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"Speaking" Subalterns: A Comparative Study of African American and Dalit/Indian Literatures

Mantra Roy
University of South Florida

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“Speaking” Subalterns: A Comparative Study of
African American and Dalit/Indian Literatures

by

Mantra Roy

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Gurleen Grewal, Ph.D
Co- Major Professor: Hunt Hawkins, Ph.D
Elizabeth Hirsh, Ph.D
Shirley Toland-Dix, Ph.D

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“Speaking” Subalterns: A Comparative Study of
African American and Dalit Literatures

Mantra Roy

ABSTRACT

“Speaking Subalterns” examines the literatures of two marginalized groups, African Americans in the United States and Dalits in India. The project demonstrates how two disparate societies, USA and India, are constituted by comparable hegemonic socio-economic-cultural and political structures of oppression that define and delimit the identities of the subalterns in the respective societies. The superstructures of race in USA and caste in India inform, deform, and complicate the identities of the marginalized along lines of gender, class, and family structure. Effectively, a type of domestic colonialism, exercised by the respective national elitists, silence and exploit the subaltern women and emasculate the men. This repression from above disrupts the respective family structures in the societies, traumatizes the children, and confuses the relationships between all the members of the families. While African American women, children, and men negotiate their national identities in USA, Dalits, the former Untouchables, attempt to realize their national identities guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. While successful resistance to oppression informs the literatures written by these historically marginalized peoples, thereby giving voice to the silenced subalterns, I argue that it is equally important to be attentive to the simultaneous silencing that has not ended. Moreover, we must be

skeptical about the power seemingly achieved by the subalterns in articulating their claims to legitimate rights because re-presentation of subaltern resistance by the elite intellectuals and by subalterns themselves becomes a critical inquiry.

Thus, while some subaltern women claim agency through representation, their narratives may not be exempt from hegemonic control. Others are thoroughly misrepresented by elitists. While some subaltern mothers undertake outlaw mothering by defying normative patriarchal motherhood, responsible representation can re-cover these tales which are silenced when these mothers succumb to their children and community's disparagement. While some subaltern children may survive disastrous experiences, others may be traumatized into silence. Representation bears witness to these traumatic silences and the silencing processes. While historically emasculated subaltern men may vent and represent their rightful frustration and wrath against the oppressors, they may be simultaneously silencing their own doubly-oppressed women.

Introduction

A Transnational Study of Subalterns: African Americans and Dalits

African American Connection with India

In 1873 Jyotirao Phule, a Marathi Dalit (then known as an Untouchable), published his book *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) and dedicated the treatise to the then Negroes in America as a ““token of admiration for their sublime disinterestedness and self-sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery,”” as noted by S.D. Kapoor in *Dalits and African Americans: A Study in Comparison* (13). The example of the growth of African American consciousness and its expression in literature, especially in the slave narratives, functioned effectively as a model for Phule to resist the oppressive caste system that had left the ati-shudras (the untouchables) without a sense of self-identity and consciousness in India. Phule’s life-long work to raise awareness among the lowest castes about their degraded condition as effected by the Brahminical caste system remains an inspiration today. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, perhaps the greatest Dalit leader in India who drafted the Constitution of a free and new India and was the country’s first Law Minister, acknowledged Phule’s work by dedicating his own book, *Who Were the Shudras?* to Phule. Ambedkar, who was actively involved in the national politics of India and drafted the Constitution of independent India, also highlighted the comparison between African Americans and the Dalits. As a graduate student at Columbia University from 1913 to 1916, Ambedkar witnessed the growing consciousness among the Blacks and their

struggle to claim their identity and humanity against the white supremacist oppression. Such first-hand experience helped him develop a “framework” for the “issue of caste segregation back home” (Kapoor 15). When Lala Lajpat Rai, a famous Indian activist against British Raj and a “founding member of the Hindu reformist movement, *Arya Samaj*” (14), compared the lynchings of Negroes in America with the attitudes of the Brahmins toward the pariahs, the untouchables, and found the former more atrocious and more inhuman, Ambedkar retorted that the Brahmin torture of Untouchables was never known, unlike the lynchings, because all “Hindus” conspire to keep their shameful and inhuman acts a secret (Kapoor 16). Ambedkar believed that the existence of an American conscience allowed the ex-Negroes to publish their suffering in the form of narratives to expose the horrors of slavery. But in India, he argued, the “Hindus” have no conscience that prohibits them from recognizing the injustice in the caste system that they adhere to (Kapoor 14).

Along with the parallels between Dalits and African Americans, the Indian freedom movement acquired a strong parallel story to that of the African Americans in the early twentieth century. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Howard Thurman (1899-1981), and later Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) formed the pillars of the interchange of knowledge and inspiration. The Dalit identification with African Americans has continued through the late 19th century until the late 20th century.

Sudarshan Kapur in his critically acclaimed book, *Raising Up a Prophet: the African-American Encounter with Gandhi*, traces the history of the well-known relationship between Gandhi’s satyagraha (non-violent resistance to British rule in India) and Dr. Martin Luther King’s nonviolent Civil Rights movement in the USA during the

1950s-1960s to much earlier connections between the African American community and Gandhi's activities through the 1920s. As Kapur argues, such a rich history of connections prior to King's "'discovery' of Gandhi in his seminary years ...in 1950 (two years after Gandhi's assassination)" not only illustrates the early awareness in USA that "struggles for transformation may be shared across cultural and political boundaries" (2-3) but also exposes the "elitist approach" towards the history of the Civil Rights movement that often silences the story of the "preparation of an entire people" (2). By tracing the interaction between leaders of the African American community and Gandhi through the 1920s until 1947 (Gandhi's most politically active years), Kapur demonstrates how the African Americans were prepared for a Gandhian non-violent resistance when Dr. King undertook the leadership. Citing the examples of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey who communicated to the African Americans the idea of a shared struggle with all colored peoples of the world under the yoke of European colonialism at the time, Kapur moves to the influence of the post World War II African American press that extensively covered Gandhi's leadership and India's path to freedom by analyzing several widely respected African American journals from 1919 to 1955, such as *The Crisis*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Chicago Defender*, and the *New York Amsterdam News* among others. Similarly, notes Kapur, several black leaders like Howard Thurman, "the celebrated preacher-mystic-theologian" and his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, William Stuart Nelson, "the editor of Howard University's *Journal of Religious Thought*", and Channing H. Tobias, "member of the Board of Trustees of the NAACP" among others, traveled to India in the late 1930s, met Gandhi, and discussed the possibility of applying his methodology of nonviolent and direct action to the

“antisegregationist struggle” and “resistance to injustice on a mass scale in the United States” (7). Similarly, a number of Gandhian followers from India, including Lala Lajpat Rai and Charles Freer Andrews, “a British Christian missionary, friend, and biographer of Gandhi,” among others, visited the United States and communicated to the African American community the possibility of active nonviolent resistance to white injustice (7). Moreover, Gandhi’s emphasis on *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satya* (truth) and his acknowledgment of following the “way of Jesus” (3) struck a chord with the African American community for whom these were important aspects of their “spirituality” (8).

It is important to note here that just like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s leadership raises the question of elitism in the African American movement in USA, Gandhi’s leadership had a similar elitism that the Subaltern Studies group has effectively critiqued and has led to the rewriting of history in South Asia from a subaltern perspective. Ranajit Guha, one of the founders of the Subaltern Studies group, focuses on the faceless millions who seemingly followed Gandhi but were never acknowledged as pro-active agents against foreign rule. The elite nationalist leaders underplayed or ignored the role of the subaltern masses without whom major milestones of the struggle, like the Dandi March or the Salt-strike or the opposition to the Simon Commission, could not have been achieved. Guha and his colleagues call upon a revision of the national imagination about the freedom movement in India. Moreover, Indian historiography tends to highlight the contribution of Gandhi and Nehru against British rule without often drawing attention to the domestic or internal condition of the millions under the repressive caste system.

While India won freedom and was partitioned along religious lines to form a Muslim state of Pakistan, the plight of the then Untouchables (today known as Dalits)

became a major contention between Gandhi and the greatest leader of the Dalits, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Prior to independence, Ambedkar insisted on a separate electorate for the Dalits, whom Gandhi preferred to call 'harijans' or 'the children of God', but Gandhi went on a prolonged fast in order to prevent a division among the Hindus, especially when the atmosphere was full of apprehensions about dividing the country. However, since the origins of the caste system were founded in and endorsed by the orthodox Brahmanical interpretation of "Hinduism" and certain Hindu scriptures, Ambedkar saw a separate electorate as an ideal solution for addressing the conditions of the Untouchables because the general electorate would have caste-Hindus as leaders who would never pay heed to the requirements of the Untouchables (Kapoor 62).

Owing to lack of education and therefore good employment opportunities, the Dalits remained backward economically. Indian independence in 1947 granted them nominal citizenship. However, their elected educated and upper caste leaders would never address their causes or work toward their uplift because of religious sanction against such interaction. Keeping these conditions in mind, Ambedkar argued for a separate electorate on the eve of Indian independence which the outgoing British government, under Ramsay MacDonald, was ready to establish but Gandhi refused. Thus, not only was India getting divided on religious lines into Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India, a "large body of Untouchables" (who happened to be primarily rural at the time) were "disenchanted with Gandhi and the Congress" (Kapur 48). As Gyan Pandey notes in *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories*, Ambedkar opposed Gandhi's "romanticisation of 'village India'" and donned not the famous loin-cloth of Gandhi, representing peasant India, but the "Western gentleman's suit and hat" to

emphasize that peasants are not a static component of India's subaltern masses but one with the potential and right to progress, to urbanize, and to claim the amenities of a modern nation state such as "homes and jobs, running water, electricity and access to power (of all kinds)...good schools and hospitals"(3-4).

Gandhi's own stand on the Untouchable issue was fairly ambiguous: on one hand he was deeply sympathetic to their downtrodden condition; but on the other, he refused to allow them to break free from the Hindu electoral fold which was solely responsible for their outcast status. However, Gandhi, recognizing their pariah status, was alive to the parallel situation of the then Negroes in USA. But the African American press did not perhaps realize the contradiction in Gandhi's stance on the Untouchable issue. Kapur notes that "Gandhi's very strong stand against untouchability was one of the key reasons why so many African Americans were drawn to him" (60). Also, that Gandhi adopted an Untouchable girl as his daughter and ensured that Untouchables could "enter into the political realm" and "made them members and full participants of his ashram communities" endeared Gandhi to the African American community (Kapur 60). But without a leader from their outcast background, the thousands of untouchables' needs would never be addressed. While William E. King, in an October issue of the *Atlanta Daily World*, expressed his conviction that Gandhi's "six-day fast" could "blast the centuries of prejudice and class feeling behind the caste system" (Kapur 62), they could not see Ambedkar's rationale behind the separate electorates. Several more newspapers talked about Gandhi as the leader of the Untouchables whose differences with Ambedkar had been settled (Kapur 64-65).

Although Gandhi's attention to the untouchability issue was praiseworthy, it was not supposed to guarantee long-lasting benefits to the traditionally underprivileged, as Ambedkar foresaw. Unlike in USA's 'separate but equal' policy that purportedly granted all rights with the hidden understanding of difference and distance, according to Ambedkar, the Untouchables would be able to claim socio-economic rights through separate electorates when their leaders would address their ageless experience of denials and discrimination. Such leadership could only emerge from personal experience of Dalits. But separate electorates were never formulated. Nevertheless, Gandhi remained a figure of great admiration among the African Americans. Interestingly, his close associates brought to the United States both the parallel between the Indian freedom struggle and the emerging movement among the African Americans and that between the Untouchables in India and the African Americans in USA.

In 1915, while in political exile in USA, Lajpat Rai stated that "there is some analogy between the Negro problem in the United States of America and the problem of the depressed classes [Untouchables and members of tribal groups] in India"(Kapur 14). Charles Freer Andrews, a close friend of Gandhi for twenty-six years and dedicated to his ideas of "winning freedom for India, removing untouchability, and establishing racial justice" (73), traveled to the United States and other parts of the world and spread Gandhi's message of justice and peace. In February of 1929, Andrews visited Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and after speaking to the African American community communicated to Gandhi the African American appreciation and support for his work. However, Andrews also stated that Gandhi was opposed to inter-caste marriage and dining which confused the African Americans, especially because it reminded them of

black-white relationships in their country. Soon Gandhi publicly negated Andrews's comments and declared that untouchability would end only when socially interactive activities could be encouraged (Kapur 78-80). There were some more speakers who brought Gandhi's message to the African Americans but it was only between 1935 and 1937 that important afore-mentioned African American leaders actually visited India and met with Gandhi.

Among the leaders who actually met Gandhi, Thurman felt that as an African American he could understand the "psychological climate" bred by the condition of untouchability and that "despite differences in the particular experiences of the two peoples, 'they do not differ in principle and in inner pain'" (Kapur 82). Impressed with the simple lifestyle of Gandhi who spun and wore only khadi, a type of cheap coarse cotton, that the majority of rural and untouchable Indians could afford, Mordecai Johnson of Howard University declared that "Negro college graduates...should don a special brand of cheapest variety of homemade overalls" and proclaim solidarity with all African Americans of the time, across class lines (Kapur 86). These six African American leaders discussed with Gandhi the applications of peaceful and nonviolent resistance against racial injustice, discrimination, and Jim Crow laws in their own country and hoped for a "black Gandhi" (Kapur 157). But it was not "until the start of the Montgomery bus boycott and the rise of King (and the rise of television) in 1955 for nonviolent resistance to grip the imagination of ordinary African Americans" for them to "appl[y] a Gandhian methodology of resistance on a mass scale" (Kapur 123). It was perhaps owing to King's appeal to the spirituality of his community that brought the movement together.

In the post-World War II period, when most colonized countries were beginning to gain independence, Gandhi's noncooperation and nonviolent resistance exemplified what could be achieved by striking at the heart of the colonizer's conscience. Through 1946 and 1947, the year of India's independence, several eminent Indian political figures visited the United States and the U.N. assembly meetings and repeated the notion of Indian solidarity with all colored peoples of the world, especially with those in the United States, much like W.E.B. DuBois who refused to be photographed with "pro-British Indians at the UN conference" (Kapur 128). The Indian-African American connection became even more pronounced when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. adopted the Gandhian nonviolent resistance methodology and led the African Americans toward their Civil Rights through the 1950s and 1960s. That Gandhi was opposing both the external British domination and the internal oppressive structure of casteism and untouchability was a major reason why the African Americans were drawn toward his struggle.

It is intriguing to note here that the direction of influence between the two peoples reversed itself in the late 1960s and 1970s when the militant Black Panthers and their claims of Black Power motivated a group of young Dalit poets and activists to compose outrageous art in order to shatter the complacency of Brahminical ideologies. They proudly called themselves Dalit Panthers. In the late 1960s through 1970s the Black Power and Black Panther movements not only gave rise to a militant resistance to white oppression but it also witnessed the emergence of anti-white establishment art. Adapting a similar ideology, in 1972 a group of young Marathi Dalit artists in India called themselves the Dalit Panthers and embraced violent politics and aesthetics to resist caste supremacy. They were the first to use the word "Dalit" literally meaning "broken or

ground to pieces” (SarDesai 107) to designate their social identity and today it is the only accepted term to refer to the former untouchables.

What is the Caste System?

Although slavery and the caste system as institutions were abolished in 1865 and 1950, respectively, the legacy of stratified systems based on labor and discourses of supremacy has continued in the respective societies. Moreover, the caste system’s official negation has not erased the system from the cultural ethos of India. The caste system in India is not unique with respect to its hierarchical structure because hierarchies of different kinds define several other cultures. However, as D.R. SarDesai notes in *India: The Definitive History*, what is indeed unique about the caste system is its “persistence through a couple of millennia” (103). To understand the caste system, one must note the following terms: “varna,” “endogamy,” “pollution” and “purity” and “untouchability.” During the Vedic times, the four ‘varnas’ (literally meaning “color”) were supposed to have originated from the four parts of the Cosmic Man: the priestly class, Brahmins (from the mouth), the warrior class, Kshatriyas (from the arms), the business class, Vaishyas (from the thighs or loins), and the menial class, Shudras (from the feet). People could change their identities by changing their professions. Over time, however, the divisions became more rigid and one’s birth became the sole determinant of one’s identity. The first three ‘varnas’ were supposed to designate the light-skinned Aryan origin while the fourth and last one would imply the darker-skinned Dravidian origin. SarDesai asserts that such color codes were never actually practiced and does not hold true today. However, the privilege of the first three ‘varnas’ was determined if not by their skin color but by their right to perform certain rituals of consecration and to “study

Vedic lore” (105). The Brahmins developed their own rituals of purity and maintained their superiority among the castes. They had access to the religious texts and scriptures and interpreted them for the rest of the society. Thus, the caste system is also known as being governed by the Brahmanical ideology.

SarDesai refutes the argument that only a division of labor with no “moral judgment on the superiority of one over the other” determined the caste system; in fact, this ‘varna’ system created a “hierarchy where a whole class (the first three varnas) looked down on the other,...the Sudras and all four on the untouchables” (105).

Endogamy helped to maintain this social order and the notion of purity observed by Brahmins was guarded strictly by forbidding exogamy. Untouchability is not mentioned in the Vedic literature and nor is it supported by the creation-myth of the Cosmic Man. SarDesai notes that the “heinous practice of untouchability crystallized around the second century CE” (107) and has continued through many millennia. Because these people were outside the four-fold ‘varna’ system, they were called ‘outcastes.’ They were responsible for disposing of dead bodies and working with carcasses of animals and their hides for leather, for cleaning the toilets, for keeping the neighborhoods germ and disease free. Ironically, the outcastes received the title of ‘untouchables’ because they touched and dealt with the filth and pollution of the entire society. Social interaction with upper castes, including eating together, sitting next to each other, going to the temple or school, or living in the same neighborhoods, was prohibited owing to fear of pollution.

Any breach of the above mentioned codes of social interaction could result in polluting the upper castes, according to the Brahmanical order. Thus the untouchables were relegated to the outskirts of society and were denied access to education, temples,

employment beyond their ancestral, often unhygienic, professions, and public social interactions in market places. In order to preserve the purity of the Brahmins, endogamy as a rule cemented the system that would prevent inter-marriage between the castes and maintain the caste purity of the Brahmins. Partha Chatterjee sums up: caste “is the biological reproduction of the human species through procreation within endogamous caste groups that ensures the permanence of ascribed marks of caste purity or pollution” (The Nation and Its Fragments 194). Thus, similar to segregation practiced in USA in the 19th and early twentieth centuries, the ex-untouchables, today known as Dalits, have always led marginalized lives.

According to N.M. Aston, a professor in the Literature and Language department in the University of Pune, untouchability “was a kind of socio-religious slavery imposed upon the dalit people. It got institutionalized over the centuries in social norms, customs and traditions” (19). In USA, however, although slaves became free men and women, the institution of racism has persisted for more than a century. Thus, two marginalized groups have experienced lives of exclusion in their respective countries along lines of genealogical factors over which they have no control. Their identity crises have been shaped by the shared experience of institutionalized segregation and the discourse of difference: discrimination, powerlessness, and voicelessness, always refracted by the lines of class and gender.

The Nation and Its Others

In this section I will explore how the Dalits constitute the ‘Other’ in the national imagination of the nation-state of India. Then I will discuss the parallel example in USA in which the African Americans also inhabit the ‘Other’ space in their national context.

Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and Its Fragments* discusses how “anticolonial nationalism” in India began with a sharp distinction between the domains of the “material and the spiritual” in an attempt to assert domestic sovereignty while still under “imperial” rule. In the ‘spiritual’ domain, India created its “national culture” and resisted the colonial government’s interference in any form. Chatterjee goes on to argue that it is in the creation of the “inner” spiritual domain that India launched its “period of nationalism.” Moreover, this spiritual domain would not be Western but “‘modern’.” Chatterjee asserts that in this phase of early nationalism the nation-state of India was “imagined” into being (6). However, in the wake of Indian Independence in 1947, the question of the ‘caste system’ as an aspect of India’s modernity weighed down upon both Marxists and nationalists. In a complicated response to Western interpretation of the caste system, the Marxists condemned the system as oppressive and anti-modern while the nationalist argument insisted that “caste in its ideal form is not oppressive and not inconsistent with the aspirations of individuality within the harmony of a unified social order” (Chatterjee 174-5). Chatterjee argues that the “variance” between the idea of caste and the lived reality of caste provides the appropriate platform to critique caste as an inherent aspect of India (175). Effectively, Chatterjee’s study exemplifies, all political and intellectual debates about the caste hierarchy and its victims, the lowest castes and the untouchables, ignore or marginalize the actual people, the subalterns. Chatterjee develops his argument that the nation-state of India was an imagined community of the nationalist elites that marginalized the lower castes, its others.

He revisits the nineteenth century when national consciousness against British rule was on the rise and demonstrates the above-mentioned “variance” by examining the

history of minor sects of Hinduism, like Vaishnavism, in Bengal in which several lower caste members became actively involved. Chatterjee then describes the actual activities of sect leaders who, while preaching against caste and Vedas, became deliberately less critical of the institutions as their followers from upper castes increased in number. However, these sects and their preachers were alive to the distinction between the “practical social aspect of the life of the devotee” and the “supreme spiritual aspect” and consequently designed their discourses accordingly. Thus, the lower castes functioned within the structure of domination and would not overstep their social status but at the same time retained the “spiritual aspect” as the “preserve of autonomy and self-assertion” (187). That the untouchables were conscious of their outsider status and accordingly negotiated their interaction with the higher castes proves how ingrained the ethos of the caste system was in the collective perceived understanding of India’s nation-state. The model of distinction the nationalists adopted with respect to the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘material’ apropos of the British was replicated within the imagined community of the nation by the ‘outsiders’ of the nation with respect to the nationalist elites. But the ‘others’ of the nation often remained so in spite of their assertion. Chatterjee gives examples of untouchable-spiritual leaders in the nineteenth century, like Balaram from Meherpur, a district in Bengal, whose aggressive confrontational songs resist the caste system and Brahmanism. But Balaram’s caste ‘Hadi’ was such a marginalized sub-caste among the untouchables that his insubordination also remained marginalized and made no difference to the caste system and its practices (190-91).

Through these discussions Chatterjee exposes how the vision of a nation-state in pre-Independence India precluded the Dalits. Chatterjee goes on to suggest that instead of

using 'dharma' or 'religion' or 'faith' as the "unifying" system for caste divisions, post-Independence India has created a "nation" within whose territories caste divisions play out not their religious conflicts but political demands (198). Today there are more opportunities for the Dalits in India than before and demands for and greater access to education, employment, and other democratic rights have punctuated India's recent history. Nevertheless, the mark of one's caste identity, often recognized in the family name, carries its baggage even today.

On 4th July, 1776, the Declaration of Independence of the United States was signed by representatives of thirteen states, and famously included the following words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..." ("The Declaration of Independence"). It is common knowledge today that Thomas Jefferson who drafted the Constitution was an affluent slave-holder in Virginia. The contradiction between his statements about the founding principles of the new nation-state and his actual practice of denying people of African descent their humanity, equality and liberty, spelled the position and rights of African peoples in the national imagination of the United States. Through American history, from the abolition movement and the Civil War, the Reconstruction era, the Harlem Renaissance until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the African Americans have always constituted a distinct cultural and social ethos within the nation but beyond the pale of USA's national imagination. Langston Hughes in "I, Too" reminded the nation that he is the "darker brother" and that he, too, "is America." One hundred and eighty-nine years after the nation-state was drafted into political existence,

the African Americans, the ‘Others’ of the nation, were inducted as rightful citizens in 1965. Gyanendra Pandey notes that exclusion from the mainstream alone does not inform these groups; rather, “an increasingly popular account of the foundation of the United States” that recognizes and acknowledges “the ‘original sin’ of slavery” and its “overcoming” as “[underscoring] the story of American democracy and liberty” has a “parallel story regarding untouchability in the received narrative of Indian democracy” (321-322; footnotes). Thus it is informative to compare these two peoples, the Others of their respective nation-states, and their histories and literatures.

Why ‘Subaltern’?

In *The Modern Prince* and *The Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci defines the ‘subaltern’ classes as those excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power that subjugates them. Through consent these ‘subalterns’ participate in the hegemony created and controlled by the dominant group. The subalterns have no independent space from which to articulate their voice because hegemony conditions them to believe in the dominant values. Gramsci believed that the intellectual has the responsibility to “search out signs of subaltern initiative and class consciousness and effective political action” (Mapping 28).

The Ranajit Guha-led Subaltern Studies group established a field of historical inquiry ‘from below’ of South Asian, specifically Indian, historiography. Guha defines the ‘subaltern’ as the demographic difference between the “dominant indigenous elite” and the masses. The “elite” comprises the “feudal magnates... industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie and... recruits to the uppermost levels of the bureaucracy” (Postcolonialisms

408). In the very first essay of the series “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” Guha specified that the indigenous elites comprised a heterogeneous group that varied from the “all-India level...(to)...regional and local levels...” and that it “differed from area to area” (Mapping 7). Gayatri Spivak delineates the primary thrust of Subaltern Studies’ research: they make “a theory of consciousness or culture” and bring “hegemonic historiography to crisis” (Subaltern Studies 4). The Subaltern Studies group exposes the elitism of the history of the Indian National movement that does not acknowledge the role and contribution of peasants (subalterns) and instead only focuses on elitist leadership against colonial rule as the only kind of engagement with anti-colonialism. The subalternist historians argue against Indian historiography and insist that the subaltern masses were not passive elements in the flow of elite-led anticolonialism; rather, the historians read the existence and exercise of subaltern consciousness and autonomy among peasants and their insurgencies during the colonial period. Retrieving important archival documents of local and often short-lived rebellions without any elitist leadership, the subalternists emphasize subaltern agency in Indian historiography and attempt to revise received knowledge of Indian history. Following Gramsci, the subalternist historians as intellectuals engage with the task of identifying subaltern agency and consciousness in the national movement.

The Subaltern Studies group began with Gramsci’s term ‘subaltern,’ and applied it to the disenfranchised and subordinated peasants in Indian society. Their founding and early monographs and articles focused on peasants and their subaltern agency. Gradually the term ‘subaltern’ assumed a wider meaning in the series and began to include several subordinated groups such as lower castes, poor Muslims, rural labor force in urban

locations, among others. While Gramsci used ‘subalterno’ instead of ‘proletariat’ in his diaries in order to escape prison censors, the word ‘subaltern’ went beyond the meaning of ‘proletariat’ in the entire body of his work (Mapping 323). Similarly, when Guha and his colleagues employed the word ‘subaltern’ for peasants in colonial India, they began with the underpinnings of social and economic class that the ‘peasant’ implies in the Indian context. In later essays Subalternist historians have invested in recovering voices (and consciousness) and histories of tribals, Dalits, migrant workers, and Indian Partition-sufferers, among others, in India. In *Subaltern Citizens* Gyanendra Pandey writes that the use of the word ‘subaltern’ intensifies the responsibility of critical historiography, whether Marxist, feminist, anticolonial or minority, “to recover subject positions, lives, possibilities, and political action that have been marginalized, distorted, suppressed, and even forgotten” (7).

Through Subaltern Studies’ work of more than a quarter of a century, the concepts of the ‘subaltern’ and subalternist historiography have moved beyond the national boundaries of India into Brazil, Latin America, Japan and Africa. It has come to refer to people who have had or continue to have limited, if any, access to institutions of socio-economic-political power, in different societies and in different matrices of power relations. Late Subaltern Studies also engages with the responsibility of the investigator. Gyanendra Pandey in “Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories” reflects on the 25 year long work in the Subaltern Studies Project and sums up the trajectory of the project, in all its variety: the Subaltern historian works with the “‘fragments’, ‘traces’ (in Gramsci’s phrase) that survive in available narratives to tell of other suppressed narratives and perspectives” (Mapping 282).

Gayatri Spivak employs the term 'subaltern' in a context similar to Gramsci's and believes that a position of economic powerlessness and dispossession characterizes the 'subaltern' who may not be able to articulate or represent herself. Her ultimate concern in her famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (published in 1988 soon after the first few articles of the Subaltern Studies group) is the doubly silenced subaltern woman who is always spoken for. She calls upon postcolonial female intellectuals to question the muting of the subaltern woman and not simply attempt to give a voice to the silenced subaltern. She is wary about postcolonial scholars repeating the colonial praxis of 'speaking for' the powerless. While encouraging the Subaltern Studies group and its attempt to revive the role and agency of Indian masses in the national movement for independence, Spivak warns the historians against appropriating the voices of the subalterns by imposing a collective homogenous identity and speech upon them. In such a situation, the heterogeneity of the subaltern masses becomes compromised and reinforces the colonial experience of cultural erasure. She raises the issue of the responsibility of the investigator who tries to unearth the subaltern voices from amidst elite discourse. Almost twenty years later, Spivak in her re-visioning of the notion of the 'subaltern' in "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview" recognizes that the thrust of the project has been the "bottom layer of society, not necessarily put together by capital logic alone" (Mapping 323). She continues to invest in the politics of representing the silenced subalterns.

