He accepts Neepa and Balai's relationship and never confronts them. Nevertheless, his inaction towards Neepa also hints at his self-centeredness and lack of sensitivity towards a wife. Tony, Tuli's fiancé is a mother's boy, well-educated and cultured exporter. He has high contacts and rich parents. He is the one who through his high contacts helps Dibyanath to hush up the news of Brati's

disgraceful death. Together, Dibyanath's family apart from Brati makes an ideal image of a perfect family.

Nevertheless, Brati could notice that this family was fraught with various problems. He could read the stereotypes working in his family. He could see the family fragmented on the lines of class and gender. He was the only one who could see Sujata's prison, comprehend her exploitation and see a sense of faith developing into faithlessness. Brati loved only his mother, she was his favourite person, and his mother was loved only by him, "Even in his childhood Brati had become aware of Sujata's intense loneliness and would console her- Ma, I'm going to put you inside a glass house once I grow up. A house built of magic glass, Ma, where you can see everyone and no one can see you" (98). As a child, he understood his father's rudeness, abuse and injustice towards his mother. He could realise his father could get away with such insults only because his Sujata did not protest. At that time he even did not have the courage to protest against his father yet he was anguished and started questioning this eternal question of exploitation and oppressive existence. This anguish and questioning led him to encompass other discriminated groups also. These people were different from his family and the differences were not only of money and power but also of unity and love. They celebrated a sense of unity and together were fighting against the corrupt forces of society to survive. They were solving their problems themselves. The more Brati drew towards them, the more he got drifted away from his mother. Sujata could feel the distance, she could notice Brati becoming a stranger to her but she never grasped the depth of that distance and therefore she could not understand his death. Sujata's understanding of Brati's death becomes a voyage which reveals the deepest truth about Brati, her life and the society she has accepted to be a part of her identity.

Devi divides this journey from darkness to truth into four parts. These four parts are the four *pahar* of a day: morning, afternoon, late afternoon and evening. The same day on which Brati had died two years ago, the day on which he was born.

Morning:

Dibyanath fails to acknowledge the existence of other. He silences them and make them invisible. He represents the powerful section of the society that has caste based biases and pre-conceived misconceptions about both women and low-class people. This section is constructed within the forms of lands that can not be technically understood as homes. They perceive them as uncultured, feckless and ugly. Dibyanath could never even understand them as humans, forget about respecting them. He treated his wife Sujata as a body with which he could cohabit to satisfy his carnal lust and produce children to add on to the number of the black sheep breathing in his powerful section of the society. As Sujata was a mere body to him, it was never difficult for him to have open illicit relationships on being refused by her. The women working with him became easy targets of his mechanisations. He used his economic power to exploit women outside marriage. Brati's acknowledgment of the same marginalisation and more so practiced by his own father made it difficult for Dibyanath to ignore him. Brati refuses to accept and live by this truth, unlike his other siblings. This silent un-acceptance led to alienation between Brati and Dibyanath and Brati's unconventional death gave crooked, cunning mind of Dibyanath the opportunity to murder his dark reality that Brati had spoken aloud of. His murder gave Dibyanath the occasion to cripple the truth once again and to put on the mask of the civilised section to remain away from the deepest truths of inhumanity. He not only like many others of his dominant class used his social and economic power to transparently subvert the procedure of jurisprudence to assure his supremacy over the marginal but also tried to efface Brati's self from his house, he was, "... still trying to wipe Brati out, even after his death" (9). He

shifted his picture, shoes to the second floor and no one in the house including Bini objected to it. Bini was the one who supposedly had a bond with Brati stronger than his own sisters. Sujata was too shocked to discover Bini's submissiveness to Dibyanath's order and she leaves the house for the bank remembering Brati and then his dead body.

Sujata was asked to identify his body, the body of the person who was the only one to miss her in her absence and cry for her. He was the only one for whom Sujata was a part of his existence, probably his only existence. He assured her of her being, "Ma don't go to office today, just this one day, why can't you stay with me" (10). Sujata was not allowed to see Brati's face, it was deformed badly. It was hammered by a sharp weapon. She was asked to identify his body through identification marks but she wanted to see Brati as that was the last time she could have seen him. The horrible mutilation of Brati's body results in a kind of self-awakening. She walks out of the morgue of the police station, broken in body but with a tough spirit of questioning. It was as if the blunt edge of the sharp heavy weapon had not only pierced Brati's face but also the ornamental garb of civility that Sujata has learnt to paste on her.

On reaching her office, the first person who comes to share her grief is Bhikan, the peon. He had also lost his son some years ago and Sujata had clasped Bhikan the day the news of the death of his son was broken to him. He could share her loss but not the pain. On seeing the sympathy in the eyes of Bhikan, Sujata recognizes Brati's death to be different. His death had so many questions clinging to it. She has to find the answers. She recalls Brati's love for poems about death. She starts reading his identification with death. Brati comes in her dreams reading these poems to her and then, "... the other part of the mind went on insisting that it was not a dream, it was real" (14). Devi uses this technique of blurring the distinction to juxtapose the death written in the poems that Brati read and the death Brati is reading out to her, the death that exists in her life. Brati is reading the poems

of death and, "... Sujata sat on Brati's bed, listening" (14). It takes Sujata to lands located in different time and space. It's a voyage inside her mind, and the read poems become her own experiences so that she can understand the images written in the poems as situations she is facing in her life. It helps Sujata to again acknowledge the various aspects of Brati's individuality, to gain knowledge for her own self, "Where did she fail" (15)?

She starts from calling to mind Brati's and Dibyanath's relation. They could not bear each other's presence and Dibyanath had always blamed Sujata for it. Brati had told her once that it is not Dibyanath but his value system that he hated. He did not like Dibyanath's restricted male and class point of views. He hated the culture of using the influence to rise in the socio-economic map. He did not like Dibyanath exploiting people and being a pawn to the governing ideologies. She couldn't understand Brati's explanation at that time but today can realise that her resistance accepting the truth Brati was voicing became the reason for his aloofness from her. After much deliberation, she dismisses all the reasons possible behind Brati's death. He was neither sick, nor the horoscope read it, nor was it an accident and he was definitely not involved in any criminal offense. She was sure that Brati had lost belief in the social system but then she immediately questions the same social system, she can see the fissures present in the same community. Selfish businessmen, money making capitalists, corrupt leaders, killers who adulterated food, goons who murdered openly in the name of safeguarding the state constituted Dibyanath's social system. Even on being the real criminals they were never held to be culprits by Dibyanath. His insensitive social system victimised the marginalised positions in the society, their efficiency was put to action only when a victim is poor. People who try to place their self outside the boundaries of the dominant social society can be killed by anyone, anywhere, anytime. Their killers will be honoured as martyrs for safeguarding the interest of Dibyanath's social system. However, do these killings, "... stand for a massive No" (20)?

Sujata was not convinced, she was sure that Brati's conviction, courage and adamant passion were not a 'No'. She began spending time in Brati's room, fondling his belongings. She could see Brati present there and then they would talk. At this point Sujata connects her feelings towards her dead son to the feelings of all the mothers who have lost their sons, in the same manner, engraving a bond of motherhood with them. In this identification, the difference between her and the mother of the other four boys killed with Brati strikes her. She understands that at least that day, the telephone rang in her house, unlike others. She reads the difference of privilege that some of them enjoy in this selfish society constructed by people like Dibyanath. Sujata's inquiry of dominant ways begins. Sujata answers, "No. It doesn't pain any more" (25) when Tuli checks if her appendix is still paining. Devi here draws a parallel between Sujata's appendix and wound of Brati's death. Sujata knows that one can decide to get appendix operated. But strangely a day before yesterday, the same day when two years after Sujata starts contemplating Brati's death, the doctor informs her appendix to be gangrenous which has to operate at the right time to stop it from bursting. However, being anemic, the operation was also not an easy solution for Sujata. It was not easy to accept Brati's death like any other natural death and live. Everything can not be cosmetically treated and removed. Tuli asks her about the operation. Sujata answers that she will get it operated after her marriage. There are certain things which this ornamental society can not provide remedy for.

Tuli is irritated, she has set the breakfast table, and no one has yet come down. She frustratingly questions if it is only her responsibility to first prepare the lunch and then make sure that everybody is on the table in time. Sujata remembers that this rule of eating together even when the members of this family were obligatory connected to each other was made by her mother-in-law. Tuli is equally determined to follow this law of her grandmother. They never gave people their own space and time. But Brati was the only one

who revolted against it. He revolted against the forced compliance to a rule which was dragging the ideologies which had fallen apart in this house, “Strange house! Strange discipline” (26)! One such facade was practiced by Bini also. Bini daily used to mechanically put some flowers in *thakughar*, their prayer room. This act did not stem from her reverence but was a part of the interior decoration of that room. Tuli calls it a sham, and makes Sujata interrogates her own belief in her in-law’s guru living in England. Tuli and her in-laws, Kapadia family, hold Swamiji in great reverence. Sujata speaks about belief and stresses the fact that one can not dismiss other’s faith by declaring absolute righteousness in owns beliefs. In this process, she starts looking through Brati’s faith. His faith which had challenged Dibyanath’s faith but was not selfish like the latter’s. The faith which does not permits a father to even consider his son being dead for once, “A father gets the message on the telephone and doesn’t feel for a moment the urge to rush to see his dead son” (29)! His concern is only his social reputation. He did not mourn the death of his son for even a fraction of a second. He just wanted to wrap up the news of the indecent death of his son at any cost as soon as possible. She pursues that Brati was long dead for Dibyanath and what happened on sixteenth January was just a physical death of a man who screwed up Dibyanath’s social workings, “Sujata could sense how they had put Brati into other camp from the time Brati had begun changing” (30).

Tuli and Dibyanath’s dehumanisation works like a catalyst in Sujata’s self-awakening towards the spirit of resistance and protest. The women who had learnt to accept life the way it came to her and never ever realised that she as a wife, mother and a woman had rights to question, starts looking for answers. She begins to locate the reason for the detached behaviour of the family towards Brati or towards that something which made Brati love only Sujata, a thread which kept them one against all the others in the house.

Afternoon:

Sujata leaves the house to meet Somu's mother. Somu is Brati's friend who died with Brati in the encounter. Rather Brati died saving Somu and his other friends. They all were present at Somu's home that dark night. This place is first of the colonies in West Calcutta. First the colonisers then the landlords and now the government have been ruling it. The rulers changed but the place remained always barren, the language describing this colony presents the colonial images that are both literal and sexist, "The colony spread and spread till it had swallowed up the fields ..." (33). The thirst to capture the unexplored land is vibrating in the lines. The opposition gets many votes from this area and in the anger to take revenge from the opposition and also punish the people, the elected government do not put in any effort for the betterment of the place and its people questioning the victim in this power play of the opposition and the government in the rule.

Unlike that night of killing, today everything is calm, there is no unrest, "There is no sign anywhere of the two-and-a-half years' disorder ..." (34). The shops are working smoothly, people are buying their daily groceries, there is no police, people are going to movies, there is the noise of various routine things. In spite of all the violence and terror of that night, these streets do not bear or remember the names of Somu, Brati and their other friends. Brati believed that social change can happen if one strives to work for it in his individual and collective competence. He began carving up feelings with have-nots of Somu's streets due to his own familiarity of deprivation. On that night, Brati had come to warn Somu and his friends about the violence waiting for them. This is the street where mutilation, rape murder and burning had become a routine thing, yet, Sujata realises, people refuse to leave this place. This was also now the only place where Sujata found some relief if possible for her. There was no superficiality here, even meeting for the first time as

strangers; Somu's sister had broken into tears seeing Sujata. People expressed what they felt.

Somu's sister is presented as a responsible dark skinned girl. Somu's murder and their father's consequent demise put the load of running the family and looking after her mother and siblings on her delicate but able shoulders. It is informed that in the desire to send his only son to the college, their father doesn't send her to the college, whether middle or low class the male is powerfully placed in a patriarchal family. But yet she toils like an engine to fulfil her liabilities. She undermines various myths regarding Dalit woman's incompetence. But patriarchy irrespective of talent and skills characterizes women solely on the basis of their gender and biology. Somu's mother is scared that the goons who had murdered Somu will not spare his sister.

Somu's mother cries inconsolably in front of Sujata repenting that night of the death of her son. She is an uneducated poor woman who is already a victim of exclusion based on poverty. Placed in a patriarchal setup, she has lost her only shoulder, Somu. She summons that night to Sujata, "It was your son, Didi, who came to warn them. He died for them. That night, Didi, in this little room of ours, Somu, Partha and Brati slept close to one another" (37). She further narrates how the three of them were talking and laughing lying on a torn mattress. It leaves Sujata in utter surprise. A boy, who remained so distanced in his house, was most lively at Somu's place. He would talk, laugh and have tea here. Sujata in a second looking at the ragged mattress, broken cups and torn calendar and identifies what was missing in her house. She could sense what made Brati a stranger for her. Brati "... was coming back to Sujata again" (38).

Brati had the space to be his true self here and this recognition is the beginning of the construction of Sujata's alternate self. Sujata's mind shifts to her house that day. Brati was sitting in his room and it was only later that she came to know that Brati was writing

slogans. This takes her memories to the days when Brati was excited about his achievements and parades on the Independence Day. Sujata can now see his child to be any other child who loves freedom, who wants to carve his own room. Brati also desired so and Dibyanath made every effort to crush the individuality and creativity of Brati. Brati could not accept this. He is used to smiling at Somu's mother query:; "...why do you waste your life like this, my child? You have every-thing. A well-known father, a mother so learned" (38). The poor and feminine self of Somu's Ma was so reliant on the pity of the upper-class to free themselves from their harsh conditions that it has stop desiring freedom. This sketches an analogous between Somu's mother and Sujata. Nevertheless, Somu and Brati also shared a similarity. They were the selves which were secular, free-thinking, humanist with an evaluative faculty that does not rely on imperceptive mimic.

Brati was at his house that day waiting for a call. Sujata did not know the reason of Brati being at home. He was waiting for a call from the messenger to confirm that Somu and the other friends have been informed to not return to Somu's home. The murderers were waiting for them. The messenger cheated them and instead of protecting Somu and friends, he informed their return to the people who were waiting to finish them. The narratorial voice comments, "The passion of a belief had blinded them to a reality" (40). She talks about a particular reality, the fact that faith is a very small lamp in a big dense forest, it can not reveal all the hidden mysteries of the forest. They died because they trusted many people. Sujata has also trusted all in her family.

Brati and Sujata had tea together that day. It was after a long time that Brati was present in the house in the evening. He was teasing Bini, both were happy. In that moment of happiness, Sujata gathers the courage to question Brati if he needs his mother anymore. She questions her importance and relevance in Brati's life. After all, Brati was the only one who was different to Sujata, they survived because of each other in Dibyanath's stifling

walls. Brati evades her questions leaving the readers wondering if Sujata deliberately did not want to read the answer written big on Brati. Probably, today sitting in Somu's home she can read the answer.

Brati had not given any specific answer to her question that day but he wanted to sit with Sujata, he again wanted to live his childhood with her. He wanted to play *ludo* with Sujata. But Sujata had some work with Tuli and she did not want to upset her. On this, after years Brati made her question her desire, "Why go when you don't want to" (43)? They played *ludo* that day trying to live the same bond which had united them. Sujata enquires about Nandini, the girl whom Brati loves. He was sure as Nandini is not the traditional beautiful girl, the boss as Brati called his father at his back will not like her. His mention, makes Brati question Sujata awareness about him having an affair with his secretary, "Ma, do you know where Boss goes everyday after five" (44)? This time Sujata effaces the question and Brati calls her passive. This suggests that both Sujata and Brati knew that Sujata is not happy, she recognizes her unquestioned acceptance and is willingly not doing anything to overthrow this pressure. However, the problem is to know whether she is doing it willingly or is it her upbringing? But can upbringing alone be questioned? It was not only Brati who knew his father's infidelities, the other children were also aware but they all thought it to be a, "... part of his virility" (46). No, upbringing alone can not be questioned. There is also something known as strength of revolution one is born with. Sujata had defied Dibyanath, not once but twice. She refused to have children after Brati and was stubborn not leaving her job. Both the retaliations had angered Dibyanath. It seems closer Brati is, whether in physical presence or memories, intact is Sujata's sense of free self and the years of their distance had made Sujata a passive recipient. Thus Brati can be discerned as Sujata's self, or a double that has been placed outside by the author just to make things explicit, "... she knew Brati knew everything. He watched his mother all the

time” (47). Brati knew Sujata in and out as if he is the mirror image of her. The mirror with whom she never communicated yet he knew her completely. In reality, he spoke the deepest truths about her, “Let’s stop the game. Why don’t we chat for a while” (47)?

Sujata did not have the time, she was running away, “Just a minute. Let me run down to the kitchen and tell them what to cook” (47). She did not have the courage to confess the crime of killing her identity. She thwarted all his efforts and went down. The phone rang and Brati left the house. It was not Brati who had distanced himself, it was Sujata who had the fear to let Brati close to her. She was embarrassed to face the mirror which will translate all her sins to her aloud. Ironically it is today, after two years later that Sujata has the strength to look into the mirror to know what was happening in Calcutta, what was happening to her.

Margaret Atwood in “This is a Photograph of Me” talks about a picture taken ‘some time ago’. This picture is blurred and the drowned persona though placed in the centre of the picture is most obscured. She compares the smudged photo with her identity which is also smeared. It is blended with others. She is someone’s daughter, wife and mother. She does not have an independent identity. In spite of the fact that she is at the centre of the creation, she is not given any importance and attention (258). Every irrelevant object in the picture is discussed but she is not mentioned until the end, “The radical citizens of Calcutta found nothing unnatural in the spectacle” (50). She is in the centre of the lake which symbolises society and drowning highlights her oppression. The photo is symbolic of her oppression. She herself is not able to locate herself in the picture, she does not know her identity and position in the society. But the moment she peeps into her own self, “...but if you look enough, eventually you will be able to see me” (258), she shows the confidence of finding her identity and place in the society. Sujata’s understanding of the

oppressed Calcutta helped her understand her own oppression, it encourages her to work hard to locate Brati's role and in turn her role in his life: "Who is Sujata" (51).

