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**Mahasweta Devi Giving Voice to the Voiceless with Special Reference to  
Subaltern Studies**

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**Lead In:**

Post-colonial studies examine how personal and collective identities are impacted by the cultural displacements caused by imperial conquests and dominance. It poses a threat to the hegemonic position of the governing forces, as well as the value system that upholds imperialism on every different level. To be more specific, the concerns it addresses include racial and ethnic diversity, language, gender, identity, social status, and, most importantly, power.

The Palestinian-American critic Edward Said's book "Orientalism," published in 1978, represents the beginning of the field of postcolonial studies. Bhabha is another prominent postcolonial theorist who examines the occurrences of cultural exchanges between conquerors and colonized people. It was Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak is the third most



prominent postcolonial critic. He is attempting to bring to light the colonized people who have been forgotten or ignored throughout history (written by the mainstream) because they were either hushed or denied the opportunity to make their voices heard. She draws attention to the predicament of the colonized as a whole, who are oppressed, unheard, exploited, and silenced; nevertheless, she observes that women are doubly unheard and invisible in patriarchal cultures. Spivak was the first postcolonial thinker unafraid to speak up and had a feminist objective.

"Deconstructing Historiographies" and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" are two of Spivak's most prominent writings, in which she raises issues about the feasibility of giving a voice to those who do not have one. To accomplish this goal, she moved her focus from modern literature to "comparative literature." She translated books from the Third World into English for English-speaking scholars from the First World. Spivak is a remarkable postcolonial translator, and her feminist approach has magnetically drawn her fellow Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi. Mahasweta Devi is working and writing to give voice to those who are voiceless, disregarded, overlooked, and bypassed to put them on the boundaries of acceptability. Spivak is an extraordinary postcolonial translator.

### **History of Subaltern Studies:**

"The word has a protracted history." In late medieval English, it was used to describe peasants and vassals. Its usage to denote lower ranks in the military by the year 1700 provided more evidence that it had peasant roots. Authors who penned works "from a subaltern perspective" during the beginning of the nineteenth century chronicled and fictionalized Indian and American wars. A master of the genre, G.R. Gleig (1796–1888) wrote biographies of Thomas Munro, Warren Hastings, and Robert Clive. Class struggle theory was begun by Antonio Gramsci (1891–1973) shortly after the Russian Revolution to include ideas of subaltern identity. Memoirs and diaries written by soldiers during the Great War reveal their experiences as marginalized individuals. (All of a sudden)



This passage from David Ludden does a good job of providing essential information on the history of Subaltern Studies. Initially, this word did not deal with any classes of people or any components of society that conflicted with one another. Regarding lower ranks in the peasants and the military, it was thus. By the 1800s, intellectuals had begun to think about the concerns of society from what is known as "a subaltern perspective." Antonio Gramsci (1891-1973) was the first person to bring attention to and explain subalternity in the form of class conflict.

Gramsci discusses the importance of art and culture in relation to the duality of power. There are two parts to his strategy for exerting influence. The first is the state, which is also called the ruling class and is in charge of keeping the other classes in their place. The second is the community at large, which encompasses various ideological institutions, including libraries, schools, and churches.

To maintain the same level of subordination, the ruling class or state does not resort to oppression; rather, it involves convincing the ruled class to consent to be controlled by its organic intellectuals. The subservient class must develop their intellectuals through education to end this ideological tyranny. Additionally, they must be required to establish their cultural hegemony.

Edward Said was the first of many writers who have contributed significantly to what is now known as "the history from below." This list includes Bhabha, Ranjit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Gyanendra Pandey, David Hardiman, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The anthology of essays that Ranjit Guha and seven of his friends started publishing under the title Subaltern Studies: Writing on South Asian History and Society got underway. From 1982 forward, Guha oversaw the editing of the annual volumes. His 1983 masterpiece Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India is his second book.



## Spivak and Subaltern Studies:

Spivak asserts in an interview with Leon De Cock that,

A subaltern is not only a fancy name for those who are oppressed, those who are different, or those who are not getting their fair share of the pie...In postcolonial concepts, a subaltern—a space of difference—has little or no access to the cultural imperialism prevalent in the world. Many persons claim to be subalterns. They offer the least amount of interest and pose the greatest threat. I mean, they do not even need to use the phrase "subaltern" because they are already harming the minority population on the university campus. It would be beneficial for them to investigate the mechanisms behind the discrimination. Let them talk and use the dominant discourse since they are a part of the hegemonic discourse and want a piece but are not permitted to have it. They absolutely must not refer to them as subalterns. (Spivak) Spivak is an exceptional postcolonial translator whose feminist approach magnetically attracts her compatriot Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi. Mahasweta Devi is working and writing to give voice to those who are voiceless, neglected, ignored, and bypassed to put them on the margins of respectability. Spivak is a translator as well. The literary body of work that Devi has produced can satiate Spivak's need for socially committed literature. In her interview with the **Times of India on January 5, 2000**, Mahasweta Devi shared the following statement:

“My social activism is the driving force of all my literary activities.”