David Arnold in "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India," an early essay on the series, justifies why and how a term used in the context of Italian peasantry can be

used in the context of Indian peasantry. He notes the advantage of using the word ‘subaltern’:

It emphasizes the central importance of the relationship of power between social groups: they are not just peasants and landlords but subordinates and superordinates, conscious of the implications and consequences of their respective positions though not necessarily in terms that signify a developed class awareness....Its use is expressive, too, of Gramsci’s persistent use of dialectical couplets – hegemony/subordination, force/consent, active/passive – to bring out the conflicts and contradictions...to be found within actual historical situations.
(Mapping 33)

Tom Brass in “Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements and the (Re-) Emergence of a (Post-) Modernized (Middle) Peasant” elucidates that the use of the word ‘subaltern’ in the Subaltern Studies project implies more than class identity:

...[because] agrarian mobilization and resistance to colonialism...has more to do with the experience and ideology of gender, ethnicity, region, ecology or religion,... these kinds of ‘difference’ [between elite and masses] cannot be understood by (and are therefore not reducible to) the class position of the subject.
(Mapping 135)

Brass proceeds to argue that class consciousness alone as an important aspect of the subaltern (in Gramscian terms) perhaps did not and could not inform the notion of the ‘subaltern’ in the case of the Indian peasantry because “ethnic/gender/religious/regional identity and experience” refract the concept of class in Indian society (Mapping 135).

Thus, the Subaltern Studies group from its very inception employed the word ‘subaltern’ to imply class identity along with other aspects of socio-cultural-political identities¹. Similarly, Gyan Prakash in his appraisal of the Subaltern Studies series identifies the “deployment of the concept of subalternity” as the most crucial contribution of the new historiography. According to Prakash, Guha, the founding editor of the series, “views subalternity as an essential object in place of class – an effect of power relations and expressed through a variety of means – linguistic, economic, social and cultural” (Mapping 179).

Given the expanding definition of the ‘subaltern’ and the adaptation of the Subaltern Studies’ theoretical framework in different geographical regions outside South Asia, it is no surprise that the study of minority groups in USA will develop another interesting dimension from the Subaltern perspective. In his very recent book, *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories*, Gyanendra Pandey establishes how and why the paradigm of subalternity may be applied to not only the “erstwhile Third World” but also to “advanced industrial (and post-industrial) societies like the USA” (Subaltern Citizens 4). Moreover, the “condition of subalternity, of impoverishment (cultural and social, as well as economic) and humiliation,” the “relation of dominance and subordination” and the struggle to negotiate and “overcome” historical or “inherited marks of subalternity” inform both the African Americans and the Dalits, in their respective societies.

¹ C.A. Bayly, likewise, notes that the Subaltern Studies project began soon after Indira Gandhi’s regime of Emergency when Indian historiography was on the verge of becoming identified with the “hegemonic ideology of the Indian National Congress” and its emphasis on “national unity” while the country was being torn apart by Naxalite and Maoist violence, “tribal resistance movements, poor peasant protest and working-class rising” (Mapping 118). In its very inception, then, the Subalternists were alert to the socio-economic and political conditions and status of the people whose predecessors they were preparing to re-write into history.

Pandey posits that the word 'subaltern' has relevance for the American context because both South Asian subalternists and scholars involved in "labour history, African-American Studies, Native American, Latino-Latina Studies, or LGBTQ in the case of US" (Subaltern Citizens 2) engage with similar lines of inquiry: the question of the "subordinated and the marginalized" (Subaltern Citizens 2). The African American condition, like that of other minority ethnicities in USA and other parts of the world, can be explored from a Subalternist perspective because their counterhegemonic resistances and historiography's attempt to recover such agency have historically defined the politics of this group.

An important question both Gramsci and Spivak raise remains crucial: the question of retrieval and representation of the subaltern voice and consciousness and the intellectual's responsibility in the process. Spivak suggests that in order to avoid an essentialist construction of the subaltern the historian must be able to read silences and welcome information retrieval in silenced areas but not claim to assume and construct subaltern consciousness. The position of the investigator needs to be questioned because the intellectual should engage with speaking to, and not for, the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman (Spivak 295).

History and literature, as disciplines, necessarily involve representation. So, like the Subaltern historian whose ability to hear plays a crucial role in retrieving traces of subaltern lives and experiences, the literary scholar engages with the task of examining subaltern lives and experiences in literary narratives. Just as Marxist and nationalist historical narratives have been critically dissected by the Subalternist historians in an attempt to revive the fragments of the nation, literature can be dissected in similar ways

to reveal hegemonic voices that re-present subaltern experiences. Toni Morrison retrieves the tale of Margaret Garner from the sensational newspaper stories and creates Sethe in order to speak to the subaltern mother's predicament. Phoolan Devi's biography is misappropriated by Shekhar Kapur and the agency of the bandit queen is silenced in celluloid. While one intellectual engages with the delicate responsibility to represent the subaltern, another appropriates and mutes the subaltern voice in representation.

My dissertation, *"Speaking" Subalterns* is informed by this understanding of the subaltern and her or his representation. It examines the issue of subaltern representation of and by the two groups of people, Dalits in India and African Americans in the US. I engage with how some subalterns are spoken for in the literary texts and how they speak in others. Harriet Jacobs in the US writes her own slave narrative but the publishing history exposes how her audience's expectations and editorial control define and restrict her self-presentation. Phoolan Devi demonstrated extraordinary tenacity and courage in challenging the masculine and caste hierarchies in rural India but her representations in print and celluloid silence her real-life agency. Toni Morrison rescues and represents Sethe's tale of extraordinary motherlove from the commotion of community blame. Baburao Bagul, in recreating Pandu's mother's sacrifice and love for her son, retrieves the otherwise silenced tale of her negotiation with complicated socio-economic pressures. Toni Morrison and Arundhati Roy make their survivor-characters, Claudia and Rahel, respectively, bear witness to the acts of silencing of their traumatized counterparts, Pecola and Estha. Both authors represent the mesh of social, economic, and familial circumstances that brutalize the subaltern children. Amiri Baraka and Namdeo Dhasal

articulate the repressed rage of subaltern men in order to claim agency but in the process they silence their women counterparts.

Racism and Casteism: Which is Worse?

It is important to note that in spite of the exchanges in the early twentieth century between African American and Indian leaders, there were several moments when racism and casteism were blatantly compared and one was judged to be worse than the other. While Benjamin E. Mays attempted to establish that “the Hindu caste system was much worse than racism in the United States,” his personal encounter with Gandhi made him recognize his position as an untouchable in his own society (Kapur 160-161). Nevertheless, some scholars have investigated how several noted Indian thinkers, including Gandhi, compared the structures of caste in India and race in USA and found the latter worse off.

Nico Slate, in his article “Race, Caste, and Nation: Indian Nationalists and the American Negro, 1893-1947” examines similar exchanges between Indian leaders and African American leaders and demonstrates how the Indians insisted that untouchability was a better condition than racism in USA. Slate examines letters and speeches exchanged between these Indian leaders and African American and white American leaders and congregations in order to explore how the example of the Negro in USA was utilized as a comparative model in the untouchable context in India. Slate notes that several Indian leaders, including Gandhi, Lajpat Rai, Netaji S.C Bose, Vivekananda, and Tagore attempted to illustrate how the race structure in USA, including slavery, was a far worse condition than that of Untouchables or the caste system in general in India. Conversely, Ambedkar insisted that the Untouchable condition was worse than racism in

USA while probably overlooking the racial tensions in pre-1920s America that he witnessed first-hand as a graduate student at Columbia, Slate points out. I believe it is not productive trying to judge which system of socio-political and economic structure is more repressive and which leaders took what stand on the comparison. That these structures have existed and continue to do so, albeit in ways different from the past, seems to be most crucial aspects of both societies. The toll they take and have taken on the identity and dignity of the oppressed people is more important than the comparative advantages or disadvantages of each. It is important to remember that the two societies are very different and that the two systems work differently.

The time period that Slate refers to, it must be noted, defines the beginning of the decline of the British Raj in India. As Sudarshan Kapur has amply demonstrated, Gandhi and his compatriots' activities were gaining world-wide attention. These leaders were also trying to reach wider audiences to justify their opposition to the British. The best parallel example of a similar kind of ongoing oppression existed in USA, with respect to the African American condition. Just as the South African movement against Apartheid cited examples of Gandhi and just as King adopted Gandhi's non-violence, just as Malcolm X and Fanon embraced violence against oppression, similarly, the Indian leaders cited the condition of the Negro in USA as a working parallel model for their own resistance to British rule. They were not accurate in the comparisons nor were they right in elevating the caste system above that of racism; but it is important that today we look beyond these differences and misjudgments and instead focus on the similar ways in which any form of oppression operates within a given socio-political context and undermines human dignity. It is important to note that the subaltern is produced and

maintained by the more powerful supremacists in many societies and that debates about which system is worse undermines the critical attention that every disempowered group deserves. Ethnic violence in Africa, in Serbia, in Sri Lanka – how can we compare which is worse when loss of human life and denigration of human dignity based on race, ethnicity, color, gender, class, sexuality, characterize all of them? Was the British rule in India worse than racial apartheid in South Africa? Is it possible and productive to engage in such comparisons? Instead, successful opposition to these regimes can act as an example for other similarly disenfranchised peoples. Comparative study of similar but not identical structures of oppression yields lessons for each that can be adapted to suit specific socio-cultural circumstances.

It is also crucial to understand, as Ashwini Deshpande warns, that “caste and race are distinct, not mirror images of each other” (329). Nevertheless, the “economic situation of the lower castes in India often resembles that of...blacks in the United States” (329). Just as major events based on racial differences have punctuated USA’s social, political, and economic history since the contact of the land with Europeans, the caste system has served as the foundation of India’s socio-economic history for several millennia and has evolved with different phases of foreign rule, all different from each other, until and after political independence in 1947. While the Mughal rule brought in its wake several conversions to Islam, the British rule effected conversions to Christianity. However, caste distinctions survived these religious conversions and Christians and Muslims, in several parts of the country today, maintain their caste identities although their religions do not endorse the caste system. Thus, Bama, a Dalit Christian nun, in her autobiography, *Karukku*, exposes the way caste distinctions infiltrate the Catholic Church

in Tamil Nadu, a state in southern India. Also, it's important to note, that the caste system gained currency as a codified social system under British rule. However, unlike race and racial difference that received pseudo-scientific sanction in USA and Europe, the caste system in India has had religious sanction from the "ideology of Brahminic Hinduism" (Deshpande 329). Thus, in two already different societies, the two structures have different types of meaning and tradition.

Caste and Race: Similar or Different?

In *Caste, Race, and Politics*, the authors, Sidney Verba, Bashiruddin Ahmed, and Anil Bhatt claim that the two groups are both similar and dissimilar. On one hand, both Dalits and African Americans have their "status determined by birth, endogamy, sexual taboos, and exploitation" in their respective societies (17); on the other hand, as mentioned above, one group's ascriptive identity is sanctioned by the rationale of sanctioned purity in orthodox Brahmanical "Hinduism," and the other's by the pseudo-scientific rationale of African origin occupying the lowest rung of the Great Chain of Being. Moreover, although both the Dalits and the African Americans are "distinctive groups that occupy a similar position in their respective societies – the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy", it is important to note that "the hierarchies are different" (19). A major difference between their socio-economic identities involves the basic difference between the two societies – USA's First/Developed World identity with its "urbanization, affluence, industrialization" and India's so-called Third/Developing World identity, with its poverty, a billion-strong population, and a wide gap between rural and urban lives. Thus, the Dalits, occupying the lowest position in Indian society, is "in an absolute position quite below the average" African American (20).

However, as Verba et al suggest, in spite of the differences in the respective hierarchies, the similarities of the Dalits and African Americans are striking and intriguing. Even today, despite the Civil Rights Movement in USA, the abolition of the caste system in 1950 by the Indian Constitution, and affirmative actions in both USA and India, these groups, on an average, are characterized by “less education, lower-status jobs, and lower income than the ‘dominant’ groups – whites and caste-Hindus” (19). The authors’ main focus is on the political consciousness and action of the two suppressed groups; they establish how the political ideologies in the two societies are similar, namely egalitarianism and equality, but have played out in interesting ways with respect to the subordinated. On the creation of a free India in 1947, universal suffrage was a right given to all its citizens, irrespective of class, caste, and gender. So, while the dalits (then known as Untouchables and called ‘Harijans’ by Gandhi) could vote, their social identities and acceptance did not change with their political identities (Verba 36). Similarly, while ‘equality for all’ as an American ideology was articulated in the Declaration of Independence, slavery and subordination of African Americans (then known as negroes) and Native Americans was common practice. Thus, as the authors state, in both India and USA there exist “a gap between the dominant *political* ideology which is equalitarian and the reality of caste or race relations” (22; italics in the original).

It is also important to note that neither of the subordinated groups is “homogenous internally” (Verba 34). There are issues of class, gender, and sexuality that punctuate and de-homogenize their respective identities. Moreover, Verba et al demonstrate that there is a difference in the internal differentiation in the two groups. While the African Americans have internal differences along “vertical dimensions [such] as education,

occupational status, income,” the Dalits have more “horizontal differentiation – they speak different languages, belong to more identifiable subgroups (subcastes)” and tend to be concentrated in rural areas, and increasingly, in urban outskirts (34). The rural dimension in India has changed considerably over the last decade: migration to urban areas by forgoing traditional occupations in favor of unskilled and underpaid jobs in cities has contributed to a major change in the demographics and income distribution in India. Also, the rise of the middle class among the African Americans and Dalits who have had access to education, good jobs, and financial security, marks both these traditionally subjugated groups that have resulted in a whole new dimension in the internal heterogeneity. Thus, in post-colonial nations like India, the “middle classes can become the unmarked universal again – the ‘mainstream’ of modern, national development” while the same “anonymity is not available to the internally colonized, or...the ‘marked’ or ‘subaltern middle classes in the postcolony – the black middle class in the United States or the dalit middle class in India.” Instances of “‘white flight’ (from predominantly white neighborhoods) where black middle-class elements have moved [in from] traditionally black neighborhoods” are not rare just as the “social-psychological condition” under which the middle class dalit professionals co-exist with caste-Hindu counterparts (“Subaltern Middle Class” 328) is not conjecture. 2006 witnessed angry protests from upper caste medical doctors in India when the government announced that a high percentage of quota seats will be reserved for admission of Dalit students.

Returning to the vertical and horizontal differences within the groups, it is important to note that “vertical differentiation allows for the development of leaders and followers” even after impeding “organization and [growth of] self-consciousness” (Verba

34-35) among the African Americans. In the case of the Dalits, however, because of the sheer complexity of divisions and sub-divisions among the castes, jatis, regions, and languages, “communications and...organizational development” become difficult (Verba 35). Thus, one of the greatest Dalit leaders, B. R. Ambedkar is recognized widely and acknowledged for his dedication to the plight of the Dalits and for his opposition to elitist political leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. But he has never been able to reach every part of the country owing to language barrier and specific caste sub-group identity. He spoke Marathi and English. Since English could not (and still cannot) reach every part of India, especially the vast rural areas, Marathi could have been the only channel. But the language is spoken and understood in only two states (in Western India) of the twenty-eight states. Similarly, his caste-group (Mahar) is a specifically Maharashtra-based untouchable caste-group, not recognized in other parts of India. Also, although deprivation and dehumanization characterized all Dalit experiences across the country, caste-based professions varied from region to region and so did the nature of exploitation. Thus, the reach of Ambedkar’s work, although extraordinary and inspiring, was limited when compared to, say in USA, the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Not every African American was in Alabama, but what King said reached and touched every one of them, across the United States. Of course there have been social reformists and activists in different parts of India who have and are still actively working for better conditions and rights of Dalits, but one concentrated effort is difficult in a country like India where the Constitution itself recognizes eighteen major languages and thousands of regional dialects.

Women, Caste, and Race

Dalits and African Americans are recognizably the Others in their respective societies. It is important to examine how the Other women negotiate their identities inside and outside their groups in the context of sexism within patriarchal society. The historical subjugation of peoples based on their race and caste assume a further paradigm of gender discrimination when the women struggle for identity and respect not only against the respective supremacists who have historically exploited them sexually but also against the men of their own groups who often fail to acknowledge their rights and contributions in the struggle against oppression. Moreover, economic issues have also informed the struggles of underprivileged women and have divided feminists of color from white feminists in USA and Dalit feminists from upper caste and urban feminists in India. Angela Davis, Alice Walker, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, among others, have discussed the experience and need for organization among women of color. In India, Dalit feminism is an emerging phenomenon although some writers like Anna Bhai Sathe have done some notable work.

The question of African American and Dalit women is a critical concern that shows further internal differentiation among these groups while indicating a similarity between the African American and Dalit consciousness. Just as Black feminist studies has established that African American women and their contributions to the making of both their racial consciousness and that of American identity is impossible to ignore or undermine, similarly, a nascent Dalit feminism is emerging in different parts of India. M. Swathy Margaret, a PhD student in the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad, India, identifies herself as “a Dalit-middle-class,

University educated, Telugu speaking Dalit-Christian-Woman” (Dalit Feminism). In her M.A. thesis, *Writing Dalit Feminist Discourse Through Translation: Translating Select African American Short Stories into Telugu*, Margaret highlights the similarities she sees between her predicament as a Dalit woman in a society infested with caste and gender privileges and that of African American women in a society that similarly privileges the white race and the masculine gender. Aforementioned Black feminists and Benita Roth’s *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave*, among others, emphasize race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality as crucial informants of feminism by women of color. They illustrate that white women’s feminism cannot and does not speak to women of color and their specific crises. In the Indian context, Margaret writes about the differences between her and the upper caste and upper class women she encountered on campus:

I also saw the urban, fluent-in-English, extremely confident women, who called themselves feminist, who I could hardly talk to. When I did talk to them I was struck by their confidence, their go-get attitude. There were no shared fears, pleasures or problems with them. They do not seem to have a caste to be bothered about..... (Dalit Feminism)

In *Fields of Protest: Women’s Movements in India*, Raka Ray, while exploring the parallel but different types of women’s movements in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay (now Mumbai), notes that one major critique of women’s movements in India refers to their elitism. Thus, referring to the criticism by Gail Omvedt, an “India-based feminist scholar and activist,” Ray observes that “few autonomous women’s

organizations have a genuine interest in including poor and working women, since they tend to have a middle-class membership” (15).

Consequently, Margaret notes the inspiration she finds in African American women writers who claimed their racial and gender identities while resisting both racial supremacy and intra-racial patriarchy:

I came to see some very touching literature of African American women writers. They provided me with the tools to explain my exclusion within the Ambedkar Students Association (all male students), my sense of distance from other feminists who are from upper castes, an eerie sense of alienation I felt in the classrooms and outside. (Dalit Feminism)

Then she critiques some Dalit scholars who are currently involved with questions of Dalit identity and politics in India:

Dalit ideologues like Katti Padma Rao, Gopal Guru and Gaddar seem to be less sensitive to the internal patriarchy of Dalit communities. They maintain that all women are Dalits...[But] different bodies are ascribed different cultural meanings. Not all bodies possess even identities. Not all Dalit bodies are one, not all female bodies are one. They interact with each other being caught in a complex web of intersecting identities. Dalit men, even those identified with the movement, do not want to see us as intellectuals. “You are a Dalit body, a Dalit female body. Why can’t I possess it. Why can’t I just come near you.” It is threatening. This happens at a very physical level. To prevent this, one of the strategies that I use, is to stay with upper-caste women as Dalit men will not dare

do express and behave in the same manner with them. In such a situation who am I closer to? The Dalit men, or the upper-caste women? Neither. (Dalit Feminism)

It is interesting to note a parallel development of early feminist consciousness among African Americans and Dalits. In USA Sojourner Truth and other African American women stood up against early white feminists in the late 19th century, as Hazel Carby discusses at great length in *Reconstructing Womanhood*. In India, as early as the eighth century, the Bhakti movement witnessed the articulation of women from Tamil Nadu, a state in southern India, who began resisting patriarchy and caste-based discrimination. They laid the path for later Bhakti activists in the north by actively engaging in “the rejection or questioning of patriarchy, the caste code, and constraints on sexuality.” Although such resistance did not have a long-lasting effect, it nonetheless founded a “fundamental critique of the Aryan philosophy (encoded in *Manusmriti*) that was at the root of the subordination of women and Dalits” (Deshpande 342). Thus, as Deshpande observes, feminist consciousness was not a Western concept that the British brought to India or what USA has exported to South Asia in recent times. Unfortunately, as Margaret notes in her experience with urban feminists, many urban upper class and upper caste women embrace the concept of feminism as a Western one while themselves becoming “mouthpieces of conservative forces” and, in turn, suppress Dalit women and their crises (343).

While noting that historically women have always organized from within larger social movements, as Angela Davis also notes with respect to the United States, Raka Ray observes that during the nineteenth century, quite similar to that in the USA, along with social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule, women like

Swarnakumari Devi, Abala Bose, Pandita Ramabai and Ramabai Ranade, among others, “campaigned for women’s education and for a better life for widows” (36). Just as the abolition movement in USA in the mid-nineteenth century allowed the space for some women abolitionists and suffragists, like Lydia Maria Child and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, among others, to demand equal voting rights, the social reform movements in India also allowed women some space amidst the male-controlled movements. However, while the suffragists in USA were ultimately more concerned about white women’s voting rights, the Indian women social reformers were also largely “upper-caste” (Ray 36).

Nevertheless, these movements opened avenues for women activists who eventually furthered important agendas. In her study of the women’s movements in Kolkata and Mumbai, Ray also notes the active engagement of upper caste and upper class women in the national movement for independence which, she repeats, tended to be confined to the elites of society. Thus, although some Dalit lower-class women, like Jyotiba Phule’s wife, played an important role in the shared struggle of gaining rights for the then untouchable women in the late nineteenth century, the Dalit feminist movement is today important but very young. Such elitism in the feminist movement in India makes the Subaltern Studies Group’s rereading of Indian historiography pertinent. Another major similarity between African American women’s roles in US history and Dalit women’s history pertains to the acknowledgment of the women in the militant phase of both their histories. While the Black Panthers had several women activists, most of them encountered acute sexism from within the political party. Similarly, the Dalit Panthers were aggressively active for a short period of time in Maharashtra, but the women are never acknowledged. In fact, the Dalit artists appropriate the voice of the women and

play the patriarchal spokespersons against casteism, thereby subsuming the women's voices.

Their Literatures

In the Introduction to *Literature of Marginality: Dalit Literature and African-American Literature* editor N. M. Aston identifies “poetics of liberation” as the essential thread that links the two literatures (10). In this seminal anthology, several Indian scholars establish the similarity in terms of content, purpose, and aesthetics that underline these two marginalized groups of peoples and their literary expressions. Rangarao Bhongle in his article “Literature of Marginality – Dalit Literature and African-American Literature” argues that these literatures do not “subvert” but “create new canons of writing” in their respective societies, thereby foregrounding the crucial question of canon-formation and the politics of classification of art into mainstream and non-mainstream (11). While Bhongle also contends that Dalit literature is mainstream because it raises fundamental questions of life and dignity, Vivekanand Phadke believes that the Dalits should not be considered “marginal” because they comprise the numerical majority (12). R. Bhongle in his essay compares the themes in *Native Son*, *Invisible Man* and *Go Tell It On The Mountain* with Baburao Bagul's “Sud”, Kashav Meshram's *Pokhran* and contends that all tackle similar issues of “poverty, ignorance, oppression and the ultimate alienation” which lead to “protest, anger, aggression and discord” in literary expressions. While the anthology, the first of its kind, juxtaposes the similar themes that writers of both groups engage with, none of the critics engages with in-depth critical discussion of identical issues in particular texts. S.D. Kapoor sees collective memory, experience, and the rise of consciousness as similar themes in the two literatures (117). Referring to

Edward Said's discussion of how European colonizers concocted images of the Other which the colonial subject had to negotiate with post-liberation by decolonizing their minds, Kapoor contends that the literatures have negotiated the problem of self-representation and self-image, stunted as they have been by what W.E.B. DuBois famously called 'double-consciousness.'

One of the most important ways of carving their identities for themselves, in the late 1960s, was the embrace of armed resistance and violent and virulent art. While the Black Panthers and the Black Power movement rocked the United States and the Black Arts movement published brilliant but furiously anti-establishment art, the Dalit Panthers in India in the early 1970s gave vent to a militant ideology by both organizing strikes and demonstrations (which often turned violent) and by composing art in a "voice of protest 'against the middle-class Hindus who [had] monopolized cultural expression'" (Kapoor 120). Franz Fanon influenced Malcolm X, Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver and inspired poets like Amiri Baraka to compose his poetry and plays. This Black "discourse" in turn inspired the Dalit Panther founders, Namdeo Dhasal and Arjun Dangle. But the Dalit movement was not as militant as their Black counterpart because, among other reasons, access to guns or arms has always been very restricted in India. But in both movements the literature and the politics were not separate. Through this brief sketch of similarities between the literatures, I aim to establish the emerging framework within which my project is situated.

“Speaking” Subalterns: A Comparative Study of African American Literature and Dalit/Indian Literature

Given the historical and socio-cultural contexts and connections between the two peoples, I examine how different aspects of subaltern identity in India and USA are fractured because of the way caste works in India and how race operates in USA. Although several movements in both societies have achieved some goals of rights and equality, it is evident that a lot more needs to be done. Going against the grain of reading successful resistance in literary texts as expressions of agency and self-identity, my project undertakes the task of exploring how the success of any form of resistance in unequal social hierarchies is always balanced by the fact of ongoing suppression. My first three chapters focus on different aspect of subaltern women and their relationships with society and their children. In them I discuss how resistance to hierarchical pressure and critique of axes of power through survival and articulation coexist with simultaneous silencing and powerlessness. In acknowledgment of the silencing, my project examines the forces of power that undermine the exercise of agency by subaltern women. Intellectual/and representers play an important role in my project as I engage with the silenced figures being re-presented.

In my first chapter, “Subaltern Silence: The Case of Harriet Jacobs and Phoolan Devi” I demonstrate how Jacobs’s agency in her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, is undermined by white editorial control that is evinced by examining letters exchanged between Jacobs and Lydia Maria Child and the narrative tensions embedded in the text. In India, Phoolan Devi’s real-life uprising against caste and gender suppression is mis-represented by media under the control of elite groups. Employing

Gayatri Spivak's discussion of the subaltern voice and Arturo Arias's examination of subaltern voice and representation in *testimonios*, I conclude that the agency of subaltern woman in re-presentation remains questionable. Since an important aspect of enslaved African American experience was the objectification of motherhood and mothering capacity and since motherhood is often regarded as destiny in traditional Indian society, in my next chapter, "The Case of the Subaltern Mother: Sethe in *Beloved* and Pandu's Mother in 'Mother'" I explore how mothers who dare to parent their children in non-traditional ways and threaten patriarchal notions of motherhood ultimately succumb to society-prescribed norms when their own children, unable to appreciate their mothers' deviation condemn them mercilessly. Drawing on Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and Andrea O' Reilly's concept of 'mother outlaws' I illustrate how Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Pandu's mother in Baburao Bagul's short story "Mother" in spite of their extraordinary sacrifices become brutalized when their respective children fail to understand them. I read the mothers' initial feminist mothering as an articulation of their agencies which is silenced by the children's rejection. I demonstrate that Bagul and Morrison represent the tales of these silenced mothers to protect them from oblivion.

In my third chapter, "Subaltern Children: The Trauma of Silence and Recovery" I focus on subaltern children who are traumatized by multiple forces of oppression and discrimination that their mothers are unable to negotiate. I examine two pairs of children, one of whom in each case survives to revisit the traumatic past. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* depicts Claudia as a survivor of the brutalizing impact of class and race and the issue of 'passing' and her friend Pecola as one literally shatters into silence when family instability, class issues, and fascination with white ideology overwhelms her.

Claudia holds her African American community responsible for the fascination with white ideals that adults cannot negotiate and that destroy subaltern children. In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy portrays Rahel as one who survives the horror of caste-based violence and death she witnessed in her childhood and revisits her twin brother, Estha who is shocked into silence by the adult world's brutalities. Roy explores how Ammu, the mother of the twins, having married outside the community and then committing the most transgressive act of loving a Dalit man, embodies the pariah in the community because endogamy forms the founding principle of the caste system. As her children, too young to understand the age-old laws and hierarchies, the twins are relegated to the periphery of the family and as subaltern children are traumatized by the legacy of exclusion their mother has had to embrace. Using Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's *Testimony* and Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* I situate the silence of the destroyed children along with the minor resistances the survivor-children undertake.

Sharply departing from the balancing of resistance and subjugation in the first three chapters, my fourth chapter "Poets of Protest: Amiri Baraka and Namdeo Dhasal" chart the forceful claiming of identity by these subaltern groups when the oppressed men embrace violent political ideologies and compose violent and virulent poetry to articulate the pain and suffering of their peoples. Using Franz Fanon's emphasis on the need for violence and Chela Sandoval's intersectional theory of opposition, I locate these two poets' poetry as mouthpieces of repressed tension and frustration with their respective social superstructures. However, both hyper-masculine poets assume the authority to speak for their women and in the process further their subjugation. While Baraka is

notorious for his misogyny, Dhasal's personal life fraught with multiple relationships and a difficult marriage are testimony to the sexism that often marks these resistance movements. I conclude this chapter with feminist critiques of the Black Panther and Black Power movements which helped shape the Dalit Panther movement (entailing a similar ignoring of Dalit women's contributions) in India. Assuming the role of spokespersons these hyper masculine poets silence their women counterparts.

In "*Speaking*" *Subalterns* I illustrate that attention to continuing injustice is crucial while reading resistance to oppression in literary art. I engage with the question of whether the subalterns can really 'speak' and how the representer(s) function in such a context.