While leaving for Somu's place, Brati stared at her for the last time. It was a grave look as if pressing Sujata to locate herself, in those eyes, mirror and lake. Her identity was so stained by the insignificant things that she could not locate herself instantly. But today Brati has also become the catalyst for this discovery. Devi delineates a stunning spectrum of myriad relations between Sujata and Brati. At times they run parallel, at times they are one, at times they nag each other's conscience and at times they are friends who can lie and "Brati lied to her" (52). He told her that he will be spending the night with his school friend Ronu but it was only later that Sujata comes to know that he had lied. But then who has lied Brati or Sujata. Sujata had deceived him, yes she was in his camp and without informing him she changed her sides. The night of Brati's death was a usual night for Sujata, her household chores had run the same way, "All the normal, daily chores (53). This further stresses the fact that Brati and Sujata were entwined. For all the other mothers, Somu, Bijit and Partha's; their sons had died that night but for Sujata, Brati had died long ago. Their bond had long been snapped by Sujata, the physical murder of Brati was just a stimulus to her awakening to this truth. They all were left helpless by the death of their sons. Nevertheless, Sujata's awakening, "Now she realised that Brati had belonged with them not only in death, but also in life" (57) helps her use her critical faculty to question their protest, living. She sees an other unlike Somu, Bijit and Partha's mother. For them, what died are their sons, their bodies, they never lamented the loss of optimistic, vigorous and judicious people who had leadership qualities to stir sleeping conscience. Somu's mother shares with Sujata that she could not understand Somu's activities and always called them evil. It was only Sujata who could see them live. She sees another Brati being raised in the Brati laughing and living with Somu, Bijit and Partha. This Brati loved his mother and

Sujata also loved this Brati but, "... never really knew him" (57). Probably, this Brati was always there. He was the Brati who had never accepted things as offered to him like his siblings, who reasoned everything. Sujata lost the vision to see that Brati and therefore he lived with his friends and was separated from Sujata in his life itself, "That was how they were inseparable in both life and death" (57). But today Sujata can also feel herself, "... bound inseparably to all those who carried in their hearts the burden of their loss" (57). Even after a sea of the difference between the learning of Sujata and Somu's mother, the former could understand each word of grief expressed by Somu's mother. Sujata recognized that Brati has not left alone rather connected her to, "... others like her, given her a new family" (58). Sujata had lost Brati years ago and today at the same place where Brati died fighting for the spirit of liberty, Sujata has started finding him again. But how can Sujata seek her liberty here among these people who themselves have been alienated by the upper class? How can she even find solace among the upper class people who are indifferent to any critical interrogation of their hollow society, "The nation, the state, refused to acknowledge their existence, their passion, their indomitable faith in the teeth of death, all that they stood for" (60)? These people were completely unaffected by such murders, it was totally normal for them and this surprised Sujata. She has been living in a society which is, "... rootless, lifeless, where the naked body caused no embarrassment, but natural emotions did ... (68). Somu's father did every effort to save not only his son but other's also. He offered his life to safeguard the life of his son and his friends. He pleaded in front of the police to save his son. He in his limited capacities tried for justice and died in the grief of the dead son. But Brati's father tried every bit and succeeded to efface Brati from his family.

The visit to Somu's place made Sujata juxtapose two kinds of reality and stance of the doom. Where on one hand, her family was excited about Tuli's engagement today on

the other, the grief of Somu's mother and anger of his sister could never be pacified and Sujata could relate to them. This identification narrowed the gap of class distinction. But in all this, today Somu's sister expressed a new facet of desire and potential. The class that has the reputation of bearing human atrocities retaliates with ferocity, she doesn't want Sujata to come to her place and probe into her family, her attitude pointed Sujata that she was not wanted in their home.

Sujata came to know her dead son Brati in this house. She does not know what will she do next seventeenth January? How will she meet Brati next year as every corner of Somu's home has his resonances? But at the moment of final parting, she puts her hand on Somu's mother and tells her that she will, "... always remain grateful to" (69) her. This moment in one go unites her with the universal suffering and also places her outside the social codes that chained herself. She felt something drawing out of her private prison of grief. Somu's home offered a window through which she could see Brati and today she has unchained her prison, "She felt the desire to draw something out of the prison that she had carved within herself, out of her own grief, and offer it to Somu's mother" (70).

Late Afternoon:

Breaking the prison, Sujata walks into a, "... house quite close to her. Sujata had often glanced at it while passing, but she had never entered it ..." (71). This house resembles the city Sujata lives in, from being polished to rugged, this house has become the recluse of both wealth and poverty as its ground floor accommodates varied rented establishments. The depiction of the house instantly summons Sujata. At one point of time, hinting Sujata's journey starting from an ornamental existence to some unknown destiny and at the other point, it becomes Sujata herself from being a woman who at least had the spark to revolt to a complete passive housewife.

Untill afternoon, the two physical places that the reader encounters Sujata at, have been symbolic of her realisations and experiences: Dibyanath's house where Brati had died, Somu's home where Brati was located and now Sujata enters this third place. On entering this house she first sees a custard apple tree standing but it is now desolate as if mirroring Sujata's loss and then the image of the tree is replaced by Nandini sitting in front of Sujata. She is the girl whom Brati had loved. After Sujata, if Brati had loved someone it was Nandini. She sat on a cane stool facing Sujata. Whether Brati's dead body, Somu's mother or Nandini, Sujata sat facing all of them as if reading her own self in them.

Nandini's first mention is of betrayal, "Anindya betrayed us" (72). Brati died because of a betrayal. A promise, a faith had been broken. Sujata has no awareness of this betrayal. Nandini knows about Sujata's unawareness but she is angered by this ignorance of Sujata. These people have been cast away by Sujata's society and though met daily, the upper class has become hardened to their state. Anindya had betrayed them, "They had developed faith in faithlessness of everything that spelt Establishment, and yet had never thought that there could ... betray them" (75). These establishments killed harbingers of change like Brati and his friends and those who could not be encountered were beaten, burnt, tortured and thrashed in the dark interrogation room, "The burn on the skin healed soon. But in the young heart within, every single burn ached forever. Then back to the solitary cell. Alone with oneself" (73).

Devi talks about the plight of the modern world where institutions based on old age and community rules are placed over and above living beings. Everybody is in the struggle to subdue everybody else. If some like Somu's sister are searching for their self, there are some like Dibyanath for whom existence has become a custom sinking them into sterile inflexibility of the same conformity. Brati and their friends were trying to break this conformity that has separated the life from being. They were unlike Jyoti, Bini, Tuli and

Neepa who did not know their own selves, they were different from Somu's mother who is compelled to abandon her identity and they were also different from Somu's sister who is tormented in their effort to find their identity in the established social society. Yes, betrayal became the reason of their physical death but in turn raising the question about the actual victim of that betrayal. Even on being exposed to the problem of oppression by Nitu, the best like Brati, Anindya could not break away from his clichéd life, "A person recruited by Nitu was above suspicion" (72). Anindya could not destroy his conformity thus becoming a victim of his own betrayal. Devi elaborately describes the act of betrayal commenced by the established system on Brati and Nandini. The description of jail evokes the images of hell, the physical hell that the society makes people like Brati go through, the hell of seclusion and isolation that they experience. This jail is a solitary cell with strong iron doors, soundproof walls and a small hole. The bondage has no connection with the outer world yet he is forced to remember each and every little fact of his experience in the outer world. These solitary rooms have doors which open in even more ferocious interrogation rooms. A thousand-watt bulb is made to frown in the eyes of the bondage till he goes blind, burning cigarettes are pressed on his skin, "The burn on the skin healed soon" (73). Yet every word for the readers turns on itself to reveal the hell that this established system itself is in. It calls for investigation all the accepted official codes. Sujata's arrival in Nandini's house discloses the murky shades of her city.

Nandini also opines that the social structure based on class and wealth is destroying the strength of unity that stands against the oppressive routine. She converts the living room of the house into a space of voice for her pent up frustration, highlighting both her and Sujata's loneliness and alienation in the corrupt social world. Sujata could see that people like her son and Nandini were closest to the reality during the process of breaking away, something she had never tried to know before.

For Brati and Nandini, their group, their purpose was an extension of home, family and nation. They were forging unconventional relationships and families based on love and identification. Their eyes had the gift to see what lies underneath the historian's architectural tombstone, Bengal, the present, the everyday in all its malice and magnificence. Nandini recollects their tremendous confidence in their struggle to bring a new age, "Brati and I would walk all the way just talking ..." (77) about it. These were the walks which bore a resistance to authority that try to enforce itself from the above, they broke the stereotypes to experience the astonishment of happiness, "... everything spelt ecstasy; we couldn't hold in the joy, we felt explosive" (77). But today these have turned into terminated, pointless search, "It will never come back. Total loss" (77). The different architectures of power have undone them. But they felt betrayed and annoyed more at the people like Sujata who shut the door on fracturing inferences of scepticism. It makes Sujata go through a limitless void and inconsolable grief. She senses in Nandini an annoyance felt towards an intruder for herself. "No one would again throw open the doors of her solitary cell ..." (79), she has been exposed to her reality. Brati had told Nandini that Sujata was being used like a doormat by his father and Sujata did nothing about it. Brati was frustrated that Sujata chose not to do anything yet she wanted the best for her and assured her integrity always. Nandini let Sujata know that Brati had confronted Dibyanath about his relationship with his secretary. He had threatened Dibyanath and thus it is today that Sujata gets to know the reason of why Dibyanath had started avoiding Brati from some time before his death itself. Brati's death assured the burial of the confrontation between the father and the son, the confrontation which acted like a fissure in the belief system of Dibyanath. It made Dibyanath confront his ugliness. Brati's death effaced those ugly marks from Dibyanath's face. Through this revelation, Nandini explains Sujata that protest does not have to only stem from personal grudges only; it can also stem from the desire for the betterment of a

system. These people were not working to formulate new ideologies, but just to make the world a better place. Had they been in the process of forming new establishments, Brati would have been probably alive today. No one will now ever fiercely debate her reality, “From now on she would be alone, totally alone” (79).

Nandini informs Sujata that Brati and she had to leave Calcutta on fifteenth January but as Brati knew that his birthday was the most important occasion for Sujata, he had postponed the departure to nineteenth January, “...he loved you. That is why he hadn't left home” (82). Not only for his birthday, Brati was living in Dibyanath's house only for Sujata. Brati wanted Sujata to accept and fight against the wrong. Sujata questions if she was responsible for Brati's death on sixteenth January? Nandini pacifies her saying that Sujata does not have to blame herself, he might have got murdered at the base he was going to. Nonetheless, it leaves Sujata and the readers wondering if she was responsible for the death of Brati that had happened years ago in Dibyanath' house. If she had revolted to the stifling ways of her husband, probably Brati would have been alive. Sujata has got the reason for Brati's death, she knows how and why Brati died and may be this is the end for her. Nandini enquires if Sujata could understand the reason for Nandini's hurt after she came out of the jail. Sujata did not have the answer. Nandini answers that it was the veil of normalcy and the false assurance that everything is quietened. Sujata was shocked, “But haven't things quietened down” (85)? Nandini screamed in denial. Nandini questions Sujata's numbness. Why is she accepting Brati's death as the end? Nandini tells her that she might be arrested again making the readers acknowledge Sujata's arrest. Neither of them has anyone to talk to. Sujata comes to know that this is not Nandini's home, her parents do not reside in Calcutta. At this moment, this home becomes the symbolic home for Sujata where from the journey of need and remembrance switches to one of desire. Sujata bids farewell to Nandini, they both know that they will not meet each other ever, “Nandini did

not say a word. She turned back, supported herself against the grimy and dirty wall. She slowly started walking back. Each step she took carried her farther away from Sujata. Sujata came out onto the Calcutta streets again” (89).

Walking away from Nandini, out onto the streets of Calcutta symbolically functions both as walking away from a screen into the world where the unconscious and the reality coalesce and also figuring generation of spirit that comes into being for Brati and his values after their loss.

Evening:

Sujata has reached her home. As it is winter, it has already got dark. Devi again uses nature to explain the feelings and thoughts of Sujata. She beautifully juxtaposes the exterior landscape to Sujata’s experiences.

Dibyanath has been waiting for Sujata. He is angry on Sujata for being late. After all, it is Tuli’s engagement today. Since Brati’s death, he had maintained calm with Sujata. He was not shrieking at her but today he could not control his anger and burst out: “Wonderful” (90)! Sujata does not reply but Dibyanath’s scream summoned what Nandini had told her, Brati’s confrontation with Dibyanath about his affair with his typist. She tried imagining what could have happened. Brati did not only try to protect his friends that day, he was also everyday safeguarding Sujata from Dibyanath’s atrocities. Now it is her turn, to protect Brati who was her spirit, whom she lost years back.

Every step and corner of the lighted house of Dibyanath are today standing in contrast to the world of Brati and Nandini speaking the difference. The reminiscences of Brati have faded away in Dibyanath’s house. People like Brati can never live in the palaces of Dibyanath or people like Dibyanath can never accept the change, “There was no trace of Brati in this, in any of this” (91-2).

Sujata is feeling like a stranger. Strangely, the house she has been living in has become distant to her than the last two homes she has visited. Everything in this house is echoing betrayal.

Sujata is not shocked to see that drenched in evil, the house is still functioning normally. There are sweets on the dining table, diner had been ordered, elaborative decorations. Bini, Neepa and Tuli have gone to the parlour to get ready. These embellishments stand against the raw grim reality for Sujata. This juxtaposition works as a symbol for the reader to see the heart-wrenching truth the lighted outer world is constructed on. For the first time, Sujata could see the ugliness in the varnish of cream on Dibyanath's face. This glazy cosmetic has not been able to hide the carnal Dibyanath. Devi uses each adjective aptly to bring out the various forms of evil existing in the world. Every adjective and activity happening at Dibyanath's place puncture the world of the haves established on ideological inclinations and political gains. She is angry, offended and thus reacts to Dibyanath's strict inquiry of her whereabouts, "If...you...don't leave...this room...at once, I'll...leave...this house...and never come back again" (93). The space stresses that Sujata's conclusion springs from retrospection, reading, debating and questioning and in this moment the entire book changes into Sujata's journey that started with reading a book topic and has now attained a living dimension. She refuses to obey the image of good, polite, homely women that Dibyanath had carved for her. She shouts Dibyanath's extra-marital affairs on his face living him crippled. Dibyanath walks out of the room, "... tamely, wiping the nape of his neck" (93). Dibyanath could exploit her till the time she works as a self-sacrificing woman but when because of her family's betrayal, she revolutionizes into a strong person, Dibyanath is left whiplashed and tamed. He could not accept this image. Her open declaration of Dibyanath's corrupt relations and acts works as a denial of their relationship and the institution that subdued her individuality. She tears apart the patriarchal

expression of love and signifies its understanding of man-woman relationship only in terms of sex, where women reside in the secondary place and men have power over their body as well as their mind, represented by the ex-typist and Sujata respectively in context to Dibyanath. The usage of the crude language which by the same patriarchy is categorised as male-language places her outside the body.

Sujata was now sure that she will not stay in this house, this body and this sleaze, “She will no longer stay in a house where Brati was no more” (94). Brati who was the symbol of humanity in all its aspects: love, empathy, understanding, helping and self-respect. She repents being weak when Brati was alive, she laments not showing the courage to leave Dibyanath’s house when Brati was alive. Brati dies saving humanity and Sujata can not even now challenge her bondage.

Sujata wanted to take a bath, “Get me some hot water Hem. I’ll have a bath” (94) as if trying to rinse away her un-protesting self, an awakening to the complexity of her own solitude. But the solitude still has to be understood and answered, Can I choose what I want to read? Who settles for me then? Can one person select for everyone? Does that mean what is real for one person is true for every person? Who characterizes what is improper, “One could kill and go unpunished, for the killers were extremely cunning, Can any society be in an even terrifying situation? Why is there no one to identify those who initiated the killers into killing the youth? How could they go unscathed? Why does it all still remain so baffling” (98)?

All this has to be answered. Sujata enquires about everyone from Hem, the caretaker and probably the only person who after Sujata lamented Brati’s loss.

Sujata is suddenly hit by her appendix pain taking her back to the labour pains she had experienced on the day before Brati has been born, “Why did she remember Brati’s birth alone? Was it because Brati would remain forever close to her heart” (96)? Or was it

that today Brati is being born to her in the true sense. Devi subtly knots the two flashes of reality, life and death, physical and transcendental.

Sujata wanted Tuli's engagement to go well though she never wanted her engagement to be fixed for this day. However, as usual, no one was bothered about her opinion. Tony is Dibyanath's choice, like Dibyanath he is also a mother worshipper. Toni has also got Dibyanath, 'Shaw and Benson account'. Tony's family religiously believes in their guru, Swamiji who lives in America. Dibyanath had every reason to love Tony and also more so when Tuli was his favourite. It is today that Sujata finds the reason for Brati not liking Tuli. Brati did not eat at the same table with Tuli. Tuli even knowing Dibyanath's affair never spoke about it. This all brings out the immense hypocrisy existing in the world of Dibyanath. People have become comfortable in the skins of followers of the superficial norms.

Brati had been always upset about Sujata not protesting against it. Sujata wants to tell the reason of her not protesting to Brati. "Brati would never know now that Sujata had suffered all the indignities only for his sake ..." (98). She wanted his studies to get over smoothly and then she would have left with him for always. Devi shows time constantly moving to and fro, constantly shuttling between past and present, between lived and desired, between existing and should have been. With every memory is attached a repentance of not being able to act honestly. Sujata is projected as a tourist, a visitor in her own world, a world that she thought was created by her without realising she was a mere space in that world which had to be filled with different requirements at varied times. She was not moving rather different images were visiting her. Sujata was fixed and it was Brati who was walking. Devi highlights the futility of seeking for landmarks as Sujata was fixed and stagnate at one place. Sujata wanted to caress Brati's mutilated face with her fingers but she realises that, "It was an inevitable part of the pattern of killing to prolong the process of

killing and watch with demonic glee the death throes of the man dying” (98). Sujata reads her life in this distorted face. Devi makes Sujata see her life through the distorting cuts of Brati’s face. Every cut of his face scratched reality which stood contrasted to what Sujata thought natural or normal.

Sujata sees Tuli, Neepa and Bini dressed in *benarasi saris* gifted by Dibyanath. They were of nine hundred rupees, something that could ease the suffering of Somu’s mother to a great extent. She strips the layers of this unessential expenditure from which is raised violence. It is the violence of class. The same violence that has killed Brati and his friends. The same violence that has paralysed Dibyanath to death of his own son. The concealments of saris and ornaments uncover the violence that exists at Dibyanath’s house. Even on being daintily dressed, Tuli seems to be distressed. She is worried if Sujata has got her the ornaments, “Sujata undid the clasp of her bag and poured the jewellery out on the bed” (100). Tuli is not content with her part of jewellery, she also wants the jewellery that Sujata had kept for Brati’s bride. On not getting it, Tuli creates a big fuss but Sujata reacts stubbornly to it, “You didn’t heed my sentiments when you fixed the day. You chose the day because Tony’s mother wished it. That I’m back home should be enough for you” (101). She also silences Neepa counting all her illegitimate affairs. In spite of such vehement criticism from her family members, Sujata gets ready for the party. She remembers Brati asking her, “...how can you go on doing your duty” (103). Sujata wants to reply, she was trained like that.

Sujata wore a black bordered white sari, she was looking different from all the other decked up, “...they all wanted to be like each other. They never wanted to be themselves” (104). The difference is not isolating her rather seems like an enlivening sense of life at these cracks. Brati also always wanted her to experience the freedom of herself. She remembers on one of Neepa’s birthday, Brati resisted her going there as visiting the eye

doctor was important. Sujata refused listening Brati thinking that Neepa will be disappointed. But today she craves to tell Brati that she doesn't want to go down for the party. She wants to 'act as her heart dictated'.

Sujata drags herself to the party, "A hubbub of talk and laughter. Did the earth belong only to the dead? The dead that ate, quarrelled and lived in a frenzy of lust and greed" (107)? But then she realises these people are actually dead, these are those dead people whom Brati could never accept and love. Finally, there is a triumphant celebration of Brati, the self that Brati championed, that rips apart the mean artificial identity. Sujata sees Brati has not died, rather is beyond the garb of fake identity and relations. Sujata met each one of these dead to see through the varied superfluous identities.

The entire family of Tony, Kapadias are unquestioned followers of Swamiji who has a halo behind his head. Devi contrasts the fake divinity of Swamiji as announced by Mrs. Kapadia to the halo that is used to make people like Brati and Nandini blind in the interrogation cells, "But Mrs. Kapadia's vision had not been damaged in the light of a thousand suns" (108) radiated by Swamiji. It is a comment on the endless night against the freedom Brati was striving for.