Further, she writes in her Introduction of the ‘Five Plays’ that, (pg. viii-ix)

Since we are at a pivotal time in history, a responsible writer must take a position in favor of those who have been exploited. It is almost unlikely that history will ever forgive him...What I want is for the current social structure to undergo a transition...My people are still suffering from starvation, landlessness, debt, and bonded labor, even though we have been independent for thirty-one years. A bright, searing, and intense rage was aimed against a system that has failed to release my people from these restraints. This anger is the only source of inspiration for all of my writing.



Because literature is a "responsible act" from historical commitments, it must be produced from a particular political stance to accomplish the goal of transforming the unjust social system. It is a forceful and politically committed message supporting the subaltern made via her literary works. Her creative writings go beyond the boundaries of what is considered to be traditional literature and instead offer themselves as potent sociopolitical and historical tracts. By defying the traditional literary ethos of "art for art's sake," she links herself with the second trajectory of literature, "art for life's sake." According to this trajectory, literature is a political act, and how it conveys meaning originates from its engagement with life.

How Mahasweta addresses the topic of "Nation" in her writings comes from a multi-faceted perspective. In her analysis, she provides a critique of the "construction" of the nation's political constitution, as well as the socio-religious-economic constitution. Her criticism of the political "Constitution of India" is based on the fact that it only provides fundamental rights and representation to the marginalized in the legal system, but not in practice. The writings of Mahasweta, in addition to contesting the constitutionality of the nation-state, also raise questions about the nation-state's purportedly contemporary, progressive, and developmental features. In destroying the pristine countryside and robbing it of all its beauty, the misguided concept of national "development" puts the region's natural balance in jeopardy and deprives the local population of their fundamental means of subsistence.

After seizing the land, the indigenous people's most valuable property, the capitalist and nationalist forces further consolidated their control over the indigenous people. The 'other-ed' society in India has been the subject of Mahasweta's writings and political activism. The treatment of this sub-country by the ruling Indian national state is a central theme in her writings. The sub-country's population is roughly 67.6 million, or around 8% of India's overall population. Her pure, smoldering wrath is a reaction to the government's imbalanced and repressive apparatus, which sometimes results in the sacrifice of their lives (the lives of tribal members). This shocks Devi's compassionate heart, and she communicates her pain with a blend of anger and conflicting feelings about her willingness to embrace justified violence in that specific situation. She states in Bitter Soil's preface, "The major purpose of my work is to portray the numerous faces of the exploitative agencies...As a result of my life



experiences, I cannot help but be enraged and scathingly critical of individuals or systems that take advantage of others. The mainstream media's continued utter lack of awareness of the situation in the tribal area has only served to fan the flames of anger. I hold the view that violence and anger are legitimate, which is why "I peel the mask off the face of India that is projected by the Government, to expose its naked brutality, savagery, and caste and class exploitation; and place this India, a hydra-headed monster, before a people's court, with the people being the millions of people who are oppressed."

Her aesthetics are closely intertwined with activism; in fact, her activism serves as the defining premise of her aesthetics. She sees her art as a platform to negotiate with the country. "I have never had the capacity nor the urge to create art for the sake of art," she says in the Introduction to her collection of five plays. Since I have not acquired any more beneficial skills, I have continued writing. I have discovered that the most effective method for protesting against injustices and exploitation is using accurate documents.

The purpose of Mahasweta's fictitious histories, such as Bashai Tudu, Rudali, Statue, and The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur, is to resuscitate and document the tribal conflicts and revolts that the official history of the nation has conveniently forgotten. Her essays, which come from a subaltern gender perspective, challenge the dominant historical assumptions of the mainstream. Her fiction undermines the fundamental principles that underpin the dominant and nationalist history by highlighting the obvious reality that it only portrays a portion of the population and, as a result, does not portray a significant number of various "other" groups. She chronicles the nation's history by re-presenting it from the perspective of the subaltern, the Dalit, and the tribal people.

In an interview with Angela Ingram, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states: "Another thing I felt while I was in India was the difference in the women's movement." It is much more concerned with issues that are problematic for women, and I must stress that it also encompasses issues that are not limited to those that are problematic for women. They go beyond that and confront the issues when it comes to the sort of problems that are different from the difficulties that women's groups could have or the problems that women as a gender face. Moreover, I was much more interested in such people, not as a spectator but more in



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terms of wanting to connect with them, wanting to be their buddy, and trying to be one of them. The job, for instance, that I perform in a non-significant capacity as a type of Mahasweta Devi's hunch-woman with the indigenous people is something that I felt deeply about.





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