My interest in reading these two literatures as parallel expressions also stems from my understanding that disparate cultures have more in common than meet the eye. Different societies like those of the United States and India comprise comparable superstructures that have denigrated major sections of their respective populations. A close reading of Black Feminist theory divulges similarities with Third World Feminism with specific political and temporal differences owing to the different social scenarios. Vijay Prashad's theory of polyculturalism exposes the interchange between cultures that he insists informs the world and needs to be acknowledged in order to ensure international social justice and peace. Unlike multiculturalism that tends to underscore the differences between the cultures by highlighting diversity, Prashad offers a premise for polyculturalism: "(It) assumes that people live coherent lives that are made up of a host of lineages....to make sense of how people live culturally dynamic lives" (xii). In *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting* Prashad's research focuses on the connection between Asians and Africans through trade leading to cultural exchanges that need to be

recognized today in order to understand that peoples across the world share transcultural linkages through history. Some of the examples he cites in the Introduction indicate the connection between various peoples: “the South Asian workers who jumped ship in eighteenth-century Salem, Massachusetts, to enter the black community; Frederick Douglass’s defense of Chinese ‘coolie’ laborers in the nineteenth century” and many more (x). Taking cue from such scholarship that emphasizes the similarity over difference between peoples and the connection over the distance between far-flung groups of people, I approach “*Speaking*” *Subalterns* with the hope that mutual understanding between different peoples of problems and experiences with injustice not only provides a framework or platform for organizing against injustice but it also develops respect for humanity in general beyond national and ethnic boundaries.

Chapter I

Harriet Jacobs and Phoolan Devi: The Case of the Subaltern Voice

Gayatri Spivak's oft-quoted and much debated essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" insists that the authentic subaltern female voice can never be 'heard' because she is always spoken for by supremacists or elites who control/delimit the agency of subalterns. I read Spivak's engagement with the issue of the subaltern voice as involving the question of the *representation* of the subaltern and her agency and not necessarily her actual agency (no matter how limited) in real life. The example she cites of her family member Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri's suicide in her essay clearly illustrates how the suicide itself can be read as an act of resistance and agency through which she assumes control of her life. But that the young woman could not articulate in speech or writing her resistance to the command she was ordained to obey and that led her to silence herself forever is what concerns me in terms of Bhaduri's representation. She therefore made her life vulnerable to (mis)representations by dominant group(s) by silencing her actual reasons. Similarly, the Sati-survivors of 19th century Bengal were recorded in the British annals to have preferred death to living after their husbands' deaths. The actual experiences of these women and their real lives were never archived since their survival itself must have involved resistance to and accommodation of oppression. While scholars like Benita Parry have accused Spivak of "deliberate deafness to the native voice where it *can* be heard" (Loomba 196), I believe, as other critics have averred, that the subaltern can very often exercise only limited agency even in instances of writing her own testimony or

narrative. In this chapter, I examine representations of two subaltern women, Harriet Jacobs in 19th century USA and Phoolan Devi in 20th century India, and argue that Spivak's rhetorical question (to which she responds negatively) can yield no singular response and is dependent on the specific conditions under which the subalterns are represented. In other words, on one hand, even when the subaltern woman is 'heard' in a self-representation, her voice may not be free from constraints. On the other hand, when the subaltern woman is represented by the dominant group, her voice is effectively muted.

In "Patrolling the Borders, Feminist Historiography and the New Historicism," J. Walkowitz argues that although subaltern women "draw on the cultural resources available to them - ...they are basically bounded by certain cultural parameters" and that they function as both "makers as well as users of culture, subjected to the same social and ideological constraints (while)...forcefully resisting those same constraints" (Loomba 198). Walkowitz's observation underscores the problematic nature of the subaltern female voice that tries to acquire agency in representation while working within stifling restrictions imposed by the dominant group. It is especially relevant when we read Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) in which an ex-slave woman represents herself.

Do we hear Harriet Jacobs's voice?

Jean Fagan Yellin, who was individually responsible for authenticating Harriet Jacobs as the real-life ex-slave author of *Incidents*, establishes the importance of the text in the canon of American studies at large and African American literature and feminist studies in particular in "Texts and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a*

Slave Girl: Written by Herself.” It is the “only pre-Civil War American female autobiography written for publication” (263) that “yokes the success story of the life of an heroic slave mother to the confession of a young woman who mourns that she is not a storybook heroine – but who nevertheless, in struggling to announce her own existence, affirms herself a new kind of heroic female figure” (270). Yellin also highlights several unique aspects of Jacobs’s narrative that is a “first-person account of sexual non-conformity” (263):

...(Jacobs) endorses a sexual standard that condemns her actions...while she dramatizes her contention that enslaved women are not permitted to adhere to this norm.....she asserts that an alternative standard should be applied in judging the actions of slave women like herself... (272)

In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Hazel Carby notes Jacobs’s skilful negotiation of “the tension between satisfying moral expectations [of her white audience] and challenging an ideology that would condemn her as immoral” and her “development of an alternative discourse of womanhood” (58, 59). Yellin asserts that “...[Jacobs] abandoned her attempt to avoid sexual involvements in an effort to assert her autonomy as a human being, to avoid being ‘entirely subject to the will of [a slave-master]’” (273).

Of course these incidents in Jacobs’s life demonstrate resistance, especially given the circumstances of chattel slavery in the American South. That she “propose[d] a new definition of female morality grounded in her own experience” also illustrates her attempt to represent the slave woman in terms of *her* sexual vulnerability as property owned by white slave masters and for which reason the Cult of True Womanhood could not function as an index of her virtue (Yellin 274). Later critics have analyzed several aspects

of the narrative and argued for the agency Jacobs exercises in presenting her experience. For example, in “I Disguised My Hand” Jacqueline Goldby argues that Jacobs’s *Incidents*, when read with her brother’s shorter “A True Tale of Slavery,” depicts the agency she exercises in using “discursive” strategies to “transcribe her experience” and therefore refusing to reveal everything of her life ‘truthfully’ (12). Having been denied free speech in antebellum South, P. Gabrielle Foreman contends in “Manifest in Signs,” Jacobs becomes a “sexual actor” and chooses Sands in order to “appropriate speech rights” and thus claims agency through action if not words (80).

However, although the “angle of vision in *Incidents* is revolutionary” as in all slave narratives, the narratives were nevertheless edited, published, and promoted by white abolitionists (Yellin 270). In tracing the history of the relationship between Harriet Jacobs and her white abolitionist-editor friends, Yellin notes that while Jacobs was working on her manuscript, a small group of white women “were developing a critique of sexism modeled on the Garrisonian analysis of chattel slavery” (275). Although these white women-abolitionists did not “confuse their own experience with the triple oppression of sex, condition, and race to which they knew slave women were subjected... it was nevertheless *a sense of their own oppression* that spurred these freeborn white feminists to identify with black fugitive slave women like Jacobs” (275; emphasis added). Although Yellin proceeds to argue for an “American sisterhood” between Jacobs and Lydia Maria Child her white editor and the famous abolitionist, Carby has amply demonstrated the racial hierarchy and bias that characterized such proclaimed collaborations. Deborah Garfield discusses the same in “Vexed Alliances: Race and female Collaborations in the Life of Harriet Jacobs,” which I refer to later.

Moreover, letters from Maria Child to Jacobs directing her to exclude details about a contemporary anti-slavery rebel, John Brown, in the concluding section of the *Incidents* and to include sentimental nostalgia about her beloved grandmother instead, problematize the authorial agency exercised by Jacobs in representing herself. It becomes evident that political goals of the white abolitionist Child shaped Jacobs's narrative as much as did Jacobs's own desire to expose the sexual subjugation of slave women. In his critique of Western responses to Rigoberta Menchu's testimonio, Arturo Arias makes a similar point: "the subaltern subjects are forced to use the discourse of the colonizer to express their subjectivity" (75).

Yellin celebrates the fact that *Incidents* was "published in the face of taboos prohibiting women from discussing their sexuality – much less their sexual exploitation..." it defied "the rules of sexual propriety" and was "supported in this effort by L. Maria Child, a prominent white American woman" (276). But Yellin herself notes that some white feminists (who were also active abolitionists) were trying to promote *their* cause of oppression and must have recognized in Jacobs's narrative of sexual vulnerability a valuable vehicle for their agenda. Such a harrowing tale of sexual oppression would readily call for demands to change the situation and would promote the political cause of gender equality by incorporating the additional factor of race in an already highly charged abolitionist climate. The apparent agency exercised by Jacobs is not unmediated by dominant interests and we see her self-representation (as emphasized by *Written by Herself* in the title) fraught with contradictions, as noted by Walkowitz above.

I shall examine selected passages from *Incidents* which, I believe, demonstrate the subtle rhetorical strategies Jacobs's alter-ego, Linda Brent, employs in order not to threaten the contemporary status quo between the races. I will illustrate that the subaltern female voice is not heard unconditionally and remains delimited by dominant expectations. What Loomba identifies as some critics' insistence on "a radical consciousness on the part of those they study" may not translate into radical self-representation (203). Effectively, reading successful resistance and agency in Jacobs's narrative can ignore actual historical circumstances. Thus "our desire to make the subaltern speak may or may not be gratified by our historical researches" reminds Loomba (203; emphasis in the original). However, in *Slave Narratives, Testimonios, and the Representation of Subaltern Voices in Literary Canons* Nereida Seguro-Rico insists that slave narratives and South American testimonies defy "the imposition of silence as a mechanism of control and of complete erasure of the victim" (16). An examination of the publishing history of Jacobs's narrative makes Seguro-Rico's contention problematic.

Harriet Jacobs took the advice of Amy Kirby Post to "contribute to the (Abolitionist) movement by telling the story of her life" and "for years she composed her book in secret and at night" (*The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* 189). Nevertheless, she was acutely conscious of the audience she was addressing, that is, primarily white Northern women who, Jacobs hoped, would realize a "sense of the condition of two millions of women... still in bondage" in the "deep, dark, and foul...pit of abominations," the institution of Southern slavery (*Incidents* 6). "(A)nxious moments between an African American female and a proliferation of white women guardians and mentors" (Garfield 275) are evident throughout the narrative when Jacobs, through her

created persona-narrator, Linda Brent, excuses herself for what would be deemed inappropriate, “foul” and thus “too delicate to listen” to by “our [white Northern women] ears,” explains Lydia Maria Child in the Introduction to *Incidents* (8). Deborah Garfield posits that an “ambivalent relation between black and white figures lingers” throughout the publishing history as well as the text of *Incidents* (275). It is clearly seen in the letters between Jacobs and Child who, remarks Garfield, “claims to christen the narrative into respectability” (275). Along with the fact that Child categorically directed Jacobs to change the content in the last chapter of *Incidents*, as investigated by Bruce Mills, I will refer to another letter from Child to Jacobs that exposes the hierarchical/domineering tone used by a white “friend” to address her black friend.

Mills investigates Child’s direction to Jacobs to make a “significant revision” to the last chapter in which Jacobs originally discussed the contemporary case of a fugitive slave, John Brown. In a letter dated August 13, 1860, Lydia Child writes: “I think the last Chapter, about John Brown, had better be omitted. It does not naturally come into your story, and the M.S. is already too long. Nothing can be so appropriate to end with, as the death of your grandmother” (*The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* 279). Mills goes on to argue that Child’s direction to discard the episode of Brown indeed helped in “realign(ing) central elements of the story with other woman-centered anti-slavery narratives,” thereby avoiding threatening “Northern readers [with] the prospect of violence and disunion” (258). Mills proceeds to establish the text, and hence Child’s rightful role in it, as a sentimental novel befitting [white] women readership tastes. However, his investigation demonstrates that Child’s editorial demand did not allow the politically-active voice of Jacobs to be articulated, an inference he does not consider. We

must remember that the same editor, Childs, claims in the “Introduction” to *Incidents*: “At her request, I have revised her manuscript; but such changes as I have made have been mainly for purposes of condensation and orderly arrangement. I have not added any thing to the incidents...” (*Incidents* 7). Thus, although Child avows in print that *Incidents* is solely Jacobs’s work, in private she forces Jacobs to forsake her political motive (and not refer to the contemporary political scenario vis-à-vis fellow slaves) and re-present herself as an ex-slave woman sentimentally nostalgic about her loving grandmother. Child’s editorial suggestion is especially intriguing because she was herself involved in the John Brown affair and had gone to several political stalwarts to plead for his case. A white freeborn woman would not relinquish her prerogative to speak for the less privileged slaves and ex-slaves even at the cost of silencing similarly underprivileged ex-slaves like Jacobs. As a parallel example, as noted by James Olney in “‘I was Born’: Slave Narratives, their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” Garrison’s “vicious” review of Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* illustrates the “psychology of betrayed, outraged proprietorship” (167). On similar lines, Arturio Arias critiques David Stoll for interviewing Mayan subalterns in Guatemala to cross-check and silence the most courageous subaltern voice of Rigoberta Menchu.

Moreover, Child directs Jacobs in the letter quoted above to “write down some of the most striking particulars [of the Nat Turner-led slave rebellion]” that will make *Incidents* “do much service to the Anti-Slavery cause” (*The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* 279). Why did Child want Jacobs to discuss one slave rebellion and not another? Is it because Nat Turner’s rebellion in the South was already crushed and could not pose a threat to the Northern whites while Brown’s ongoing case might have? But given the

“thwarted endeavors to market her work,” Jacobs had to accept the hegemony of the white editorial pen because Thayer and Eldridge agreed to publish *Incidents* “if it [was] prefaced by Lydia Maria Child,” the “premiere abolitionist.” Also, Amy Post and George Lowther were “solicited for the ‘Appendix’” in order to “reinforce Child’s validation of *Incidents*” (Garfield 285). This appendix was requested even when Jacobs, on finishing a “draft of her narrative” in 1857, asked “her friend Amy Post to compose a preface” (*The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* 189). Moreover, several letters from Jacobs to Amy Post have been archived that illustrate Jacob’s proximity to and confidence in Post.

In another letter dated September 27, 1860, in a tone difficult to identify as friendly, Child “exudes” her “imperative helmsmanship” (Garfield 289) when she directs Jacobs: “Write to me whenever you want to; and when I have time, I will answer. I want you to sign the following paper, and send it back to me” (*The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* 281). Garfield examines the language in some of these letters which establishes the race-conscious ‘friendship’ between the two. She rightly concludes that the text of *Incidents* “is forced to be assessed according to the official marginalia of these two white supporters” (286).). Carby concurs:

...texts of black women from ex-slave Harriet Jacobs to educator Anna Julia Cooper are testaments to racist practices of the suffrage and temperance movements and indictments of the ways in which white women allied themselves not with black women but with a racist patriarchal order against all black people.

(6)

In the context of this publishing history, is it possible that Jacobs exercised unmediated agency in critiquing white men and women while exposing the horror of sexual exploitation and subjugation of the black woman within the institution of slavery?

As discussed above, I agree with Yellin and Carby that the narrative is the first of its kind to articulate the inadequacy of the code of True Womanhood to judge slave women because of their sexual vulnerability. But she could not have done it without the approval of Child and other white friends, given the control the white feminist-abolitionists exercised. Moreover, as Carby's critical examination of the history of True Womanhood demonstrates, white women themselves felt stifled by its "dominating image" (23). However, such patriarchal oppression did not alter the "power relation between a slave and her mistress" (30). Furthermore, if the 1893 Columbian Exposition, held roughly 30 years after Emancipation, was "not the result of a practice of sisterhood or evidence of a concern to provide a black political presence but part of a discourse of exoticism," then an attempt to read a slave narrative, written in the politically tenacious atmosphere of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, as an exercise of white sisterhood with black ex-slaves is deliberately naïve (Carby 5).

The 'native informant' narrates what the white consumer/anthropologist wants to know. In this sense, Linda narrates only what her white readers will want to read, not what she wants them to know of her experience (for example, Jacobs's concern with Brown's case). Also, for the ex-slave "there [was] no reality not already classified by [white] [wo]/men: to be born [a slave was] to find this code ready-made and to be obligated to accommodate oneself to it" after escaping from the slave-holding South (Barthes, qtd. in *Woman, Native, Other* 52). Circumstances of similar sexual oppression

did not bind white women and their slave counterparts because white women had access to more power and privilege owing to their race. I will examine selected passages from *Incidents* to argue that Jacobs's tenuous relationship with white friends and editors colors her critique of whites and self-presentation in order not to be too bold and disturb the status-quo between black ex-slaves and their white abolitionist friends.

At the end of chapter five entitled "The Trials of Girlhood" in which she categorically describes the sexual possession of slave women that any slave master could claim, Linda asks two rhetorical questions directly of her readers and follows them by a re-confirmation of her "weak" pen. I believe Linda stops just short of criticizing Northern men and women openly: "In view of these things, why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the north? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right? Would that I had more ability!" Hurriedly, she catches herself from being too bold (and claiming agency as a critic) and concludes by showering praises on "noble [white] men and women who plead for us...God bless those, every where who are laboring to advance the cause of humanity" (*Incidents* 48). Despite an attempt to articulate her critique, Linda continues in that expected of her underprivileged status. As Spivak confirms, "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (307). How can a recently escaped slave-woman steal the privilege or "rob" the Northern white prerogative of the abolitionists to urge the political cause? (*Woman, Native, Other* 19). Moreover, Linda reaffirms that she only intends to "add [her] testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is" (Preface by the Author 6).

Again, while condemning those Northern white men who act as slave-catchers, on one hand she castigates those Northerners who "consent to act the part of bloodhounds,

and hunt the poor fugitive back into his den,” but on the other, she exposes the fate of those Northern men’s daughters who are proudly married off to Southern “slaveholders” (56). While she complains against Northern whites, she also implies that her purpose in exposing these brutal realities is to show how white women in the South have to suffer the immorality of their husbands’ violation of slave-women for their sexual pleasures. Linda carefully cushions her indictment in her concern for the marital bliss of white daughters of the North. The subaltern voice, in Trinh T. Minh-ha’s words, is subjected to a “repression [that] takes on the forms of both suppressed and forced speech” (*Woman, Native, Other* 47) that would relatively euphemize white crime by suppressing outright condemnation and by forcing verbal concern for Northern white daughters. Such self-conscious writing also underscores the “hierarchical friendship” between a “Southern chattel” and white editor-mentor friends. Moreover, the “female slave cannot express her sense of wrong apart from that of her white [counterparts]” (Garfield 282, 284).

In another episode Linda feels compelled to exculpate her young son’s maturity to her audience who may be surprised at his perspicacity. Linda recounts how Benny told her he was aware of her presence in the garret for a long time and protected her by notifying the grandmother whenever he noticed Dr. Flint near the house. Linda recollects how she had indeed noticed Benny “manifest uneasiness, when people were on that side [garret] of the house” (234). At this point in the narrative, Linda, instead of proudly praising her son, at least when she was writing among sympathizers, begins to explain why her son was so alert and mature: “Such prudence may seem extraordinary in a boy of twelve years, but slaves, being surrounded by mysteries, deceptions, and dangers, early learn to be suspicious and watchful, and prematurely cautious and cunning (234-5). I

believe frank praise for a son, alert even at a tender age to the horrors and fears of slavery could not have interfered with the political purpose of the slave narrative. Yet, Linda feels the urge to explain the natural intelligence of such a young son of a fugitive slave to her Northern white audience. This is another example of curbing her voice because it refigures the “tension,” aroused by the mention of intelligence possessed by a slave-child, between a “subordinate and mistress” as that between a “black writer and a white reader,” irrespective of the same cause they claim to be serving. (Garfield 287). Always conscious of “her separateness from dominant culture,” Harriet Jacobs’s subaltern voice is “moulded” by white supremacist demands (Loomba 231). After all, slaves were supposed to occupy the lowest rung of the Chain of Being, and claiming intelligence on the part of a slave child would be making a giant leap. Moreover, no white person could authenticate Benny’s sharpness, unlike his mother’s that was attested to by several white men and women (“Introduction” Davis and Gates xxix).

The subaltern voice of the slave subject, Jacobs/Linda, cannot emerge independent of the restrictions indirectly imposed by the “power” of white readership and editorship that “has always inscribed itself in language.” Consequently, “speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion” (*Woman, Native, Other* 52). The context of Linda’s agency becomes suspect because, as Garfield attests, such dynamics of power “unsettle[e]...the strong alliance between Jacobs and her ‘friends’ [and] infiltrate[s] the writing and publication of *Incidents*” (281).

However, the above passages can be interpreted as rhetorical strategies as noted by Celeste-Marie Bernier:

...a strategy of performing humility...of slave narrators and orators who prostrated themselves before their audiences to gain sympathy by presenting themselves as poor ignorant and oppressed sons or daughters of Africa desperately in need of white redemption. This strategy...[had]...become a familiar narrative technique within nineteenth century black abolitionist circles in North America as it became part even of the literary strategies of Douglass, William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs and countless others, however ironically employed (71).

But what Bernier reads as resistance to abolitionist paternalism in Douglass's second biography and in Hammon's poetry demonstrates the constrictions imposed by binding parameters that made Jacobs modulate her published voice (71). The fact that ex/slave narrators had to abide by certain social codes is evident in Garfield's reading of one of Jacobs's letters to Amy Post in which Jacobs discusses her disappointment with Harriet Beecher Stowe's response to her request and Mrs. Willis's letter. Garfield points out how Jacobs identifies herself as "any one" (not 'Lady') and "disparages" Stowe's "[un]Ladylike" response to Mrs. Willis, thereby reinstating that for the black ex-slave, her white mistress's dishonor takes precedence over her own neglect. Garfield asks "Would roundly asserting the depth of her own wound make Jacobs's resentment of the legendary Stowe seem like indecorous black overreaching?" even when she was writing to a white friend, Amy Post? (285).

I conclude this section by asserting that Jacobs's voice was not unmediated by her white editor-friends' diktat. While Jacobs definitely exercised agency in narrating her experience, it was not free of demands of the dominant group. I believe that her voice is

neither completely suppressed nor is it totally free from the hegemonic claims of her white friends and allies.

Who is the real Phoolan Devi?

In India Phoolan Devi, a poor Dalit woman, became famous through the 1980s until her assassination in 2001 as a woman bandit who took the laws of the land in her own hands and allegedly killed several upper caste men. According to Bishnupriya Ghosh, Phoolan attracted the attention of the press because as a low-caste Dalit woman, belonging to the sub-caste of Mallahs, “designated as MBC/Most Backward Castes in state parlance,” her actions challenged hierarchies of caste and gender in rural India where caste politics, intersected by gender and class issues, assume a complex feudal scenario (459). Just as slaves who escaped from the brutal system of slavery in the American South were labeled “fugitive” for breaking the laws of a slaveholding society, the Dalits who break away from the repressive caste stranglehold are ousted as baghis (rebels/outlaws). They commit “crimes” like “looting, arson, or murder” to avenge the injustices of the upper castes and are considered dacoits or bandits who can no longer live in society (Ghosh 460). Along with other crimes, Phoolan’s supposed killing of twenty-two Thakurs (upper caste men) in Behmai, a nondescript village in Uttar Pradesh, a state in north India, forced the Indira Gandhi-led central government to launch a “massive paramilitary operation” to terminate Phoolan’s ‘lawlessness,’ notes Mala Sen (xix).

When she was finally apprehended by the Indian government in 1983, Phoolan made headlines during her surrender to the state government before being imprisoned for eleven years. After her release in 1994 she launched her political career by getting elected to the lower house of the Indian Parliament, Lok Sabha, as a candidate of Samajwada

Party whose electoral base comprised Muslims and OBCs (Other Backward Castes). She was reelected in 1999. In 2001 she was murdered by men who claimed to avenge the Behmai massacre.

Phoolan's unconventional life and career took the media in India and Europe by storm. Several books detailing her extraordinary life and a famous film, *Bandit Queen*, by Indian filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, have attempted to recapture the life of Phoolan. In the process of multiple representations, however, the 'real' Phoolan is probably lost. Except for newspaper reports and the aforementioned books and film there is no archival record of the actual person anymore. It is important to note that a practical problem with hearing Devi's own voice was her illiteracy that made her completely dependent on journalists' transcriptions of her experiences. Phoolan spoke Bundelkhandi, a regional dialect of Hindi, the Indian national language, which had to be translated first into standard Hindi in order to be translated once again into English for a wider audience within India and abroad. In such a case, the credibility of translators and the writer's own discretion played a crucial role for an accurate rendition of Devi's voice, twice removed from the final representation.

In the following section I illustrate how the subaltern woman's voice and agency are suppressed in the re-presentations which often contradict each other. I choose three texts: Mala Sen's *India's Bandit Queen: The True Story of Phoolan Devi* (1991), Shekhar Kapur's film, *Bandit Queen* (1995), and French ghost-writers Marie-Therese Cuny and Paul Rambali's *I, Phoolan Devi: The Autobiography of India's Bandit Queen* (1996). Sen's account is considered to be the 'definitive' biography; Kapur's film is the only

celluloid representation; Cuny and Rambali's account demonstrates, among other things, the continuing French interest in the exoticism of India.

Mala Sen painstakingly tries to re-create and consolidate Devi's narrative through extensive research. Kapur clearly appropriates Phoolan's voice and renders a brilliantly shot melodramatic tale while confirming the Western (specifically British) notion of Indian society as stagnant, repressive and sexist. Marie Therese-Cuny and Paul Rambali, in their French version published as a testimony, recast Phoolan as a force sacree (sacred force) and, much like Kapur, reveal a voyeuristic approach to Phoolan's experience through explicit discussion of male physiognomy. They also attempt to re-present Phoolan as a Robin Hood figure, acutely conscious of her responsibility toward her wretched people.

Taking my cue from Asturo Arias's critical reading of Western responses to Rigoberta Menchu's testimonio, I investigate the authenticity of Devi's representations by Kapur, Cuny and Rambali, and even Sen. Although Sen's account cannot be dismissed as fabricated, partly owing to the sources she cites and her personal interview with an imprisoned Phoolan, it is rather ironical that Sen wrote the screenplay for Kapur's film which distorts several details of her own research. Ghosh rightly posits, "...when the popular apprehends the subaltern, there is always an act of translation, a re-codification of the subaltern subject and her acts in accordance with the desires of specific populations or publics" (459). Elite and western perspectives successfully rob the subaltern woman of her voice and Spivak's statement that the subaltern woman is always spoken for holds true in Devi's re-presentations. Also, Kapur and Cuny and Rambali's renditions arguably demonstrate what Loomba suggests: "[s]everal attempts to write 'histories from below'

have come close to essentialising the figure or the community of the resistant subaltern” (200).

Arturo Arias in “Authoring Ethnicized Subjects: Rigoberta Menchu and the Performative Production of the Subaltern Self” critiques David Stoll’s skepticism of Menchu’s testimonio as inauthentic. While Arias defends the factuality of *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, he discusses the testimonio’s purpose of ‘collective memory’ and also acknowledges the slippages of translation that are constitutive aspects of this particular genre. Some of his criticism of Stoll’s response *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1998) applies to my reading of the elitist representations of Phoolan Devi by Shekhar Kapur and Cuny and Rambali. He argues that Stoll insists on “seeing the ‘authentic’ indigenous subjects as noble savages whose alleged primitiveness puts them closer to some imagined natural truth” (76). Kapur deliberately depicts Devi as only a helpless victim of caste and gender oppression (the “imagined natural truth”) and refuses to acknowledge her individual tenacity and agency in the face of severe oppression. Similarly, Cuny and Rambali portray Devi as a force sacree who assumes the “noble” mission to save and protect fellow subalterns. Both these re-presentations function as pseudo-testimonios which effectively mis-represent Devi.

On one hand, Cuny and Rambali, who themselves knew no Hindi, never acknowledge the language barrier and instead claim that Devi signed every page of the manuscript and authenticated the truth factor when the transcripts she heard were in English, a language she did not understand. On the other hand, as stated above, Mala Sen wrote the screenplay for Kapur’s film. In the first situation, the translators are never acknowledged while in the second, the question of the role and ethics of the elite

mediator and interpreter looms large when the person who came closest to knowing the subaltern becomes an accomplice in the misrepresentation. Who, then, speaks for and/or represents the subaltern? – becomes a crucial question. Which interpreter-intellectual can the subaltern woman trust? Spivak's aptly warns against elitist and/or Western suppression of the subaltern voice when the elite intellectuals "masquerade(e) as the absent nonrepresenter(s) who let the oppressed speak for themselves" (292).

Nevertheless, Mala Sen's narrative, *India's Bandit Queen*, has gained currency as the "definitive biography" (Ghosh 461) because it acknowledges several sources in order to persuade the readers of the credibility of her narrative: books like Sir Francis Toker's *The Yellow Scarf* on Thugs, as described by British colonial officers, and Taroon Coomar Bhaduri's *Chambal – The Valley of Terror*, that help Sen inform readers of the legend of banditry in the Chambal ravines; Phoolan's prison diaries; police records and interviews with police officers who had personally interacted with Devi; newspaper and magazine articles from *Esquire*, *India Today*, *Hindustani Times*, *Times of India*, and *Onlooker*, among others; and Sen's personal travels through the hot, dry, barren landscape of Northern and central India to interview Phoolan's family and friends.