Some were drinking in the party, others gossiping. Molly and Jishu Mitter were praising themselves for the upbringing they have given to their son, Ronu unlike Brati. Ronu had gone to the club on the night of Brati's death. Devi critiques urban violence of commercialisation through Jishu Mitter's comment about Sujata, "Sujata looks lovely! In white. Grief. Wonderful" (113). Everything is glamorised, ready to be sold or purchased. Being the survivor in this capitalist world, the journalist, Tony's friend wants to buy Sujata's experience as a bereaved mother to sell his newspaper. It will sell easily. People want to realise the bliss in their life only by finding it absent from others'. Amit and Neepa start fighting openly over Neepa's extramarital affair. However, the irony is, no one is

interested in these different events of madness, pointing that this madness has become the normative code. These people are deciding and defining society for everybody. Mr. Kapadia asserts, “What is the country’s problem? We can not accomplish integration ... Food is no problem” (120). He does not feel that farmers have any issues with the government rather according to him they are earning rich and can buy all that they wish for. He only knows the discussed problems of caste, gender and religion. Kapadia is completely oblivious to the realities of his society. The statement assesses critically the concept of nation and nationalism. Poverty has killed Somu, it is still murdering his entire family. His siblings are still not allowed to lead a normal life. They are still struggling for integrity but people like Dibyanath and Kapadia don’t allow that to be established.

Sujata observed everything but she did not speak. Her silence at their conversations speaks rejection of her past self and the symbols that enclose the self. There is a construction of a new self which deconstructs the element of hatred and sympathy attached to the socially understood misguided. The understanding of Dibyanath’s society gets destabilised by their failure to notice the class and gender fissures and faults in their society. They come out to be short-sighted and self-centred people who believe in exploitation.

Sujata’s pain was growing and Tuli calls her to meet a friend of Tony who was in a hurry and was leaving from outside itself. Sujata comes to greet him outside. It is Saroj Pal, Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department who had proved Brati to be a criminal. He becomes the symbol of Dibyanath’s society which works hard to fix the theories of the secondary-self or the ‘other’ created by the dominant versions. Saroj Pal is the reminder to Sujata that self, unity and fellow feelings between the people who want to deconstruct the fixed stifling notions will always be opposed by Dibyanath’s society. As William Butler Yeats in “The Second Coming” says, “Turning and turning in the widening gyre”, the

opposites will always exist (99), however it does not mean that people like Sujata will always be victimised. Sujata questions, “Did Brati die so that these corpses with their putrefied lives could enjoy all the images could enjoy ...” (126)? ‘Never’ is the answer, “Sujata’s long-drawn-out, heartrending, poignant cry burst, exploded like a massive question ... It was a cry that smelt of blood, protest Ironically, blood and protest are also the two pangs that a mother experiences at the birth of her child. It makes me remember my favourite “Spelling” by Margaret Atwood in which she elaborates the birth of a child like the course of self-discovery and articulation. The first stage of the process is where a woman without questioning accepts the routines and patriarchal prejudices followed by the second step of protest. It emerges from the comprehension of artificial existence and finally as a baby is born, the woman discovers herself, she finds her power and identity (265-66). Sujata’s appendix burst and the novel ends on this note. The burst of Sujata’s appendix is the expression of her denial of the hollow existence. She refuses to be dominated by the hypocritical society. The novel begins with the pain of birthing and ends on the note of pain. The former was also the birth of a mother and the latter marks her transience. She becomes one with the brutal and estranged truth of the death of one thousand and eighty-three revolutionaries struggling in double-faced bourgeois society.

Nabina Das’s *Footprints in the Bajra*

Footprints in the Bajra is a story of Muskaan, a young girl, running in the setting of Bihar Maoist activities. Muskaan declines to be a victim of the circumstances she is living in. The novel begins in the dense fields of Bajra in Durjanpur, “...a world of darkness and shadows that jostle in the slightest light” (15). Durjanpur has no electricity, it is the bad man’s place where thieves and robbers can rob or enter your house at any time. Muskaan is an orphan who lives with her *mausaji*, Suryakant Sahay. She has passed the

twelfth class and goes to a college twice a month. Nora, who is a New Delhi based student cum activist not only narrates Muskaan's journey of escape and freedom from these dangerous fields but also acts as a catalyst for Muskaan to gain the required consciousness of her long suppression. Nevertheless, Muskaan's jail is the male-utilization of a woman's body and psyche. Nabina Das delineates Muskaan's poignant journey of realisation of her marginalisation as secondary even when she thought herself to be one of the strongest parts of her organisation that was supposedly working for liberation from the state oppression. The journey is divided into nine parts and unlike *Mother of 1084*, it is a linear process.

Sheherwali: Visit to Durjanpur

The novel's words are charged with denotative to connotative meanings, "If you misrepresent them, they'll abduct and kill you" (15). It is the first line of the novel. Muskaan is briefing Nora or Sheherwali as Muskaan addresses her, about Durjanpur. Nora has come to research Durjanpur and its hidden ventures. All this time of the briefing, Muskaan has been scrutinising Nora, as if trying read her reactions hidden under a mask. The beginning itself introduces Muskaan being trapped amidst the traditional jails setup for women and the global changes happening in relation to human-self. On being questioned by Nora about her awareness of their values and aims, Muskaan stays numb. She evades the subject.

Nora has come to Durjanpur not only research about the area but also to perform their plays. She has come with her theatre group named Campus Theatre. There is a constant juxtaposition of the thick, impenetrable forests and concrete, constructed metropolitan architecture. Nora questions, "How can one convince students who are used to ranting in cafes, bookshops and campus plazas [...]" (16) to come and perform in the discomfoting sounds of Durjanpur?

Their first show is performed in Mandap. This place in Durjanpur is the one where different kinds of socio-political and religious ceremonies take place. Muslims are not allowed to enter this place, however for the first time to see Nora's theatre, the Muslims step here. The local headmaster, Suryakant Sahay, Muskan's guardian and a community leader is happy to see Muslims at the Mandap stating as if he desired change and peace based on equality. Das, here again, contrasts Durjanpur with the big cities, but only to point the various discriminations existing in the cities also. This makes the reader question the difference between varied places when it comes to exclusion of people on the basis of social, economical, political and religious factors. The novel thus uses this common place, Mandap to summon those different structures that practice discrimination on the different levels of existence at the same platform. Das like Omvedt and others hints that women survival cannot now be worked out in seclusion. It should be seen in relation to sweeping changes and must surpass social, economical, political and religious distinctions. Nevertheless, private and public existences all the time connect with each other to form life. Muskaan gives a long scarf to Nora before she goes to perform, informing her about the possible sexual exploitation of the woman sported in jeans without a *dupatta*. Nora wants to retaliate; she does not want to drape the scarf. She knows that this is one of the rules that men ordain to subjugate women and she is not scared of these rules but at the same time she is afraid of the violent activities that take place in Durjanpur. Muskaan updates her that it is a common thing finding a dead body here or a gun. On hearing this Nora gets scared to sleep alone but Muskaan is not. One can understand the important role of place in framing the experience. Muskaan also tells Nora that in Durjanpur people do not run over each other but they do not believe in educating their daughters. Headmaster Sahay runs a school where there are fifty students but the maximum of them are boys. Muskaan is educated enough to understand these statistics, she does not enjoy the fact that girls at Durjanpur are only taught

to cook, “My dear Sheherwali, women here are under double yokes. They are worse off than farm animals! Only I have my freedom of choice” (22).

Muskaan: In Bed with Che

Muskaan reveals that the enormous work of cooking, washing, booming, mopping she does at Sahay’s home is just a cover for something. It is some mission and this assignment that has been given to Muskaan by Sahay. Muskaan is confident and proud of the fact the Sahay depends on her completely to carry out his aim and uphold his philosophy as a son would have done. She again stresses the gender binaries existing in her society. Equating herself with a son marks the desire to rise up. Soon after the mention of the mission, Muskaan tells that she loves reading her mausaji’s gift, *Life of Che Guevara*. She also loves to read books which have the legends of revolutionary heroes and their uprisings. These books have formed Muskaan’s fairy tales. Apart from the books, Muskaan loves comrade-in-arms Palash Paswan. They are very good friends. Slowly the readers are getting to understand Sahay’s mission and Muskaan real task. Comrade Avadhut is their supervisor. Muskaan knows every skill required in this mission, she can strike, cut, swim, run and drive too. She is comrade Madhu. However, her skills are yet to be put to action. Her place in this mission was a recipient, away from the meaning of a functional being. Madhu is trained but is still treated like a child. Das uses language to make us see Muskaan’s place in this world of Maoists. The description never even hints at this world being that of Muskaan. Muskaan comes out to be a child enamoured and lured by some stardom. Palash, Avadhut and her training seem an escape from the conventional burdening work meant for a woman. It in no way gave the control of her life to her, she wanted to learn firearms but was denied till the time Avadhut wants her to learn that. Muskaan here emerges out to be a pet who is prepared to fight but can be hunted by the powerful male at anytime.

Avadhut asks Palash to train Muskaan in the firearms. During their training, Muskaan is completely overpowered by Palash's physicality. It makes us question Muskaan's true desires. Comradeship could have been seen as a true liberating tool only if it would have destabilized her co-dependent behaviour and built up own desires and directions. Muskaan can do anything for the pleasure and security promised by Palash, "It's fun teaching you. May be when we are not practicing, we can go watch turtles in the river" (30). Palash also tells Muskaan that the turtles were dying in Durjanpur as the government did not take care of them, ironically turning Muskaan into a turtle who will not only be brutally treated by the government but is also a prey of Palash's lust in the garb of love. Muskaan soon falls in love with Palash but they decide not to disclose it to anyone. One of the many reasons they hide their love from Suryakant is his prejudices against class, caste and religion. Palash Paswan is placed at a lower level in social ladder than him and thus he will not allow Muskaan to enter into any kind of relation with him. Sahay's biases in not only limited to Palash, the other comrade Arif being a Muslim also falls in the same line. This attitude of Sahay forces the reader to interrogate the ideas and their boundaries propounded by a particular group. Sahay's doings and actions expose the double-mindedness of the person fighting for his state's independence.

The same doubts are also faced by Muskaan, however, unlike Sahay, she questions and answers her own inhibitions. Muskaan can clearly see the difference between her and Nora. She remembers that on first meeting Nora, she had her own reserves. Muskaan wanted to know if Nora is a Muslim name. On knowing that Nora gets her name from her Christian grandmother, Muskaan is impressed. She reads the difference between New Delhi and Durjanpur. Durjanpur will murder anyone who would even try to cross the socio-religious boundaries. Muskaan is seen reading the democracy that Sahay's wants to achieve through his struggle. Nevertheless, she also questions the purpose of the

terminological plays of Nora and her friends, “But I also know perhaps these students aren’t aware that this play they have brought from New Delhi can do nothing to alleviate the problem they want to address” (36). Muskaan has begun reflecting on Durjanpur’s condition. She draws a parallel between Nora’s plays and Durjanpur. Sahay has told her that Nora is soon flying to America for a student exchange programme. It has been funded by ‘Pepsi- sponsored cocktail’ that promises to work for downtrodden. He wants Muskaan to help her enjoy the excitement hidden in the, “... stab-wound bloodied underbelly of rural India ...” (37). Sahay’s words fuse the different places and people into each other where Durjanpur is merged with entire India and at the same time, there is a stress on the difference. This comment also brings the reader face to face with the versions to which the ruling revolutionaries have subjected the struggle to.

Muskaan is appointed to protect Nora. She shows the discrimination laid by the Indian *Varna* system Durjanpur is deeply immersed in, “... lotus- crammed village tank neatly slices into two halves this settlement of five hundred people” (40). Women are not safe in Durjanpur. Muskaan compares them to juicy treats for armed men. She then takes Nora to people’s courts. On enquiring about these courts, Muskaan explains that these courts are arranged by people who do not trust authorities. There is a case of a young girl going on. She is crying on being victimized by her own aunt and uncle. The trial resembles any other trials that are carried out in the societal normative courts. The Uncle and aunt are calling, “... the girl a prostitute and other names” (44). The judge is sitting in the same manner with a table in front of him. There are witnesses. These courts are more or less the same as normative courts but they offer a new political insight. These courts are formed in dejection to the working of government; however, what is also exposed is how the so-called revolutionary spirit is also victimising women. This is the politics that is there on the agenda of revolution. They are using these helpless victims to achieve their own end. The

liberator of people has become an impediment to the autonomy needed today by women. Muskaan gets furious when Nora claims that the young girl must have got justice, “An illiterate village girl gets justice ... Ask any women in this village or around and come back to tell me how many of them ever got justice when such issues came up. They won’t even know the meaning of justice” (46).

Ironically, the truth is that Muskaan knows that this girl, Gauri gets justice, she gets her piece of property. This is a change in terms of a woman getting her rights but what Muskaan says reveals the counterpoising of patriarchal violence against the liberal violence of the comrades. The laws of ‘kangaroo courts’ against the wounded sense of women’s integrity, “With Comrade Bhattarai’s visit nearing, our courts will build up a crescendo, influence the media, confuse the authorities and gain grassroots support” (47).

Nora: With the Headless Goddess

“... decent women in the village do not go about anywhere with a bunch of men ...” (49). Das explicitly brings out the construct of gender. Nora is quite blunt about using fair creams to keep her feminine self safe. Muskaan notifies that Maoists do not kill women. This difference is not only present in Durjanpur but exists in the big metropolitan cities also. Nora boyfriend was apprehensive about her visit to Durjanpur with ten men. He could not adjust to the idea of Nora sleeping with them in a same room. He wanted to fly off to New York with Nora to lead a comfortable life. Das again questions the difference between Durjanpur and New Delhi. Amidst it, she places the central theme of Nora’s play that is enacted at Durjanpur: *The Ghost at the Altar*. It is about an orphan boy who works in a carpet factory. On being suppressed he sets himself free along with his co-workers. They form a group to counter the system that refuses to change itself. Her play is met with criticism. They were accused of spreading revolutionary ideologies by the Durjanpur men, “As it is the Maoists have made our life hell” (55). Nonetheless, Das uses this episode to

cut out the reaction of women. They were more interested in Nora herself. They were first seeing a woman performing out on the street outside the reel life. Given this background and two different reactions of men and women, Das does not only show the binary opposition operating between the two genders but highlights the polarisation between the progressive Maoists and suppressed women, "... these women approach and run their course fingers on Nora's arm and made sure she is not made of fragile porcelain" (55). It is only Muskaan who understands this. She shouts at these women telling them to learn from Nora's plays.

Muskaan takes Nora to her evening college in Banka. There she meets Avadhut who scans her face. On being told by Muskaan that Nora wishes to go to America for a creative writing course, Avadhut expresses his displeasure but requests Nora to perform her play in a place near Durjanpur. Das gives a romantic turn of events to Nora and Avadhut relation.

Nora on his request agrees to perform the same play at Chinnamasta, the abode of the headless goddess. Coincidentally, Nora is also playing the role of an angry goddess in the play. But the performance is hindered by sudden violence. Many people, unseen enemies started chasing them. Nora, playing the goddess is left frightened. There is a clever use of imagery of the goddess by Das to bring out the reality of construction working in the concept. Avadhut holds the hand of Nora and takes her into the dense and dark fields of Bajra. Nora gets scared evading all the artificial strength that the Sheherwali has been projected till now: "...a gunshot goes off nearby deafening me momentarily" (69). It is Muskaan who saves her instantly setting a distinction between her and Nora. Their positions are swapped. "Sheherwali, Muskaan whispers. Now that you have found me out, stay with me" (70).

Nora comes to know that it was all planned by Avadhut and his army. Their Maoists identity is revealed to Nora. She further understands that their play was just a trap to lure an important landowner's son. They wanted to kill him to avenge the feuds these rich people have with the 'so-called social renegades'. Suryakant Sahay was the master mind of this execution and the landowner's son is found dead the next day, his throat was slashed.

At the time of the killing, Muskaan unaware is helping Nora to escape, "We could have got you an early bus to the train station. Now you have stained yourself with blood all over" (71). Nora had fallen down and thus she could not leave Durjanpur.

Avadhut: Am I Mr. Butterfly or Lazarus?

This part begins with examining Muskaan role in the army. Avadhut reveals the use of language as tooled by Sahay to convince his village brothers about their actions. He uses big metaphors. Avadhut is happy killing the landowner's son because it will get them in the news. He also confesses that in order to safeguard his cover, he has put the life of Nora and Muskaan in danger. He could have helped them and the entire theatre group to escape but just in order to safeguard his identify, he abandons them in the middle of the chaos created by him. This attitude forces the readers to equate workings of establishment and Sahay's anti-establishment. The murders and killings of the opposition people have been an age old mantra to maintain the sole authority. Avadhut is more bothered protecting their organisation than saving the lives of Nora and Muskaan. He neither wants them to return nor get hold by the police.

Das through Avadhut tries to lift the consciousness of the exploited people to rescue them from self-destruction. Avadhut describes the clever process of establishments to enslave the people, though he himself practices the same. He describes how the society prostitutes itself to retain power and the way government works in extolling power structures among the masses to ensure resistance against any attempt towards radical

uprooting of these structures, “The glitter and shine baffles us, as does its tantalising promise of a syrup lick ... curbing all our attempts to dissent” (75). It is as Langston Hugh’s tells in “Harlem”, dreams deferred dry up (126).

The question is isn’t Avadhut prostituting himself to be powerful. There is a strong hint of a desire to be recognised by the people in Avadhut also, “I emerged as ‘Comrade’ Avadhut, the ‘saintly comrade’. To be honest, I took immense pleasure in my transition, or should I say, my new Lazarus status” (86). Married at a young age, Avadhut has been a hot-headed man. He soon lost his wife Meena in a car crash. He was driving the car. Pestered by the blames of Meena’s parents he wanted a change and so he met Sahay. Sahay did not take much time to brief Avadhut about the problems of Durjanpur and the aim of their organisation to uplift the place. Avadhut’s easy acceptance of the role offered by Sahay in his organisation points at his thirst for recognition and a consumerist image and therefore, his self-comparison with the classical figure of Lazarus works as a parody of the traditional figure of power. Lazarus had risen again because of his faith in the Christ and Avadhut rises because the society always needs a hero to base their faith on. His idea of subversion is not executed in terms of any liberating ideology rather he emerges an image to battle against the already rooted.

Sahay also makes Muskaan the victim of same freedom mimicry: “Yes Mausaji. She almost did a military salute ...” (86) on being introduced to Avadhut by Sahay. Her desire to be different from the traditional docile girl is schematised and packaged well by Sahay. He gives her all those images and symbols which have been traditionally associated with patriarchal control and power. These equipments give her the semblance of power. This bias is a common practice against such women. Manimala in “The Bodhgaya Struggle”, talks about how in 1978, women’s struggle was left unheard by the Sangharsh

Vahini which was together started by men and women against the autocratic exploitation of the ruling party, Congress.

Sahay is trying to emerge out to be the new power centre of Durjanpur or a new place where the 'proletariat population' will not be exploited, "We are providing justice to the people" (93). This also clearly reveals a close nexus between Sahay, the government and landlords. They both are recognised by the people by the power that gets defined through the opposite. Sahay shouts at the landlord, Madho Singh, "To us, you are a class enemy and the only way we can overcome class enemies is by awarding them death" (93). On this, Palash shoots Madho Singh "...in the head twice in powerful but quick blunt thuds" (94).

There is a want to be differently recognised by the people, "The idea was not to hide the fact that Madho Singh was killed by just anyone. The idea was to let the whole world know this is how Maoists punished ..." (95). Ironically, Ernest Olmos who had helped Avadhut meet Sahay, around the same time is captured and killed brutally by the police on the doubts of terrorist's activity. Das successfully shows the horrible reality of power play existing as fissures in both the systems. Avadhut is sure that Nora is a threat to their existence. He doubly victimizes Nora. On one side she is seen as a danger to their life and on the other Avadhut turns her into the devil that incites his lustful passion.

Nora: A Marlboro Maoist and His Gang

Nora could not believe the reality she has to live in Durjanpur. Even being a strong confident woman she is not able to accept what happens to her and Muskaan a night before. Though she has read a lot about such happenings in Durjanpur yet the incident leaves her terrified. She curses her decision to be at Durjanpur. Nora's experience helps to realise the difference between the read facts and the true comprehension of their existence. It interrogates the claims of awareness. On the contrary Muskaan even on knowing the

purpose of Nora's visit can understand the former's fear, "No use lamenting, I can understand how you feel" (102).

They return to the hiding camp. In the room where Nora lays are hung the posters of Mao, Che, Lenin and some other revolutionaries like them. She describes the place as dark and menacing, immediately juxtaposing the literal description with the last night's happenings in the mind of the reader. She hears voices she has not heard before. They are discussing some plan and then amidst these strange voices, she could identify one of them. It was Suryakant Sahay. Nora is not able to believe her ears, "...the sage like elderly man is nothing but a cunning commander of a group of dangerous people ..." (106).

Muskaan apologises to Sahay for being identified by Nora. The loving *mausaji* is very upset with Muskaan, he rebukes her for not being in her uniform. Muskaan did not act the way she has been taught. Their conversation works as a yardstick for their relation. The love is just a polite garb to train Muskaan the way Sahay wanted her to act. This lays bare the traditional trap a woman has been trapped since ages. On the other hand, Sahay and his other comrades take the issue of their identity being exposed to Nora. Nora pretending to sleep overhears their conversation and fears if she is "...a central character in the Maoist Kangaroo court? A culpable class enemy ..." (106) who is now waiting for her verdict?

The Kangaroo Court which is a mark of protest asserts defeat also as it becomes a symbol of a new power which is shown in the process of being immortalised in the memory of people. We see that these rebels are unable to separate themselves from the structural constructs of the traditionalists. It also questions their goal. All of a sudden the issues that were explained by Muskaan vanish and what seems to remain is just an image. One can always say that the Maoists, who are traditionally explained to be situated at periphery placed at the centre of power but what can not be escaped is the fact of both the traditionalists and Maoists are caught up in the same power game. They both employ the

female labour for their purpose. Das conveys the existence of patriarchal boundaries in each domain of human life.

There is a pervading sense of violence in the way the comrades communicate. Das focuses on their process also apart from their aim. Avadhut asks the captive Nora to relax but then suddenly addresses, “Listen comrade Palash, don’t forget to collect your new assault rifle from Raxaul” (107). They also want to kill Nora now as she knows about them and their workings. Interestingly, Muskaan also favours it, “She can’t cook, can’t dig, can’t toil, can’t shoot. What a liability” (109)? Her phrases assert her need for an identity. The comradeship allows her to move away from the subjugated identity of a woman but limits her association to the outside world. Ironically it fixes the identity of this woman into a new role. Muskaan is thus not a transformed woman but is transformed into a hollow symbol of transformation by an organisation which still reflects the State.

It is only Avadhut who finally decides to save Nora. This puzzles Muskaan, “...when did you become so compassionate about the enemy” (111). In doing so Das compares her to “...a snake whose tail has been stomped upon” (111) confirming Muskaan’s position in the organisation to be just another role given to a woman to be performed.

The linear time is passing away and we meet Nora at the John F. Kennedy Airport. She is released by the Maoists on the condition of not revealing their identities and workings to the police. It was a bargain, revealing their truth would have been an end of Nora’s future. Avadhut had given her their address before she left them. She wants to write a letter to Muskaan. In spite of what all had happened in Durjanpur, Nora felt an attachment towards Muskaan. She could see a desire for change and set things right in Muskaan. This is something that Nora wanted to always do in her life. Her visit to Durjanpur was backed by the same motive, “I share with her similar impulses, rather, convictions” (114). She feels

the difference between them is only of the different approach. She yearns to tell Muskaan that they are one in their desire.

Nora recollects the reason of delaying her departure from Durjanpur. She wanted to be with Muskaan but the latter always saw her as her enemy. Nora is the only one who is able to understand the warmth of Palash and Muskaan's relationship. Even on being criticised and tagged jealous by Muskaan, Nora realises that Muskaan is, "...so young, so human, this Muskaan. She is so like us" (119). However, soon the reader is offered a different picture of Muskaan. A night before Nora's departure, frightened Muskaan comes to her room and wakes her up, "Get up fast and move to the backyard" (120). An outrageous mob from *chabutara* has come to avenge the murder. In all the violent chaos, Muskaan is the one who takes the courageous lead to face them. Avadhut is seen merely hurling slangs at them. Das uses him to offer an edging subversive critique of the progressive urban world and the state oppression but at the same time his words also places him in the position of an interrogator who assures that not everybody can take part in the commanding social roles as this will disrupt Maoists' position in the new struggled hierarchy, "Shut up, it's not the same, he said curtly. We risk our lives and you sit in your plush living rooms and seminar halls" (123). This statement is when placed at the backdrop of Muskaan fighting the crowd alone, reveals the urban progressive state ideologies and the male Maoist thinking to be the sides of the same coin. Some who exist by subjugating people and the others who validate the former by fighting against them, like the concept of 'self' and the 'other'. Nora's silence on this remark places her on a different plane from Avadhut and even Muskaan, "I did not want another kangaroo court to decide whether I should be thrown off the jeep or not" (123). One can easily see that Nora understands the institutions as clutches. One has to be free from ideological tools and roles. This understanding clearly demarcates the armed fight of Avadhut and the ideological battle of

Nora. There is always a sense of threat to their identity, “I have told you, we are on a revolutionary path. This is not a Bollywood movie” (127). Woefully, writing a letter from New York City to Muskaan, Nora knows that Muskaan is still captive to this “... Durjanpur, the poor little Maoist” (128).

Headmaster Sahay: Narrative of a Crazy Old Man

Sahay describes himself as having something special. He has a red patch on his thigh. He describes life as eternal waiting, not missing to quote *Waiting for Godot*.

His red patch as he says has a history. History is necessary for a revolution to begin. His patch becomes the image of history. Das blurs the distinction between the two:, “It pains and swells up time and again, not really a chronic trouble, but more as something that doesn’t want to fade away from the memory or be separated from my body. It has a history” (132).

Sahay’s tale takes us through little village houses and backyard gardens of vegetations, small towns to carefree good people teeming with life even whilst enduring the clashes of men and machine. He narrates his memory to a young person eager to know about him. Winding his way through the beautiful past, Sahay along with his friends found the way to the jail and soldiers, “... with guns aimed at them” (135). They were all happily prepared to face their end. They were singing and patting each other’s back. They were to be punished for going against the government. Das invokes hell describing the shots. Sahay was not killed and found himself with the red patch in a hospital room carrying it like a ghost. This ghost wants his revenge. A motive, a purpose had to be accomplished. It is still seeking fulfilment. Ironically, the credit card salesman who was interested to know about Sahay is also never able to seek fulfilment, he tells Sahay, “Nothing has changed, you changed nothing for me” (139). Their condition highlights the binary equation required for the existence of an oppressive society. This equation consists of one who exists by subduing

fellow human beings and other who authenticate their existence by taking pride in his marginalised position. Sahay could not subvert the existing system and his decision to fight as a marginalised clutched him in the web of existing social hierarchies. He is, “Resurrected, refreshed and reddened with a new anger” (140). This anger will keep the identity of the government intact. It is on this ideology Sahay creates a battalion of armed rebels.

Sahay now lacks the same courage he had shown that day with his friends. He could not tell his comrades that he did not kill all the landlords that night just because of the fear of paying a heavy price for it. He confesses that he is losing his strength of mind and this strength is something that he applauds Muskaan for, “It’s from her fortitude that we old fogies learn to progress on the path of revolution” (143). Das repeatedly draws parallels making readers question the similarities between Sahay and the conventional setup of Indian society. However, Muskaan clearly comes out to be courageous among the two. She is the one who bravely faces the mob from *chabutara* whereas Sahay was left shaken. The spontaneous divergence from her defined role announces a complete breakdown of all power relations.

Nevertheless, the survival of such brave people is not easy in our society and Muskaan is abducted by the mob. Avadhut could have saved Muskaan but seeing the mob, he assured his safety over Muskaan’s and hid inside the broken water tank. This questions the power of Maoists to safeguard the interest of society. After Muskaan’s release, the greatest fear of Sahay was the possibility of Muskaan having revealed all their secrets. The Maoists could not even retain their cohesive identity. Sahay further places himself in the image of a protector for Muskaan. He explains how Muskaan is lucky as he had taken her after her parents’ death in a train mishap. Sahay wants to frame Comrade Madhu in his own image. He is disappointed knowing the possible relationship between her and Palash. He

gets furious knowing that more than him, she misses Palash, “Nonsense! This is not what I have trained her for ... she is my protégée. Romance and emotions are not allowed for her” (151). Maoists are fighting for humanity and Sahay dictates rules that stand in opposition to the basic human emotions and values. He exemplifies Avadhut recounting the detachment he practices after the demise of his wife. Sahay makes it further clear that he strictly wants Muskaan to choose a partner of an equal social status. All these expectations project Sahay’s venture to be artificial, uncovering the conventional one-dimensional front of authority. Sahay’s strict concepts of Maoism and class consciousness suggest the upstart of neo-patriarchy and Muskaan has to be on watch against it. Nora’s letters for Muskaan angers Sahay. The readers can see the different ways Sahay and Muskaan perform their duty. Muskaan tries her best to aid the people’s struggle in her limited resources and Sahay injured by his circumstances turns into an avenger.

Through the class discussion of Avadhut and Sahay, Das further highlights the existence of some stereotypical fissures present in the Sahay’s anti-establishment organisation. Avadhut doesn’t agree with Sahay’s ideas and this stresses the differences existing within their organisation. Das craftily gives the viewers these insights in between the discussion about their movements. It makes the reader question the effectiveness of these new strategies to free the society from exploitation.

Nora: Reaching Out to the Rebel

After a long wait, Muskaan finally replies to Nora’s letters. Muskaan holds her responsible for what had happened at *chabutara* that day. She, in fact, labels Nora guilty for all the bad that she thinks has happened to their militant organisation after that incident, “It happened all because of you” (156). There is a clear exposure of misgivings of an oppressive regime. The regime has subtly assured the sieving of its ideologies into its

agents, “Did I ever think that I, Muskaan ... would receive letters that came from the very evil empire that I despised” (157)?

Nora’s reply is a kind of ideological confrontation. She writes to Muskaan about her least interest in the *chabutara* incident. Nora is more interested in discussing the human. Nora tries to uncover the inhuman values that codified the Maoist males. She mentions about Palash in her letter who left Muskaan after her abduction on the obvious grounds of Muskaan’s body being defiled. Not only Sahay but Palash is also an agent of the patriarchal constructs of the society. Muskaan till Nora’s letter never questions this abandonment. Nora questions Muskaan’s future plans about education, job and life. These questions show Muskaan standing individual to the group she thought has helped her liberate from the conventional subjugating roles of a woman. However, the truth is put into words by Nora. Muskaan is truly alone without any knowledge of how to begin afresh. Avadhut though rescue her but leaves her aimless.

Avadhut goes to America. Muskaan is shocked to know that Avadhut has detailed information on her life at New York City. Avadhut inquires about the letters from Nora. He feels Muskaan is changing and her, “... growing aspirations. Muskaan’s realisation of reality beyond stark life-and-death cycle of Durjanpur” (162) can be seen. A new Sahay is in formation whose ideologies smell the same but the ideas are different. He defends Palash abandonment of Muskaan on the grounds of the purity test that Sita had to go in the *Ramayana*.

Muskaan has started understanding that Avadhut and Sahay are not her true protectors. On Nora’s suggestion, she has started working with Shaktishalini, a non-profit agency in Patna. Avadhut and Nora have a heated argument over it. Avadhut defends himself through the garb of being a protector, “Muskaan has never marched alone. She believes in collective action” (164). But he could not convince Nora, nonetheless, Nora

feels difficult to resist his charm. When Avadhut bids bye, she questions if he will return, “Will you come again...to ask about Muskaan? I was afraid to say ‘me’” (165). A quaint parallel between Nora and Muskaan is witnessed here. Muskaan had always considered Avadhut to be her idol. She was enamoured by his dedication towards their cause. If fathomed, Muskaan was in awe of the comrade image of Avadhut given to her by Sahay and his organisation. On the contrary, Nora through her experience can read a different face of Avadhut yet she can not resist being tempted by his charm. Does Das imply that roots of women subjugation rest in the sludge of multifarious images? Nora reads Avadhut to be an egoist yet she confesses that feelings are feelings.

Amidst the memories of Avadhut, Nora gets to hear from her long-lost acquaintance Rehana. Rehana has always been a strong political woman and works as a social worker with the same organisation Shaktishalini, where Muskaan is also working now. Rehana keeps informing about Muskaan to Nora. Muskaan is having varied experiences at Shaktishalini. She is dismissive on one hand but on the other, she is also surprised people discussing things openly. But she definitely is not the one who will follow anyone. Rehana also informs Nora about an unknown gentleman who is keen to help Shaktishalini. “But before he committed to his act of charity, he asked about the agency’s programmes, the causes they fight for, the geographical areas they concentrate upon and about their dedicated workforce” (172). To Nora shock, this man turns out to be no other but Nirav Saxena, the real name of Avadhut.

Muskaan finally calls Nora in New York. Muskaan tells her about her fight for the poppy growers at Patalgarh. In this process, she meets Palash there. Muskaan informs Nora that she fought with Palash too. She has understood that Palash does not love her anymore. But Muskaan still believes that it is Avadhut who really cares for her. Probably, he is her only support left. He has asked Muskaan to apply for one of the projects of

Shaktishalini which will have its work in New York also. Muskaan has understood her solitary position but she still does not realise the breach between the inner and outer reality. She still does not realise her separation from Avadhut's aims and still tries hard to be one with it.

Muskaan: Life, Love, and a New Path

In this section, we meet Muskaan in New York City. She has come to the City for some Shaktishalini's project with a global women's group. She is eagerly excited to meet her Sheherwali Nora.

Muskaan has found a new spirit working with Shaktishalini, "At twenty-one, I'm empowered ... I'm a bird! I'm a leaping frog! May be ready to swim" (181)! Muskaan does not want to think about her past anymore. Surprisingly she now sees her past as violent instead of the completeness that it used to provide her. Through Muskaan we get to understand women's general tendency to follow any new trend or the features of any ideology which gives even the slightest hint of being different. Muskaan's separation from her camp ruptures the harmony established between her inner and outer reality and reveals the void of nothingness. Her meeting with Sahay after a long time at Shaktishalini summons the memories of the same violent past. She was happy to see Sahay but her new self was divorced from those chaotic memories. She asserts her free thought and individuality. She bravely discloses her trip to States to her Mausaji, Sahay who, "... would be dead against anything in favour of America" (183). Hearing this, Sahay again starts intimating Muskaan about the Maoists activities in India and Nepal. He tells her how America is responsible for a breach between their Nepal Maoists' solidarity but Muskaan has woken up to the dangers of this solidarity.

In her orientation sessions, Muskaan meets women of different ethnicities, black, white, Afro-American and women from Nepal. These orientation sessions are strictly

charted out. Their every reaction and second are under scrutiny. If there are some women who are surprised knowing that Indian women are still learning, the others have "... seen a bit more of the reality" (185). The reality is the suffering caused by the double marginalisation of poverty and discrimination. This was a new facet that Muskaan was becoming aware of. She could understand a difference between Maoists who emphasized on 'product management' as opposed to the required 'process management'. Sahay and his comrades have been subjugated by a pattern and habit. Their actions are fixed, unlike these women who have decided to help their sisters through the tools and ways best suited to the latter. Some plan to use puppets, some Buddhist *mandalas* and some street plays for the girl's child at their respective places. The street plays make Muskaan remember Nora's visit to Durjanpur. It is today she can value that trip over what Avadhut had commented about their aloofness from reality. Nora's visit had a sense of purpose as against an always existing sense of anguish of Avadhut's aim.

Muskaan can understand this anguish now but she is still at an ease. Nevertheless, meeting Avadhut in New York City marks the move towards immediacy and truth that was not there before. Muskaan is seeing Avadhut dressed casually for the first time, he was differently dressed in Durjanpur. Muskaan also feels a difference between Avadhut and Palash, "Avadhut exudes a sense of calm control that was so lacking in Palash" (190). For the first time, we watch reality moving closer to Muskaan. She is angry at Palash, "But why am I thinking of that bastard? He had refused to hear me out and rejected because ... violated me ... Because I was a woman, after all" (190). There is a sense of clarity and an acknowledgment of her life. In opposition to her earlier indifference and silence, Muskaan shows a need to take things seriously. There is the wisdom of agency, she wants to kill Palash, "I know how to kill" (190). Seeing her perturbed, Avadhut consoles her, this time grabbing her shoulders. Avadhut never wants to return to his old life.

He discloses his love for Muskaan and the truth of Palash and Arif's death at the hands of the Hunting Brigade. This conversation between Muskaan and Avadhut lays bare the ironical fact that works in the lives of women. They have to choose between seclusion and oppression, "Yes, I am with him. There is no one else I can cling to ..." (198).

Muskaan is seen gripped by uncertainties. She does not know if it is right to share her relationship with Nora right now. She calls Nirav's house a den. She lies to Nora about her and Nirav. Yet she has gradually overcome some of the uncertainties. She is sure that on her return she wants to enroll for Bachelors. One can not deny her will and purposefulness marked against the world of suppression, "I'm even hoping to settle down one day, have a family" (201). Das stresses the fact that two spaces need not be binaries.

Muskaan is right now living between Nirav and rescued inmates like her. She plans to marry Nirav but sees her reflection in the pain of her inmates. Nirav behaves as if nothing had happened to them in the past. He comes as a completely different man and sometimes it frustrates Muskaan, "I am so dizzy with all this love making" (204).

Avadhut has started commanding Muskaan. He wants her to act according to him. When Muskaan tells him about her plans to do Bachelors, Avadhut tries to dismiss them saying that his business will not allow him to stay at one place in the world. He almost threatens Muskaan saying that if she decides to study, she will have to stay alone in Shaktishalini. He also orders Muskaan to not to listen to Nora in everything. All of a sudden the relationship which had a strong bond of togetherness standing at its threshold transforms into a mere comforting relation, Avadhut proclaims, "Why do you worry? You are young. There is so much to do. Besides, I am there for you always...don't you believe me Muskaan" (208)? Muskaan questions herself if she has anyone else to believe in. The history seems to surface again in a new garb, but this time Muskaan knows to sustain

herself. The section ends with Muskaan last words, “I do. There’s no one else I can believe more. But then...” (208).

Footprints in the Sun

This last section opens with the meeting of Nora and Muskaan. However, instead of the engulfing bajra fields of Durjanpur, they are now meeting in a cafe called Ozone. The physical setting is completely different from the descriptions of the Bajra fields. Das has intelligently used it to show the vast distance travelled by Muskaan, “... she is used to this chameleon life where clothes, language, food and habits undergo changes while she meets up newer people around her every day” (209). The physical place becomes the reflection of the inward change. Till now the bajra fields have emerged as symbols of dark engulfing conventionality or the abode of rebels who were equally conventional and orthodox. They curbed the freedom of Muskaan the same way, the traditional society does with every woman. Set against it is this modern cafe which marks a kind of subjectivity.