Sen acknowledges the translators, "Mandakini Dubey" and "Anjula Bedi, who translated the bulk of Phoolan's prison diaries with great care and attention" (Sen xiii). Sen also refers to her knowledge of Hindi in order to establish her claim about recording the actual words of Phoolan's family members about their now-famous relative. Also, by describing in detail her chance meeting with Phoolan outside the Gwalior court in a "12-by-6 foot room" filled by "armed guards," Sen convinces the reader about her actual experience with the Bandit Queen (19). Thus, although Sen's account does not claim to

be a testimonio, it comes closest to knowing the “truth” about Phoolan Devi. Moreover, Sen concludes her Acknowledgments page with a disclaimer that alerts the reader to possibilities of discrepancies in her narrative: “...we have tried to untangle fact from fiction. Still, I am aware that here, in India, the imagination runs wild and the story changes as it is told and retold” (Sen xiv). Such admission to her readers ensures her credibility as a narrator committed to the truth available to her. In his critique of David Stoll’s demand to know the “verifiable truth” in Rigoberta Menchu’s testimonio, Arias establishes the impossibility of adhering to the “(Western) power’s regime of truth (that) has always recognized the intellectual who interprets the subaltern subject in the name of Western accuracy” (82). Mala Sen acknowledges a similar unlikelihood of ever locating *a* particular truth about incidents in rural India. However, because Sen’s account details the struggle, suffering, extraordinary courage and tenacity of Devi, and owing to her exhaustive research, we can read Kapur and Cuny and Rambali’s mis-representations referentially by drawing from David Stoll’s criticism of Menchu’s ‘too Westernized’ self-portrayal.

In an interview with Udayan Prasad, a UK based film maker, for the journal *Sight and Sound*, Kapur asserts that the film “needed (his context) as a director” (14).

Portraying her as a victim of gender and caste oppression and multiple rapes only, and ignoring her innate strength, individuality, and the challenge she posed, Kapur establishes her tale as one of revenge against dishonor and caste oppression. In the interview Kapur defines his goal in the film: “to provide non-Indian audiences with at least a notion of the oppressive nature of this odious social structure” (Prasad 16).

Similarly, Srilata Ravi in “Marketing Devi” notes the various publications on Phoolan’s

story in Europe as proof of continuing Western interest in the exotic image of the Other: Shears Richard and Giddy Isobelle's *Devi: the bandit queen* (1984), French translation of Mala Sen's account, *La Reine des Bandits-La veritable histoire de Phoolan Devi, traduit de l'anglais par Claude Seban et Elie Nicoud* (1994), and Marie-Therese Cuny and Paul Rambali's *Moi, Phoolan Devi, reine des bandits, Paris, Fixot* (1996), and Irene Frain's *Devi*. Ravi also argues that the notion of the force sacree or 'sacred force,' that became a familiar trope for the Indian woman in French imagination since colonial times, reiterates itself in this profound interest in Phoolan's experience. Although Ravi discusses Irene Frank's approach to Phoolan in *Devi*, I shall read Cuny and Rambali's version of Phoolan's "autobiography" in order to argue that the Indian Dalit woman's French portrait combines the exotic and the sacred. In the process, Phoolan's "real" voice is suppressed by Kapur and the French writers' agendas because "(r)eality is transposed into images and images become myths wherein the signified undergoes total deformation with respect to the signifier..." (Ravi 137). Thus, Stoll's accusation of *I, Rigoberta Menchu* trying to "win a mass audience by appealing to Western expectations about native people" functions as valid criticism for Kapur and Cuny and Rambali's renditions (Arias 82).

However, as Arias argues, Menchu was right in "craft(ing) a strategic discourse" in her collaboration with Elisabeth Burgos-Debray to garner international support to prevent the "continued genocide of her people" (83). But Kapur distorted Devi's experience to fulfill his and the British production's expectations. Similarly, the collaboration between Devi and the French writers is full of contradictions. Some believe Cuny and Rambali's book preceded Phoolan's political plans to become a Member of

Parliament, and thus her ghost-writers followed a definite agenda in their narration. Nevertheless, their focus on male physiognomy and their projection of Devi as a sacred force are emblematic of a Western anthropologist's voyeuristic gaze. For a detailed analysis, I will refer to those scenes and passages in *Kapur and Cuny and Rambali* that deviate from Sen's account and illustrate how their imposed versions of her experience rob the subaltern of her "authentic" voice. We have to keep in mind that Sen wrote the screenplay. However, if we consider the liberty a film director may take with the screenplay, we may agree to exonerate Sen's culpability in the misrepresentation.

Kapur ignores the fact that class issues combined with caste politics to complicate and shape Phoolan's experience. While Sen provides detailed accounts of the family feud between Phoolan's father and her richer, exploitative cousin which influenced Phoolan's resistance to injustice in her early life, Kapur begins the film with Phoolan's marriage to a much older Putti Lal. Divesting Phoolan of her courage to threaten older influential men like her rich cousin, Kapur shows Phoolan as a helpless victim of sexual exploitation whose body becomes the site of enactment of masculine and caste power. From the first few scenes, in which Putti Lal is shown exploiting a pre-pubescent bride, Kapur fetishizes Phoolan's sexual identity as her only identity. Similarly, in *Cuny and Rambali's* ghost-written account, Phoolan discusses her sexual torture by her husband in graphic details. For a rural Dalit woman who objected vehemently to scenes of nudity in the film, *Bandit Queen*, in 1994, it is rather surprising to observe her refer to the male organ as a "serpent...that tore into (her) body" in *Cuny and Rambali's* text in 1996 (CR 100-01). I take issues with these passages because in India, especially rural India, any discussion related to sex is taboo although sexual exploitation is far from rare. Hailing

from such a background, Phoolan, I find it difficult to believe, would have narrated these sexually graphic details to her French ghost-writers on her own.

Similarly, while Sen and Kapur both discuss the village headman's son's thwarted attempt to rape Phoolan and his consequent blaming her for it, only Kapur shows this man's involvement in summoning Gujjar's gang to capture her. In reality, as Sen notes, it was Phoolan's cousin who contacted the bandit leader to take her away when she physically abused him for stealing her father's neem tree, his only remaining asset that could fetch him extra money. Cuny and Rambali adhere to these details but Kapur could not afford to pose a banal story of family fights for property as the cause of Phoolan's forced association with bandits; only the portrayal of a story of gruesome caste oppression could win accolades from a Western audience. Madhu Kishwar concurs in her scathing review of the film in *Manushi*:

A more educated brother cheating his illiterate brother out of his land or the story of a wily cousin using his money to buy support in the village panchayat and with the local police has nothing "oriental" "exotic" or "third world" about it. Make it a case of upper caste tyranny over a lower caste woman and it becomes an instant hit formula in the West. (qtd. in Ravi's "Marketing Devi" 145)

After Gujjar's death, when two Thakurs, Sri Ram and Lala Ram join the gang under the leadership of the young Vikram Mallah, Sen notes, there was increasing tension because the upper caste men found the presence of Phoolan titillating and Vikram's relationship with her an obstruction. Moreover, they were uncomfortable about a Mallah youth leading the gang. She discusses the confusion among the gang members when Vikram was first shot in the thigh, and the fleeing visitor of Sri Ram became an obvious

suspect. However, Cuny and Rambali refer to the bullet being lodged next to his spine. Phoolan must have known the truth about this major incident in his life. Why would she give two different versions to different people? Are Cuny and Rambali making Phoolan emphasize the seriousness of the injury in the first attack on Vikram's life in order to reinstate the grim nature of Indian rural banditry for a French audience? Noone will ever know.

After Vikram heals in Kanpur and returns to his gang members, he is finally killed during a night by Sri Ram and his allies and Phoolan is taken captive. This is where Kapur deviates again: instead of showing caste-based intra-gang fights that victimized many bandits, Kapur shows a blissful couple torn apart by sudden death. It helps to maintain the notion of sudden danger and its deadly nature in this world, argues Kapur. He defends his directorial decision in the following manner: he felt the need to "create a sense of uncertainty. Not knowing where the next bit of oppression is coming from, not knowing where the next bullet might come from....(he) didn't want (the audience) to enjoy it, (he) wanted them unprepared, defenceless" (Prasad 16). But it robs banditry of its own rules and power-games that result in such deaths. This is an elitist perspective that imposes its own version on the subalterns' reality. Instead of showing the ongoing struggle among the gang members, Kapur focuses on the unpredictability of bandit-life. He colonizes the outlaw life and refuses to see any order in it because that order does not fit into his elitist expectations of subaltern lawlessness. Arias similarly argues that Stoll's critique of Menchu's testimonio derives partly from "her too Western...politics" that are not "representative...of authentic 'native' Mayan thought" (75).

Mala Sen observes that what happened to Phoolan after Vikram's death has many versions. She quotes a reticent Phoolan who said, "*mujhse mazaak ki* (Those people really fooled with me)" (125). Sen also quotes an American journalist, Jon Bradshaw, who reported on the multiple rapes in Behmai. However, Sen again quotes from Phoolan's diaries about her being "locked up for three days without food and water" from where she was rescued by a local priest, also referred to by Bradshaw. Phoolan never mentions her rapes in her diaries. It is therefore very interesting to note that the film *Bandit Queen* (screenplay by Sen herself) became famous for its controversial gang-rape scenes, chilling in their crudity and simulated reality, and also for the scene in which a naked Phoolan is paraded through the village by Sri Ram to fetch water from the well while villagers watch silently. Under threat of censorship in India, Kapur justifies this scene in his film: "I don't see why, when we are showing something that does happen on a regular basis in India, why we should censor it out" (Prasad 17). Kapur, after reading Sen's book, which includes both quotes of Phoolan and Bradshaw, chooses to depict the more sensational one rather explicitly. Sen knew better than everybody in the film crew what Phoolan's statements were. Yet she seemed to have been party to the gross misrepresentation. Arundhati Roy, a virulent critic of the film, concurs:

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that whenever Phoolan says "*mujhse mazaak ki*" (those people really fooled with me) she does in fact mean that she was raped. Do they have the right to show it? In all its explicit detail? This raises the question of an Individual's Right to Privacy. In Phoolan Devi's case, not just Privacy, Sexual Privacy. And not just infringement. Outright assault. (Roy)

However, Kapur does not show Devi's narrow escape from Behmai that Sen's book details. He chooses only the sexually explicit episodes in Sen's account to adhere to in his portrayal of Phoolan while collapsing several other important details. Consequently, Phoolan's voice is ignored even when she clearly refuses to reveal these incidents in her post-banditry life. In fact, it is quite well known that Phoolan demanded that the sexually graphic scenes be deleted before releasing the film. But Kapur went ahead with his film and released it to a wider audience outside India (Roy).

Similarly, in Cuny and Rambali's account, Phoolan describes her gang-rape and her naked parade through the village. Discussion of this detail by Phoolan in 1996 is rather disconcerting when only two years ago she had reacted vehemently against the release of Kapur's film that captured these contested details. If she was worried then about her public image being spoiled through cinema, how was she not aware of the same disservice done by this book? Moreover, Phoolan had refused to divulge details to her biographer, Mala Sen, through the late 1980s until 1991 when Sen's account was published. I believe it is the voyeuristic Western eye that observes and re-presents the subaltern Third World woman's sexual experiences in Cuny and Rambali's account (*Woman Native Other*).

Yet another famous scene in the film shows the massacre of twenty-two Thakurs in Behmai, a controversy that Phoolan claims she was not involved in. Sen quotes from Phoolan's interviews: "I was not there at the spot on that day and God is my witness...I was on the other side of the village when the massacre took place" (155). But Kapur chooses to show Phoolan lining up the men and watching their being gunned down by her gang members. This Behmai massacre created a furor in the country that compelled Mrs.

Gandhi to increase pressure on the top police officials to take control of the situation. Although Phoolan was finally apprehended because of the Behmai massacre, she never admitted to being involved in it. In fact, what Roy warned in her critique of the film (*“Bandit Queen the film, seriously jeopardises Phoolan Devi's life. It passes judgments that ought to be passed in Courts of Law. Not in Cinema Halls”*) came true when in 2001 two assailants shot Devi dead to avenge the Behmai massacres.

Cuny and Rambali corroborate Sen's quotes about Phoolan denying her presence at the scene of the Behmai massacre; however, in their account, Phoolan reflects on what newspapers reported about the incident and incorporates the element of force sacree: “(She) was called the Bandit Queen, a poor mallah girl who, ever since her lover was killed by thakurs, had wielded the fearsome sword of Kali, the patron saint of thuggees” (408). Clearly, these are Cuny and Rambali's conclusions because no one familiar with Hindu mythology will ever identify Kali as a “patron saint” of thugees. Kali is *not* a saint, in the Christian connotation of the word, but is an incarnation of Durga, the Goddess of Power.

Kapur never shows the interaction between the police officials and Phoolan as they negotiated her terms of surrender. Instead, Kapur shows the police tagging along with Sri Ram, her primary tormentor, who shouts foul, sexually explicit language through a loudspeaker in his attempt to draw a deeply humiliated Phoolan out of her hideout in the ravines. In this melodramatic conclusion, Kapur ignores Phoolan's real-life negotiations with Rajendra Chaturvedi, the Superintendent of Police of Madhya Pradesh, on the terms of her surrender. Sen's account captures the fierceness of a woman while she cautiously negotiates her terms of surrender. It took Chaturvedi “several...meetings”

through which Phoolan refused to commit anything without “think(ing) it over and discuss(ing) the matter with Man Singh” (Sen 209). Sen also notes in detail the fifteen “demands” Phoolan made that Chaturvedi had to get approved from the state Chief Minister before she agreed to surrender. Thus, Phoolan was not a vanquished Dalit girl who bowed her head in surrender. Rather, the state government made accommodations to get her to surrender. On the contrary, Kapur uses his only voice-over in the film in which we hear a broken-voiced Phoolan narrating the terms in a tone of passive surrender. Thus, in his re-presentation and re-creation of Phoolan’s experience, Kapur silences Phoolan’s voice effectively and creates *a* Phoolan, a victim of caste and gender oppression, which is palatable to a Western audience. Spivak reiterates: “...the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (295).

Cuny and Rambali, on the other hand, stick to the details of the surrender as noted by Sen, but conclude their account by re-invoking the force sacree image. Phoolan recollects her release from jail eleven years after her surrender, and reflects on the difference between the ravine-bred bandit and the woman who was released on parole and given police protection in Delhi: “I was no longer the wild creature who fought with the ferocity of the goddess Durga to survive in the jungle. There was no more vengeance in my heart....The demon struck me with lightning, and I became the lightning for others” (495). Thus Cuny and Rambali deliberately blur the distinction between the “signifier (woman bandit) and the signified (divine violence)” so that the “(passive) reader/consumer understands the myth as a factual system and not a semiotic system” (Ravi 144).

Along with some deviations from Sen's account, Cuny and Rambali pursue their goal of projecting the rural Dalit girl as a sacred force. The language used by them recalls the dialectics of Hindu mythology with frequent references to vengeful goddesses contending with demons. Recourse to such expressions to describe Phoolan's desire for vengeance is a twentieth century extension of nineteenth century French imagination about India when "the savagery and religious passion of the Thugs helped fuse the tropes of divine allegiance, violent death, helpless women, and erotic devotion into one essentialising signifier – 'la violence sacree'" (Ravi 139). Thus, as Phoolan progresses in her career as a bandit, her language of revenge (imposed on her by Cuny and Rambali) translates into that of divine vengeance for justice, just as her 'enemies' become 'demons' whom the Goddess-incarnate must slay. In an incident not mentioned by Sen, Cuny and Rambali show Phoolan's village headman groveling before her for mercy: "Please, release me, oh goddess! You are truly a goddess! You are the incarnation of Durga!" (303). I doubt if Phoolan really saw herself as an extension of divine power. Total faith in powers of gods and goddesses is not uncommon in rural India; but imagining oneself as an extension of such power is more mythical than real.

What Ravi identifies in Irene Frain's account of Phoolan is also applicable to Cuny and Rambali's version: the narrative is "testimony to (the ghost-writers') observation that one of India's charms lies in her ability to produce myths" (143). Moreover, as Cuny and Rambali's account progresses, Phoolan is projected as a justice-seeker for all who takes on the responsibility to avenge rapes and tortures of poor low-castes by upper caste men, a kind of Robin Hood figure conflated with force sacree. Phoolan's ghost-writers observe: "(Phoolan) helped the poor people by giving them

money and... punished the wicked with the same tortures they inflicted on others, because (she) knew the police never listened to the complaints of the poor” (396). Thus, Cuni and Rambali exemplify the struggle of a subaltern woman by silencing her own determination to survive within the oppressive caste hierarchy and stifling patriarchy of rural India; instead, they make of her an outlaw heroine bearing great responsibility for her fellow low caste men and women.

I conclude this section with the continuing question of the dis/service done by well-meaning national elite and/or Western representers to the Indian subaltern woman. Phoolan had to depend entirely on others for her portrayal, and in the process was thoroughly misrepresented. Her real-life agency was silenced in all forms of presentation, except in Sen’s biography. But Mala Sen’s role is perhaps the most problematic and raises the question of the ethics of elitist involvement in the subaltern question. We don’t know the extent of her involvement in Kapur’s actual filming project and whether Kapur made changes to the screenplay. But that she was a prominent member of the crew makes her role crucial. Did Phoolan make herself vulnerable to misrepresentation by revealing her experiences to Sen at a time when it was crucial for Phoolan to communicate to the world the injustices she had suffered in real life?

Unlike Harriet Jacobs’s narrative which, I have argued above, was a *de jure* re-presentation by her white editors and audience, all existing accounts of Phoolan’s experience are *de facto* re-presentations by elitist and urban Indian and European intellectuals/interpreters. In both cases, the authentic subaltern voice is difficult to hear amidst the mediators’ controlling voices. Thus, although Henry Louis Gates, Jr., along

with Benita Parry, critiques Spivak and Bhabha's insistence on the irretrievability of the subaltern voice because, according to Gates, "they devalue the actual counternarratives of anticolonialist struggle as mere reverse discourse," it is evident that Phoolan's voice has been represented by Kapur and Cuny and Rambali who have obscured her actual "counternarrative" (threat) to the elitist caste hierarchy and have left no scope for the reverse discourse to be articulated. Similarly, Harriet Jacobs in preserving the status-quo of black and white relations with her white editors and friends in her self-representation obscures her "counternarrative" to the domestic superstructure of white supremacy (Gates 464). I conclude that the subaltern female voice of the black ex-slave, if heard, bears the imprint of the 'clash' with white-controlled publishing. On the other hand, the Dalit subaltern female in rural India, completely represented by the elite, "cannot be heard or read" (Spivak 308).

Chapter II

The Case of the Subaltern Mother: Sethe in *Beloved* and Pandu's Mother in "Mother"

Harriet Jacobs decided to bear children to a white man out of wedlock instead of succumbing to her master so that her children could not be sold off as the latter's property, thereby defying ideals of True Womanhood as prevalent in 19th century America. She chose to hide in a garret for seven years until she could escape and help her children escape to freedom. Jacobs became both a ship and a harbor for her children by protecting their human rights and obtaining their freedom. Phoolan Devi, on the other hand, suffered many gynecological problems during her ravine-life and prison-term; when she was operated on in custody after her surrender, her uterus was removed without consulting her. The doctors have been quoted saying they did not want more Phoolan Devis to populate the country. Without her knowledge or consent Phoolan was deprived of her biological right of reproduction by urban educated men of upper class and caste. Some subaltern women negotiate their maternal identities from within the structure of oppression while others cannot exercise agency to define their identities as 'good' mothers.

In *Beloved* Toni Morrison examines the predicament of a recently-freed ex-slave mother, Sethe, who commits infanticide in order to protect her daughter from the horrors of slavery. Her immediate community ostracizes her, her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs,

withdraws from society and eventually dies, her living children view her as a monster who can kill, her dead child's ghost returns to castigate her, and her only friend from her enslaved past, Paul D, judges her as less-than-human. Baburao Bagul in his short story "Mother," depicts the plight of Pandu's mother, a poor, Dalit widow who takes a socially powerful lover, an upper caste and upper class man, to ensure flow of food and resources for her son, Pandu. Her male neighbors lust for her and the women envy her. But that she has access to minor luxuries like her clothes, Pandu's clothes, and food earn her the title of a loose woman. The unnamed mother's low-caste and equally poor neighbors condemn her as a whore who fails to perform her maternal duties and instead engages in sexual pleasures. Her son Pandu also joins them. Do these subaltern mothers *fail* as 'good' mothers?

Who is a 'good' mother? In her famous treatise on mothering and motherhood, Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* distinguishes between the "potential relationship" of a woman to her "powers of reproduction and to children" and the "institution" that ensures that the "potential – and all women – shall remain under male control" (13). She defines the former as 'mothering' and calls the patriarchy-imposed institution 'motherhood.' This institution predicates the role of the 'good' mother on "'unconditional love' ... as a single-minded identity" in relation to one's child. A 'good' mother is a "beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing" woman whose "innate" "qualities include "patience, self-sacrifice" (34, 37). Rich argues that patriarchal cultures across the world define motherhood in such terms. Mothers feel compelled to evaluate themselves against these standards and often feel guilty for not being able to conform to them. Rich believes that "warmth, tenderness, continuity, solidity" between mother and child is "a natural

phenomenon” (Rich 23). However, it is also perfectly natural for mothers to experience “love and violence intenser and fiercer” than any they have ever known for their children (Rich 37). Anger, impatience, frustration are emotions not prescribed by the ideology of motherhood although they comprise many mothers’ actual mothering experiences. Instead, society passes a judgment on the ‘bad’ mother who does not adhere to the stereotype of the Madonna-like mother.

Rich discusses how the glorified ideals of motherhood are not applicable in circumstances in which mothers can only reproduce children but cannot mother or nourish them. The institution of slavery in the United States witnessed such a scenario in which rape of slave women was the norm in order to increase chattel property. In *Women, Race and Class* Angela Davis explores the condition of the slave woman when a “premium was placed on (her)...reproductive capacity.” The children were sold off and the slave-mothers could have no legal claim on them. The nineteenth century ideals of True Womanhood, including the “exaltation of motherhood,” did not extend to the slave-mothers (7). How would slave women, post-Emancipation, negotiate their identities as mothers when the notions of personal ownership and claims on their own children were new and unfamiliar?

In the Indian scene, Dalit women have always been bread-winners along with the men of their households owing to economic needs. While rural India employed their labor in agricultural fields, poverty in semi-urban locations push them to work as construction and/or factory workers for meager wages. Out in the construction sites these women often become victims of their higher caste contractors’ lust and encounter economic and sexual exploitation (*Dalit Women* 18). Fernando Franco, Jyotsna Macwan,

and Suguna Ramanathan note in *The Silken Swing* that Dalits have always granted more independence to women and equality between the genders, but the Brahmanical tradition imposed restrictions, created “ideological constructs to sustain caste,” and controlled women’s sexuality in order to preserve caste purity through endogamy (34).

Unfortunately, the Dalits have internalized these upper caste notions and repressed their women by imposing restrictions among themselves due to the process of Sanskritization or “emulation of ‘upper caste’ practices for the sake of higher social status” (Silken Swing 34). However, “the low ritual status of these castes has led to the equation of autonomy with sexual permissiveness, which is then made a target of contempt” (34). Dalits often judge their own women by brahminical standards and condemn them as promiscuous. Just as women slaves were viewed as breeders and not as human beings with the capacity for feelings of tenderness and maternal attachments and were exploited sexually, the Dalit women are often taken for granted and used and abused sexually. Back in the domestic space the Dalit women have to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers. Caught in the mesh of poverty, caste, and patriarchy, how do these subaltern women discharge their maternal duties?

In *Mother Outlaws* Andrea O’Reilly discusses how “patriarchal culture” deems those women “‘bad’ mothers” who “resist patriarchal motherhood and achieve empowered mothering.” In other words, women who do not subscribe to selfless sacrifice, unquestioned devotion to children, and complete self-effacement, become ‘outlaws’ from the institution of motherhood as defined and imposed by patriarchy (2). However, what happens to the mother who dares to parent her child on her own terms but whose agency is silenced by the forces that delimit her subaltern life? Can she be a

successful outlaw mother? What happens to the mother who perhaps wants to be a ‘good’ mother to her child/ren but her powerless position in society overwhelms her mothering? Toni Morrison and Baburao Bagul, in representing the silenced but extraordinary mothers, attempt to articulate the impossible space inhabited by the subaltern mothers as they try to be ‘good’ mothers to their children.

Sethe as a Subaltern Mother

Under slavery Black women functioned as breeders and their children’s value was not much different from that of a “newborn calf or colt” (Davis 10). Physical and emotional access to their own children was often denied the slave women. Some slave women tried to build a community *inside* the slave cabin and exercise ““some degree of autonomy”” but were always at the mercy of slave masters who could sell their children and terminate their relationships (Davis 17). Many resisted slavery’s harsh conditions and accompanied their men in slave revolts and escaped to the north for freedom. Nonetheless, claiming personal ownership and possession of one’s own children was a very new concept for fugitive slaves. Escaping the torture, the rapes, the relentless hard work, the forced absence of love and relationships was one thing; but the realization of self-identity and of rights as family members was an unfamiliar experience for them to grasp. In *Beloved* Toni Morrison examines an ex-slave mother’s problematic means of claiming her children and deciding what is good for them. Given the circumstances of Sethe’s situation – the horrible experience of being valued as a breeder and the trauma of rape and torture while heavily pregnant on her way to flee from the plantation – can she be condemned as a monster-mother who kills her children?

In *Beloved* when her white owner arrives in search of Sethe and her children, Sethe puts away her child, the “crawling-already?” daughter to a safe place from where the inhuman system of slavery could not snatch and brutalize her (Beloved 110). She slashes the infant’s throat and attempts to kill the other children. Empowering herself to take charge of her daughters’ destinies, Sethe kills her “crawling-already” daughter to ensure that the baby does not become a victim of Schoolmaster and his nephews who “took (her) milk” (Beloved 20). She stuns everyone by claiming her children as her own and is ostracized by her community. Almost everyone felt “fear, condemnation, and spite” for her “outrageous claims, her self-sufficiency” (Beloved 202). Critics have remarked on the nature of Sethe’s motherlove; some condemn her, like Stephanie Demetrakopoulos who calls Sethe’s love “‘pathological’,” while others, like Andrea O’Reilly in *Politics of the Heart*, praise her for her courage (134). Other readers and critics discuss *Beloved* as an embodiment of pain who returns to claim the mother who left her in isolation and confusion. Howard and Buglar leave home and Denver holds her responsible for her own loneliness inside and outside the house. They are too young to realize the depth of protection and security Sethe tried to procure through her murderous act.

Andrea O’Reilly advocates that Sethe “tries to kill her children because, for her, death is preferable to slavery” and that Sethe “claims, through her act of infanticide the right” to decide what is best for her children” (*Politics of the Heart* 135). Sethe undertakes mothering on her own terms by choosing to decide what is safest for her children. O’Reilly notes that many critics, along with characters like Paul D and the community, have blamed Sethe for her “excessive motherlove” (*Politics of the Heart*

138). When Paul D criticizes Sethe's love as "too thick," reminds her of having "two feet...not four" and suggests there must have been "some other way" than killing the daughter to escape Schoolteacher, Sethe ridicules Paul D's suggestion: "Let schoolteacher haul us away, I guess, to measure your behind before he tore it up? I have felt what it felt like and nobody...is going to make... [Beloved] feel it too. Not [her children], not none of mine, and when I tell you (her children) you mine, I also mean I'm yours" (Beloved 194, 239).

These lines sum up the claim a fugitive slave-mother makes that pushes her to slash her own child's throat. Reilly aptly comments: "What Sethe claims is not necessarily ownership but a biological, emotional mother-child bond, which for her has primacy and authority over the law" of a slave society (Politics of the Heart 136). Morrison suggests that Sethe cannot be blamed for her action even when she actually kills to protect. Sethe's subaltern identity, determined by her recent enslaved status which could not protect her from rape and torture by white slave masters, informs her desperate act only to ensure that her daughters do not undergo the same defiling she had suffered. Sethe's murder is testimony to the nature of slavery and what it can do to women and their mothering capacities and instincts. In *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle*, Gurleen Grewal emphasizes that the "traumatic nature of that experience (slavery) is voiced in the nonfigurative meaning of possession" that Sethe exercises on her children (97-98).

Sethe exercises agency to decide what will happen to her children. Her decision to do whatever it takes to prevent Schoolmaster from dragging her children into the abomination of slavery speaks of her empowered mothering. But in the midst of community blame and misunderstanding of her children Sethe's agency is silenced and

made invisible. Morrison narrates this tale of extraordinary subaltern motherhood in order to bring the readers' attention to the matrix of oppressive forces which she has to negotiate for asserting her maternal identity. After delivering her fourth child on the Ohio river, with the help of a white girl, Sethe, torn and bleeding, reaches her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs's house, only to feed her child her own milk. From being raped and whipped while heavily pregnant, Sethe ensures her "crawling-already" daughter gets the milk only she could offer by crossing the Ohio with a new-born tied across her chest. Does this episode not speak of her maternal instinct? Sethe, as a survivor of atrocious physical and emotional trauma, recognized death for her child as the only way to protect her from white men's brutalities. Reilly correctly suggests that "[i]nfanticide for Sethe, . . . , [is] an act of preservative love" (Politics of the Heart 136). Doesn't a mother want to protect and preserve her child from the worst situations? Doesn't a mother want to see her child grow into adulthood amidst security, health, and love? Then how much more is that mother's sacrifice when she smothers that child only to protect her from the horrible things that have happened to her self? The children did not have to suffer what a slave woman had to suffer. Sethe ensured that. Sethe decided that white men could not abuse her children in their death; but while alive, they would be destroyed by white men and their laws. To borrow Morrison's words from an interview quoted by Reilly, Sethe "claim[s] . . . the right and responsibility to 'say something about what happens to [her children]'" (136). Because Sethe "does not mother according to the script of sensitive mothering," she is judged and condemned by her community (Politics of the Heart 123).