This was the life Muskaan was completely against in the opening of the novel. Yet, Das does not take the conventional stance of urban winning over rural. If Durjanpur was, so is the city seen as a dedifferentiated land of unknown and unnamed people, a homogenous intact where an individual can not be spotted. But the visible reality is not the only truth, individuals are laden with distances hiding their own reality. Muskaan is still filled with some of the particular pieces of the past that are reserved as memories. She is dressed up in jeans-shirt but the dim lights of the cafe-bar quickly summons the ugly memories, carrying an underlying baggage with it which the readers otherwise may not see, that is, a stagnancy. Muskaan has been ordered by Nirav. She has been asked to not to disclose their relationship to Nora. It is been one year now and Muskaan is not being able to live with this secret anymore. It marks the desire to break away from stagnancy. There is a craving for freedom, for inner space synchronized with the desire for belonging. Das shows

how any place can be gendered. What is more vital is the inner journey taken by the corporal act of a voyage, “It doesn’t really hurt Muskaan the Sheherwali calls Nirav a bastard” (217). The self is changing which is a subversive act.

Nora’s critical opinion about Nirav along with the suspicious facts about him shifts Muskaan’s perspective. But even after Nora’s rant, Muskaan likes Nirav. She enjoys his company. She openly confronts Nirav for not telling her about his becoming a trustee of Shaktishalini. Nirav is taken aback, “Rehana shouldn’t have told you about this right away” (219). Muskaan says that Rehana has not told her the secret, Nirav guesses Nora to be the informer: “Women, I tell you” (219). We see a continuous process of exposing covers of marginalisation a subaltern woman has to experience. Nirav chose Muskaan as in this love relationship he would have never required to reveal and unfold himself in front of one Muskaan unlike with Nora, “You are still friends with Nora” (219). Muskaan’s love would have been a woman’s longing for her lover and her loneliness, “Nirav is complex, he himself knows. Nothing constitutes a permanent position of reference in his life, be it women ...” (220). He uses Muskaan for his plans. Muskaan is an active part of Shaktishalini which will, in turn, assist Nirav fulfilling his big plans. He could not tell his plan to Muskaan because in reality Durjanpur never got over for Nirav. It shows how each human is in a different dilemma and has a different perspective. The inner space alters our insight of the outer reality. Nirav could be liberated in domination whereas Muskaan has started understanding that liberation lies in the constant state of becoming. Muskaan discloses the murder she had committed. She had murdered a man that night at Chinnamasta to save Nora. She also narrates the horror of her rape to Nora.irate, full of anger and sarcasm, Muskaan riles against the society of Durjanpur, its mentors, its systems and its upholders. She satirises and accuses those upholders who do not let women free. She speaks about the Naxalite women crossing the fields in the dark and being pursued. Muskaan’s retaliation

gives Nora the courage to confess, “I slept with Nirav” (227). This clears the evil intentions of Nirav. Muskaan doesn’t hold Nora to be the culprit, “... Nirav’s the one” (227).

Investigators come to inspect Shaktishalini. They suspect Shaktishalini to be collaborating “... with forces that work against the country” (229). They could be Maoists as specified by one of them. On the other hand, Nirav’s appointment and Nepal-based projects also had some connection. Gradually with each detail, the trap of Durjanpur is uncovered or if one wants to put it as freedom was being uncovered to be a trap, “They would have called it an encounter death. How ironic! That Muskaan would have ceased to exist without as much a whimper” (231). The final blow comes when she gets to know from Sahay on her last visit to Durjanpur that Nirav has allied with Nepal’s rebels and Sahay agrees to this move. Sahay, the man who was Muskaan’s ideal has also failed to see the true liberation, “... the bajras grow dark outside and absorb all timid sunrays one by one” (242). Muskaan today clearly knows that Nirav has used her to get a place at Shaktishalini, “She doesn’t know this landscape, this part-wet-part-dryness of the soil ...” (242). A corporal environment becomes a place only when pragmatic virtues of home, belonging, and collective encounters get joined to it.

Muskaan had to collect some Shaktishalini parcel from Banka, Banka from Patna was just a few hours travel. On reaching Shaktishalini’s headquarters at Banka, she gets to know that Nirav is also staying there. Nirav is surprised seeing Muskaan there. Muskaan confronts him with a gun, “You tell me” (247). Nirav tells her everything, yes he had planned everything, he has used her and above all, Sahay was always an active agent in all this planning, “You are lying, not Mausaji” (252). Muskaan is ostensibly made to be an angel and whore according to the requirement of the situation by her own guardians and relegated to the borders of the society, “Dusk has settled over the wintry sky of Delhi like a musty roof. The city has another name tonight. Refugee” (252).

Muskaan has started staying in Sarojini Nagar but she is still with Nirav. Nora visits Muskaan as she gets to know that Muskaan has been appointed as the main person of Shaktishalini's project in Nepal. Nirav has not returned since days. Nora can clearly understand Nirav's plan to use Muskaan till required and then be done with her. She forcefully grabs Muskaan and takes her to talk to the media. Muskaan could not deny because she somewhere agrees with Nora's thinking. She leaves with Nora with many doubts and especially if the police get to know that she took a gun to kill Nirav. Muskaan, on one hand, is feeling lonely and missing Nirav, there is also a hint of ensuing guilt because of the gun episode. On the other hand, she seems to be assertive about her opinion about Nirav, she calls him a traitor. Her situation is thus multifaceted and complex, as it is full of contradictory emotions. It delineates these feelings within the self, tussling with one another. However, Nora is sure about her actions and in a great haste makes sure that Rehana helps her to make Muskaan meet the media.

We finally see Muskaan emerging out from the frustrations, demands and tensions and her own personal angst. She throws away her dependency and the stigma associated with Durjanpur, the place that lies closest to her heart. The Bajras which have been Muskaan's best friend. It is real lived practice that reads a place. She now wages a politically committed war, "Former Maoist territory hums with community work: bajra belt washes away blood" (263).

Muskaan not only reports about Nirav and Sahay, she also opens a school in Durjanpur which has five hundred students from nearby villages also. She is studying the shift of feudal system to cooperative culture as her Masters thesis. It is she and not any male Naxalite leader who voices the narratives of conflict existing in Durjanpur. It is a woman rewriting and appropriating the space dominated by male hooligans.

Muskaan works hard for the betterment of the women of Durjanpur. She has arranged for women to learn and grasp different facets of computer and accounting. She has helped them collaborate with many NGOs which buy their handcraft work. The older rules and customs of Durjanpur do not exist anymore. She recognises the pain of the women of Durjanpur. They are split between the requirements and pressures of the violent system they are a part of. She can relate to the desire of coming out from the mental as well as physical exploitation they face living in a gendered space. She helps them come out of the fences of domestic roles imposed on them. Her efforts are consciously devoted, political, and feminist. She boldly encounters these dark areas of their and her own existence. The struggle for survival has not ended for Muskaan just the dynamics have altered. There is a strong assurance towards marginalized classes and women making them more democratic so that they can chalk out their own space. The bajras now, "... rustle with an incoming evening breeze" (263).

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Chapter 3

Spellings: Women's Reading Beyond the Binary Territories of Upper and Lower

Foreword

Today You came over to dinner for the first time

You not only came, you forgot your caste and came

But

With a smirk you said Oh My- Do you serve chutny koshimbir this way? (Bansode 49)

Hira Bansode's "Bosom Friend" starts on a note of fragrance. It is the fragrance of memories, desires, surprise, hope and fresh *chutny*. Bansode is overwhelmed receiving her upper-caste friend for dinner at her place. This visit is the assurance of no hierarchy but equality. It is the meeting of two humans where there are no submissions. The first paragraph summons several images to synthesise and express Bansode's unbound joy of acceptance. The joy of acceptance stems from problematisation of self-reading of a Dalit woman. Playing Shabari of the *Ramayana*, who is imprinted on the pages of history for her unconditional reverence and dedication towards Lord Rama, Bansode serves *chutny* alternating between happiness and anxiety of rising out of her fragmented past. *Chutny* not only adds colours and health to the Indian food but also completes the food adding power to it. It is the binding element of the Indian food, shuttling across wide ranges of Indian plates across time and space, paradoxically, dissolving and nourishing the diverse flavours of India. The mesh of symbolism and cultural allusions created by the images of Shabari and *chutny* not only highlights Bansode's flight from the world of reality to the world of imagination where space of social realities is insignificant but also relates her experienced

reality to the universal experience of oppression faced by women of lower-class and lower-caste. The upper-caste rich friend soon restores the chaos by her sudden pouring, assuring and widening the gap between the sky and the earth leaving Bansode ashamed and devastated. Bhima and Baby undergo the same emotional conflict as Bansode when the bonds of sharing and solidarity break through the load of discrimination and subordination.

Thrity Umrigar's *The Space Between Us*

Born a poor woman, abandoned by her husband, Bhima lives in a slum with her granddaughter Maya. Their small dwelling is furnished with poverty. The floor is of mud and in a fraction of a second, the entire hut of Bhima can be crossed. The roofs of the slum huts are patched and the drains smell poison. Work of the slum women begins early, while they have to line up with bones breaking heavy pots at the communal tap for water, the untouchable, *harijan* women would clean the heaped shit lying in front of the communal toilets. Thrity Umrigar while detailing the work of a *harijan* woman in *The Space Between Us* informs us that at times Bhima sitting on her mud floor observes this *harijan* woman sweeping away the pancakes of human filth. She feels miserable at the plight of the *harijan's* exploitation and therefore, unlike many other women of her slum without considering herself to be *harijan's* superior, Bhima smiles at her. It can be seen that the institutionalised status of the class structure in the cultural matrix of the Indian society is not only backed by the inevitable role played by the division of the labour and economic resources but also by the passive consuming of the constructed cultural meanings. Ironically, the same Bhima has to repeatedly experience this marginalised-harassment herself.

Bhima is also vulnerable to the inherent values and singular meanings stuffed in these class compartments by the dominant class. She is substituted as the *harijan* woman in

her relationship with her upper-class-caste *malkin*, Serabai. Sitting in the dining room, Sera sips her tea from the exotic mug bought by her daughter Dinaz from the Cottage Industries whereas Bhima who has been serving them with all her heart since time immemorial drinks from a steel glass that is set aside for her. Like always, Sera sits on the chair and Bhima has to squat on the floor. Dinaz pokes her mother, she questions Sera's hypocrisy as on one hand Sera addresses Bhima to be their family member and a person she can not exist without yet she can not share her furniture and utensils, "And you and Daddy are always talking about those high-caste Hindus burning Harijans and how wrong that is. But in your own house, you have these class differences, too. What hypocrisy Mummy" (26).

Bhima has been working as a domestic help in Dubash household for more than twenty years now. She has been a thick shoulder for Sera when the latter becomes the victim of gender-based discrimination. Sera's dead husband, Feroz treated her as a heartless body.

Sera's marriage took away her freedom and fulfilment. Feroz cleverly seduced her into marriage but only to make her the victim of his brutal violence. Feroz along with his mother Banu made every effort to destroy Sera's identity and forced her into silent acceptance. They internalised their norms to such an extent in her that she initially could not even notice her utilization. Feroz had weaved a thousand lies to get married to Sera. He had assured Sera of being the only girl ever in his life but she soon gets to know about Feroz's ex-girlfriend Gulnaz. On confronting Feroz about this lie, Feroz retaliated saying that it is not Sera's business to poke into his past relations. Even after severe agony, solitude and seclusion, Sera never retaliated rather she used to wait for Feroz's calls to mend things up.

At times Sera recollects, being gripped by the intense desire to leave Feroz's house but because of the lack of the conviction, she was never able to accomplish that. Sera could not even tell her grief to her parents as marrying Feroz was her own decision. Sera's

torments were not restricted to beatings and abuses, Feroz had also accused her of infidelity. Like many other honest wives, Sera had to suffer a lot. She was targeted for flirting. A mere polite nodding to a waiter made Sera a victim of double standards practiced against women. Feroz and his mother Banu together reduced Sera to nothingness, a body which should not project anything.

But the fact to be noticed here is Sera's lack of action even when she could understand her exploitation. She was conscious of her suppression and yet did not take any adamant step against it. Sera symbolizes the internal fights and pain of those middle-class women who through their education know what is women empowerment but lying under the debris of age-old traditions and customs lack the bravery to pave the way of freedom for themselves. Their class sophistication bounds them in a bond of eternal slavery.

From the beginning to the end, Sera is persuaded, governed, helped and ruled by other agencies. She is always in the positions of subordination to events and people, her act of flattening her relation with Bhima into the economic class structure is also powered by the patriarchal values. She is in the grip of an underlying fear that any outburst is threatening to the entire cultural values she has been brought up in as it is the very existence of her upbringing and that is why she feels, "...exposed under the X-ray vision of Bhima's eyes..." (111) when Bhima encourages her to voice her individuality. Bhima asks her to share her torture with her parents making her see the shame is Feroz's. She tells Sera that the latter does not have to embarrass as the beatings bring out her husband's barbarity. Stereotypically, Sera's condition in the Indian cultural space can be read only as women's sexual victimisation in the Indian family concealing the fact that this cultural space is a made-world of insisted right meanings.

Bhima nurses the wounds of Sera, yet Sera shares the ideology of her men. As Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi in *Daughters of Independence* say that controlling women's

freedom and sexuality keeps the patriarchal social and economic hierarchy intact (57), we can see that the upper-class-caste patriarchy successfully injects the deep-rooted contempt for the lower in their women also. This brings out the contradictions of the upper-class-caste women and also exposes the fact that the upper-class-caste patriarchal structures do not necessarily manifest themselves through physical violence and dictates. They at times rearticulate oppressive ideologies to show a change happening yet, in reality, establish new sets of conventions for their women. They have let Sera enjoy a sense of solidarity in exercising the power over the lower-class-caste woman. The other dimension of this patriarchal oppression is experienced by Bhima. She has internalised and accepted the notion of pollution, that is, the lower in the social hierarchy being impure and untouchables.

If on one hand, Sera's treatment and attitude towards Bhima elucidates one way of curbing women to maintain socio-economic hierarchies, Viraf's sexual violence on Maya shows the other. Viraf is Sera's son-in-law. Sera completely adores her son-in-law. She sees him entirely different from her husband. According to her Viraf is a perfect husband who knows how to take care of his wife. Viraf is the new male, representing the modern classlessness, his individualism is set against the perspectives and dead weight of the traditions followed by the old men like his father-in-law, Feroz, "Without being asked, he removes three plates and sets them on the dining table ..." (68) for his wife, mother-in-law and himself. However, moving away from the past does not mean moving away from the conventional freedom and constraints of the masculinity and femininity respectively. As Dinaz is pregnant, Viraf is not able to control his lust on seeing Maya, Bhima's granddaughter who nursing the paralysed Banu in their apartment. Viraf's act of exploiting Maya's sexuality keeps both the gender and socio-economic hierarchies intact.

Viraf has come to see Banu, Sera's mother-in-law and exploits Maya finding her alone. Nevertheless, what is new is the way Viraf justifies the crime of an upper class

man. He gives altogether a new perspective to the heinous crime of rape. Born in the new age, Viraf is still sure about the sanctity of marriage. It is the most important social relationship and has to be protected against the threats of all the other unjust relationships. Despite knowing this fact when Viraf could not restrain himself from the urge of sensual gratification, he, in order to escape punishment, gives Maya the limited liberty to articulate female sexual desires which are otherwise considered to be profane in the Indian patriarchal society, "... feeling the tension in his chest muscles, and somehow recognizing, with an ancient, primal wisdom, that she was the cause of that tension, that she was the reason for his shallow breathing. And her awe turning to pride..." (276-77). Maya loses her reason in the bodily attraction and this gives Viraf a license to fulfil his concealing evil. Maya does not desire Viraf rather he seduces her into becoming the object of his desire.

However, at the same time, Umrigar steals this moment to bring out the new features of femininity constructed by the patriarchal society to compliment the emerging attributes of masculinity. Maya's freer and independent space seem to be tailored by the modern patriarchy to pave the possibilities of their own freedom. Patriarchy is letting women sexuality be free from the clutches of past so that it can be styled up in the waters of modernisation. Viraf easily escapes the judicial punishment without abandoning the conventional traits of patriarchy, "Listen Maya ... that was a bad thing you did, tempting me like that, taking advantage of me while I was in a weak mood" (279).

Maya's protest is easily silenced through the trap of victim and victimizer often applied to deal with the issues of sexual exploitation. Viraf does not let her speak rather blames her for the act. He acts like a victimizer who ironically is ready to spare Maya from the punishment on the condition of never harassing him again. He indirectly makes her feel guilty towards Dinaz and her unborn baby. This highlights the entrap of debt that the marginalised owe towards the owner. He makes her remember all the favours that Dubash

family has done for her and Bhima over the years. He is smart enough to show this bond of Dubash family and Bhima as one-sided dealings, “They’ve treated you like their very own, sent you to a good college. You have a bright future ahead of you. Now don’t let this one incident ruin your life. You understand what I’m saying” (279)?

Viraf does not come out as a victim rather he is reminding Maya of the eternal taboos associated with the Indian female sexuality. Women’s breach of the conjugal relationships to get any other type of sexual behaviour approved is sealed to be blasphemous.

The articulation of female sexual desire outside the normative institutions is not acceptable. However, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Third World women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991) discusses that the victim v/s agency is not the only power equation working, “The relation of power ... are not (only) reducible to binary oppositions of oppressor/ oppressed relations. I want to suggest that it is possible to retain the idea of multiple, fluid structural domination which intersects to locate women differently ...” (12-13). In the light of this claim, Viraf’s act of blaming Maya also reveals the reality of female sexuality playing the pivot of the normative class-caste structure. The exploitation of Maya, a marginalised woman by the rich man has been naturalised. On the other hand, the act of Feroz unjustly accusing his wife, Sera of infidelity, “Flirting with a waiter ... Smiling at him, saying thank you every damn time he filled your glass with water” (165) babbles the false sense of honour and respect associated with the sexuality of an upper-class woman. The whole normative structure can be upturned on the slightest hint of a woman knocking the thick walls of the socio-economic hierarchical boundaries. While the sexuality of one woman is openly disdained, others’ is stringently controlled.

Culture is how we live, but gradually sharing of the meaning of our lived and encountered experiences starts expanding which in turn, expands the cultural space. Thus,

in a way the cultural space is formed through fabrication, exchange and consumption of meanings. Sera since her childhood has been taught to be a good girl. She has grown up to get married. But as Stuart Hall converses in “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms” and “On Postmodernism and Articulation”, the ‘exchange’ as he terms it ‘articulation’, works at two levels; at the first, articulation means expressing the meaning and at the second, it means expressing it in a particular context and manner. When it is placed in the outline of ‘hegemony’, the articulation can produce either acceptance or negotiation. Conversely, it is not just about overpowering or suppression but a play which is open to the changing positions of power. Sera thus is not just a victim of sexual exploitation and violence but of the position from where she can see Indian culture and her identity chained in that static space which can fall from the eternal prestigious position through her speech and can be restored to its purity by her silence.

Sera has to recognise that both culture and identity work at multiple and shifting levels but she is contend with Bhima’s recognition of her pain. She is satisfied simply because someone understands her distress. Bhima is the channel through which Sera is able to merge her dreams with the harsh reality. She is able to explore issues of her life in front of Bhima which she otherwise could not raise in public. This is her only limited space to assert her position of subjectivity.