Before the Misery (the murder), the community felt jealous about the abundance in Baby Suggs's kitchen that fed all of them. When Sethe took control of her child's

destiny, the community was awed by her audacity and wondered “Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight?” (Beloved 179). In Stamp Paid’s words, Sethe was like a “hawk on the wing” who “split to the woodshed to kill her children” (Beloved 185-186). Sethe’s mothering may not have been intelligent but is it not intelligible given her circumstances? Morrison upholds the subaltern mother’s impossible conditions as the latter tries to be a protective mother.

Beloved is the embodiment of the anguished spirit of the murdered child who cannot comprehend the murderous protection her desperate mother gave her. Sethe apologizes to Beloved for murdering her eighteen years ago. She explains why she did it, that is, out of love and protection for the baby girl when the Schoolteacher came to take them away. Sethe argues, “[Beloved] had to be safe and I put her where she would be” and because her love was “tough,” Beloved has returned to her. Sethe justifies her act to “Beloved...She my daughter” (236). If Sethe had not killed her child, all her children would have been returned to the “South, [where] the children, in all likelihood, would have been sold off and separated from their mother” (Politics of the Heart 136). Denver does not know what occasioned the Misery in the shed eighteen years ago – “whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard” (242). But she concludes, like her brothers before her, that “there sure is something in her that makes it all right to kill her own” (242). That is why Denver vows to take care of Beloved and promises to “keep my mother away from her (Beloved)” (243). Denver wants to warn Beloved not to “love (Sethe) too much...May be it’s still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children...I have to protect [Beloved]” (243). Failing to understand Sethe’s extreme reaction to the white men eighteen years ago, when she was a suckling infant, Denver

creates her own fears about Sethe. She dreams “monstrous and unmanageable” things (Beloved 121). Such misplaced concern unfortunately undermines the subaltern mother’s daring and non-conformist mothering. Denver, a child born outside the system of slavery, cannot fathom her mother’s unconventional love that inspired the infanticide and in her childish way can only equate murder with lack of love. Sethe’s mothering loses its currency and the subaltern mother’s agency through extraordinary mothering is silenced.

Sethe clearly asks for forgiveness of Beloved and the latter questions Sethe about the tormentors involved in the scene that marred Sethe and Beloved forever:

Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now.

Where are the men without skin?

Out there. Way off.

Can they get in here?

No. they tried that once, but I stopped them. They won’t ever come back.

(Beloved 254)

Gradually, Beloved begins to demand explanations for Sethe’s act and Sethe is eaten up with remorse and cannot apologize enough. Although Sethe feels guilty when she is reprimanded by the spirit of the daughter she killed, Beloved cannot understand why her mother removed her from life, a white-controlled, brutal existence that had traumatized Sethe already. In spite of the autonomous mothering Sethe undertook eighteen years ago, she surrenders to the self-conscious guilt that the ideology of motherhood can subject ‘bad’ mothers to.

...Why did you leave me who am you?

I will never leave you again

.....

I brought your milk

You forgot to smile

I loved you

You hurt me.

You came back to me

You left me. (Beloved 256)

Sethe perhaps wanted to have been a 'good' mother but her social position did not allow her. In the face of the horrors of slavery in which her race and sex provided sufficient reasons for ruthless exploitation, Sethe decided her children would not go through her experience. Her children's inability to comprehend her maternal sacrifice is understandable but it silences the subaltern mother's agency completely.

Eventually, in the final section of the novel, we see the three women restricted to House number 124. Sethe engages in games of affection and love with Beloved to compensate for her act eighteen years ago and the consequent estrangement. Sethe tries to explain how much she loved Beloved, how she "had suffered, been through, for her children, waving away flies in grape arbors, crawling on her knees to a lean-to," Beloved resolutely "accuse[s] her (Sethe) of leaving her behind" (284). Sethe "crie[s]," "plead[s] for forgiveness" and repeats several times that "Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life" (284). Sethe tries to convince Beloved that far "worse" than the "teeth of the saw under the little chin" was what "Baby Suggs died of, what Ella

knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble,” that whites brutalized black people for any purpose and dirtied them to the point of blacks’ own self-loathing. And Sethe would not allow any white man to dirty her children, “her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean” because it was made with love by her and Halle (296). But Beloved only understands that Sethe “took her face away, leaving her...in a dark place, forgetting to smile” (296). Thus, as Teresa N. Washington notes, Beloved cannot be convinced that Sethe wanted to make her “girl-children” “safe, first and foremost (because) [t]hey are the ones who can grow to have their milk stolen, their wombs defiled, their womanhood mocked” (178-79).

In “Reading subaltern history” Priyamvada Gopal delineates the theoretical agenda of the Subaltern historians. She states that the Ranajit Guha-led school examines historical archives and asks: “*Who* is the ‘one’ who interprets historical events and how does the mediation of that ‘investigative consciousness’ influence the writing of history?” (139). Gopal refers to a young woman Chandra’s accidental death in 19th century Bengal that occurred from an inefficient abortion when her natal family tried to terminate a pregnancy from an illicit affair with her brother-in-law. On her death, this family was taken to court and found guilty. No records survive of the brother-in-law’s indictment although he was solely responsible for the pregnancy. Gopal notes that Subalternist historians attempt to “write contextualized and full narratives” in order to do justice to the subaltern voices and histories (140). Morrison offers such ‘contextualizing’ for Sethe’s infanticide and attempts to revive Sethe’s agency and love from the commotion of criticism that effectively silenced Sethe. Although Sethe’s community and children fail to read Sethe’s sacrifice and love in her murderous act, Morrison wants readers to

sympathize with Sethe's subaltern situation. In creating the character of Sethe Morrison tries to "do justice to [Margaret] Garner's stupendous act of resistance" and her "complicated psychic power" to wrest the claim on her children's lives away from the white slave masters (Grewal 98-99).

Pandu's Mother as a Subaltern Mother

Baburao Bagul traces the history of an unnamed Dalit mother's subjection within the patriarchal system in his short story "Mother." Bagul demonstrates how Pandu's mother's 'bad mother' status emanates from her insistence on parenting her child on her own terms. Although initially she does not succumb to community pressures, she does suffer defeat when her own son, Pandu, fails to understand or appreciate her sacrifices. Bagul draws the readers' attention to the complex web of circumstances Pandu's mother maneuvers in order to be a successful 'good' mother. The torrent of abuse her community hurls at her and Pandu's rejection of her makes her sacrifices invisible. In recreating her story, Bagul attempts to make the subaltern's agency 'speak'

As a poor Dalit woman in the outskirts of urban India Pandu's mother has been working in construction sites in order to provide for her family. Her decrepit husband had been dependent on her until his death by tuberculosis. Bagul emphasizes how her caste, class, and gender conspire together to create an impossible space from where she is expected to perform her role as an ideal mother. As a Dalit woman she could not have had access to education and therefore few employment opportunities except low-skilled work as required in construction sites. Money would be meager and exploitation of labor would be high. As discussed above, these women are often subject to sexual exploitation by their employers. Dire poverty and fear of losing their jobs would prevent them from

complaining because in many cases they would be the only breadwinners for their families. On returning home they would be subject to patriarchy and would have to negotiate their financial independence with their subordinate status as wife and mother. Bagul exposes these contradictions of the subaltern woman's reality and attempts to advocate for her *own* way of mothering which may not subscribe to the ideology of motherhood.

Bagul depicts the repressive patriarchy that blames its failures on the woman while putting the woman through unbearable emotional and physical tortures. Pandu's father as a Dalit man could not have had access to better jobs than what his wife had. Bagul indicates that because the Dalit man could not earn the household income and had to rely on his wife, he felt doubly emasculated. Outside the domestic space he was crippled by his caste identity and now inside the domestic sphere, his gender prerogative of being the provider was compromised owing to his failing health. While he remained restricted to his room, Pandu's mother labored under back-breaking work at "construction sites, hauling bricks and cement" only to ensure "kitchen fires" could be lit to cook food and money was available for procuring "medicines, and milk and fruit" for her husband and Pandu (Bagul 187). In "Dalit Feminism: A Psycho-Social Analysis of Indian English literature" Anita Ghosh concurs, "The Dalit woman, more often than not, is dependent on her own labour. She labours outside her home from morning till evening" (58).

Instead of being supportive to his wife's extraordinary work, the decrepit husband believed that her full-blown beauty "automatically meant that perhaps she consistently sold her beauty, gave it away for a price" (Bagul 187). He subjected her to indecent examinations for "proof of her infidelity" by scrutinizing her "feet, her thighs, her

breasts, her sari and blouse...her lips and cheeks” every night after she returned from work. These nightmarish experiences traumatized Pandu’s mother for life because her manual labor at construction sites and her monetary income were not good enough evidences of her dedication as a wife and mother.

Pandu’s father also abused his wife physically and aimed to destroy her beauty that sharply contrasted with, and seemed to augment, his own sense of helplessness owing to “his disease, his failing strength, his joblessness” (Bagul 187). Thus, the physically and socially crippled man vents his frustration on his abler wife whose beauty, strength, and employment seem to devalue his gendered role as a male. His total dependence on her also breeds this jealousy and dissatisfaction because it robs him of his masculine prerogatives. But he forgets that her youthful strength and ability run the family and supply his medicines. Bagul focuses on the predicament of a subaltern woman who is forced to rise above her gendered role of a submissive and male-dependent entity because of her partner’s inabilities but is condemned for her transgression.

Bagul highlights another aspect of the subaltern woman’s plight: While she was mortified by her decrepit husband’s jealousy of her physical beauty and her financial independence, after his death Pandu’s mother continues to be victimized by the men in her community who lust for her and view her independence as a challenge to their male prerogatives. The women find her husband-less status and her physical appeal threatening to their conjugal lives and direct their condemnation of her in terms of her mothering. Moreover, her affair with an upper class and upper-caste man aids the community to treat her as a whore because traditionally a widow mother is expected to be an asexual being and to be devoted to her son and dependent on the mercies of her community. The

community blames her because it cannot accept a low-caste poor but beautiful widow fending for herself and her son without seeking help of other men and women and without surrendering to the lust of male neighbors. Also, because patriarchy has created the ideology of motherhood in order to control female sexuality, the spectre of the mother-figure as a sexual being threatens and disrupts gender discourse (The Silken Swing 32). Here, Bagul centers the subaltern mother's experience in terms of the multiple strands of repression she has to negotiate.

Pandu's mother emerges as a "bad mother" who challenges the notions of patriarchal motherhood and does not forgo her personal sexual pleasures. She refuses to compromise her self-hood while being a committed mother. While her neighbors condemn her as a whore, she ignores them because if her body can fetch security for her child, she will not hesitate to utilize it for his sake. As an empowered mother, incorporating "agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority," she becomes what O'Reilly calls an "outlaw" mother" (Mother Outlaws 11). However, when Pandu begins to reject her, she is shattered and her agency is cut short and silenced. Pandu is too young and inexperienced to realize that his mother dares the oppressive patriarchal ideology of motherhood while keeping his welfare in mind. Bagul explores the struggle Pandu's mother undergoes to reassert her maternal abilities amidst community claims of her bad mothering.

Pandu recalls how she had adorned herself in a new sari and jewelry and had basked in her own physical beauty by caressing "her own arms and breasts" and admiring the "new silver chain around her neck" (Bagul 185). These images blend perfectly with that of a loose woman being showered upon with gifts from a lover, an immoral image

Pandu's classmates had painted of his mother. When Pandu breaks down "with a heart-rending cry" which draws the neighbors to his house, they abuse the mother as a "shameless tart." While Pandu does not try to defend his mother against the obscenities hurled against her, his mother enters the scene "with lightning steps, knowing he would be hungry, and waiting" (186). No sooner does she see the cluster of women, her "envious enemies," at her doorstep than she realizes that Pandu has indeed joined the "enemy ranks" (186). The men lust for her and strip "her bare in their mind's eye" and women burn "with envy" but cannot take their eyes off her attractive presence. Only Pandu views her with his "new-found knowledge" and observes her "tightly-worn sari, the careless confidence, the defiance in her walk" and considers her lips "reddened...with betel juice" as "evil" (186-7). Pandu is now "convinced of her guilt" and he is prepared to "take sides against her" (187). Just because Pandu's mother fails or refuses to preserve the chaste image of a helpless widow-mother, dependent on her neighbors for physical and emotional support, she is condemned by her community and her son. Bagul reveals the complex network of pressures Pandu's mother encounters here: the men lust after her and the women hate her; they judge her as a failed mother and use it as a weapon against her; and her son in his innocence cannot understand her *own* way of loving him.

When Pandu's mother confronts the "suspicion in (Pandu's) eyes, the glance that took her in from top to toe," she recognizes the "accusations" her "TB-ridden, suspicious, nagging" husband had hurled against her during his ailing life. The past humiliations loom large in her mind when she encounters Pandu's suspicion. Not willing to suffer similar indignities again and this time from her son, Pandu's mother directs her "fury" towards Pandu for refusing to see the reality of her sacrifice that his father had denied to

acknowledge: “Die, you bastard! Like your father who died of his own evil” (188). Pandu, a mere child, does not understand these words that bear venom not against him but against society. He childishly concludes “his mother did not need him any more” because why else would she wish him death. Because his mother in all her frustration seems so alien to him at this point, Pandu, employing his child’s logic, decides for himself that his mother “had murdered his father and would murder him” (188). Bagul underscores the flow of criticism Pandu’s mother has to encounter simply because she is an unconventional mother who fulfills her maternal duties in a non-conformist way. Can this mother be blamed for her kind of mothering, Bagul asks.

Since society condemns her as a worthless mother who leaves her child alone and hungry while consorting with her lover, Bagul portrays Pandu’s mother’s concern for her son in order to speak for and represent her commitment. She notices his “thin, spindly arms...concave stomach...and the whitish pallor of his skin” and shudders at the thought of losing him to TB like his father. Her intensive mothering reasserts itself when she worries about Pandu’s health, “Have you been coughing?...do you feel feverish? Don’t be stubborn, tell mother” (188). Bagul wants the reader to recognize the intensive mothering that she undertakes in spite of her relationship with the overseer. Soon the mother feels guilty about having “neglected him...hadn’t even touched him” as she was overwhelmed by her lover’s “strong arms” to which she surrendered gladly after ten years of “loneliness” (189).

Because Pandu’s mother begins to retreat into the ideology of motherhood, she feels guilty for having neglected her son in favor of her lover. Realizing her lack of attention to Pandu and feeling remorse for shouting at him in anger, she apologizes to

him: ““Son, forgive me...I’ve brought you some new clothes...come eat, son. Forgive me, I’m just an old silly.”” This is where the subaltern Dalit mother re-inscribes the code of ideal motherhood and dismisses empowered mothering. The ideology of motherhood is so deep-seated that the mother condemns herself as a failure when she recognizes her transgression of prescribed codes. The agency she exercises to parent her child differently is wiped out when she internalizes the ideology of motherhood. Bagul articulates this tale of courageous mothering that is silenced by the mother herself and highlights her struggle to raise her child which speaks of her subaltern condition. Poverty, loneliness, absence of simple pleasures make the subaltern woman take on a lover who can support her economically in exchange for physical commitment. Is Pandu’s mother guilty in engaging in this relationship with the overseer which ultimately helps both Pandu and herself?

The child loses confidence in his mother who does not conform. While his mother pleads with him to wear the new clothes and eat some food, Pandu, “disgusted at the thought of his classmates jeering at him, abusing her in front of him,” lashes out at her, ““Whore! I spit on your clothes”” and runs away. His rejection and abuse of his mother will not stop them from humiliating her but as a child he is not equipped to recognize the courage in her transgression of the ideology of motherhood. Consequently, “[h]er pain knew no bounds” writes Bagul in describing the rejected mother’s feelings. A mother who lived ten years of her life as a widow, forever tormented by men around her, “only for [Pandu]” and had “tried so hard to love” him finds her world crumbling around her when that son becomes an accomplice of the community and accuses her of being a whore and abandons her. “[C]rying helplessly” she recalls all the men who had tortured

her, including her husband, the neighbors, and now her son (189). Bagul reveals the sacrifices she makes only for her son: how she

‘could have lived a merry life’ with either of the men who offered to marry her, like Mohammed Maistry who offered her a car in exchange of marriage, Walji Seth who tried to bribe her to become his mistress, and Dagdu who wanted to surrender his life’s savings to her. But she refused all of them and ‘gave up everything, son.’ (190)

The mother’s complete devotion to Pandu’s well-being becomes articulated when she confesses, “‘I lived for you, hoping you’d grow up, be my support, but you have betrayed me...’” (190). Had she done what her community and her son thought she was doing, she could not have secured food and clothes for Pandu, could not have sent him to school. After several years of physical and emotional spousal torment followed by widowed isolation, Pandu’s mother has made the mistake of attempting to be an outlaw mother claiming selfhood as a lover as well as a mother to Pandu. She thus transgresses socially-sanctioned sacrificial motherhood and earns the condemnation of all, including her son’s.

While she fought against the community whenever they berated her son for her supposed “business,” she crumbles under the weight of her son’s disparagement, misunderstanding, and rejection. But confronting Pandu’s criticism is a different matter altogether because, as a mother, her son’s condemnation nullifies her sacrifices.

Ultimately, in sheer helplessness and dejection over her son’s rejection, she surrenders herself to the strong brown arms of her overseer-lover. She cannot escape his claim on her body in order to embrace her son who returns to her doorstep, thereby perpetuating

the unbridgeable gap between them and fixing in Pandu's mind the image of her as a whore. Her purpose of living for her son stands completely defeated.

Bagul discusses her story because it needs to be told. A Dalit subaltern woman has to suffer multiple lines of repression: as a low caste poor woman she is sexually exploited by her lover whose financial gifts support her family; as a wife she supports her decrepit husband but has to bear the torment emanating from his emasculated frustrations; as a beautiful widow she is a victim of her male neighbors' lust and their women's envy; as a mother she is expected to be a self-sacrificing, self-composed mother who will provide emotional and physical support constantly to her son. Bagul represents the impossibility of meeting these demands.

It is rather intriguing that Pandu's mother has no name or identity except in terms of her relationship with Pandu, reminding us of Rich who describes the ideology of motherhood as requiring the absence of selfhood for the mother. Consequently, the breach of that relationship leaves Pandu's mother with no social identity in a society hostile to the claims of a subaltern woman's sexual independence and refusal to adhere to prescribed codes of motherhood. In the Dalit context, the son's rejection disempowers the subaltern mother who succumbs to the ideology of motherhood and cannot assert her independent maternal identity. Ultimately, the subaltern mother cannot enact her agency, or, symbolically 'speak'. But as Priyamvada Gopal charts the agenda of the Subaltern historians as taking the responsibility to articulate or 'speak' for the silenced subaltern, Bagul, in tracing Pandu's mother's narrative, speaks for her and her agency that would not be otherwise archived because she herself surrenders to the pressures of dominant ideologies.

Although both the subaltern mothers exercise agency in their own ways, they are rendered invisible by the social norms and expectations of their respective communities. Because Spivak notes that there “is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak,” Morrison and Bagul attempt to retrieve, re-create and re-present these silenced mothers’ extraordinary mothering that can otherwise be subsumed in the noise of social criticism from a dominant perspective (307). Morrison as an intellectual undertakes her “circumscribed task” to represent the subaltern woman with sensitivity (Spivak 307). Bagul, in the mode of Subaltern historians, “[bends] closer to the ground” to recover the “residuum” of a silenced subaltern experience (Gopal 140). Spivak warns both postcolonial intellectuals and Subaltern historians against essentializing the subaltern experience when speaking for the subaltern woman. Morrison neither valorizes nor criticizes Sethe for her extraordinary mothering, for her “rough choice” (*Beloved* 212); similarly, Bagul does not adore Pandu’s mother nor does he censure her for her non-conformist mothering. Rather, both intellectuals explicate the multiple lines of repression the subaltern woman has to negotiate to prove themselves as what is deemed ‘good’ mothers by their respective social milieus.

Chapter III

Subaltern Children: The Trauma of Silence and Recovery

In the Introduction to *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with Difficult Heritage*, editors William A. Logan and Keir Reeves discuss how the meaning of “heritage site” has changed over time from being sites of cultural and historical pride to those bearing witness to painful phases of history. They note that since they are all sites of “dissonance,” a lot depends on who chooses to interpret the significance of the site and brings what kind of memory and meaning to it (3). They investigate if it is “collective shame” or “personal pain” that plays a role in the recent popularity of “atrocious tourism” (3). They enquire about the importance of reliving the trauma, the atrocities, the pain and the shame, especially in those communities that have had direct and large-scale experiences with torture and trauma both as the perpetrator and as the victim (4). While sites of concentration camps recall horrifying memories for Holocaust survivors, they can also help the victims articulate their traumas in order to come to terms with them. Silence post trauma is perhaps the most debilitating experience for survivors, as Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman have examined in their seminal work, *Testimony*. Thus, those survivors who have been able to express their pain have been able to come to terms with their past. Of course there are more who have never been able to articulate their traumatic encounters. Their silence has destroyed or fragmented their inner lives but the survivors bear witness to the trauma and “open...new conceptual spaces for the yet unborn (or never-to-be-born) answers” (*Testimony* xvi).

Although the purpose of *Places of Pain and Shame* is to revisit the trauma and pain associated with specific geographical sites around the world where histories of mass suffering have been perpetrated (they refer to six countries), I intend to extrapolate the association of painful memory and trauma with sites onto a more personal/individual one – home and community. Just as the more powerful groups of people or countries have perpetrated traumatic violence on the less powerful, similarly, on a more individual level, the sites of home and community can often victimize their own people with laws, discriminations, restrictions and exercise of power. Often, privileges of race, caste, gender, and class conspire to brutalize the less privileged within the same community and within the same family. In the Introduction to *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman Lewis states that trauma affects both concentration camp survivors as well as those affected by “small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes (and communities)” (3). In this essay, I will examine how children are traumatized by the play of powerful forces that they are too young to comprehend and too vulnerable to resist. Toni Morrison in her very first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, examines the debilitating effects of race, class, and gender on three pre-teen African American girls, Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, in 1940s’ Ohio. Similarly, Arundhati Roy, in her only novel till date, *The God of Small Things* (TGST hereafter), showcases the way two pre-teen fraternal twins, Rahel and Estha, are devastated when they find themselves on the wrong side of the fatal combination of the privileges of gender, caste, Anglophilia, and marriage laws, in late 1960s’ Kerala, a state in South India.

In *On the Edge: A History of Poor Black Children and their American Dreams*, Carl Husemoller Nightingale analyzes how African American children are ““color-

struck” by the oppressive white supremacy around them. (114). Mainstream white culture and cultural products re-emphasize black people’s ‘difference’ from the (white) norm and successfully alienate them and instill a deep sense of inferiority and self-hatred. Moreover, this legacy of self-alienation in one’s own country and privileging of everything white conditions black parents who, in turn, impress upon their children the insecurities that can traumatize the most vulnerable section of American society, the black children. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison explores, on one hand, how internalization of white-coded values destroys the poor Breedlove parents who fail to shelter their children, Pecola and Sammy, from the effects of racism that traumatize them; on the other hand, she demonstrates how stronger, more tightly-knit families, like the MacTeers, can believe in themselves, despite the fascination with white cultural values, and can provide security to their children, Claudia and Frieda, who successfully resist the tide of inferiority thrust at them by the prevailing white indices of perfection.

In TGST, Roy unfolds the stifling legacies of patriarchy, caste-consciousness, and British colonialism Rahel and Estha confront when their mother’s outsider status combines with latent Anglophilia within the family to engender a series of events that alienate and traumatize them forever. Rahel and Estha’s Syrian Christian mother from Kerala, Ammu, has transgressed social norms by venturing out of her community and marrying a Hindu Bengali from Calcutta and then divorcing him and returning to Ayemenem. Although a divorced daughter is a disgrace to a traditional Indian society, a divorcee son is not. Chacko, Ammu’s brother, is also divorced from an exogamic marriage, but he returns from England to take charge of the family pickle business and his daughter and ex-wife are as welcome as they would have been if they were still

married. Roy implies that patriarchal privilege defines the lives of the brother and sister, privileging one disproportionately over the other. Rahel and Estha live the legacy of this differential treatment. Moreover, Chacko's ex-wife is a British lady. Their daughter, Sophie Mol, is half-white. Now, the colonial legacy of India joins hands with the ongoing patriarchy. Not only is Sophie Mol the daughter of the son of the house, but she is also half-white. Thus, gender privilege of one parent and racial privilege of the other elevate Sophie's social position in the family way beyond Rahel and Estha's. Roy demonstrates the web of social forces that complicate and define the subalternity of the children.

Along with patriarchy, caste laws regulate the community of family members and its conscience which eventually choke the lives of Rahel and Estha and those they love. Ammu transgresses the "Love Laws" by having a relationship with Velutha, an Untouchable. Not only does it raise the spectre of a woman asserting her sexual needs, thereby defying patriarchal laws that circumscribe female sexuality, but it also shatters age-old caste laws. Ammu does both. She commits unpardonable sins and disgraces her family's well-renowned lineage. Ironically, Roy indicates, the same lineage allows Chacko to fulfill his sexual needs, his "Man's needs," by taking sexual favors of low-caste women employees in his factory in exchange for money. A man can have his sexual needs, not a woman. Thus, Chacko is never blamed for his sexual exploitation of poor *and* low caste women. He somehow does not transgress caste but Ammu does. This reiterates the social sanction upper caste men enjoy when they exploit their gender and caste privileges. While Ammu is ousted from the family and Velutha is battered to death, Chacko lives on as the restless prince of a decadent empire, founded on laws of gender and caste privileges.

In the heart of this complex scenario Roy situates the two fraternal twins who cannot fathom the laws their mother apparently transgresses. Although their mother's family, with whom they live, is rich and privileged in terms of social and economic status in the small town of Ayemenem, Rahel and Estha are relegated to the periphery of this world. In such a subaltern role, these two children have to negotiate their social identities, especially when confronted with blatant discrimination, in order to understand the rejection they experience from Ammu's family. In the world of Ayemenem, like in *The Bluest Eye*, one child is traumatized into silence while the other survives and returns to the site as an adult to come to terms with their traumatic past.

Murari Prasad's indictment of caste and gender hierarchies in India is equally relevant to the superstructures of race and class as seen in *The Bluest Eye*: "Ancient and larger historical pressures continue to have their social sanction, and underpin the cultural code invoked against the weak and suppressed" (163). The children become victims of what Gurleen Grewal describes as the communal response of the oppressed to the values of the oppressor: while the black community "accept[s] the definition of the world of elites as common sense," and then recognizing their difference, finally "collaborate[s]" in furthering their "own oppression" (24), the women in the Ayemenem household in *TGST*, themselves victims of repressive patriarchy, nevertheless reiterate the privileges of caste and gender by punishing the woman who threatens these hierarchies instead of protecting her. Thus, the children, points out Murari Prasad, "[politically] free but fragile, innocent and energetic but dread-filled, vulnerable and unprotected" are "subject to the sledgehammers of coercive powers" of race, caste, class, gender and other social codes (165). Moreover, the narratives of both Claudia and Rahel explore "the depths of history

defined precisely as historical unspeakability” and the attempt to “retriev[e]...the possibility of speaking and to...[recover]...a return of the voice” (Testimony xix).

By employing child-narrators, both Morrison and Roy explore how children negotiate different binaries between white beauty and black beauty, between male privileges and female deprivileges, between higher and lower economic classes, and between upper caste and lower caste. In Sujala Singh’s words, the children act as “bridges, interpretive filters” between the communities’ obsessions with dominant ideals and the pressure they exert on the overwhelmed children (14). Therefore, Morrison and Roy articulate the “small voice” of subaltern children that “dominant history,... is constitutionally unable to record or actively suppresses” (Needham 371). As adults, Claudia and Rahel try to articulate the complex axes of power that victimized Pecola and Estha, respectively. What Grewal identifies as Claudia’s motivation for revisiting her childhood is equally applicable to Rahel’s actual revisiting of Ayemenem: “a desire to relive and reflect upon the personal and the past in order to comprehend its lived exclusions” (34). The survivors bear witness to the “truths that are unspoken – or unspeakable” that effectively muted their less-resilient counterparts (Testimony xiii).

Both Grewal and Needham posit that Morrison and Roy’s characterizations of Claudia and Rahel achieve resistance, no matter how weak, to dominant ideals. I agree with both of them but I also argue that the painful stories of Estha and Pecola’s silences illustrate both novelists’ acknowledgment of and concern for the simultaneous destruction of the not-so-resilient subaltern children. While Rahel and Claudia survive their victimization and attempt to negotiate their objectification through minor rebellions, Estha and Pecola succumb to their traumas (Bjork 45). *The Bluest Eye* and *TGST* present

subaltern resistance not as completely stable and successful but as tenuous and limited in scope. In other words, both novels retrace a “journey into history as fall to silence and a triumph, a return and a repossession of the living voice” (Testimony xix).

Subaltern Children in The Bluest Eye

The “grotesque...(d)emonization of an entire race” and “social and domestic aggression...could cause a child to literally fall apart” (Afterword, *The Bluest Eye*, 210)

“If she was cute, ... then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser” (74) concludes the child narrator, Claudia, in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* about the difference between herself, her sister, Frieda, and their friend Pecola, all dark-skinned African American children, and the “high-yellow dream child” Maureen Peal who joins their school in the winter of 1941 (62). Through a child’s perspective that is not yet initiated into the adult world of internalizing white ideals of beauty, or has not developed the “psyche which...allow(s) (Claudia) to love” white dolls, Morrison explores the devastation through discrimination that the African American community inflicts on its children. On the one hand, Morrison describes how various adults of the African American community absorb the white standards of beauty and find themselves incurably deficient, less worthy, and end up privileging lighter skin among themselves, having successfully internalized “a dominant culture’s values.” On the other hand, she focuses on such “mimicry’s” severely “inimical” impact on the children’s “interests” and “cultures” (Grewal 21).

I focus on some episodes in *The Bluest Eye* in which the black children experience the brutality of discrimination that traumatizes all the three girls, but destroys Pecola into embracing silence and insanity. Morrison depicts through these episodes how

the harsh treatment is inflicted by the two social institutions that children are most familiar with, school and parents, in terms of what matters most to their age group, viz., peers and dolls. Morrison demonstrates how "...teachers [and parents]...reinforce existing hierarchies by consistently favoring lighter students [and white dolls]" (Werrlein 63). As Antonia Navarro-Tejero suggests about TGST, the marginalized adults' "longing for power" through assuming dominant standards intensify the "oppressive conditions" of the more "powerless" children who are "pitted against" these "power structures" (101). Rachel Blumenthal rightly observes that Morrison critiques the "sociohistorical narrative" or the "economic and racial codes that create the ultimate horror of Pecola's story" (118). African American adults imbibe the fascination with white ideals of beauty and perfection, and disseminate the same among their children. Children like Claudia resist such self-devaluation and incur the wrath of parents while children like Pecola surrender to these values and recede into silence and invisibility.

Deftly employing a child's way of interpreting her surroundings and highlighting her incomprehension of the adult world's prejudices and deferences, Morrison emphasizes child-Claudia's frustration with white dolls in order to "discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped [her], but apparently only [her]" (20). True to a child's nature, Claudia, unable to discern the reason for such anxious adoration of white baby dolls, begins to destroy them. She is too young to know that such surrender to colonizer/white ideals has baffled generations of colonized/marginalized peoples who have nevertheless remained grounded in such fascination (22).

In sharp contrast stands Pecola who imbibes in full the fascination with white ideals of beauty and self-hatred from her mother and the community around her. Her father Cholly's abandonment as a child, traumatic encounter with white hunters, and emasculation as an adolescent, mark his life as an adult. Unable to assume responsibility, Cholly stumbles through life as a low-class factory worker who can never stand up for his own rights. Providing security to one's children is traditionally expected from a father; but Cholly is incapable of taking such responsibility. Moreover, Pecola, unlike Claudia and Frieda, wholeheartedly believes in her "ugliness." This conviction in her lack of beauty is reaffirmed by her mother, Pauline, who bears her physical difference from the white indices of beauty – white skin, blue eyes, blond hair – as a cross and has succumbed to "a dominant culture that has pervasively imposed their white, male-engendered stereotypes upon" the African American community (Bjork 37). Thus, finding themselves incapable of matching the white standards of beauty and life, Pauline and Cholly's home is rent with anger, bitterness, desperation, and poverty, all arising from a conviction in their worthlessness, thereby rendering the Breedlove family completely dysfunctional. Just as children try to seek unreasonable solutions to family problems that they don't understand, Pecola begins to believe that if she were beautiful with blue eyes, then "Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too" (46). Pecola thus yearns for the bluest eyes in order to dispel the gloom and frustration in her family.

Effectively, Morrison emphasizes the importance of family bonding and security that can protect black children in a society laden with white values that send signals of inferiority to the black population. Despite their fascination with white dolls, Claudia's family breeds security for the children. Mr. MacTeer attacks their tenant, Mr. Henry,

when the latter manhandles Frieda. Similarly, when the children catch cold, Mrs. MacTeer checks on them through the night to ensure they are comfortable. Conversely, Cholly burns down the house in his anger and rapes his daughter out of helplessness. Similarly, Pauline shouts and scolds Pecola when the hot juice of “blackish blueberries” spills on the floor and burns Pecola’s leg but rushes to soothe the white Fisher girl whose frock gets stained (108-9). The fascination with white baby dolls translates into the actual action of fawning over a white child at the expense of black girls and their injuries, physical and emotional. Thus, “the dominant entities have the sanction, safety and protection” while the subalterns actually need it (Prasad 166). Such signals from the family destroy Pecola who in her wounded and vulnerable state turns to the same ideals that have alienated her parents from her.

While favoring one child over another can brutalize the latter, Morrison asserts this issue becomes more complicated when race (manifested through skin-color) underscores the harsh privileging. The presence of Maureen Peal, a mulatta child, with lighter skin color and “long brown hair,” nearly “derange[s] Frieda and [Claudia]” (62). It is not jealousy pertaining to color and class that affect Claudia and Frieda; rather it is the appanage that Maureen enjoys on the campus that “bemuse[s], irritate[s], and fascinate[s]” them (63):

[Maureen] enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls; white boys didn’t stone her, white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners...She never had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria – they flocked to the table of her choice, ... (62-3).

However, the same teachers, who fawn over Maureen, try “never to glance at [Pecola]” and call her name “only when everyone [is] required to respond” (46-7). Again, unlike Maureen, Pecola is the “only member of her class who [sits] alone at a double desk” (45). Morrison therefore critiques institutions like the school and teachers that reemphasize the color-coded values of white perfection and beauty. In fact, her deconstruction of the narrative of the Dick and Jane primer used in the country exposes the racial baggage it carries and the disastrous consequences it has on black children who identify themselves as an anomaly in the perceived popular notion of family.

However, although Claudia and Frieda do not surrender to these ideals of the white world, they are nonetheless bewildered by the “slippery light in the eyes of [their] teachers when they encounter[] the Maureen Peals of the world.” (74). Similarly, when Maureen joins Claudia and Frieda in their defense of Pecola against the jeering black boys in school, Claudia notices how the boys relinquish their teasing of Pecola under the “springtime eyes” of Maureen (66). Unable to understand the secret of her privilege, Claudia and Frieda, displaying instincts of survivors, begin searching for “flaws to restore (their) equilibrium” which begins with “uglying up” Maureen’s name to “Meringue Pie.” However, when they see Maureen trying to befriend Pecola, and on realizing that Maureen was born with six fingers, an abnormality that can lower her several advantages, they seem to forgive her despite the “unearned haughtiness in her eyes” (63). Morrison portrays the McTeer sisters beginning to resist the overwhelming messages of white fascination actively and refusing to ‘like’ Maureen just because their teachers and peers fawn over her. Nevertheless, true to a “false spring day” (64), the friendly walk towards an ice-cream parlor on their way back home is rather brief and ends with a quick heated

repartee of questions and answers that disperses the group in no time. Maureen's pride in possessing the privileges of lighter skin and straighter hair rises to the surface when she screams in self-defense against the less-submissive MacTeer sisters: "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!" (73).

Werrlein points out that in order "(t)o *defend* herself against Claudia and Frieda, Maureen denies her own blackness in a taunt (black e mo) that crushes Pecola" (69, emphasis mine). Morrison illustrates a society "historically coded in white terms" in which such "disavowal of [black] race" is a source of class privilege and "accession," thereby critiquing the African American community's imbibed sense of worthlessness as imposed by the white supremacist society (Grewal 25). While Claudia and Frieda attempt to reclaim their dignity by calling Maureen a "Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie!" they notice how Pecola cowers into silence under the burden of Maureen's humiliating remarks. Similarly, Pecola withdraws into humiliated silence when Geraldine throws her out of her well-manicured house, calling her a "dirty, nasty bitch." Thus, in reliving their childhood, Claudia "bears[s] witness...(and) *bear[s]* the *solitude* of a responsibility, and...*bear[s]* the *responsibility*, precisely, of that solitude" as she re-evaluates the insensitive community that took a toll on Pecola (Testimony 3; emphasis in the original). Claudia's close well-knit family structure helps her withstand the onslaught of white fascination and she survives it to retrospectively hold her community culpable for Pecola's loss. Claudia alone bears the responsibility of reliving Pecola's suffering because the latter is completely lost.

Claudia and Frieda realize that Maureen is just a symbol of the "Enemy." But "(t)he *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us" (74). Clearly, they

neither understand the reason behind the “honey voices of parents and aunts” nor the “obedience in the eyes of (their) peers” that lighter skin color summons with ease. As newcomers to the social codes of privilege, they are yet to “comprehend [their own] unworthiness” (74). As Werrlein suggests, “(t)hrough Claudia's anxiety, Morrison points to the particular predicament of black *girls* in a white nation. For power they need beauty, and for beauty they need whiteness” (63).

Such unworthiness is impressed upon the black children when they recognize their difference from the ideals of beauty showcased in the popular modes of entertainment. Claudia challenges social norms when she expresses not her adoration for but her disgust with and “unsullied hatred” for the typical Christmas gift of a “big, blue-eyed Baby Doll” that induces “clucking sounds” of fondness in adults. When she refuses to see the charm of the “single-stroke eyebrows...the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips” of the “blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll” (20-21) and dismembers its “blue eyeballs, twisted yellow hair” (21), she confronts the frowns and “tears” of “outrage” of the parents for refusing to cherish what they had always desired: ““I-never-had-a-baby-doll-in-my-whole-life-and-used-to-cry-my-eyes-out-for-them.Now-you-got-one-a-beautiful-one-and-you-tear-it-up-what’s-the-matter-with-you?”” (21).

Therefore, when the “little pink-and-yellow” Fisher girl feels threatened in the presence of three older black girls in her own polished and spacious kitchen, Claudia feels a “familiar violence” rise in her. The disgust she harbors for white dolls and for the Maureen Peals of the world, which is actually a transposition of her frustration with adult fascination with everything white, resurfaces in her when the white child shows signs of

fear for no reason (108-9). Now, the encounter with that model white girl, dressed in a “pink sunback dress and pink fluffy bedroom slippers” and the dance of meaningless fear “across her face” ignites Claudia’s anger against all white girls. Since Claudia cannot express her displaced wrath at white girls for the preference her own parents harbor for white skin, blue eyes, and blond hair, a white girl feeling scared on seeing black girls irritates and angers Claudia. Morrison hopes more black girls can be like Claudia who can openly resist the avalanche of white fascination.

While Frieda and Claudia, “who despises Shirley Temple [and white baby dolls], minimally [resist] the self-effacing impetuses that seduce Pecola” and survive these discrepancies in their childhood, Pecola succumbs to the overwhelming messages of the white world’s superiority and unattainable desirability and gradually recedes into silence (Werrlein 68). Through Pecola Morrison seems to warn the readers of the ultimate disaster such obsession with white-coded values can incur. She dreams of Shirley Temples and Marie Janes and wants to be like them because she understands that their beauty invites love from all but her own ugliness (because different from white beauty) does not, cannot, and should not. Pecola strives for beauty in order to experience love—a telling statement from Morrison of her traumatic experience at home and in the community, both of which are blinded by white ideals of beauty. Claudia’s narrative thus exposes the “tendency to....render (the victim) invisible” by providing a “social context” “to hold traumatic reality in consciousness” such that the victim can be “[affirmed] and [protected]” and made visible (Trauma and Recovery 9).

Finally, Pecola tries to achieve the blue eyes that make others beautiful and loveable by petitioning the fraud religious teacher, Soaphead Church. As a man “(s)ervile

to white supremacist values,” he seals the desire for white beauty as legitimate and fatally misleads Pecola into believing that her wish has been granted (Grewal 29). Morrison uses Pecola as a “thematic representative” of “a larger, more complex, more diffused social and herstorical schema” that devalues anything non-white (Bjork 38). Sadly, Pecola’s conviction in her assumption of pretty blue eyes coincides with her rape by her father. The deluded girl begins to believe that her blue eyes, and not her pregnancy resulting from perverted rape, make everyone shun her out of jealousy. Thus, the attempt at gaining visibility by possessing blue eyes (to her the *only* index of beauty) renders her permanently invisible.

Through a reflecting adult-Claudia, Morrison critiques the community’s role in Pecola’s fatal wish: “All of our waste (desire for white beauty) which we dumped on her and which she absorbed” at the cost of her sanity (205). A child’s vulnerability is ravaged by the community’s obsession with unreasonable desires of white physical beauty. Because black parents favored white baby dolls, only such dolls were the prized Christmas gifts to their children. Because black mothers demonstrated that a white child’s fears were more important than their own children’s, daughters rejected their own beauty and yearned for blue eyes. Because teachers favored light-skinned Maureen Peals, the Pecolas believed in their unworthiness. Bjork aptly argues that Pecola’s “extreme fondness for the cup...represents an indictment against the whole of a value system that has afflicted not only Pecola and her family, but an entire community” (Bjork 35).

Claudia blames the entire town for Pecola's descent into insanity when she says, “All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness” (205). As Werrlein suggests,

“Morrison puts insight into the eyes of a child (Claudia) who already recognizes the perils of such aspirations” (69). Thus, Morrison explores how subaltern children can be scarred and destroyed forever when their community bequeaths its sense of unworthiness (compared to that of the elite majority) to its most vulnerable group. Although Claudia survives the assault of community fascination with white ideals, either because of her strong family ties or because she learns to adjust herself to them, Pecola is lost in her insanity that confirms the pathological state of the subaltern for the dominant group as it relentlessly imposes its values on the marginalized and traumatizes them.

In *Testimony*, Dori Laub writes that silence in a traumatized person can be “both a sanctuary and...a place of bondage.” It is the listener’s responsibility to “*listen to and hear the silence*” (58, emphasis in original). The silence that Pecola inhabits at the end of the novel perhaps offers her a sanctuary from what she understands as the community’s refusal to accept her incredible and improbable beauty; but Claudia and readers recognize it as a place of bondage that has curbed African American identity by relentless imposition of white supremacist ideals by both white and black communities. It is a survivor like Claudia who “recognizes[s], and *meet[s]* the victim’s silence” and calls upon the reader to bear witness to the trauma of Pecola (Laub 64; emphasis in original). Since the detrimental effect of fascination with white ideology is never factually articulated, the need for testimony increases because “historical accuracy is in doubt” and because “the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear” (Testimony 6). A similar testimony is called upon in the case of Rahel in TGST.

Subaltern Children in The God of Small Things

TGST locates several strands that define a modern postcolonial India in which Anglophilia combines with repressive caste distinctions, traditional views privileging arranged endogamic marriages, class, and oppressive patriarchal practices that ignore male transgressions but punish the same transgressions if committed by women. In this complex fabric of social customs Roy locates the tale of two seven year old fraternal twins, Rahel and Estha, whose childhood is destroyed when they recognize their neglect and the preference shown to their half-British cousin, Sophie Mol, who is “Loved From the Beginning” not only because she is half-British but also because she is Chacko’s daughter (129). Just as obsession with white images of beauty frame the experiences of all characters in *The Bluest Eye*, the entire narrative in TGST is framed by different stages of involvement of the Ipe family (Rahel and Estha’s maternal family) with Sophie Mol, in Ayemenem: her expected arrival, preparation for her welcome, her actual arrival, her welcome to the house, her adventures with the twins, and her accidental death that coincides with another fatal discovery.

The primary narrative voice in TGST belongs to an adult Rahel who returns to Ayemenem after twenty-three years to meet her twin brother Estha. This narrative voice alternates with a third-person narrative voice belonging to the twins when they were seven years old and the actual incidents happened. Just as Claudia survives her childhood to narrate the victimization and destruction of her friend, Pecola, Rahel has survived to narrate a similar tale of her brother, Estha. What Bjork explains about the narrative consciousness in *The Bluest Eye* is equally applicable to TGST: “[Rahel] vascillates from a personal subjectivity to an objective recognition” of what actually happened in their

childhood that destroyed Estha (32). While fascination with white ideals and values dominates and massacres the black children's lives in *The Bluest Eye*, a similar fascination with a white child (whose father's patriarchal privilege accentuates her social standing in the family) brutalizes the unwanted twins who are, after all, the children of a divorced daughter. Obsession with white ideals combines with Pecola's pregnancy and she descends into insanity; Estha's traumatic experience at Abhilash Talkies, followed by Sophie's privileging and death, and Estha's implicating of Velutha, draws Estha's childhood to a close, and he withdraws into a cocoon of silence.

Roy gains access to the "small voice" of the subaltern child through Rahel and critiques the obsession of Indian adults with their son's half-white daughter (Needham 382). She describes the grand preparations to welcome Sophie Mol which effectively throws into sharp contrast the peripheral space the twins are pushed to occupy: In the "What Will Sophie Mol Think? Week" Baby Kochamma (grandaunt of all the three children) makes sure that the twins do not speak in Malayalam (the family's native language) but only in English in order to be at their best fluency when they welcome their more privileged half-British cousin, Sophie. If the twins are caught speaking in Malayalam, they are punished and made to write "*I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English*" a hundred times each. Such suppression of one's native expression parallels the negation of African American cultural expressions and adoption of white cultural standards. The lesson is drilled into the underprivileged children that the superior white child (read first world) is privileged as the "norm against which the third [world children are] judged" and should acknowledge her less privileged cousins and their ability to communicate with her in *her* language (Grewal 24). Also, the relationship

of Sophie with Chacko, the patriarchal head of the family, underscores her privilege. In a telling scene, Roy describes how the patriarchal power shifted from Ammu and Chacko's father to Chacko when the younger man stood up for his physically abused mother against their father, the perpetrator. Roy writes it was not concern for the mother or the injustice done against her that dictated Chacko's action; rather, it was Chacko's claiming of patriarchal authority from his father. Thus, male privileges define and delimit the lives of all women in the house. But Ammu who challenges these rules suffers severe punishment, ostracism and an untimely and lonely death. Most importantly, it is the women of the house who lock her up and then leave her to die by herself. Such behavior reveals the conditioning of women who value male privilege even at the cost of their own rights and emotions.

Returning to the episode of the children's language, on their way to Cochin to pick up Sophie and her mother, Chacko, Estha, Rahel, Ammu, and the children's grandaunt, Baby Kochamma, stop the night in a hotel where the whole family watch *The Sound of Music* before they go to the airport the following morning to receive the guests. In the theater, Estha has the traumatizing experience with the "Orangedrink Lemondrink Man" who makes Estha assist him in his masturbation; consequently, Estha views himself as unclean and less likeable. While Estha is assured by Hollywood that Baron von Clapp-Trapp loves only "clean white children" he finds himself and Rahel wanting:

"(a) *Are they clean white children?*

No. (*But Sophie Mol is.*) (101).

Thus, images of whiteness merge quite rightly with Sophie Mol, and the twins, especially Estha, feel themselves incurably lacking. Of course such a sense of inferiority is inscribed

by their relatives (who overvalue Chacko's male privilege in the family and subsequently his daughter) who try to convince them that they are lesser than Sophie Mol. When Estha feels sick, his mother, Ammu, wants them to leave the theater and Rahel refuses, Baby Kochamma reminds them they have to be "well for (receiving) Sophie Mol (the next day)." But when Rahel, like Claudia, resents this fawning over Sophie and says "mostly to herself" that Estha need not be ready for Sophie Mol, Baby Kochamma frowns on such resistance:

“‘What did you say?...getting the general drift (of resistance), but not what was actually said.

‘Nothing,’ Rahel said.

‘I *heard* you,’ Baby Kochamma said.’” (105).

Just as a white immigrant shop owner refuses to 'see' or hear Pecola's voice, the adult world in Ayemenem refuses to hear Rahel's expression of resistance. In fact, Baby Kochamma may have interpreted as envy what in reality is the "truth of 'psychological deprivation'" experienced by the twins and by Claudia and Frieda, all heavily "marginalized subjects" (Grewal 35). All the children experience what Murari Prasad identifies as "a facelessness the dominant culture [and its adherents]...threatens to impose on the subaltern groups" (159). Ranajit Guha in 'The Small voice of History' discusses this inability to hear "as a structural condition of colonial [and] nationalist...historiographies" that establish "their focus and coherence by suppressing or disregarding 'the (small) voices'" (Needham 372).

As Toni Morrison observes that children are the most “delicate” and “vulnerable” section of the marginalized community, they are also often the most acutely observant (*The Bluest Eye* 210). They observe the privileging but cannot understand the reason. Like Claudia and Frieda, Estha and Rahel are yet uninitiated into the adult world of Anglophilic postcolonial India and are “yet-to-be-normalized child[ren] who [are] both inside and outside the narrative of subjection” (Grewal 34). Moreover, they fail to understand the underprivileged status of their mother in the Ayemenem household. They observe Sophie’s carefree walk toward them with “the smell of London in her hair” (135), her “bluegray-blue” eyes, her “pale skin...the color of beach sand” and her “beautiful, deep red-brown” hair (137). While Estha and Rahel have strict instructions to follow and perform their appointed roles in the “Play,” Sophie says and does what she feels. Therefore, while Margaret, Sophie’s mother, does not become angry with her for not saying “Thank you” to her biological father, Chacko, Ammu feels “A Far More Angry Than Necessary feeling” for her children not performing their assigned roles. “She had wanted a smooth performance. A prize for her children in the Indo-British behavior Competition” (139). Here is an (ex)colonized mother compelled by society to feel anxious about having her children fit their assigned roles in the game of deference to an (ex)colonizer-child. Also, Ammu feels the pressure to prove to society that a divorcee mother, living on charity at her parents’ house, is perfectly capable of raising well-behaved children.

Moreover, children can be traumatized if adults constantly remind them of their inferiority with respect to other children. Just as Pecola, Claudia and Frieda are brutalized by the way Maureen Peal is privileged in school, Rahel and Estha are traumatized the

same way. None of them understand the reasons, the “*Thing*,” that privileges Maureen and Sophie Mol in their respective societies. While school teachers and parents smile fondly at the Maureen Peals, adults like Baby Kochamma reiterate Rahel and Estha’s deficiencies. When the cousins engage in a casual conversation about an elephant they see on their way home from the airport, the adult world, in the form of Baby, intervenes to remind Estha of his difference (and therefore lack) from Sophie. When Estha, a mere seven-year old child, says ““Thang God”” on recognizing the elephant, Baby corrects him with ““Thank God, Estha”” (146). Just as Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye* is “stripped of selfhood” by “conforming to white culture’s expectations of them” and expels Pecola (Rubenstein 129), Baby Kochamma is a worthy “[descendant]” of MaCaulay’s “Minutemen,” indicating a “constituent of contemporary India’s postmodern identity” (McGill 258). Thomas Babbington MaCaulay delivered his famous Minute on English education in India on 2nd February, 1835, and proposed the training of a “class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Pritchett 34). Under such a conformist’s instructions, the Indian Ambassadors have to “sing in English in obedient voices. Obediently. As though they hadn’t been made to rehearse it all week long” (147). Roy indicates how adults impose their adoration of the white world on the children and maim them emotionally for life. Pecola believes she is ugly compared to Maureen because her mother (and her teachers) finds her lacking in the white indices of beauty. Similarly, Claudia’s family insists she love her white baby doll. Baby Kochamma and the rest of the family ensure Rahel and Estha behave well and accept their lesser status before Sophie because of her father’s status within the family.

Just as the white-and-pink Fisher household holds no place for the three black girls and Geraldine's green-and-gold house ejects Pecola as an intruder, the Ayemenem house prepares for the welcome of Sophie Mol and pushes Rahel and Estha to the margins of its consciousness. The way Claudia fails to comprehend *why* Maureen garners such special treatment and recognizes her own feelings matter less, Rahel is shocked to recognize her marginal position in the "Play" that begins with Sophie Mol's arrival. Her excited narration of Estha's vomiting to her "beautiful blind grandmother" is abruptly checked by Ammu's gentle touch on her shoulder that meant "*Shhhh*" and clarified Rahel's "small part" in the "Play" – "She was just the landscape. A flower perhaps. Or a tree. A face in the crowd. A Townspeople" (164). Like nondescript subalterns on the periphery, Rahel and Estha watch the play of deference to patriarchy combined with fascination for erstwhile colonizers.

The constant need for the (ex)colonized to ascertain that the precious traits of the (ex)colonizer are indeed present among them is evident in the way Mammachi believes Sophie Mol has the blue eyes and blond hair of the British. She sees "redbrown hair (Nnnn...Nalmost blond), the curve of two fatfreckled cheeks (Nnnn...almost rosy), bluegrayblue eyes" (166). What the African American community in Lorain, Ohio, desires and replicates in white baby dolls is reaffirmed by Mammachi through her close examination of Sophie. Moreover, Sophie, being Chacko's daughter, holds a special position in the patriarchal framework of the household: she is the only heiress of Ayemenem and Paradise Pickles and everything that the Ipe family stands for. While both Claudia and Rahel resent such adoration for white standards, Rahel is too young to comprehend that her mother's outsider status determines their marginal roles in a

patriarchal family. So, Claudia dismembers the white baby dolls and Rahel forbids Velutha, their only friend, besides their mother, in the Sophie-loving Ayemenem house, from paying attention to Sophie:

“Where’s our Sophie Mol? Let’s take a look at her’ [Velutha asks]

‘Don’t look there,’ Rahel said urgently.....and clapped her hands over Velutha’s eyes.

‘Why?’ Velutha said.

‘Because,’ Rahel said, ‘I don’t want you to’” (169).

Rahel, wielding a child’s feeble power over her friend, tries to control the meaningless overflow of love and fawning for Sophie. But the tide of postcolonial anxiety affecting her entire family proceeds unchecked. The family cook declares Sophie a “‘little angel’” while the self-reflective adult narrator articulates the underlying discrimination:

“Littleangels were beach-colored and wore bell-bottoms (Sophie). Littledemons were mudbrown in Airport-Fairy frocks (Rahel)...” (170). The same cook, a lower caste, extremely poor woman, relishes the discrimination the twins face and reiterates their marginal position in the family. She reminds Rahel about Sophie’s future role as her employer, thereby underscoring Rahel’s inaccessibility to the family fortune and her peripheral identity: “‘When she (Sophie) grows up, she’ll be our Kochamma, and she’ll raise our salaries,...’” (175). Rahel, like Claudia, is unable to contain her anger and frustration with the adult world’s fascination with Sophie. While Claudia hopes to bang the school-locker door on Maureen’s hand, Rahel thinks Sophie Mol in the center of the Play “ought to be slapped.” Rahel redirects her helpless fury toward a “whole column of

(red) juicy ants,” much like Claudia’s mutilation of a white baby doll (176), as both try to explore their self-conceptions “as different from the norm” by expressing their impotent rage in minor acts of violence (Grewal 23). Again, like Claudia’s discovery of Maureen’s six fingers, Rahel decides not to include Sophie Mol in their games, thereby trying to reassert their dislodged positions in the “Play.”

Just as teachers smile fondly at Maureen Peal, just as Pauline pampers the crying pink-and-white Fisher girl, and just as Claudia’s mother and aunts adore white baby dolls, the “Play went with (Sophie)...Fond smiles followed her” everywhere (177). What Claudia identifies as indirect messages of being “lesser” is articulated by Rahel’s interpretation of the contrast between herself and Sophie:

“The Fond Smiles watched Fondly.

Little Girls Playing.

Sweet.

One beach-colored.

One brown.

One Loved.

One Loved a Little Less” (177).

While we see Rahel struggling with and trying to make sense of the illogical privileging of Sophie, Estha retreats to the privacy of the family pickle factory and immerses himself in his traumatic thoughts of the threat posed by the “Orangedrink Lemondrink Man” (5). It is no wonder that an already scared child, by nature silent, who tries to escape from his own fears, will be an easy victim of social forces created and

imposed by adults. When Sophie Mol joins the twins on their boat-ride across the Meenachal River, each child has her or his own thoughts. Estha hopes to escape the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, Rahel hopes to get over the “Play’s” rejection, and Sophie hopes to become friends with her cousins. None of their hopes is fulfilled. The boat capsizes and Sophie dies while the twins, good swimmers at their tender age, survive physically only to die from within soon after.

The discovery of Sophie’s dead body coincides with the fatal discovery of an unpardonable transgressive affair between Ammu and Velutha, a Paravan, a Dalit man. Now, a caste-ridden patriarchal society joins hands with its Anglophilic side to crush such a rebellion. Baby Kochamma orchestrates a magnificent story to implicate Velutha for the death of Sophie and also to punish him for overstepping caste barriers. When she reaches the police station, she files a complaint against Velutha for a “beautiful child’s (Sophie)” death and because “(t)wo children (Rahel and Estha) were missing” (247). Even in loss, the white child of the family patriarch is more precious than the brown ones of the divorcee daughter. When Baby Kochamma meets the twins, themselves survivors of a heavy storm on the rough river, she holds them responsible for Sophie’s death. She blames them for their “lovely little cousin’s body...lying in the drawing room” and reminds them that “*God* doesn’t forgive” anyone for “tak[ing] a person’s life” and yet “(they) did it” (300). Just as Morrison explores how attempts to achieve white ideals of beauty destroy black children, Roy demonstrates how a caste-conscious Anglophile, Baby Kochamma, “stamp[s] out every ray of hope, destroy[s] their lives completely” and presents a solution: identify Velutha, a low-caste man who Rahel and Estha love as a dear friend, as the culprit.