Maya, on the other hand, breaks this limited space sanctioned to women, she is adamant not to share the name and pain she had gone through the violent act of Viraf. She questions Bhima, “What does it matter who the father is, Ma-ma? The fact is that the baby is growing in my stomach, not his. That makes it my curse and my blessing, no one else’s...” (41). Sera articulation of silence was the act of acceptance but Maya’s is a negation. She agrees to Bhima’s condition of aborting the child, if it calms Bhima. Bhima is scared that soon Maya’s illegitimate pregnancy will be visible to the world. She thinks

shedding the child will shed the shame associated with it, ironically seeing it to be Maya's shame. Bhima who could understand Feroz's barbarity fails to recognize Maya's position. Maya does not revolt against her decision but keeps a condition, "I want Serabai to go to the hospital with me instead of you" (56). Maya's act of denying the space offered by the patriarchal society to women to voice their resentment and pain breaks the dominant ideology and norms, simultaneously paving opportunities for the marginalised to redesign the cultural space. Maya leaves no gap to critique it. On the day when Sera accompanies Maya to the hospital, she locks her house but instead of giving the keys to her old companion Bhima, hands it over to the unknown neighbour. Maya could not control her anger on the constant suppression of the Dubash family. She provokes Bhima asking the reason for not trusting her with the keys. She questions her as to why even after years of dedicated servility, Sera has not handed over the keys to Bhima and instead given them to an unknown stranger?

Maya's loud public breach of the patriarchal codes of governance staggers Sera to an extent that she calls Maya, "... so defensive, so uncultured, so—low-class, really" (119). Sera's words mirror that one common self which lies firmly under the different selves operating in a culture. This self is the symbol of a collective cultural identity that is inculcated through the hegemonic ways of naturalisation. It also brings out the point mentioned by Jyoti Puri in *Women, Body, Desire in Post-colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality*. Puri claims that every class has its own policies to subjugate their women but it is not done explicitly rather through a method of normalization. This process makes it difficult for women to unbind themselves from the multilayered policies (201). In the truth of the above claim, Sera has junctures of difference with Bhima.

Sera–Bhima relationship is constructed through a process of selection and rejection. Their relationship is not born out of correspondence but is the result of a

combination, an equation of similarities and differences just as meanings are produced in the structural world of language. They both view a particular situation with individual underlying thoughts and perspectives and the agreement is the result of a common system of rules and regulations operating in the network of social relationships.

Bhima remembers the way Sera and Feroz had helped her when Gopal was helplessly laying in a government hospital. However, what Bhima is trying to remember is the confident way they spoke to the doctor.

Bhima was left completely mesmerised by Feroz's confidence. It made him a star in her eyes and this gives Bhima the courage to talk to Sera about Maya's pregnancy. Even being bolder than Sera, Sera's artificial world convinces Bhima of her deficiencies. She has struggled through many difficulties and emerged a winner but yet today she thinks that Serabai will solve her trouble.

Sera and Bhima, both recognise and slip into their chairs acquiring the respective social identities, society has ordained for them. This division of women's identity on the basis of class and caste in the same equation is indispensable for keeping the patriarchy and its social hierarchies intact.

Sera's act of generosity will produce a position of agency over Bhima which will not only guarantee the social prestige of her family but also ensure her domesticity through confining her act and agency in the boundaries of middle-class women's yardstick of respectability. As Kumkum Sangari discusses in her "Introduction" to *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, this benchmark is assured by the nature of women's economic work (2-5). However, as already pointed once, the ways of detention are not cabined. Viraf is quick to de-familiarise the domestic subjugation of women in the interest of patriarchy by creating a mist of power and self-control around his wife, Dinaz. Viraf teases her for being her boss's favourite and Dinaz enjoys a sense of power in this. An urban professional

woman who knows the way to claim deserved promotions and perks. Viraf even accepts his lack of such skills and in this acceptance he again launches certain traits which can be seen as the enactments of femininity. He not only lays the new features that the modern woman will have to adopt in order to be labelled successful but also subjugates Dinaz's achievement to the mercy of her boss. Viraf by presenting a different sketch of femininity frees Dinaz from the traditional restrictive role of women only to make her the captive of alternative femininity constructed by patriarchy, "Dinaz immediately sets down her fork and leans over to kiss husband on the cheek. " I'm sorry, janu," she says. I feel the same way, too. Sorry for being so insensitive" (71). Dinaz is the same girl who questions the discrimination that her parents practice towards Bhima. Viraf has allowed Dinaz a cosmopolitan lifestyle but only to dress her according to his desires.

The reality of escapism placed in the space can never be oblivious. Bhima knows that she can not sip tea from the same mugs of the Dubash family. However, the suppression does not only work by providing an escape into a materially better place but also through the access marginalised have to the state power. Bhima takes Serabai to get Maya admitted to a college. It is a big college and Bhima is sure education in this college will get both Bhima and Maya away from the clutches of poverty. They stand in a queue waiting for their turn to fulfil the admission formalities. The clerk attending the students, seeing the condition of Maya, responds in a harsh way and it is Sera who confronts her. She scolds him with the tool of the elite education that she had got in her convent school. Her English-accent scares off the clerk to an extent that he not only completes their formalities but also seeks forgiveness.

The clerk exemplifies the power and position of the upper-class. Nevertheless, the courage of Sera also shows that the woman, who could never re-emerge from her

oppression at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law, outweighs the clerk with a single act of resistance.

Sera tries to escape her gender dishonour also by locating happiness in Dinaz's wedding. The apparent difference of Dinaz's marriage exports her into the world where her fantasies come real. When she sees Viraf linking, "... his right index finger to Dinaz's left ... All the misery with Feroz is worth it because it has brought me to this moment. My daughter has a marriage I never had. And I brought her to this point" (71).

This momentary flowing of identity into the other also provides a sense of control to Bhima. Gopal, Sera and Viraf are the different forces of domination under which Bhima shuttles. Maya becomes Bhima's escape in this situation.

Bhima and her husband Gopal loved each other a lot. Gopal was completely taken aback by Bhima's charm and did every possible effort to woo her and finally persuaded her to marry him. He was very happy marrying Bhima and promised her a life of a queen. He also kept his promise firm for fifteen years but after fifteen years of immense love, Gopal transformed into an agonizing husband.

An accident had occurred at Gopal's factory in which he lost his three fingers. The company without giving the right compensation chucked him out of the job. Gopal could not accept this loss and insult and to overcome the pain took to alcohol. He did not do anything to help Bhima run the household. The loving wife, Bhima understanding the hurt of her husband, could not say anything to him. She took the lead of her house and began managing it all alone. But Gopal like a cruel patriarch started taking the advantage of Bhima's goodness. He got pleasure by beating and exploiting her. Ironically, the Bhima who asked Serabai to share Feroz's shame quietly submitted to Gopal's shame. She accepted his brutality. But one day, when Gopal stole the money she had kept for the medicines of her son, Amit, Bhima changed into wrath and she with all her courage

thrashed Gopal publically. Bhima's freedom of expression resulted in societal chaos and Gopal avenged the explosion of her anger in public by abandoning Bhima and their daughter Pooja alone to live. He took them soon with him.

In this turbulent time, Sera employs the tools of empathy and sympathy to ensure the regulation of existing socio-economic structures of power. She gives Bhima the knowledge of the world which is otherwise alien to her. This knowledge, in turn, gives Bhima the temporary power to see and understand the world in a different way. She expresses gratitude for the way Serabai shows her the obscured truth of the political world. It is Serabai who shows her that it is not Muslims or Hindus who are bad but the politicians. Bhima could not first trust this reality but, "... then Serabai took it upon herself to translate parts of the newspaper for her, and Bhima learned about the burning of Muslim villages by Hindu mob and how the politicians played each group against each other. Then Bhima stopped hating the Muslims and started hating the politicians instead" (308).

Ismat Chughtai in "Kallu" also deals with the same issue of lower-caste education. "Kallu" is about the victimisation of a poor young boy at the hands of an upper class family and especially, Mumani. Chughtai in the first part of the story makes the reader examine if the basic human rights of lower class people enshrined in the Constitution are successfully delivered by the society. She also raises the issue of lower class exclusion from domains of knowledge. The extreme poverty also contributes to their lack of education and progress. Kallu, the seven-year-old boy does all the work for two rupees a month. One day while playing with the daughter of the house, Salima Bi, he in all his innocence asks her if she would marry him, overhearing this conversation, Mumani Bi throws a sandal at Kallu in a rage and asks him to leave the house immediately. The mother is strictly against the alliance because of his lower class. However, the now Deputy Collector, Kallu/ lower class self that Chughtai represents in the second part, rejects the dominance. He still loves Salima

Bi, and on even knowing the declining social and economic position of her family wants to marry her. Mumani even now is unable to accept the relationship as it entails the admission of her guilt. Kallu understanding her hitch addresses her Amma Bi. By doing so he places Mumani on the highest pedestal of reverence yet breaks the rules of the dominant class and also subverts the power equation. He is shown to possess a fine critical mind that refuses to blindly follow the dominant dictates of the upper caste. Kallu is aware of his power and uses it intelligently. The shift from Dulhan Bi to Amma Bi is a symbolic shift of power where Kallu changes the rule and silences the upper class and cajoles them to follow his heart happily. He comes as an energetic fighter who positively engages with ‘upper caste’ prejudices and wins.

When Serabai lets the class honour vanquish the sharing of gender injustice by trusting Viraf’s accusation of Bhima stealing seven hundred rupees, Bhima turns into a confused object shuttling between contradictions. She loses the intelligence of a unified subjectivity and it is where the necessity of someone to act on behalf arises. She feels cheated, she thinks that Serabai instead of teaching her written words should have revealed her own mind to her. She also flings apart the courage of the upper-middle class man, Viraf, “How scared could he have been, knowing that an old uneducated woman was his opponent?...That’s how much he bought and sold you for, seven hundred rupees. That’s your worth- less than a party’s supply of beer” (309). However, she still feels that Serabai will understand her.

In an effort to rejuvenate Maya, Bhima takes her out to Chowpatty for food. There on meeting Sera, Dinaz and Viraf, Bhima is left shocked on noticing Viraf’s attitude towards Maya, “It was strange how she found out. One moment she didn’t know the next minute she did. One moment her mind was as blank as a desert; the next minute the snake of suspicion had slithered into her thoughts and raised its poisonous head. And now she

must live with the earth-shattering knowledge that Viraf Davar was the father of Maya's dead child" (267).

Viraf's use of state power to secure his social position first makes Bhima desire Sera's shelter as she does not realise that Sera had shared with her the subjective knowledge of the world in which the important thing is not the eradication of injustice but the aggression against the injustice done to one sect. Sera in her translation of the article weaves a story about Muslim houses being burnt by the bad politicians, dividing the world into powerful and powerless, where Bhima identified herself as the wronged and thus, her hate shifted from the age-old enemies of the Hindus, that are, the Muslims to the politicians. Sera, in her act of translation, neither provides Bhima the space to question the construction of binaries nor let her place the legitimacy of injustice in the larger framework of objective history. So, as a structuralist demonstrates that language through its structure communicates a conceptual world and, by relation, the culture we live in. We can not also negate the fact that construction of language happens at the higher levels. This truth is also poignantly dealt by the heart-wrenching writer Saadat Hasan Manto in his short story "Toba Tek Singh".

Many of us have been acquainted with this story in its translation or original version at some stage. Set amidst the turmoil of partition, the central figure of the story is Bishan Singh, a Sikh lunatic who is struggling in a madhouse for almost fifteen years to find out "...where is Toba Tek Singh" (110). As the staff of the madhouse could recall, Bishan Singh had owned vast pieces of land in Toba Tek Singh. Toba Tek Singh after the partition is a city in the Pakistani province of Punjab. Bishan had a reputation of a well-known landlord but one unfortunate day his brain "... tripped" (109). His family brought him chained and left him in the madhouse for never to return. Like many, he was baffled at the sane and civilized governments' reordering through the attempt of exchange Hindustani and Pakistani mad-men. Finally on knowing that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan and he was

about to be uprooted and dispatched to Hindustan, he stood on a middle spot and after some time the man who had not slept for the last fifteen years laid dead on no man's land, that is, on the partition line of Hindustan and Pakistan. The story has copious traces of Manto's familiar assets of wit and irony. It brings out the trauma of the Partition of Hindustan into Hindustan and Pakistan and its aftermaths through a satirical yet grotesque expression of control and exploitation of common man by the government and its rulers. Sanity/ insanity opposition is aggressively undermined. If the political official mapping of the government rendering pain to the point of fragmentation of individual psyche is considered to be sane, then anyone reacting against being twisted away from physical and psychological securities is insane. This is how mad-men and particularly Bishan Singh come out to be the icon of masses. The shriek that fills the air works as a means of communication, a way to talk to the reader who can see himself being produced in the story, that is, in the course of the action, the reader is persuaded to be active. The action of authority/ power and its impact is delineated with a kind of disturbing cruelty which wafts up into a crucial consciousness. When the reader now goes in the real world he can identify certain practices and values of the men in power which are uncritically glorified or suppressed to suit the established political power. He can understand the reality through the analysis of these practices and values of the authority that are considered to be the most important. Both the player and the viewer in the Indo-Pak cricket match will now not feel that he has let his country down if he neither wins on the field nor shows aggression at the defeat of his country, respectively. However, this is also a special story in the sense it moistens one's eyes on every read. The dilemma of Bishan Singh is so appealing not just due to the representation of common man's suffering and ethical basis to it, but also because Manto takes us to into the depth of his feelings in the end. A man is keen on returning home eagerly and is struggling to do so in the face of unexplainable hardships for the last fifteen years but is ultimately forced to

die. The story is so appealing because it makes the moment of Singh's death in the face of political hardships so effective and poignant, yet does so without any melodramatic gestures. The pain of a helpless victim in a disillusioned world where hopes are crashing down is conveyed to the reader not on an explicit basis but due to the fact that s/he has already been acquainted with the depth and intensity of love that a man possesses for his place to which experiential qualities of home, belonging, and collective emotion are bound, in the area of relations, where various people breathe in harmony.

The second story narrated to Bhima is Maya's story, the story of the punishment inflicted on the female sexuality, that can not be confined in the walls of a permanent relationship, and thus is blamed to be sexually immoral. On seeing Viraf's face, Bhima politely requests Maya to pour her heart out and Maya narrates the story. However, the difference between the two stories is that Sera's story makes Bhima identify with the good people standing in opposition to the villain but Maya's reverses the conventional binaries of hero and society v/s villain who is a threat to the good society. This story places the heroine outside, struggling against a corrupt society and culture. The ideological role of the story is to help the listener accept the normative codes but Maya's story helps to decode the male violence as the heroine has been raped by the role model who himself generates the fantasies of power.

Viraf reads Bhima's act of reading as a threat to his patriarchal authority so before Bhima's resistance, he himself places Bhima outside their home, a home which had become the society of meanings, relations and roles for Bhima. Ironically, what Viraf could not read is the fact that Bhima now realises her position of being outside the society and the understanding of her position also reveals to her the corruption prevailing in that society. The myth of the society, coincidentally created and preserved by the society, that aligned the heroine and the society against the villain is stripped naked. Bhima has recognised the

villain, it is the same society and thus her open defiance makes her emerge as an icon of liberation, “He thinks he can buy my silence with his seven hundred rupees? If he builds me a house of gold I won’t forgive him for what he has done to my—” (303).

Bhima leaves, she assesses past through a subjective transmit of mind. Her upsurge against the society comes out connected with the traumatic memories of oppression, both hers and surprisingly also Serabia’s. Bhima sits near the shore and keeps her box of accessories that she has taken while leaving Sera’s house. This box contains the memories of her past miseries and she is firm not to take it back.

The different traumatic memories act significantly in her resistance yet the image that finally overwhelms her mind is that of the Afghani *ballonwalla* reminiscent of the Rabindranath Tagore’s Afghan “Kabulliwallah”. This Afghani Pathan invokes the bond which is beyond the province of history, the bond of unconditional love. Bhima remembers her son, Amit but, however, she is afraid as his face is getting washed away from her memory. She does not even remember Feroz’s face but, “... she can picture the Pathan’s face as if she had run into him yesterday ... she remembers the beautiful brown hands, hands that created poetry out of nothing, that turned lifeless pieces of rubber into magical objects that brought joy to the eyes of children” (313-14). There is a positive transformation of unconventional associations. She can hear him aloud as if his voice is travelling from far away mountains and valleys trying to communicate with her. Bhima has never questioned him, yet Pathan is giving her answers. The magic of Pathan strikes her, even being a solitary person, Pathan is the mesmerising pipe piper, our Krishna who can woo and charm anyone because he has understood to compose a song out of loneliness.

This bond transcends the sociologically created constructs of gender, class and caste. Bhima is not lost in the darkness of loneliness instead traverses from the insides of the society to the outside where she is free and knows how to safeguard her fundamental

rights against violations, “Freedom. She is almost grateful to Viraf now, for is treachery has been the knife that has cut the thread that kept her bound for so long (315).

Bansode in “Bosom Friend” and Baby in *A Life Less Ordinary* are also liberated when they deny conforming to the tradition of acceptance from the other, “Are you going to tell me my mistakes” (50)?

Bansode consciously and vehemently rejects the binaries that her upper class-caste friend is trying to impose by expressing her freedom to think and communicate. The poem ends on a tone of disseminating consciousness and information for the Dalit women to address the prejudice aimed at them.

Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary*

Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary* is a translation of twenty-nine years old domestic worker’s real life into a book. Baby’s life has been moulded by various social experiences but finally, is reconstructed by an informed awareness. The book presents the growth and progress of consciousness in Baby, who then begins to question her exploitation and assert her independent selfhood.

Baby’s struggle against the devastating poverty and discriminatory patriarchal restrictions breaks the mould of gender stereotypes. Right in the beginning when Baby introduces herself, she clearly expresses her love for school in contrast to the hatred she had for her home, more so after her own mother “...with grief in her heart, one day suddenly left...” (3) her and the siblings with their father. The sudden abandoning of her mother, the consequent second marriage of her father, nagging stepmother and the marriage of her fifteen years old sister put the burden of running the household and looking after her younger siblings on her weak but capable shoulders. Baby recollects that even after having immense work she never stopped going to the school. There were days when she used to go

to the school without eating anything and telling this to anybody meant bad beating from her father. Yet, her work in the school was appreciated but at home, she received nothing but rebukes.

She accepts her duties and liabilities yet paradoxically her childhood dialogues highlight that her resistance starts emerging soon out of her sense of self-respect and understanding. The inhuman and brutal conditions amidst which she has to survive clearly highlight the victimhood yet on hearing the news of her father's third marriage soon after her real mother left, Baby reacts, "I said to my brother, "How much more do you think we will have to bear?" (7). Baby's reaction can be foreseen as developing into something that Kumkum Sangari writes in "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement". It is called female incitement. This involves the concept of woman provoking a man to act and in this process, she becomes a part of the public domain. Basically, incitement is read as the threshold of private and political or domestic or public where a woman can reformulate herself in various ways (872).

Being a child, Baby has no easy escape from an insensitive father still what can not be ignored is the fact that her resentment stems from a realisation. It is the realisation of being confined into endless repetitive structures. At times she is really upset with her father. She can understand that her father will not do anything to change their position rather because of him they have to listen to all kinds of fake sympathies from their known ones. The same consciousness is also read in the elder sister recited by Saleem Peeradina in "Sisters". On being scolded by father, the elder sister reacts vehemently. In the fight with her younger sister, it is always she who gets the scolding from the father. However, the father writes that the elder daughter is intelligent enough to read the biases of his actions. She does not spare her father without letting him feel his mistake.

Unfortunately, Baby's father does not even know that he is unfair. Baby's father has always been living with the image of his self constructed as 'low' in the socio-economic hierarchy by the upper caste and the capitalist society. Harold A Gould in "Sanskritization and Westernization" discusses how Srinivas looks "...the desire of the lower castes to move upward by transforming their ritual and social structure until it conforms more nearly to that of the Brahmana and, therefore, represents elite status within their experiential ken" (946). The father has been introduced struggling to fix a stable job which can at least earn him the minimum required for his family. The constant displacement has already made him vulnerable to a sense of alienation. He stays away from home for months and even on his return after long intervals never seem happy. He has always remained immersed in the world of his alcohol. Amidst this rootlessness, repeated marriages become a means of reclaiming, reconstructing and preserving his identity, past and culture as ordained by the social hierarchy. As written by Mary E. John in *Women's Studies in India*, "The sociologists like Leela Dube have discussed that men use women to work the caste relations" (444). He can not realise that these marriages are mere means of escaping the status struggle. The burden of this status struggle leaves little energy for real subversion, that is, the reconceptualising of the low self in order to stir the conscience of the upper and the consequent birth of a powerful self. A similar entrap laid for the Dalits has been explained by Ruth Manorama in "Dalit Women: The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden" where through the fake notions of liberty, the upper-caste provides a new understanding of the self to Dalits (447).