While Pecola's conviction in her new blue eyes and ignorance about her perverted pregnancy destroy her and make her mad, Estha's identification of his dear Velutha as the culprit devastates him. Estha's "mouth said Yes" and "Childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid in like a bolt" (303). Unable to articulate the trauma, Estha takes recourse to silence. The playful life of the twins and their Ammu comes to an end. Estha is sent to his father in Calcutta, Ammu has to leave her Ayemenem home after disgracing it, and Rahel is sent off to boarding school. Gradually, the twins grow up in different locations with different people, and away from their Ammu who dies soon after. Rahel survives the intense trauma to narrate and reflect on the incidents that split her from her egg-twin. Estha withdraws into silence. On realizing how he had betrayed Velutha and Ammu, Estha stops talking. The "quietness" infects his thoughts, memories, words (13). Like Pecola, who wallows in a schizophrenic dialogue about her beautiful bluest eyes, Estha is too "steeped in the smell of old roses (Velutha's blood), blooded on memories of a broken man (tortured Velutha)" to have any words or reasons left to communicate with a cruel world that made him kill their mother and Velutha. While Claudia and Rahel accept the discriminatory world of adults on their own terms and survive, Pecola and Estha retreat from such a world.

As discussed above, Claudia bears witness to the silent trauma of Pecola. Similarly, Rahel, by revisiting the site of her and Estha's traumatic experience, bears witness to the silent trauma and suffering of her quieter sibling. Moreover, in the unspeakable union with Estha, Rahel gives voice to Estha's unbearable pain and anguish. In both the novels, Claudia and Rahel, also traumatized by childhood events, depict the "power of speaking the unspeakable" that releases "creative energy" by shattering the

“barriers of denial and repression.” Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, recognizes this flow of energy in trauma survivors who can confront their “past in order to reclaim the present and the future” (2). We know from *TGST* that Rahel took a long time to grapple with her memories as she drifted aimlessly from architecture school to a pointless marriage and odd jobs in America until Baby Kochamma’s letter announcing Estha being “re-Returned” to Ayemenem reached her. We don’t know what Claudia did during the intervening years; but that she revisits her childhood and Pecola’s story as an adult, indicates her coming to terms with her own trauma and reclaiming her present and future. While Rahel and Claudia’s testimonies of and recovery from their childhood traumas could happen only when they were “safe” by sheer temporal lapse, when they could “[reconstruct] the trauma story” and when they could “[restore] the connection” between themselves and “their community,” Estha and Pecola never recover from the terrible memories and experience (Herman 3). For both of them, “secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom” (Lewis 1). Estha embraces silence and tries to “appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eye” (*TGST* 12) and “[i]mprisoned...behind her illusion of blue eyes, Pecola (takes recourse to) schizophrenia and silence” (Bjork 53). Both Estha and Pecola, in Lewis’s terms, suffer from “borderline personality disorder” (3). As the weaker ones among the subaltern children, Pecola and Estha “[remain] the losing party” and embrace silence while their stronger counterparts eventually engage with the “unequal dialogue” of perpetuation and experience of trauma (Herman 8).

Needham aptly argues that resistance against and “collusion with the dominant” group exist simultaneously in Roy’s novel, and the same can be argued for Morrison’s

novel, in terms of the characters' identifications with gender and class within the oppressed communities. Needham concludes that Roy "does not present subordination as a stable, unproblematic condition" (379). However, while Pecola and Estha are completely traumatized by their childhood experiences, Claudia and Rahel are also deeply brutalized by the events, in spite of their resistances. Thus, these subaltern children are fatally subordinated by the more powerful adults of their communities who have succumbed to the most powerful dominant ideologies and "live their own unnatural lives under the gaze of the dominant culture" (Bjork 53).

Through Claudia and Rahel who bear witness to their respective traumas, Morrison and Roy represent the possible resistances subaltern children can engage with. Through the characters of the silenced subaltern children, Pecola and Estha, the two authors demonstrate the disastrous consequences of internalizing dominant values by subalterns. The intellectual representers re-create and re-present the silenced subalterns who are lost to archival records. Kamala Visweswaran in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* reiterates that intellectuals need to engage with silenced subjects through "accountable positioning" (...Donna Haraway's term), an endeavor to be answerable for what [they] have learned to see, and for what [they] have learned to do" (48). Deeply conscious of these responsibilities, Morrison and Roy re-present the invisible and unspeakable.

I conclude this chapter with another common experience of the victimized children: the physical or emotional absence of a father figure. While Morrison explores how Cholly Breedlove's neglected childhood and early emasculation render him an irresponsible and incapable father for Pecola, Roy demonstrates how a caste-ridden

society refuses to allow a Dalit man, Velutha, to be a surrogate father to the upper caste twins. Thus, these subaltern children have only their mothers struggling against social norms and lack the protection and security of another parent.

Chapter IV

Subaltern Poets of Protest: Amiri Baraka and Namdeo Dhasal

“Locked in a lightless shaft. Light at the top, pure white sun....To pull down, what had grown so huge.”

From “The Heretics” (Baraka Reader 110).

Robert F. Williams was “one of the most influential African American radicals of his time” as noted by Timothy B. Tyson in “Robert F. Williams, ‘Black Power,’ and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle” (541). Williams famously recalls a scene from his childhood when a black woman was brutally beaten and dragged to prison by a white police officer while white bystanders laughed and “ ‘the emasculated black men hung their heads in shame and hurried silently from the cruelly bizarre sight’ ” (Tyson 540). Similarly, recreating real life in fiction, Mulk Raj Anand describes in his novel *Untouchable*, Bakha, the low-caste toilet-cleaner, feeling helpless when confronted with the local priest’s attempted molestation of his sister. Again, Cholly Breedlove in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* turns upon his own community and family by misdirecting his frustration with the white world onto his helpless daughter, and Velutha, the Dalit man, is battered and killed in Roy’s *The God of Small Things* for allegedly murdering a half-white, higher-caste child and for indulging in a forbidden inter-caste sexual liaison with an upper-caste woman. Radically and deliberately different, the Black

man of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s' United States and the Dalit Panther of the 1970s in India embrace violence to demonstrate their anger and frustration against race and caste supremacists.

Having been crushed under colonial heels for generations, there comes a time when degradation and suppression find an outlet through violence. In his Preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre notes how the colonized's "irrepressible violence.....is man reconstructing himself" (Fanon lv). Similarly, in the late 1960s and 1970s, both the African American man and the Dalit man emerge on their respective socio-political scenes and attempt to reconstruct their identities by first claiming their humanitarian rights. Imamu Amiri Baraka in USA and Namdeo Dhasal in India are two such artists whose politically motivated art and social activism articulate the frustration with race and caste supremacists through militant and aggressive vocabulary and anti-establishment messages. In *Black Power* Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton underscore the urgency of the need to stand up against continued subjugation:

Racist [and casteist] assumptions of white [and upper caste] superiority have been so deeply engrained into the fiber of the society that they infuse the entire functioning of the national subconscious.....The time is long overdue for the black [and Dalit] community to redefine itself, set forth new values and goals, and organize around them. (31-32)

Taking Chela Sandoval's theory of oppositional and differential consciousness, as discussed in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, as a framework, I argue Baraka and Dhasal employ a "differential consciousness" (5,6) to emancipate the colonized minds of their

fellow subalterns, like their decolonialist predecessors and contemporaries W.E.B. DuBois, Ambedkar, Frantz Fanon, Roland Barthes, Black Power activists, and other revolutionary thinkers. I contend that Baraka and Dhasal anticipate theorists of “postmodernism” of the 1980’s and “globalization” of the 1990’s in promoting a “mode of oppositional consciousness” to be articulated by the “[fellow] subordinated” (Sandoval 8, 9). Their aggressive diction and obscene idioms are aspects of their oppositional consciousness and, like Fanon, demonstrate that conquered peoples can be made to read “[white and upper-caste] cultural forms very differently than [what the] white[s] [and upper castes]...[read] themselves” (Sandoval 86, 7). In other words, their language signals a new vocabulary “that can help to decolonize the imagination” (Sandoval xii, xiii).

It is important to note that Dhasal co-founded the Dalit Panther in 1972 as “a militant activist dalit organization” and it was his political agenda to brutalize upper caste sensibility by violently opposing it. Dilip Chitre notes that the “purpose of the Dalit Panther was to bring young dalit men and women together and organize continuous action and protest against the oppression of dalits in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India” (Dhasal 13). Evading several attempts of assassination, Dhasal nevertheless suffered serious injuries at several points in his Panther career. In 1975, the “Congress, the Shiv Sena (which has matured into an extremist Hindu party over the years) and the Republican Party...regarded Dalit Panther as their prime enemy, and the Dalit Panther’s moving spirit Namdeo Dhasal was their prime target” (Dhasal 15). However, Dhasal continued his political activism through organizations and through his political writing, namely poetry. Chitre writes: “...Namdeo is a born activist and Dalit Panther his raison

d'être, as much as poetry is the life of his spirit. Namdeo cannot separate his activism from his poetry, and his poetry is only the literary form of his activism" (Dhasal 15). In recognition of his irrepressible talent, Dhasal became the "recipient of the only Lifetime Achievement Award to be given by India's national academy of letters – the Sahitya Akademi – at its golden jubilee in 2004" (Dhasal 19).

Amiri Baraka in his Black Nationalist phase embraced the tenets of Black Power and made his writing, poetry, plays, a novel and essays, a medium for expressing the legitimate anger of the oppressed Blacks. Following Malcolm X's assassination in 1965, Baraka renounced his bohemian life and ideology and entered a "new life as a cultural nationalist" (Reader xxiv). For Baraka, "political action and political art" work together to address the "urgency and impatience" of the time. He writes, "...It is easier to get people into a consciousness of black power, what it is, by emotional example than through dialectical lecture. Black people seeing the recreation of their lives are struck by what is wrong or missing in them" (quoted in Lacey 94). Thus, his "We want 'poems that kill.'/Assassin poems, Poems that shoot/guns.../Knockoff/poems for dope selling wops or slick halfwhite/politicians...Setting fire and death to/whities ass" in "Black Art" is only a poet-activist's rendition of the social revolutionary's message (Reader 219):

From our (Black Power activists') viewpoint, rampaging white mobs and white night-riders must be made to understand that their days of free head-whipping are over. Black people should and must fight back. Nothing more quickly repels someone bent on destroying you than the unequivocal message: 'O.K., fool, make your move, and run the same risk I run – of dying. (Black Power 52)

Both artists recognize that their respective countries are divided into two ‘nations’ or ‘worlds’ along the lines of race and caste, respectively. Vijay Tendulkar, a well-known non-Dalit Marathi poet, delineates the distinction between the two “worlds” in the context of Dhasal’s work:

‘The world of Namdeo Dhasal’s poetry...begins where the frontier of Mumbai’s white-collar world ends and a no-man’s land opens up. This is a world where the night is reversed into the day,...of desperation against death, of the next day’s anxieties, of bodies left over after being consumed by shame and sensibility, of insufferably flowing sewages,...’(Dhasal 10)

Similarly, in “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)” Baraka describes “Rhythm and Blues...(as) part of the ‘national genius,’ of the Black man, of the Black nation.....of urban and rural.....Black America,” thereby establishing his concept of the Blacks inhabiting a nation of their own within the United States (Reader 190). Again, Baraka argued in “The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation” that “black People are a race, a culture, a Nation” (Reader xxiv).

Fanon’s description of the “‘native’ sector” versus the European sector demonstrates the Manichean divide between the worlds (Dhasal) and nations (Baraka) of the Dalits and the Blacks and their respective colonizers’ sectors. Fanon writes:

The colonist’s sector...all stone and steel...(is)...a sector of lights and paved roads...where the streets are clean and smooth, without a pothole, without a stone. The colonist’s sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things.....The colonized’s sector (is)...the shanty town....a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow...It’s a

world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other... (it) is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light,.... a sector on its knees.

(Fanon 4-5)

Just as the colonized in Fanon's account learn "violence" from their colonizer and "vindica[te] and appropria[te]" it to "destroy the colonial world," I argue that resentment against the dehumanization of their fellow African Americans and Dalits have taught Baraka and Dhasal, respectively, to defy the repressive social hierarchies that have historically curbed the subaltern identities of their respective peoples, by adopting violent language and candid critique (Fanon 6). Effectively, both poets create a new idiom of art to address their peoples' conditions. Thus, what Patrick Roney writes about Baraka's recognition of the need for a different art for the subjugated blacks is also relevant to the Dalits: "...in his (Baraka's) description of Afro-American ethos as a 'no-man's land,' the black country so essential to white America...., Baraka has revealed the condition for the creation of his and perhaps of *any* black art" (412).

In the following section, I first discuss two poems by Dhasal and Baraka that depict their experience of and compassion with the degraded condition of their fellow human beings. The subsequent pieces articulate the bottled up anger and frustration against the hegemonic power structures. Both poet-activists emphasize the humanity of their fellow subalterns and recognize, as pointed out by Fanon, that when the colonized "discover their humanity, they begin to sharpen their weapons to secure its victory" (Fanon 8). Dhasal and Baraka employ hyper-masculine and aggressive imagery to represent their fellow subalterns' repressed rage and to inspire them of the urgency to assume control of their lives and dignity. The forceful wresting of control from the

supremacists' grip translates into violent imagery in their works. However, it is important to note that both poets appropriated their groups' women's voices and ignored their contributions or relegated them to the peripheries of the respective social movements. Subsequently, feminist critiques of the respective movements illustrate the complexity of the social movements. I will return to this issue near the end of the essay. In the larger picture, however, evincing "sensitivity" to the state of the colonized mind, the poets underscore the need for a "mode of perception and decipherment" among the subalterns to realize a "differential consciousness understood as political intervention" (Sandoval 90, 1). In Carmichael and Hamilton's words, the proud Dalit man and Black man should be able to say the following:

'You [white/upper caste man] have contained me and I am saying 'No' to your containment. I am stepping out of bounds. I am saying 'No' to you and thereby I am creating a better life for myself. I am resisting someone who has contained me.' That is what the first act does. The black [and Dalit] person begins to live. He begins to create his *own* existence when he says 'No' to someone who has contained him. (Black Power 104-105)

The two poets employ the methodology of the oppressed, as defined by Chela Sandoval, that enables the "differential mode of oppositional social movement" to act (82, 3).

"On a barren blue canvas,

Clothes ripped off, a thigh blasted open,

A sixteen-year old girl surrendering herself to pain.

And a pig: its snout full of blood" (Dhasal 60)

In “Mandakini Patil: A Young Prostitute, My Intended Collage” from his first collection of poetry, *Golpitha* (1972), Namdeo Dhasal registers his deep sympathy for the Dalit prostitute, Mandakini, who is consumed by her clients and her circumstances. It is important to note that the Dalit woman often forms the image of rock-bottom social degradation in Dhasal’s work. In what resembles a dramatic monologue, Dhasal underscores the meaningless sexual relationships she (the absent addressee) engages in from a very tender age in order to survive. While representing the pathetic circumstances of her life, he warns her not to mistake these paid sexual liaisons for love, and writes: “In the backyard of love, all you find is fruits of fear and disgust” (Dhasal 56). He compares ‘love’ to “infinite and sovereign nothingness” that also describes the illusory “worship of the geographic contours of man/And of the romance of arse-fucking” (56). Through the use of startling obscene language, Dhasal hopes to shatter the dreams (he calls them “hallucination”) of Mandakini (59). He also assures her that the fanciful “tree, the sky, a sea, a flower, a bed” she may interpret the “darkness” of her hallucination to be, will, in reality, “[cheat]” and “[lead] (her) to the grave” (59). The darkness may imply a figurative darkness of the prostitute’s bleak social reality and her ignorance, or it may refer to the actual physical darkness of the night under whose cover her life is made most economically ‘productive’. He reminds her of the treachery of “(p)eople whom we regard as our own” and refers to the “old Madam who keeps (her) caged, ... known to people as Destiny” who exploits these young girls for their whoring business. As Dilip Chitre notes in his Introduction to Dhasal’s poetry, the Dalit prostitute functions as “the central symbol of the stigmatized and loathed...an object of carnal ‘love’ but still ‘loathed’” in

Dhasal's work (11). For this "object of exploitation through sexual possession, and an otherwise loathed non-person" (23), Dhasal expresses his deepest compassion:

"I've been dazzled by your worn-down and lackluster face....

You make anguish scream inside me; and stream inside me; and appropriate me" (58).

And this profound sympathy for the most degraded humanity stirs disgust and revulsion in Dhasal's mind against the social hierarchy of caste-Hindus that conspires with urban poverty to engender such dehumanization. He observes that Mandakini's

"hair,...clothes,...nails,...breasts...reveal to (him), within (him)self/colonies of the dead; hunchbacks left to die in the streets; sandwiches; streets; milk of a she-dog that's just given birth to her litter" (57), thereby deconstructing the filthy and repulsive world she inhabits in order to expose Dalit readers to the reality of their desultory lives. Dhasal concludes by drawing a similarity between Mandakini and several other women in similarly exploited circumstances:

"Never before had I seen a face so devoid of light/As was yours; and of a thousand other females like you./Flashing out from so many countries, and so many cages;/And bearing so many different names" (57).

While portraying the Dalit prostitute with sensitivity, we must note, Dhasal speaks *for* her and of her condition.

An interesting example is Peaches, the prostitute Amiri Baraka's protagonist, "a black northern airman stationed in a small southern town" (Lacey 171) meets in his only novel, *The System of Dante's Hell* (1965) in a section entitled "Heretics." In a striking parallel to the repellent world of Mandakini, Baraka's Bottom lives in "blackness....

[The inhabitants] kill each other & hate the sun...[they are] [T]heir black selves. Their lust. Their insensible animal eyes” (Reader 102). Here ‘blackness’ may refer to the actual skin color of the blacks and their unique cultural difference from the whites and, like “darkness” in Dhasal, may also symbolize the moral debasement and poverty they are forced to suffer in order to survive. Baraka takes his readers by the hand through the dark, shady, and seedy place that has its own “culture of violence and foodsmells” (Reader 103). Like Dhasal who warns the young girl against falling in love, Baraka notes how the notion of love can hold no meaning in such an economically and morally wretched place: “...the bones of love shattered in my face” (103). In this world, “drunk niggers...[stab] each others’ laughter in some grey abandon of suffering.” “That they suffered and cdn’t know it” is perhaps the worst condition of human existence, as explored by revolutionary thinkers like Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong-o. Baraka underscores the horrible life of poor blacks in USA when he observes that their “[h]eritage (constituted)) hysteria and madness, the old meat smells and silent gray sidewalks of the North” (Reader 104).

Soon Baraka’s protagonist meets Peaches and Della, “two 17 year old whores strapped to negro weekends” (Reader 105). Describing Della as a “small tender flower. Covered with the pollen of desire. Ignorance. Fear of what she was[,]” Baraka moves on with a fatter Peaches and delves into her world smelling of “despair and drunkenness. Silence and laughter, and the sounds of (her) movement under it. (Her) frightening li[fe]” (Reader 106). Although some may read misogyny in the way Baraka describes Peaches trying to seduce his over-fatigued self, it is evident that Baraka understands her hollow and desperate life: she only understands “her own whore’s bones telling her what to do”

(Reader 108). Moreover, even when he is “pounding flesh in her,” he is “spitting tears...hearing (him)self weep” (Reader 114). Escaping into Bottom after forced sex with Peaches, Baraka’s protagonist confronts the decayed morale of human beings, pushed to the extremes of misery and vile living: a man he runs into offers him sex, and when denied, the man keeps “yelling into the darkness in complete hatred of what was only some wraith.” Baraka emphasizes the dehumanization of such people by describing the desperate man’s scream “like some animal’s, some hurt ugly thing dying alone” (Reader 115). This observation not only points to Baraka’s compassion for the degraded condition of Bottom’s residents but it also extends his sympathy for prostitutes like Peaches who know no alternative to their grimy sordid lives. Lacey notes:

(t)he scenario of *The System* is, in large part, a swift, cinematically recollective romp through the Newark of the author’s youth. It ‘communicates,’ like Baraka’s poetry, by the vivid montage of scenes and characters. In the first pages we see images of the despised, spineless,neighbors of the narrator... (165)

Finally, when he leaves Bottom without informing Peaches, he “wanted to cry because (he) thot of the huge black girl watching her biscuits get cold” while waiting for his return (Reader 120). At the end of this section, in what seems to be a delirious dream, Baraka once again articulates his compassion for Bottom’s people when he says he “fell forward weeping on the floor” and awakes from a two-day long sleep, “screaming for God to help [him]” (Reader 121). Similar to Dhasal’s case, Baraka represents the sordid life of Peaches and in the process speaks *for* her. Although Peaches, like Mandakini, may not be in a position to articulate her own condition, it is important to keep Spivak’s warning in mind: the subaltern woman is always spoken for. Audre Lorde in her critical

evaluation of the 1960s' reminds the reader of the appropriation of *different* voices within the Black community: "...Black women were told that (their) only useful position in the Black Power movement was prone" ("Learning from the 60s" 456).

Nevertheless, out of his experience with and compassion for the degradation of fellow blacks, Baraka 'screams' in his frustration against the white world that has created such a condition for the poor urban blacks. He realizes that white colonialism in USA "purposefully, maliciously and with a reckless abandon relegated the black man to a subordinated, inferior status in the society" (Carmichael 23). Similarly, Dhasal urges Mandakini to resist her oppression by identifying her as the agent of change, as a "sword, the blood dripping from the neck" and as the "living lightning, and...the water in the bones" whose "dry-moist fingers" "Will turn the stone/Into platinum;/And (she)]will forget/[her] untimely/Slaughter" (60). From this point, both Dhasal and Baraka promote vengeful resistance against the oppressors through aggressive language and aim for what Sandoval refers to as "psychic emancipation" (xii, xiii). They assume violent masculinity in order to compensate for years of emasculation of their fellow subalterns. They challenge "dominant ideological forms through their deconstruction" thereby employing a major technology of the methodology of the oppressed (Sandoval 82,3). Dhasal writes "Man, You Should Explode" to encourage his fellow Dalits to question and defy the caste system and elitist politics that have subjugated a majority of the population in India. Similarly, Baraka writes "It's Nation Time" to call on Black people to claim their identity as Black and not "Negro" people by condemning the white supremacy. Fanon justifies the rightful aggression among the colonized when he writes that since the "colonial subject learns" first and foremost to "remain in his place and not overstep its limits," his

“dreams...are muscular..., dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality” (15). And these dreams Dhasal and Baraka translate into plausible social changes through their urgent, emphatic and virulent poetry.

Dhasal’s “Their Orthodox Pity” registers all that the Dalits are deprived of in their socio-political existence by the upper castes, the “feudal lords” (Dhasal 47). The Dalit-speaker articulates how categorically his fellow people are marginalized by those who have “locked all light in their vault” and “imposed” “this lower life” on them, the Dalits. Rendering them completely “helpless,” the higher castes do not even allow a “pavement” for the Dalits to tread on (traditionally, Dalits are not permitted to walk the road used by higher castes for fear of polluting the latter). Similarly, the Dalits cannot claim or “find even dust to fill up (their) scorched bowels.” The speaker underscores the strictly demarcated existence allowed the Dalits and laments the caste-ridden justice system that, like a “bribed person, favours only them (upper castes)/While we (Dalits) are being slaughtered” (47). In another poem, entitled “Water,” Dhasal comments on how “even water is taught the caste system” in that Dalits are not permitted to draw water from the wells (rural) and public taps (urban) used by higher castes even if extreme summer conditions have dried up the wells assigned to the Dalits. Dhasal highlights the lack of humanitarian feelings among the caste-conscious elites by juxtaposing the anguished plea of a thirsty Dalit

“O Lady give me some water, give me some water O Lady

Pour me a trickle, O Lady

My throat is parched.

O Big Brother, O village Patil,

O Master, O God My Lord,..."

with the cruel refusal from the upper castes:

Away, away, you daughterfucker,

You fistfucker, you shithead, you jerk,

You pedigreed bastard,

Get away, get away, you block in the way of water. (Dhasal 45-6)

Emphasizing the denial of basic civic rights Dhasal urges his fellow Dalits to take up arms against this oppressive caste super structure in his poem, "Man, You Should Explode"

"Man, you should keep handy a Rampuri knife

A dagger, an axe, a sword, an iron rod, a hockey stick, a bamboo

You should carry acid bulbs...." (Dhasal 34)

He encourages his people to demolish all institutions of political society that have only degraded the Dalits and refused to acknowledge them as fellow human beings

One should topple down streetlights

Smash up police stations and railway stations

One should hurl grenades; one should drop hydrogen bombs to raze

Literary societies, schools, colleges, hospitals, airports...(Dhasal 35)

An angry Dhasal attempts to galvanize the Dalits to raze all religious norms that aid in dehumanization to the ground

One should crumble temples, churches, mosques, sculptures, museums

One should blow with cannonballs all priests

And inscribe epigraphs with cloth soaked in their blood

Man, one should tear off all the pages of all the sacred books in the world...

(Dhasal 35)

Fanon aptly reminds us that the “Church in the colonies is a white man’s Church...(which) call[s] the colonized...to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor” (Fanon 7). Such institutions, therefore, must be demolished that propagate inequality among human beings. Dhasal, like Baraka discussed below, hopes to shatter dominant ideologies or what Roland Barthes aptly calls “speaking corpses” (Sandoval 90, 1).

Recalling the impunity with which upper castes sexually exploit Dalit women, Dhasal instigates the Dalits to avenge their mothers’, wives’, sisters’, and daughters’ humiliation by visiting the same horrors on the upper caste women.

“You should hump anyone’s mother or sister anywhere you can

Engage your dick with every missy you can find, call nobody too old to be screwed...

Perform gang rapes on stage in public...” (Dhasal 34)

Maybe then the upper castes will realize what helpless lower caste women and men experience when the former unleash their injustice. In my first chapter I have discussed how Phoolan Devi's humiliation was rendered a public joke in her village while her parents tolerated it silently.

Desecration of Dalit homes and women is a well-known crime that goes unpunished even today. Times of India reported an incident on 6th April, 2008, about a Dalit woman and her eighteen year old granddaughter being killed by "unidentified assailants" in their own house in the Ghatampur district in Kanpur, a major city in Uttar Pradesh ("Two Dalit Women Killed in UP"). Police are yet to bring the guilty to justice. Thus, law and order forces play accomplices to caste-based discrimination and violence. Hinting at such random atrocities Dhasal rouses the Dalits to "(r)emove sticks from anybody's fence and go in there to shit and piss, and muck it up..." (35).

Ultimately, Dhasal incites fellow Dalits to "Wage class wars, caste wars, communal wars, party wars, crusades, world wars" and "become totally savage, ferocious, and primitive/...and create anarchy" (35) in order to annihilate any form of discrimination exercised by elite state-culture-history sanctioned institutions against the subalterns. In Fanon's words, the "colonized subject" or the Dalits must recognize that the "skin (caste in this case) of the colonist is not worth more than the native's" and that the Dalit's "life is worth as much as the colonist's" and thus "prepa(re) to waylay (the colonizer)" by destroying his institutions that establish the difference and inferiority of the colonized subaltern (10).

Following such cleansing, such removal of hatred and suffering, Dhasal believes, people will be able to

...stop robbing anyone or making others their slaves

After this they should stop calling one another names – white or black, Brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya or shudra....

.....

One should share each morsel of food with everyone else, one should compose a hymn

To humanity itself, man, man should sing only the song of man. (Dhasal 36)

At the end of what shocked standardized Marathi literature, Dhasal propagates love and harmony to be shared by all, irrespective of caste, color, and religion, thereby decolonizing the world and “remov(ing) its heterogeneity, by unifying it on the grounds of nation...” (Fanon 10). Dhasal believes that the “differential form of oppositional consciousness and social movement as the methodology of the oppressed....can generate a hermeneutics of love...” (Sandoval 10, 1). It is interesting to note that the very institutions that were scandalized by the violence propagated by Dhasal’s poetry were themselves culpable in creating and maintaining differences based on caste distinctions and often overlooked their caste-brothers’ dehumanization of a major section of the population. Just as European colonizers propagated the “missionary motive” to “‘civilize’...the underdeveloped, backward peoples” (Carmicheal 17) by massacring non-Europeans and were in turn repulsed by the ‘savage’ revolution of the colonized, the higher castes that abstained from killing animals for food did not even let “a sigh for us (Dalits) escape[] their generous hands” (Dhasal 47) and were equally appalled by the “obscene” idiom employed by Dhasal and other Dalit writers. Thus, subversion of

dominant ideologies is an effective “liberatory” tool “of deconstruction” in the hands of the subjugated (Sandoval 91, 2). Dhasal, like Baraka discussed below, “strike(s) out into the region....unrepresented and unrepresentable” by the elite, dominant “phrase regimen” by first undercutting and blasting its sterile complacency (Roney 425).

In the United States, Amiri Baraka, in his Black Nationalist phase, does not describe the suffering of his fellow blacks in urban USA anymore. Instead, he rouses Blacks to join in the destruction of the “whiteys” who have made living detestable for the blacks (Reader 224). As forthright as Dhasal, in “Black People!” Baraka invokes the treachery of the whites with respect to the flow of monetary resources in USA and instigates the blacks to wrest power from the whites, in one breath:

...money don't grow on trees no way, only whitey's got it, makes it with a machine, to control you you cant steal nothin from a white man, he's already stole it he owes you anything you want, even his life. All the stores will open if you will say the magic words. The magic words are: Up against the wall mother fucker this is a stick up! Or: Smash the window at night (these are magic actions) smash the windows daytime, anytime, together, let's smash the window drag the shit from in there. (Reader 224)

Baraka assures his primarily black readers that they must “make our (their) own World, man, our own world, and we can not do this unless the white man is dead. Let's get together killhim my man...let's make a world we want black children to grow and learn in...” (Reader 224).