The weight of poverty leads Baby's father to avoid every effort. Baby's second stepmother never pays heed to her father's words. She never feeds the children properly and often beat them up without any issue. She fabricates false stories and gets the children thrashed by their father. Her father does not ever bother to cross check the allegations and in

the fit of frustration beat the children brutally. The third mother does not even go to fetch water for herself and the children have to do so. She also asks Baby to give her jewels so that they can be redone properly. Baby gives them but they are never returned to Baby and in fact, one day she sees her stepmother wearing a set of new one. There are many things they have to go through. Her father and stepmother also drink in front of them. Being children, Baby and her siblings can not do much to protect themselves. Baby has to finally leave her studies because her third mother is not able to manage the household all alone.

Where the father is stuck in the circle which make the escape impossible, Baby makes sense of the everyday world. She can understand she and her sister becoming the source their parent's worry. Her mother knows that no one will take their responsibility, "Ma also thought of taking up a job, but that would have meant going out of the house, which she had never done. And after all, what work could she do? Another of her worries was: what would people say? But worrying about people will say does not help to fill empty stomach, does it"(2)?

The above-quoted lines stress the multiplicity of an event. They not only elaborate what has already happened but are also an articulation of a silence, which has been expressed with the reality it begins from. These moments are generated from a tensed confrontation with the patriarchal capitalist culture that produces fixed frames of positions to see and perceive the world. Baby's Ma is the symbol of the passive consumer of the normative consciousness that secures social control by making her the passive consumer of their ideologies, however, Baby raises up the consciousness that culture is something we make in the different works of our everyday life.

Baby's ma unable to deal with the situation suddenly leaves the home with her younger son. Baby, on the other hand, does not suddenly break away from the traditional culture rather constructs oppositional meanings.

Soon after her mother leaves, Baby's sister gets married. Baby has to do all the household chores her now which makes her lives her physically weak and sick. She is admitted to the hospital and awakens to her sheets stained with blood. Since that day her father often told her that she is not a child. Baby discusses this transformation from a child to a grown up girl as an encounter between her and the reader, "... Baba watching me intently ..." (10) and "Like Baba, I think the boy who lived in the hotel behind our house also begun to think I was a grown up. Every time I sat down to read in the room, I would find him watching me from his window" (11). She now encounters socially constructed gendered location. The reading is accompanied with preconceptions. Ironically, Baby, who is herself well read, can not understand the difference in her after returning from the hospital and this brings out the constructed materiality of gender. Baby can feel this difference in every eye. The boy who lives in their street also started eyeing her. He continuously watches her, observes her and at times also follows her. Baby has heard him talking about her to his friends but still when Baby's friend questions her, "Why does that boy want to know everything about you?" (11) Baby dismisses the strangeness of the act. The conversation between Baby and her friend, the question and the answer bring something to the encounter. Baby deconstructs many myths regarding lower class women's inefficiency. It conveys the truth that meanings can be comprehended only when both the question and answer are placed in the whole. So if the question represents the submissive self, the answer portrays the birth of the new female self emerging in protest to these readings.

Her father and the third mother are really annoyed with the emergence of this Baby. The stepmother constantly complains against Baby to her father. There are many discussions about getting rid of her. Annoyed, Baby decides to stay with her Pishi-ma for some time. Visiting Pishi-ma is a big source of joy for Baby. She loves talking to Pishi-

ma's daughter. She gets to know that this daughter whom she addresses *didi* is soon going to be married. For the first time, Baby gets to witness the extensive process of parading a girl in front of strangers to be approved for marriage. Some people are coming to see *didi* and many arrangements have to be made for their visit. On seeing Baby, a beautiful energetic girl, they enquire about her for the obvious reasons to get her married to one of their relatives. Pishi-ma knows that Baby is too young for marriage and thus she very politely refuses the offer. However, the fate can not be held for long.

Baby is called back from Pishi-ma's house and forced into the patriarchal paradigm of marriage. On her return from Pishi ma's house, her family decided to marry her off. Her stepmother's brother has brought a match for Baby. The family is very excited. Her stepmother makes tea for the boy and asks Baby to serve it to them. On seeing Baby, the man starts questioning everything possible about Baby's culinary skills. He is just concerned about how well Baby can handle a kitchen and house. Baby is not able to understand the purpose of these questions, all she can see is the huge age difference between her and this man. The man is around twenty-six years old and Baby not even thirteen. Presenting the daughter as an object for acceptance by the future husband is a social practice, a ritual form of sexuality, a way of communicating through the body. The sexuality that is nurtured through the gaze of moral guardians is placed outside the public domain to get the scores and approval on the scales of social expectations of femininity. The lower class position and economic instability of her father completely trap Baby into conforming to the image of the woman as the self-sacrificing caregiver. Her wedding is just announced to her.

One day her father and stepmother come with bags full of vegetables and fruits that are required for her wedding. Turmeric paste is put on her body, people are dancing, a large *chulha* and *pandal* are set up. She is asked to fast that day. Baby though can not

understand anything but is very excited. She does not realise that these are the preparations for, "... her days of grief and pain, little did she know what the future held for her. On the seventeenth day, a Wednesday in the month of *Agrahayan*, Baby was married" (34).

The third person narration makes varied differing range of discourses activated during reading. These counter discourses help to articulate and connect many social and cultural issues which include changing ideological relations between classes, and patriarchy and its role in the life of a girl.

Baby is married on Wednesday night. The whole night passes in mirth and merry. She chats and plays with her friends the whole night. Thursday being an inauspicious day, Baby is not sent to her husband's house. On Friday, a taxi is called and she, her brother, *mama*, *masi* and her husband sit inside it. Baby has no idea about where are they going. Her mother keeps some rice and *dal* in her *aanchal*, only to return them back saying, "Ma, with these I pay you back for all the days you have fed and clothed me and looked after me" (35).

This scene is a cultural marker of the grim truth of the gender-bound perspective that the lower class shares of its traditional ruling elite. It is also discussed by Ruth Manorama in "Dalit Women: The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden". The moment Baby's taxi reaches her husband's place, it is crowded by many people. A woman comes to help her and takes her to her husband's house. She dresses her in a beautiful sari, bangles and *sindoor* because people as a part of custom will be coming to see her. The woman hands a *thali* full of sweets to Baby, asking her to serve everyone. Her husband is teased saying that he has married a child. The confused little girl does not know how to handle the situation. Someone is asking her to serve, someone to greet and some to set her *pallu* right. Baby's marriage exposes the hegemony of the patriarchal society through the institution of marriage. The heterosexual patriarchal society believes conjugality to be the base of sexual

relations and expression of female desire is considered an act of confrontation. When all of them have finished their food on the day of *bahu bhaat*, that is, a day where the new bride has to serve everyone before she eats, her *mami* forces her to eat from her husband's plate. She is scolded by her *mami* on refusing to do so, "We're not going to be here forever you know. You're the one who has to be here. Just be quiet and eat" (36).

Mama's act of ensuring her compliance to the normative structure is no doubt is in fulfilment with the Brahminical social structures of society. The strict control of Baby's sexuality is the depiction of forced sexuality which is constructed so rigidly that one can not break through the conjugal relation. She is indirectly but with all the air of obviousness fed the codes within a day that have been always followed by women. She finds her husband sleeping beside her the next morning, the neighbourhood women make sure that she addresses their husbands as *dada*, she is the one who will now be fetching water for the house. It is made sure that her every act of resistance is minutely monitored and punctured. She shares the fear of evenings. She fears and her heart beats frantically on return of her husband in the evenings. She does every effort to escape him at night. She has to sleep on the same mat with her husband yet she does whatever possible to avoid him, for instance, she sleeps with her head turned the other way. However, after some nights her husband finally pulls her hard towards him and begins "...to press his body against mine. I started to cry out in fear. But then, I thought, what's the point? I'll just wake everyone by shouting like this, so I shut my eyes and my mouth and let him do what he wanted. I just endured everything" (37).

Baby tries to share this pain with Sandhya didi but the latter dismisses the complaint by laughing at it. Being offended, Baby shares the grief with her brother, she could not reveal the reason for her despair but tells him that she wishes to return to her home. The brother when gets to know the reason of her hurt from her husband also walks

away without taking her. Baby's stepmother gets furious when she comes to know about Baby's behaviour on this issue. Baby does not get support from anyone. She is semi-conscious about the problematical situation or circumstances. She understands what is happening to her yet knows that shouting for help will not help her as there is no space for her to protest against the sexual intercourse forced within the limits of the conjugal relationship. On the other hand, the decision to endure brings the need to deconstruct those cabinets which label certain acts as sexual attacks. The meaning of an attack is completely transformed once it is defined as a sexual attack. But the question is if some legally accepted physical acts can explain the effect of sexual attack on the victim? A sexual attack has been conventionally understood as an assault on the pure self of the victim, however, this assumption further problematises the self that is being understood only in relation to a body and thus limiting liberty to the issue of justice, where the outcome can be, 'hence proved guilty or pardoned'. So, if placed in the larger space of women empowerment, it can not be denied that Baby, by choosing to endure definitely accepts to chain her body in the boundaries of the masculine power bringing the matter into the realm of justice. Nevertheless, it creates a new space where self is liberated from the heterosexual body and thus sexual attack can not be only restricted to the boundaries of attacking the female self, existing inside the heterosexual body of a woman.

Baby is reaching at a self-realisation that she can not escape but has to confront her situation. After two months of her marriage, one day suddenly she starts feeling sick. She is at her father's home at this time yet no one is concerned about her state. She throws up every day, can not eat much yet no one is bothered. Her husband is also not worried about her condition. He never offers to take her to a doctor. Finally, it is Sandhya who takes her to a doctor where Baby comes to know that she is pregnant. She is too young to even understand the meaning of pregnancy. Her stomach starts to grow bigger with every passing

day which makes her dread her state. Her husband, Shankar does not even now take her to the hospital. Eventually, Baby decides to go to the hospital and show herself to the doctor, “Given his behaviour, I had little hope that he would bother to come to the hospital with me when my time comes” (42).

Baby’s neighbour, Sandhya *didi* is Baby’s only support. Sandhya *didi* and her husband treat Baby like their own daughter, “Talking to Sandhya *didi*, the days passed well enough ...” (37). Sandhya and her husband bring the truth of diverse faces of patriarchy in the lower class itself. Sandhya is treated humanely in contrast to Baby. She is neither been beaten up nor ignored by her husband, however, the permission of the husband is still compulsory mainly if she has to go out. Sandhya’s relation with her husband highlights the naturalised alliance of men and power. Sandhya does not have to be controlled to protect the social order of restraint dictated for a woman.

Sera believed that power could be gained by recreating the power of patriarchy but Sandhya does not even see herself repressed by the male power because she mistakenly understands social power to be itself masculine, thus even when she is deciding, she is in the territory of masculinity. Baby in all the pain of first pregnancy goes to fetch water from Sandhya’s house. Sandhya has already told Baby to always do *pallu* in front of her husband as Shankar treats him like an elder brother. But on that day because of extreme discomfort, Baby forgets to put the *pallu* on her head. Even after seeing Sandhya’s husband, Baby does not remember to draw the *pallu* on her head. Sandhya on watching this furiously shouts at Baby to cover up her head. Baby also appreciates the scolding because it saves her from being pointed as ill-mannered by her father’s friends who are coming towards her house around the same time. Thus, we can see that the masculine structures in the Dalit patriarchal society are not necessarily maintained at an obvious level. The another instance of it is Sandhya’s acceptance of Shasti sister’s condition. These sisters are banished by the society

for the reason that Baby could not understand. They are sweet to Baby yet she is not allowed by her husband to visit them. Baby is curious to know as to why people do not talk much with Shasti sisters, “ One day I asked Sandhya-didi why my husband did not like me going to see Shasti and her sisters. She said, “You won’t understand,” but I persisted. Can’t you see that although they’re all married, not one of them lives with her husband?” (78).

Nonetheless, Shasti sisters are the part of the same community. Shasti and her two sisters were married but none of them lived with their husbands. The eldest was comfortably married but returned to her mother leaving her husband because of the budding bond between the elder brother-in-law’s widow and his younger brother after the death of her elder brother-in-law. Shasti had been married to a widower who also had a son. He married Shasti so that someone can take care of his son. They never had an emotional bond between them, the husband never let it happen. Soon after their marriage, he left the son and his house in the care of Shasti to work somewhere else. On several letters from Shasti he returned and stayed with her for a year. Shasti conceived during this time but the inhuman husband cheated on her and left her at her mother’s place never to return. Baby did not see any mistake of Shasti sisters in it. She questions their unsaid exile by the society, “ Shasti and her mother were both very religious and Shasti often became possessed by the Devi. I used to wonder how she could be bad if Devi could enter her (79).

Within a patriarchal society, separation of husband and wife finds its target in a profoundly gendered manner as the disgrace of being a witch is hurled only at a woman. Shasti constructs a space where a female spirit is terrorizing to the male. She uses the same space to do everything that is denied to a woman. Her possession becomes a way of articulation which releases her from all responsibility for her actions can be attributed to the *devi* that possesses her.

Mary E. John is right in saying that, "...dalit culture could not remain immune to the larger upper class patriarchal structure ..." (443). Shankar's act of, "...kicking and beating ..." (79) Baby on her visit to Shasti's house clearly delineates the patriarchal nature of Hindu ideals of a good woman.

On being publicly beaten up by her husband, Baby questions that why are such injustices hurled only at women? Nonetheless, all this did not stop Baby from visiting Shasti. But soon Baby herself, "... became the bad woman in the neighbourhood..." (81). She is stalked by a man regularly. According to the dominant view of patriarchal society which puts the blame of stalking and molestation on the character of a woman, the woman becomes the hopeless victim of the false consciousness. Even when Baby's father and husband are struggling against their existing condition of low, they follow the middle class model of womanhood that is built on an uneasy combination of the spaces that make women free to choose their feminine identities but from the offered images. Identities, other than them, will lead to inevitable danger and Baby could understand that such places will have stalkers like Pratap and Ajit.

Ajit is Shankar's friend and lives across the road. He addresses Baby as sister-in-law, *boudi* but his intentions are bad. He often visits them and in very less time becomes friendly with Shankar's family. He plays with their son and brings sweets and toys for him. However, Baby senses his hidden motive behind this sweet play and she confronts him openly telling him not to come to their house as people will talk bad about her. Ajit does not listen to Baby and rather increases his number of visits. He starts coming in Shankar's absence also. It makes Baby fear Shankar's wrath. His frequent visits earned a bad name to Baby and knowing this, her husband without listening to Baby's argument starts beating her regularly. But finally she decides to fight back and heated arguments started happening between the husband and wife.

Baby's sharp response against her husband serves as a monumental junction as she the heir of the lower class women history undertakes the path to discover the constructed meanings of a community. She not only tries to read the meaning and their entrenchment in the everyday lived lives but also battles to forge a valid foundation for her anguish. She voices her innocence bravely and decides not to take the false blame from anyone. Nevertheless, this does not stop Ajit from stalking her, rather he chases her openly. But Baby has now started questioning the contradictions in the lived culture. She writes an incident where the local boys of her colony collect money to film a movie. Baby has always been a movie lover, excited she finishes her household chores early that day. One has to also acknowledge her self-confidence. She never thought of asking for permission for the movie from Shankar. When her husband returns home that evening, she just asks him if she should serve his meal and informs him about her plan to go for the movie. When he refuses, "there's no need to do so. So I asked him why. I was so angry, I blurted out all kinds of things to him" (83).

Baby is translating her lived reality and while doing so, she is reconstructing her subjectivity outlined by series of socio-cultural experiences. After a miscarriage, Baby decides not to return to her husband, "I would much rather be alone. I have one child. I'll keep him with me and find work somewhere" (89). However, after few days, she reluctantly returns to her husband yet she is confident that people's opinion now will not matter to her, "'I thought, well, I'll speak to those who speak to me and not to those who don't'" (91). It is very clear that Baby's brutal husband and crumbling condition which has its origin in poverty and lack of proper education is an inefaceable experience for her yet she is rearticulating the dominant culture, that is, a subculture of conflicts is producing oppositional meanings, "And so time passed and I found myself pregnant again. On top, of this I was worried about how to send my son to school. How would we manage, I

wondered” (92). Yes, Baby has an understanding of lack of material resources but she also has the courage to recycle the available resources. She uses the same limited space imposed by the dominant socio-economic order to deconstruct the dominant cultural productions. Baby is now a mother of two children. But with two, it became hard for them to manage their finances. Even in such circumstances, Baby is sure of educating her children. She does not behave like a helpless woman, instead, thinks of working herself to bring her children in a good way. She decides to use her education to earn money. She offers to tutor the children in her neighbourhood. Education becomes her tool to battle against poverty, “I would teach them a bit, and alongside my boy could study as well. Little by little people began to send their children to me. I managed to piece together seem two or three hundred rupees at the end of the month” (96).

So, initially, when Baby is not able to reject the impositions of her class and caste, she makes her way through them by using them to her advantage. Baby knows the power of education to change the lived socio-economic reality of their class and caste, “Predictably, when my husband saw that I had some money in my hands, he reduced the amount he gave me for household expenses. Nevertheless, I enjoyed teaching and I decided that even if I earn nothing from them, I would not give up teaching them” (96).

Baby’s gradual control over the course of her life becomes the reason for her husband’s heightened anger. Shankar is anguished and thus, he does not even visit Baby to the hospital on the birth of their third child, a baby daughter. He could not bear the humiliation of his wife debunking his authority. There are a number of occasions when Shankar could not resist his anger but whether it is unleashed because of his degraded status or because of his inability to overcome his exploitation, the anger is always taken out on Baby. However, when Baby could understand the equation of self and other as explained by Gills Deleuze and Felix Guattari to be the boundaries which are continuously changing

arrangement of a range of interrelated 'assemblages', Shankar is emasculated. The movement through territorialized spaces, or the 'lines of flight' as Deleuze calls movement, can lead to 'deterritorialization', dismantling of power structures as deconstruction helps us to look at power structures as mere constructs, making them lose their meaning. This process can, in turn, lead to 'reterritorialization', subversion or a new power equation. Baby asks her doctor to close her tubes and she does not even need any one's permission for it. This existence of political consciousness aids to restructure the Dalit woman's subjectivity. Baby is completely aware of her circumstances now. She can see things getting worse day by day. Her elder son is getting spoiled. He does not like to study rather is interested in useless jobs like his father and uncles. He even bunks his school and at times does not return home for days. The father is least interested in the life of his children. He does not even give enough money to Baby to feed his children. Finally, Baby one day decides not to take any more insults and rebukes from her husband.

Baby's assertion is a form of resistance, the cruel action of authority blows up into a critical consciousness. However, Baby has to meet challenges at various levels. Shashti's mother is afraid if Baby will be able to handle her children all alone. She is the one who for the first time hints her that Baby might have to do work that she has not considered yet, that is, some work that she considers to be inferior in any way. Baby initially gets reluctant, she is not sure what will her father say if she cleans and washes in people's house. Shashti's mother advice to bother about life rather than the artificial dignity of the father gives Baby the strength.