Both Dhasal and Baraka employ what Sandoval defines as the “third ‘outer’ technology” of the methodology of the oppressed or “‘meta-ideologizing’” which is a

process of “appropriating the dominant ideological forms, and using them whole in order to transform them” in order to make “purposeful interventions in social reality” (82, 3). Thus, Dhasal chooses the “bibhatsa rasa” that “produces repulsive or nauseous feelings” from the nine rasas or “emotive stimuli” proposed by “Classical Sanskrit aesthetic theory” (Dhasal 11). The logic is that because Dalits are “‘loathsome’ . . . in the perception of the chaste and touchable caste Hindu,” a Dalit poet can only adopt this ‘rasa’ to express the loathed condition of his people. It will thus employ obscene and vile imagery that, although it will shock the elite, upper caste poetic sensibility by subverting their established norms, can be the only appropriate emotive stimulus to describe their degraded ethnic condition (Dhasal 12). Similarly, Baraka refuses to follow (white) standardized English grammar mechanics and successfully undermines the white establishment. He faithfully employs “the crackling and essentially poetic language of the streets” because his poetry is “directed to a black audience” (Lacey 93). Moreover, as argued by Patrick Roney, Baraka “sought an art form that would express the radical, singular *ethnicity* of African American existence” (407). Both poets “*unwork* the grounds and aims of (a touted) heritage (ideology) by the violent assertion of a (specifically ethnic) trace” (Roney 418) by projecting their “poetics” of the “black [and Dalit] idiom[s] as a new genre of discourse” (Roney 422).

Joint retaliation against a common oppressor is possible when the oppressed recognize potential in themselves and begin to see themselves differently from what they have been told by their oppressor, that is, not as inferior people. Carmichael and Hamilton emphatically state in *Black Power*:

Black people in the United States must raise hard questions, questions which challenge the very nature of the society itself: its long-standing values, beliefs and institutions. To do this, we must redefine ourselves. Our basic need is to reclaim our history, and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism, from the depredation of self-justifying white guilt...create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society...this is the first necessity of a free people... (34-35).

In an attempt to revive pride in one's racial heritage and history, one of the first steps to reclaim one's identity from the colonizer/oppressor's grip, Baraka reaffirms the beauty of black people who were rendered helpless in an alien land among alien people in his poem "Ka 'Ba." Baraka writes that "tho we (blacks) suffer, and kill each other/and sometimes fail to walk the air," referring to how black people in the 1960s were viewed by the whites, the blacks have a long history of beauty and creativity that were suppressed and misunderstood in the Americas, and something that contemporary blacks should revive and be proud of:

We are beautiful people

With African imaginations

Full of masks and dances and swelling chants...

Though we sprawl in grey chains in a place

Full of winters, when what we want is sun.

We have been captured,

Brothers. And we labor

To make our getaway..... (Reader 222).

Roney aptly sums up that Baraka's "Black Art seeks the radical newness of the post-Western by redoubling the search for a more original origin, one that was present before the latecomers from Athens and their progeny arrived on the scene to usurp the stage" (412).

Without delving into compassion for the degradation of the blacks, Baraka calls for unity among the blacks in his poem, "It's Nation Time." He urges all blacks to join hands because the "black man is the future of the world" (Reader 240). Fanon writes that the "colonized...is made to feel inferior, but by no means (is) convinced of his inferiority. He patiently waits for the colonist to let his guard down and then jumps on him. The muscles of the colonized are always tensed" as symbolized by the Black Power image of the clenched fist (16). Tracing the progress from humiliation, from 'niggers' and 'Negroes' to proud 'blacks,' Baraka instigates the blacks to shatter (white) public institutions that have held them down:

move

From crushed roach back

From dead snake head...

From dancing teeth and coward tip...

When the brothers strike niggers come out

Come out niggers

When the brothers take over the school

Help niggers

Come out niggers

All niggers negroes must change up

Come together in unity unify

For nation time

It's nation time

Boom

Booom

BOOOM

....

Dadadadadadadadadadad

...Boom. (Reader 240-41)

Baraka simulates armed resistance against the white oppressor in his onomatopoeic lines and corroborates Fanon's understanding of the reactionary readiness among the colonized. Just as lynching of blacks was a familiar terror-tactic employed by the whites, different forms of physical abuse were familiar experiences for the Dalits. In response to such mistreatment through history, Fanon reminds us that the "very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves with force" (42). Along with demolishing white monuments of authority, Baraka insists on a new identity for blacks, radically different from the submissive and docile "Negro." Carmichael and Hamilton justify that the term

“Negro” is “the invention of our oppressor; it is *his* image of us that he describes....From now on we shall view ourselves as African Americans and as black people who are in fact energetic, determined, intelligent, beautiful and peace-loving” (37-38). This parallels the Dalit initiative to rename themselves proudly as Dalit (literally, the broken), instead of succumbing to the pejorative ‘Untouchable’ and ‘Harijan’ as used by Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, Dhasal and Baraka, like the Black Power activists, examine their respective subaltern statuses “from the dominant viewpoint as well as from their own, shuttling between realities, their identities reformatting out of another, third site” (Sandoval 84, 5). This “third site” is the self-definition that the subalterns must be able to carve for themselves. These poet-activists combat what Baraka calls the “[white/upper caste] ‘denial of reality’” by undertaking the “far more difficult task of finding one’s place” (Roney 416). Moreover, this “third site” is identified as a “transgression” by Roney, or the “*unthought* that animates Baraka’s [and Dhasal’s]...poetry” (416).

However, both poets also recognize that the subalterns have “accommodated themselves to the racist [and casteist] system. They have capitulated to colonial subjugation in exchange for the security of a few dollars (meager livelihood through menial tasks) and dubious status” (Carmichael and Hamilton 14). In order to inspire the erstwhile “niggers” to claim their newer selves as fearless Blacks by breaking free of the shackles of racism, Baraka refers to several great spiritual leaders and Gods from across the world who were not white:

Christ was black

Krishna was black shango was black

Black jesus nigger come out and strike

Come out and strike boom boom

.....

Tear glasses off dead statue puppets even those

They imitate life

Shango budda black

Hermes rasis black

Moses Krishna

Black. (Reader 241)

Baraka hopes for a world in which all blacks will be united, where “brothers are we/with you and your sons your daughters are ours/ and we are the same, all the blackness from one allah/when the world is clear you’ll be with us...” (Reader 242).

Unlike Dhasal who envisions a world free of differences of any kind based on caste, color, and religion, Baraka invites all black people to unite under the umbrella of Islam and create their black nation:

“It’s nation time,...

It’s nation time, build it

Get up muffed dagger

.....

Get up got here bow

It’s Nation

Time!” (Reader 242).

Although slightly different in their calls for unification, both poet-activists call on their fellow subalterns to unite against the caste and race supremacists. Because distinctions based on caste form part of institutionalized Hinduism, Dhasal wants to erase all religious reference in his envisioned world of equality. Baraka’s reference to non-white religious/spiritual leaders seems valid because although the Bible was used to justify slavery in America, there is no religious foundation for racism. So he tries to convince the Blacks of their inherent potential by citing examples of great spiritual leaders like Christ or Krishna or Buddha who were not white. This is Baraka’s attempt to decolonize the Black mind with the “desire to ‘raise the consciousness’ of a divided and debased people” (Lacey 94). This is corroborated by Carmichael and Hamilton:

It is absolutely essential that black people know (their) history, that they know their roots, that they develop an awareness of their cultural heritage. Too long have they been kept in submission by being told that they had no culture, no manifest heritage, before they landed on the slave auction blocks in this country... With redefinition will come a clearer notion of the role black Americans can play in this world. (38-39)

Dhasal and Baraka demonstrate to their fellow subalterns that their low-caste, polluted, and untouchable identity (for the Dalits) and their inferior racial identity (for the Blacks) are “cultivated by the colonizer (and) may be only an artifact engineered by that imagination to serve its own needs for superiority,” as reminded by Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (Sandoval 85, 6).

Both poets try to remind their fellow people of their humanity that was eroded by the supremacists, thereby instilling the motivation to embrace violence to make up for generations of helpless emasculation and low self-respect. Carmichael and Hamilton describe the mental climate of the blacks, and the same can apply to the Dalits' mental make-up in their caste-ridden Indian context:

From the time black people were introduced into this country, their condition has fostered human indignity and the denial of respect. Born into this society today (mid-twentieth century), black people begin to doubt themselves, their worth as human beings. Self-respect becomes almost impossible (29).

The violence Dhasal and Baraka's works evokes connotes the aggressive and critical questioning of the hegemonic controls. As artists, their writing serves the purpose of creative revolution against mental and physical oppression just as the "ecstasy of dance" in Fanon's account helps to channelize the "supercharged libido and the stifled aggressiveness" of the colonized. Like the violent imagery of maiming, killing, and raping in Dhasal and Baraka's poetry, "(s)ymbolic killing, figurative cavalcades, and imagined multiple murders" punctuate the colonized's group-dances in Fanon's colonized society (19-20). Roney aptly observes that "rather than serving as an ideological weapon in the struggle for change, revolution can only be justified by art, that is, as a creative act" (423). We must also remember that Dhasal and Baraka's poetry articulate the speech of the disempowered in their attempt at empowerment. But in embracing the rhetoric of violence are they repeating the violence they have suffered themselves? Their aggressive poetics perhaps enunciate their peoples' repressed and

rightful wrath, but are they reinforcing the cycle of violence? Are they reinscribing their disempowered status by adopting their oppressors' tools?

It is worthwhile to investigate if violence is the appropriate or justified response to violence. Violence perpetrated by the caste and race supremacists is an unpardonable fact; but violent reaction from the perennially subjugated will recreate a cycle of violence that will only intensify the hatred and distance between the groups. Although the poetics of Dhasal and Baraka breathe violence with a message for ultimate love and peace, one remains skeptical of their methodology. Audre Lorde warns: although the “Black Nationalist badmouthed the nonviolent” and “other strong Black workers...were racked and silenced” because their visions did not conform to the “raw energy of Black determination” and pledge for violence, many “high expectations of rapid revolutionary change did not in fact occur” (456-457). A similar evaluation of the Dalit Panther movement can be justified because atrocities against Dalits have not stopped, dalit men have silenced their own women, and the militant activities did not achieve anything concrete.

Nevertheless, while encouraging their fellow people to adopt a militant approach to their oppressors, both poet-activists pay tribute to their ideological gurus, B.R. Ambedkar for Dhasal and Malcolm X for Baraka. In “Ode to Dr. Ambedkar: 1978,” Dhasal enumerates how the Dalit leader challenged caste Hindu hierarchy:

You were strong enough to uproot mighty banyan trees.

You raised weapons

Not as mercenaries do;

You raised them against injustice.....

All these hollow folk-tales that speak of heaven and hell, karmic merit and the burden of sin;

You deprived the 33 crore sucker gods of their business making their shops empty...” (Dhasal 84)

Through this poem Dhasal not only pays tribute to Ambedkar but he also reminds his fellow-Dalits of the leader’s commitment to reviving their dignity and humanity. By challenging the age-old socio-cultural hegemony of caste, which is as firm and deep-rooted as the banyan tree, Dhasal reminds us, Ambedkar was resolved to shatter the unjust caste system that degraded human beings in order to seek justice and humanitarian rights for his fellow-Dalits. Along with praising Ambedkar for standing up against traditional caste discrimination, Dhasal castigates the Hindu pantheon of 33 crore gods and the commercial practice of Hinduism that mistreats Dalits as non-humans. Reducing gods to “business” Dhasal underscores the malpractices of Hindu upper caste priests, the Brahmins, and questions Hinduism’s essence as a religion.

Similarly, in “A Poem for Black Hearts” Baraka reminds his fellow-Blacks of Malcolm’s dedication to the cause of their equality and dignity: “...For Malcolm’s/pleas for your dignity, black men, for your life,/black man, for the filling of your minds/with righteousness...” (Reader 218).

Baraka refers to Malcolm X’s “eyes,” “hands raised to bless,” “words/fire darts,” “heart,” and “pleas” that worked relentlessly only to raise the dignity of the denigrated African Americans. Malcolm, like Ambedkar in India, attempted to “rais[e] us (blacks) above our

filthy cities” in order to revive self-respect among the blacks and to make them recognize the wrongs the “grey monsters of the world” visited upon them (Reader 218).

Both the poets salute the agents of change these two leaders have been and try to instigate the same vigor, courage, and motivation among the people in order to continue the leaders’ legacies. Dhasal traces the origin of revolt in Ambedkar’s work to demanding a radical change in the Dalit condition:

You let the volcano of revolt become active.

Yours was not a blind revolt.

It was for changing oneself, for changing the world.

New eyes; a new heart.

You believed in awakening; not in terrorizing. (Dhasal 84)

Similarly, Baraka concludes that Malcolm’s agency for change irked the supremacy enough to kill him and silence the demand for change in the black condition: “...the victor’s tireless/thrusts, words hung above the world/change as it may, he said it, and/for this he was killed, for saying,/and feeling, and being/change, ...” (Reader 218).

Just as Baraka calls Malcolm a “black god of our time” (Reader 218), Dhasal identifies Ambedkar as one who “created a bend in history that was difficult to achieve – an outstanding feat/.../You stand shining in front of us./You did not allow us to remain mystified” (Dhasal 83). Both leaders hoped to forge a change in the thinking of their fellow subalterns so that the latter could dismantle the self-images handed down to them by their oppressors. The colonized mind is so overwhelmed by the colonizer’s definition that renegotiating self-identity becomes a crucial task for the decolonialist. Both poets

identify a source of empowerment in the two decolonialist leaders. Dhasal and Baraka, ardent followers of their respective leaders and firm believers in justice and humanity, urge their fellow people to embrace the examples set by the leaders and to progress toward self-pride and a new identity. What the two poets are essentially doing through their art is helping the “subjugated classes” identify the “artifacts” constructed by the supremacists and then guiding them to deconstruct them to allow the “social projection (the meta-ideologization) of new and revolutionary meaning system” in order to “ensure survival of the powerless” and to “induce social justice” (Sandoval 85, 6).

Both poets employ aggressive language to urge their fellow subalterns to rise above their degraded state and complaints and be inspired by the leaders’ sacrifices. It is arguable that such employment of aggressive diction and tone reveal a level of frustration with accommodationist and peaceful attempts of earlier generations and the continuing dehumanization of the people. Carmichael and Hamilton emphasize in very clear terms their agenda as practitioners of Black Power:

Those of us who advocate Black Power are quite clear in our own minds that a ‘non-violent’ approach to civil rights is an approach black people cannot afford and a luxury white people do not deserve....White people must be made to understand that they must stop messing with black people, or the blacks *will* fight back! (Black Power 53; emphasis in the original)

Such a combative tone perhaps shatters the preceding voicelessness of the subalterns and functions as a clarion call for violent opposition to injustice. Dhasal proclaims the caste hierarchy as a chronic disease in India’s psyche that must be uprooted in order for the country to progress. While Dhasal reminds fellow Dalits of their equal rights as human

beings, Baraka warns his fellow African Americans of the irreversible degradation they will bring upon themselves if they fail to continue Malcolm's example of wrenching identity and pride for themselves from the white grip. Thus, for both poets, the "technique of artistic production...both repeats and destroys the basis of the American [and Indian] experience, indeed by destroying its very status as a universal basis" (Roney 417).

Dhasal writes:

“Are they (upper castes) the only ones who've come forth from a human mother's womb?

Are the rest of us the progeny of cats and dogs?

What sort of an illusion is it in which they live?" (Dhasal 82)

Baraka, on the other hand, pushes Blacks to follow Malcolm's legacy:

For all of him, and all of yourself, look up,

Black man, quit stuttering and shuffling, look up,

Black man, quit whining and stooping, for all of him.....

.....let us never breathe a pure breath if

We fail, and white men call us faggots till the end of

the earth. (Reader 218)

Lacey rightly observes that "Malcolm's *manhood*.... - is held up as a challenge to black men. It is the standard to which the 'victims' must aspire. The poem ends with a clarion

call of mounting intensity, with staccato challenges....(and) (t)he poet implores the black man to discard the old images, the old masks” imposed by white oppressors (107).

Instead of nostalgically appreciating and acknowledging the leaders’ contributions, both Dhasal and Baraka employ a bold, belligerent, challenging tone and voice to remind the supremacies that violence is the appropriate weapon of the oppressed and it will be wielded in order to reclaim the dignity of human life, the sole motivation that guided these two remarkable leaders of the oppressed. Baraka’s exhortation to his fellow black people articulates Black Power as preached by Malcolm X and as defined by Carmichael and Hamilton:

(It) calls for black people to consolidate behind their own, so that they can bargain from a position of strength...(and whose) ultimate goals are not domination or exploitation of other groups, but rather an effective share in the total power of the society....The goal of Black Power is positive and functional to a free and viable society. (47-48)

The same sense of empowerment, achieved not at the cost of another group’s rights, underlies Dhasal’s encouragement to his fellow Dalits to take charge of their lives by challenging the supremacist caste system like their leader Ambedkar. It also forms the ultimate message of his poem “Man, You Should Explode” discussed above.

By employing extreme masculine images of brutal rapes and torture, of wielding weapons of destruction, both these poets are trying to reclaim the emasculated subaltern’s masculinity. Through violent imagery the two poets become spokesmen for the revolutionary time of the late 1960s and 70’s when the oppressed people in the two countries actively sought a new self-definition by tipping the balance of power not

through negotiations but through armed rebellion, through urgent demands for political and humanitarian rights. While Dhasal met the then Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and discussed the state of the Dalits that needed immediate attention, Baraka through his BART/S (The Black Arts Repertory Theater/School) staged politically-charged plays and public readings of his poetry to address Blacks as well as the whites of the ongoing oppression that needed immediate deliverance. The subaltern figure, although only male, actively engages with the praxis of “political intervention” (Sandoval 90, 1) by first destabilizing the status quo of caste and race relations and then by establishing a hermeneutics of love, “hope, and transformative resistance” but at the cost of their women counterparts (Sandoval xii, xiii).

Although I conclude this essay with the contention that the poets are attempting to repay the masculine fear and violence the caste and race supremacists have visited on the subalterns, it is obvious that they have ignored the subaltern women and their double repression in terms of caste and race and gender. Also, the praxis of ‘eye-for-an-eye’ tends to perpetuate the cycle of brutality and may fail to achieve peace and love that Dhasal’s poetics seems to envision. The blatant sexism experienced by women Black Panthers cannot be ignored. Paula Giddings in *When and Where I Enter* demonstrates how Black women in SNCC took a long time to resist the sexism they encountered from Black men because for them the race issue was more pressing than that of gender. Similarly, the sexism the white women encountered led them away from the Black movement and they concentrated their energies on the white feminism of the 1960s that eventually shared the same radicalism and media attention as the Black movement. Effectively, Black women were caught between the two movements neither of which

would allow them their deserved spaces. Similarly, when Angela Davis made headlines by being included in the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted List," many white feminists angrily protested and declared that "Angela Davis has nothing to do with the women's liberation" (Giddings 305). Moreover, the rise of the white feminist movement undermined the Black movement and the Black women effectively became very sensitive to the "issue of Black unity" (Giddings 309). While Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver advocated the "rape of White women as a justifiable political act" Kathleen Cleaver, wife of the latter, acknowledged that women's issues required a consolidated struggle based on the sexism women faced and not be restricted to racial identity although she was mindful of the fact that white and Black women could not rally for the same causes because their experiences were vastly different (Giddings 310-311).

Giddings also notes that male chauvinism sharpened its claws within the Black movement in tandem with its deterioration. She cites the example of Martin Luther King Jr.'s discomfort among "assertive women" (312). In the late 1960s when the "*machismo* of leather-jacketed young men, armed to the teeth" defined the Black Power movement and took the United States and the world at large by storm, the women Panthers, like Davis, Kathleen Cleaver, Gloria Richardson, among others went comparatively unnoticed because they had to "genuflect" to the men when they voiced their opinions or were called "castrators" (Giddings 316-317). Black Panther women either had to remain silent and submissive and follow the men around (as Amiri Baraka insisted) or embrace harsh sexism from their fellow male Panthers. *The Crisis* also noted, in Sonia Pressman's words, that "the rights of Black people (implied)...the rights of Black men" (Giddings 319).

In India, the Dalit scene differs in the sense of not having the longevity and impact that the Black Power movement had in the United States. However, a similar sexism seems to have dominated the movement. Only Dhasal and his co-founder Arjun Dangle and their male colleagues are mentioned in any study of the Dalit Panthers and no women are ever mentioned. It is well-known that Mallika Dhasal, wife of Namdeo Dhasal, was equally active in the movement but her contributions are never acknowledged. In an interview with V.S. Naipaul in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* she revealed how she tolerated Dhasal's multiple outrageous extramarital relationships, frequent and obsessive visits to brothels, his contraction of venereal disease, and violent mood swings. In fact, her autobiography exposes a lot of contradictions in the Dalit Panther movement. Very similar to the Black Panther movement, the chauvinism in its Dalit counterpart coexisted with their demands for equality and human dignity. The forceful assumption of agency through protests and revolutionary art to demand human rights and dignity for the long-oppressed Blacks and Dalits was accompanied by a simultaneous suppression and silencing of the women of the respective groups. The male representers/intellectuals silenced the women and appropriated their voices, as Spivak warned against.

Conclusion

Literature of the Subaltern in a Transnational Context

In the Introduction to *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories: Investigations from India and the USA*, Gyanendra Pandey charts the conversation his volume initiates on issues of “marginality, citizenship, and history” by examining “subalternity” in two very different locations, the USA and India (1). While both countries have distinct trajectories of historical, political, economic, and cultural development, both societies are marked by “extreme inequality” (2). Both nation-states play important global roles as major democracies and both are extremely “hierarchical” (2). The institutions of slavery and racism in the United States have their parallel in the caste system and notions of untouchability, purity and pollution in India. Although the socio-political structures of race and caste operate differently in the respective societies, the resulting effects of discrimination, humiliation, unequal opportunities and subordination affect the lives of the disempowered in similar ways. However, just as African Americans are not the only minority group in the USA that bears the burden of historical subjugation, Dalits or ex-untouchables in India are not the only group that faces discrimination in India. Nevertheless, it is informative to comparatively study these two groups’ experiences not only because of the actual historical exchanges between scholars and activists from these two groups but also because the sin of slavery in USA and that of untouchability in India tend to inform the received interpretations of these two countries’ histories.

The historically suppressed groups live the legacies of exclusion based on their race (USA) and caste (India). Their identities are refracted by the histories of their oppression in their respective societies. They constitute the ‘Others’ of their respective nation-states. Since subalternity denotes the condition of having lived in or still inhabiting spaces marked by difference and exclusion in a society, Pandey advocates for the Subaltern Studies’ perspective of examining the history of African Americans in USA, as several Latin American Subalternist scholars have undertaken in the context of their societies and cultures. It is perhaps futile to argue whether African Americans are subalterns in USA or not since they struggle under the domination of their domestic elitist hegemony, much like the Dalits in India.

Social hierarchy always disrupts and fractures the family structures of the subjugated. African American scholars have noted how the emasculated black male often cannot take responsibility for his wife and children owing to the debilitating effect of racism. Women defend their positions but encounter both racism and sexism. The children are caught in the web of these socio-historical forces and fail to understand them. In the Dalit scene, the men face denigration outside the home and attempt to re-enforce their male prerogatives on the women who struggle against sexism from Dalit men and sexual exploitation from upper caste men. Once again, children are victimized by these social forces. Since endogamy forms the foundation of the caste system, exogamic marriages take their toll on the transgressive women and their children.

I examine the above mentioned situations in my four chapters and discuss how the two subaltern peoples negotiate the complicated forces of repression and exclusion they encounter in their respective societies and how successful resistance to oppression

coexists with the silencing of subalterns. I also engage with the question of responsible representation because literature embodying these experiences is often written/composed by the not-subaltern among them. What is the elite/intellectual's responsibility? Keeping in mind Spivak's contention that the subaltern is always spoken for, I critique in Chapter I the re-presentations of an African American woman and a Dalit woman and the roles of the de-facto and de-jure representers. In Chapter II, I discuss the silenced agencies of extraordinary subaltern mothers that are re-created by responsible intellectuals. Without the intervention of the intellectuals, like the Subalternist historians, the less-important (in the respective national imaginations) narratives may be lost forever. Chapter III focuses on the survivor adults' re-presentation of the traumatic experiences of their childhood in which the less-resilient subaltern children were silenced. In my last chapter I highlight the repressed rage of subaltern men who forcefully attempt to claim their identities and rights from the supremacists through violent and aggressive poetics. But at the same time these hyper-masculine self-representers silence their female counterparts.

Audre Lorde points to the responsibility each member of any oppressed group must take in order to bring the cycle of repression and violence to a close. It is not enough to resist the oppressor; it is important to pay heed to the silenced among the oppressed. The role of the representer, both in the capacity as subaltern-participant as well as a scholar-critic, becomes important because ignoring the silenced involves perpetuation of oppression. By ignoring or silencing the less-articulate or weaker members of the oppressed group, the speakers of and from the same groups will destroy each other and not serve the purpose of alleviating the groups' conditions (458-461). The intellectuals from or outside the groups must be alive to the delicate balance they must

engage with when they begin to re-present their fellow subalterns. While Spivak insists that the intellectual should not “abstain from representation,” s/he must not essentialize the subaltern experience or consciousness which runs the risk of silencing the subaltern. In my first and fourth chapters I demonstrate how the act of representation, with all good intentions, can jeopardize the subaltern voice or agency because the intellectual re-presenters silence the subalterns (Chapter I) and fellow subaltern women (Chapter IV). The third and fourth chapters engage with the responsible representers who are alert to the pitfalls of essentialism and instead attempt to revive silenced tales of subaltern agency (Chapter II) and bear witness to acts of silencing (Chapter III) ((Gopal 148-149).

“Speaking” Subalterns as Comparative Literature

Marian Galik in “Interliterariness as a Concept in Comparative Literature” defines “interliterariness” as the “basic and essential quality of literature in an international and inter-ethnic context” that in a “global [process]...leaves aside the purely ethnic or national aspects of literatures...and focuses on trans-ethnic, trans-national, and lately on the geoliterary development as a whole.” Interliterariness is primarily concerned with “a literary fact or a phenomenon as the most basic element of literature and of its study” and is produced by “an extra-ethnic or extra-national character..., surpassing the confines of ethnic, national, or single literatures” (35-37). Since literature written by, for, and of the marginalized encapsulate the fundamental questions of human life, dignity, repression, resistance, agency, and identity, a comparative reading of literatures of two oppressed peoples, African Americans and Dalits, reveals their value as literary texts that articulate parallel experiences of dispossession and struggle. A comparative reading of these two

literatures reveals the interliterariness of literature that has become the focus of Comparative literature study today.

My Voice/Positionality

Spivak reflects upon the Subaltern Studies and states that the group of scholars “never presupposed a consciousness for ‘their own group’, but rather for their object of investigation, and for the sake of the investigation” (Mapping 332). Spivak points to the motivation and responsibility of the intellectual-representers in their engagement with the subalterns. The historians, in her description, engaged in a “strategic use of essentialism” in order to retrieve the silenced voices and consciousness (Mapping 333). But referring to her recent work with adivasis (tribal groups often identified as the indigenous/aboriginal people of India) in Bengal, along with Mahasweta Devi, as a “resident teacher-trainer” Spivak postulates a reason to work with subalterns: “learning to learn from below” (Mapping 333-36). She asks if her deep involvement in the “grain of their lives” is a “requirement for good history writing” (Mapping 336). She thus problematizes the position of the intellectual vis-à-vis the subaltern in her or his engagement with and representation of the subaltern. How far or how close should the intellectual be from the circumstances of the subalterns in order to engage with their representation, including a critique of already existing representations of the subalterns?

In an essay mentioned earlier, “Voices from the Edge” Pandey writes about the historian’s “ability to hear” the voices embedded in the ‘traces’ or ‘fragments’. I extend the “ability” to a ‘desire to hear’ those unrecorded voices and experiences in my examination of the re-presentation of the subaltern, whether by a subaltern or by an elite. I am deeply conscious that there can be no direct dialogic relationship between me, the

literary scholar, and the represented subaltern because of the matrix of narratives and widely different scripts that inform their representation and my access to their representation. I am aware of the limitations of and accountability involved with the issue of retrieval of subaltern voice in representation. While espousing ‘concern for the disprivileged’ can ring of elitist detachment and privileged distance, I cannot extricate my scholarly interest from my firm faith in social justice. It is a risk worth taking.

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About the Author

Mantra Roy was born in India and came to the United States for her Ph.D. She holds her Bachelors and Masters degrees from one of the premier institutes in India, the University of Calcutta. Her scholarly interests include Postcolonial Theory and Feminist Studies, African American literature and culture, South Asian literature, Hollywood and Indian cinema, Diaspora, and Comparative and Transnational Studies. She enjoys reading, watching movies, painting, and listening to music. She loves to cook for family and friends. She believes in building relationships across national and cultural boundaries.