Baby first inverts the image created by the patriarchal structure of her community by being close to the upper-class model of the normative world. She asserts that the self-image of women has to change from one of helplessness to critical interrogation of her subjectivity. An image of a strong woman willing to take on responsibilities, coming

from a poor background helps her make place outside the boundaries of her community. Baby agrees to take her first job. She will have to do everything: cleaning, cooking, chopping, washing, dusting. It is a Brahmin family and they soon started liking Baby's work. Her hard work earns her work in many more houses and her cordial and helping nature makes her the favourite of everyone in all the places she works. Seeing her dedication, the employers take every possible care of Baby and Baby also does not do some extra work for them. She is not treated like a servant in any of the houses because of her behaviour.

The understanding of the relationships between upper castes and Dalits, on the part of Baby definitely does not miss to portray the tragedy of crushing fight of survival. In all her work, she has to struggle very hard to find time for her children. She takes her third child, her little daughter along with her on work and sometimes has to bear people's comments because of it. She writes that one of the owners does not like her daughter playing with Baby's little one, "I thought, just because we are poor doesn't mean we can't be touched" (109). Baby's new awareness also helps her to accept her mother's abandonment as her struggle for survival.

Baby's husband does not like her working at other's place but he never tells her this. Baby has accepted the fact that he will not be able to earn to feed his family all by himself. However, one day to Baby's shock, a lot of money is discovered in his pockets. Baby gets really angry seeing all this money. She works hard day and night to not only feed her children but also to make them independent beings. Nevertheless, she does not say anything to Shankar but things stretch to the limits the day her little daughter catches a terrible cold and Shankar does not help her. It is with the help of Shasti's family that Baby is finally able to save her daughter. Baby questions herself, "I was unable to bear the way he treated me and I would ask myself, am I an animal or human being for him to treat me this

way?” (117). There is an attempt to find her own voice or identity, by locating herself in tradition and then keeping herself in separateness from the same tradition. Baby has now started to crack the treatment she had to meet. They are given new meanings. Baby finally leaves her husband in the lookout for employment opportunities in Faridabad, “I touched everyone’s feet and then took my children and climbed onto the train. The train moved away and I waved to everyone with tears in my eyes. I was saying goodbye” (121). The decision is the manifestation of Baby’s power. In one way, she can be seen as the victim of the dominant capitalist culture where identity is packed into the economic baggage. However, this suppression is limited by Baby’s use of same cultural place to affirm her position of subjectivity. It is an attempt to outline the construction of oppositional meanings in the established culture. She is determined to work hard to make her children grow into good human beings.

Baby does not completely subvert the class structure rather initially positions her struggle within it. She first destabilises the image of a domestication indoctrinated into her in the effort to imitate upper-class patriarchal practices and in the hope of gaining acceptance into that society. Baby starts working as a maid. Ironically, her work works as the version of domesticated culture of femininity, nonetheless, Baby herself decided to extend it to the public sphere. No doubt, here also she faces violence. This violence representing the violence unleashed on the lower class by the upper. The woman who employs Baby is very strict. Baby has to report to the work at sharp eight in the morning. There are four other servants who work in this house. The servants are neither allowed to talk to each other in their native language nor given any time to relax. The woman after some time gives Baby the room to stay in her own house. Baby is happy thinking that she will now be able to save some time of her travelling to feed and teach her children. However, the reality comes out to be something else. From the day of shifting, the woman

does not even spare Baby for a single second, “I was the one who was made to work the hardest- perhaps she thought that since she had given me room to live with my children, she had a greater claim on my time” (137-8).

The other point which can not be missed here is the fact that Baby’s *memsahib* has only poor women working in her house. It brings the reality of how gender and class together play in identity formation, they both overlap. The comparison of *memsahib* and Baby’s life reveals the fact that the needs and ways of working are different. The upper caste women though experience a gender-based equality yet they share the ideology of patriarchal subjugation which gives them a hollow sense of victory over the weak lower class women. However, the increased employment and educational opportunities provide the same lower class woman with the possibility of upward mobility. This upward mobility can give her agency at the present moment. Baby comes out to be powerful not only in domestic domain but also fights the burden of poverty through her skills and hard work. Baby takes justice into her own hands and when questioned about the injustice she meets at the hand of *memsahib* by her friend, “Why do you continue to stand for this?” (144). Baby realises that leaving this house will give her time to be with her children. She will be able to take her own decisions. Working in this house has made her slave again to the same system of the society. Therefore, one day without even informing or taking the permission from the woman, Baby walks out of the house with her children. She has money to survive for two months and is confident of getting some new work by that time. With her desire for freedom and dignity and confidence in work, She moves towards life.

Baby’s consciousness to practice her subjectivity has already reflected her inner power and now the realisation of her competence suggests the understanding of her rights to negotiate her relationship with the world on her own terms.

Baby at last finds work at Tatush's place where everyone treats her like a family member. Tatush has three children. He is a very good man and does not exploit the labour working at his place. In fact, at times seeing them busy he does his errands on his own.

Tatush apart from Baby's skills at work is also left amazed at the interest and enthusiasm Baby has to teach her children. He first inquires if her children are studying but Baby's silence speaks all. The next day he asks Baby to bring her son and daughter. Tatush gets them admitted in a nearby school. Baby is clear that she has the power to make her economic decisions, nonetheless, the constraint of lack of education can not be ruled out. Tatush ask her if she would like to read and write. Dalit intellectuals like Phule and Ambedkar have always stressed the importance of education as a tool to fight oppression. One day, Tatush gives Baby a notebook and a pen and asks her to pen down anything she wants. Be it anything, her observations, understandings, someone's story or her own tale but everyday something has to go into it. On getting the notebook and pen, she happily returns home and starts writing on the same day itself. She at times writes and at times reads the book by Talsima Nasrin.

Reading and writing do not instantly change Baby's position in the society. People are still curious to know about her husband and "Some men would make the excuse that they wanted water to drink and would push their way ..." (153) in her house. Yet, this does not stop Baby from enjoying the new light in her life and one day Baby receives a letter not only praising her writing skills but there is a magazine in which Baby's writings are published. Tatush without informing Baby had sent her writings to one of his friends.

Her text has a powerful agency of control, symbolic of her mobility in the public sphere. The journey of writing has an underlying journey towards a sense of self-worth. It expands the economic opportunities and frames an empowered social identity. Baby runs to show her achievement to her children, "See! Tell me what is written here"

(173). Her daughter hesitatingly read each letter and made out the words: “*Aloo Andhari, Baby Halder... Ma! Your name in a book!!*” (173).

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Conclusion

Once upon a time...

I lived in a country

Utterly discrete from the country

In which I live now

That was a country devoid of

Caste, Class, Religion...

And other divisions.

.....

Then, one day I was born

A baby girl

And things fell apart.

As seen in the preceding chapters, since time immemorial, all across India, women's struggles have originated because of the denial of the existence of a self. Women have been negotiating a space for themselves and trying to search for an identity. However, the Indian feminist literature till the late twentieth century has mainly been the voicing of the experienced realities by middle class women who tried to find a space for themselves beyond the domestic confines of the house. If we trace the Western literature till the same period, it has also been dominated by the waves or diverse groups that though had different mantras to gain freedom from the patriarchal jaws but yet confined the freedom to their respective formulations.

These stances and rebellions have been homogenizing women and demanding them to rigidly adhere to the tenets of being a feminist expounded by different groups.

India is a big mirror to an undifferentiated crowd of unnamed, unknown and faceless people. It is a country with various constructions of mechanical regulations which glance at the masses as homogenous wholes abandoning the microcosms. There are multiple small worlds within India like class, caste, religion, capitalism and Naxalism. This country is no one place and therefore, cannot be seen as a huge uniform mass of people having a common lived reality or the obvious truth is never the only experienced reality. Therefore, the Indian women's search and writings for the desired space and identity have been seen to become more accentuated as the country is divided along many lines of class, caste, religion and many other divisions and marginalities.

Class/ Caste Frames Broken

In *The Space between Us* we see that the fixed position of the two Indian women, Bhima and Sera in the class arrangement of the cultural web of the Indian society is not only supported by the indispensable role of division of the people on the basis of labour and economic capital but also by the submissive consuming of the assembled cultural connotations.

Bhima, sitting under the patched roofs of her small hut understands the plight, exploitation and the lower status of the harijan woman who everyday brooms human waste passively, however, she is oblivious to the same reality of discrimination practiced on her by her upper class *malkin* Serabai. Ironically, the docile victim of patriarchy, Serabai unknowingly enjoys a sense of oneness with the class that has even beaten her up, while employing authority over Bhima. The upper class man-made structures successfully dominate two women in different ways, one is obvious and the second is a victorious shot of the deep-rooted disapproval for the lower in the upper class woman.

Baby in *A Life Less Ordinary* has an understanding of the lack of material resources, as one of the prime conditions of her lower position in the social society. She substitutes this lack by recycling the limited available resources. She not only uses the tool of her education to earn resources for the bright future but also takes up the task of washing and cleaning that is considered filthy by her patriarchs. These jobs are considered demeaning by her patriarchal society as they are believed to dismantle the steps required to project oneness with the uppers. They do not want to break away from the uppers' social constructs and rituals ordained for their women. Baby thus appropriates restricted dominant socio-economic space itself, to subvert the authoritative cultural productions.

Bhima, on the other hand, achieves liberation by leaving the house of Serabai which had become the fulcrum to unearth the roles, positions and meaning working in the socio-economic society. By moving out of the house, she herself becomes the kernel from where the fabricated reality of the constructed society can be clearly seen. She can easily decode the lack of courage, to accept the truth, working in Viraf and Sera's act of throwing her out. The binding base of the society working on the figure of a hero safeguarding it against the evils of lie, cheat, greed and lust is ripped apart by the liberated Bhima.

Bama in *Karukku* narrates many tales of the brave Bondan-*maama* who by the elders of both upper and lower is considered bad. Nonetheless, at the same time, he is loved by the children for his successful transgressions of the constructed boundaries. Through these tales, Bama not only triumphantly wrecks the dominant creation of the Dalit self in the cast of bad, evil, passive and inactive but digs a free space within the Dalit self.

Sujata in *Mother of 1084*, through the contrast of selfless love of young revolutionaries towards various classes and Dibyanath's hypocrite upper-class society strips off the mass of integrity from the latter.

Dominant Traditional Religious Myths and Ideologies Perforated

Draupadi in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* is a well-read woman. She is a blend of flexibility and scripted knowledge mandatory to survive in the ever-evolving and changing spaces of this post-modern world. In the assembly hall, after being lost to Kauravas, she questions the order of Yudhishtir's stake to attain her freedom. The traditional narration of disrobing seals the location of Indian wife to be an eternal slavery which can not get altered with situations. However, by showing the entire Kuru clan dumbstruck at Draupadi's' debate on dharma, the difference between the sources and comprehension of knowledge and dharma is unveiled. Draupadi discloses the difference between discussing the written scriptures and the self-formulated moralities and definitions, revealing and authenticating a space where the discourses of dharma, ethics and moralities can be framed in respect to multiple perceptions. Thus, in accordance to the Hindu reverence of dharma, Draupadi does not dismiss it but marks its multiplicities. This puncturing of the fixed idea of dharma not only locates the gaps but banishes the patriarchs as symbolised by the Kuru clan, and their justification of chaining women. The Kurus themselves fail to use their written dharma to battle against the dharmic claims of Draupadi.

Bama in *Karukku* narrates a communal myth. It is a tale of a chaste woman Nallathangaal who is forced to commit suicide because of the socio-economic gendered reality of a Dalit woman. Her own society bolts doors on her. She does not have money to feed her seven children and devoid of a protective husband and education she is left with no choice but to commit suicide. However, her idol along with the idols of her seven children is installed in a shrine. By exploring the language of myths banned to the Dalit community, Bama, first of all, celebrates this profane act and then overthrows one of the significant myth of the dominant Tamil patriarchal culture. The Tamil culture till today celebrates and reveres the chastity of Kannaki who through the power of ideal womanhood had set an

entire city on fire to purge it from sin. Kannaki accomplishes such a divine act only by strictly following the patriarchal codes laid for women's body.

Using her mythical tale, Bama questions the difference between the chastity of a Dalit woman and a Brahmin and thus, she constitutes the Dalit woman through her exclusion from the dominant power structures and at the same time represents these gaps of the dominant religious myths where the selves of the marginalised breathe and become. These are unexplainable gaps of prescribed and practiced. The hollow space in between the two is the fissure where the marginalised identities are constituted. It can also be understood as poststructuralist and psychoanalytic absence always existing in language and unconsciousness.

Bama's further disclosure of the Nallathangaal myth been forgotten by her own community not only threatens the power of myth language but also shows the self-in-becoming which never has a fixed noun or value attached to it.

Appropriation of the Prescribed Language

Pratibha in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* undercuts the two main strategies of the dominant literature that produce images which are unquestionably consumed by every Indian. One, the dominant literature uses the language which is a mere construction as its prime device to rule and second it codifies language into various fixed compartments. Nonetheless, Pratibha subverts these strategies by appropriating them.

The old grand narratives like *The Mahabharata* has become a cosmic repertoire of diverse Indian identities. Their fabricated sense of eternity makes them the language and literature to read and grasp the truths and actions of individual socio-economic and political identities. However, Draupadi's helplessness to read herself tainted in one of these central narratives reveals out their construction by language and timely revisions by the communal

objectives of groups and societies which leave certain voices unrecorded. Ray exposes this construction by making Draupadi's narration emerge from the spaces of denial. Everyone knows the Draupadi who swore to plait her hair with Duhshasan's blood but Pratibha's Draupadi narrates how scared she was listening to the words of revenge at her birth. Draupadi's fearful trembling is set against the crude political agendas she has always been depicted as a party to. Pratibha's Draupadi constantly efforts to explain and warn not only the Pandavas but the entire Kuru clan against the dangers of the game of dice but yet the historical grand narrative has been labelling her to be the reason of the biggest bloodshed. Ray uses language to battle the truths affirmed by language.

Ray also uproots the patriarchal genre of epic from elite locations of culture and through the new Draupadi places it amidst the common Indian girls. Unlike the quasi-divine figure of an epic, Draupadi is a common Indian girl for whom life is not a serious matter but a beautiful playful world replete with the joys of love and human desires. This juxtaposition of two languages highlighting the destruction involved disparages the glories of the war fought to keep the fate of nations intact. Ray gives minimum pages and description to the narration or depiction of war rather uses all the possible colours to bring out the joy hidden in human life and happiness of humanly desires. It is also reveals that the protagonist of big stories is not necessarily the male heroes on whose actions rests the destiny of the whole nation but common women who are even acted upon. Ray's Draupadi is born to enact her father's desire and she dies at the will of her husbands, however, she emerges to be victorious by showing these definitions and ideas of ideal heroes to be a mere construct.

Bama in *Karukku* destabilises the prime purpose of the autobiographies in the first line itself. She neither introduces the self nor tries to delineate it to the readers hinting at the impossibility of reading one fixed- identity or coding it into given nouns of the already approved language. Like Pratibha, she also employs the governing language which

is otherwise not allowed to a woman, as her tool to put forward her realities. For instance, by using the myth of Nallathangaal, she brings out the monetary tragedy of Dalits being performed on the body of Dalit women.

The Mantras of Globalised/Capitalist Packaged Images Uncovered

The other kind of patriarchal domination seen operating in *The Space between Us* can be comprehended in the context of the modern global capitalist market which thrives on the concept of packaged images. Viraf is clever to employ the artistic expertise of defamiliarisation. He sells the glamorous features of femininity to prey his aspiring urban professional wife, Dinaz.

However, Muskaan in *Footprint in the Bajra*, through the 'kangaroo courts' and Naxalite spirit of revenge operating in the open killings not only reveals the performances of socio-political establishments and anti-establishments to be working on similar meanings but also exposes the concept of heroic image relished by both the seller and consumer in the capitalist society. By probing into the contracts of the claimed liberal group, she understands her non active and peripheral position in the Naxalite power play. She stumbles on the liberation ideologies that schematise the new images of women to suit the new patriarchal cloak.

Engagement with Marginalised Women's Sexuality

Viraf the modern patriarchal hero in *The Space Between Us* enacts classlessness. He does not rule the lower-class women in the traditional way. In order to satiate his sexual lust, he builds a narrow tunnel where the so-called blasphemous female sexuality can be performed. So instead of class, he fashions and uses women sexuality to captivate the lower-class Maya.

Nevertheless, Through Draupadi in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* the changing sexuality of marginalised women can be witnessed. In a scene where the Pandavas and Draupadi are asked by Krishna to make confessions, Draupadi intrepidly confesses her love for Krishna in front of her five husbands. She transgresses the margins of rigid femininity constructed by the moralities of the religion to reveal women as a desiring subject. She is fearless of the patriarchal ethicalities and uncovers herself to come out of the shackles of protection and security. She indomitably writes numerous wishes and pleasures of romantic rendezvous with both Arjun and Krishna overturning the culture where women sexuality has to be kept enclosed both in life and its echo, that is, art.

Notions of One Fixed Self Ripped

Baby in *A Life Less Ordinary* deconstructs the dominant perspective of seeing the woman-self only in relation to her heterosexual body. Baby's husband forces his sexual lust on her but aware of the non availability of recognised spaces of revolt against the sexual exploitation unleashed in the institution of marriage, she does not revolt. However, the same institution when further, placed in the areas of her class, does not even permit her any ideological confrontations, she battles against its various social injustices. These acts launch spaces where the self is untied from her heterosexual body.

Draupadi in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* reads the vast chasm lying between the place of culmination called sea and a flowing river juxtaposing it with the gap between the dharmic throne of Hastinapura and herself. This rigid throne is always indifferent to the changing feelings, requirements and emotions of its kingdom. The *kshatriya* dharma of the Pandavas can not make friends with the *kirtas*, the understood devils of the forests but the flowing river Draupadi can. This otherness of Draupadi is not the negative-other but highlights the strong but evolving dependence of human beings and

nature opposing the needs of social structures to place people in the location of the 'self' and 'other'.

Draupadi's desire to be born again as a human destroys the primal desire of *moksha*. It also highlights the difference and multiplicity existing in the seat of the self. She not only negates the existence of one defined self but by placing it in the dharmic design of rebirths reveals the psychoanalytic fact of unfathomable identities lying in the eternal unconsciousness which can not be summoned by collective memories.

Bama in *Karukku* puts two incidents next to each other to unmask the self-information. The lower-caste Parayas understand their untouchability in the eyes of the upper-caste Naickers but the same Parayas massacres with Pallars, the another lower-caste group even over a ripe banana. This highlights the alternative formations of a self.

In *Mother of 1084* Sujata's personal experiences and memories of Brati's alienation collide and correlate with the visits to four different places filled with varied understood public realities. Each visit marks the interaction of Sujata's self with other selves. This flux of fluid and changing selves formulate and modify her experiences and perspectives, which not only help her to see through the fissures present in the upper class social constructs but also assist her to attain freedom from the social roles.

Redefined...

Therefore, through all the above points we can clearly see that Indian women writings can not be reduced to feminist writing if the latter is just about holding to the already laid fixed doctrines of being a 'feminist'. However, in India, the land of diversities, the spirit of feminism has broken the boundaries of marginalities and works in relation to globalisation and capitalism. The redefined spirit of Indian women's freedom is about who each woman is and what she desires without reducing the freedom to any 'ism' that

homogenises and annihilates distinctions. In the selected Indian women's works, we have seen the writers and their stances of freedom embracing multiplicities of identities and selves that are continuously in the course of shifting, discovering and becoming as they originate from different women's needs and positions.

Rephrasing Draupadi's words:

It is a new beginning...

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