The word 'subaltern' is basically a term for subordinates in military hierarchy, so for as its literal meaning is concerned. It is almost a synonym to the proletariat. From the Post-colonial perspective, the subaltern refers to persons, socially, politically and geographically outside the hegemonic power centres, isolated from the mainstream of life. It also refers to any persons or group of inferior rank and status whether because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. In Post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern. Homi Bhaba, emphasizes the importance of social power relations in his working definition of subaltern groups as: "Oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority groups: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power."1

Post-colonialism is an attempt to undo the effect of Colonialism on cultures. Its chief concern is to give voice to the voiceless. This is especially true of those voices that have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies. It also aims at effectively and fairly incorporating the subaltern voice into social studies. Post-colonialism is concerned with decolonizing the future and changing the colonial mindset. The critical nature of Post-colonial theory consists of destabilizing, mitigating or even subverting the Western ways of thinking, therefore, creating space for the subalterns or marginalized groups to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse. Post-colonialism as a literary theory deals with the literature produced in the countries which once were the colonies of other countries, especially of the European powers, Britan, France and the Netherlands, etc. During the Colonial period, the colonizers suppressed the colonies in different ways. The colonizers imposed their cultural values on them. The same suppression is also prevalent in present times with a difference in various forms, viz, suppression of the marginalized section of the society, such as, women, dalits, tribals, etc. and above all- the subaltern. This kind of suppression existed before the Independence and it still persists. The suppression of dalits, the landless peasants and the underdogs of the society gave rise to various reactionary outfits like the Naxals and the Maoists. They were once suppressed and now with their separatist movements, they pose a grim threat to our integrity. Such elements are supported by foreign elements inclined to disrupt and destabilize the democratic fibre of the country.

In the light of the Post-colonial theory, the Subaltern study may include on humanitarian and democratic grounds, dalits, tribals, landless laborers, women and other marginalized, underprivileged and oppressed sections of the society. They have been at the receiving end since time immemorial. They have been the victims of injustice, socio-economic discrimination for ages. Their castes or class, being at the lowest rung of the society, has a direct bearing on their prospects. The subalterns have been the subject to the dominance of others.

In the context of tradition-ridden Hindu society, dalit status has often been associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such involving leatherwork, removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and waste besides doing other manual works. Dalits worked as labourers, cleaning streets and sewers as a result, they were commonly segregated and banned from participation in Hindu social life. They were not permitted to enter temples, nor to sit with class Hindu children in schools and were required to stay outside the village. Even an incidental contact of a dalit to a caste Hindu was considered an act of blasphemy.

So far as the religious position of the dalits in India is concerned, they were not allowed to touch Vedas and other Hindu scriptures. They were forbidden from worshipping in temples. They were also kept away from taking part in any religious activity. They were not even allowed to listen to the teachings contained in holy scriptures. They had to live under so many religious and social taboos.

All the cultures and societies, advanced or unadvanced, have certain power centres. The subaltern or marginalized groups have been strategically distanced from power centres. Deprived of any power socio-economic, political, and religious, they have always groped for identity. They live in physical and psychological ghettos. The social organizations in which they are imprisoned by customs and traditions build walls of segregation around them. Nevertheless, they have a quest for identity. They long to went out what is clamouring within.

In most of the world cultures, women are also taken as the subalternized lot of the society. Women have been standing at the crossroads of history for centuries. In a male-dominated world, they feel ignored and isolated. In Hindu Smritis, especially in Manu Smriti, women were relegated to an ignoble position. They were forbidden to touch the Holy Scriptures. The image of women in the entire world literature appears rather as an object of male desire or
on ideal supporter or assistant to a noble cause, dedicated to her male counterpart. Therefore, their position in a male-dominated society is no better than that of a subalterned entity. They have been the subject to the age-long male oppression and subjugation.

With the rise of democratic awareness and spread of education, things are improving though far from being satisfactory. The efforts of the democratic agencies, preaching of saints and, various social movements for reforms and contact with foreign awareness, have created an atmosphere to salvage the subalterned sections. In the same context Indian dalit writing emerging as a powerful voice claiming the rightful place for the dalits, is redefining the identity of the dalits and breaking the myth of the subaltern. It is a decisive step in this direction. Dalit literature focuses on the fundamental human values to establish secular values like individuality, identity, liberty, equality, fraternity, long denied to the dalits. Today, the dalit writing has attained the status of a distinct, creative world literature and highlighting the struggle of the human spirit against age-old oppression. Education and freedom of expression has given voice to the voiceless. The end of Colonialism has given birth to political awareness and freedom but things have not changed much to the expectations. Dalits’ journey from marginality to centrality is still in progress.

The theme of subaltern has always found an unmistakable echo in world literature, especially in the works of Post-colonial writers. Authors, social activists and political thinkers have raised their voice against oppression, exploitation, socio-economic and political discrimination and the sub-human treatment given to this most neglected group of society. Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Premchand, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Omprakash Valmiki, Baburoa Bagul, Anna Bhau Sathe, Bandhumadhav and Daya Pawar are all preoccupied with the theme of the subaltern. Afro-American writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison have also lodged their protest against this sub-human treatment given to the ‘other’. Mahatama Gandhi began his struggle against the imperialist rule in South Africa where he protested against the dehumanizing system of the apartheid. Nelson Mandela also fought a long battle against racial discrimination.

Mulk Raj Anand, Mahasweta Devi and Premchand, the authors chosen to carry out the proposed study, write in three different tongues. They belong to different geographical regions,
different cultures, different backgrounds and different ages yet with the same motto. Mulk Raj Anand writes in English, Premchand, in Hindi and Mahasweta Devi, in Bengali. Besides, these linguistic differences dissimilarities one thing that binds them together is their very Indian sensibility which they depict in their fiction. Their treatment of the proletariat or the marginalized in their works strikes a responsive chord with us. The protagonists of their novels are, by and large, rebels. They break away with traditions. When the subaltern characters of their novels speak, the entire world wakes up to life. What is striking about them is, their concern for the deprived and the exploited sections of the society. Themes pertaining to the issues related to the subaltern find an unmistakable echo in most of their works.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), is a prolific and highly instinctive writer of Indian writings is English. He along with Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan forms a trinity of Anglo-English fiction. He is preoccupied with the predicament of the underprivileged and the oppressed sections of the society. Therefore, he strove to project the problems, conflicts and aspirations of the subaltern through his work.

In Coolie (1936), Anand depicts a very moving picture of the proletarian hero as a hapless victim of the social system. Munoo, the protagonist, is an orphan hill boy. He leaves his village to see the world with his own eyes. But his very first encounter with reality turns out to be a nightmare. He works as a domestic help in a clerk's house. The ill-treatment of his employers makes him leave the place. He next works in a pickle factory but his bad luck continues to dog him. He is forced to leave his job and becomes a coolie and here he toils hard from dawn to dusk in adverse conditions. Then, he starts working in a cotton mill. He is knocked down by the car of an Anglo-Indian lady who takes him to simla as her servant. Here, he plies rickshaw for his mistress and dies of tuberculosis.

Another novel of Anand, Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), deals with the theme of the oppression of the poor. It tells the story of a peasant who tries to protect his daughter from being molested by a British soldier. Set in a tea plantation in Assam, it depicts the concept of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and exploitation of one at the hand of the other in the Pre-Independence period. The novel is a pathetic story of a labourer, brutally exploited and killed by British officers. The novel shows the deep concern of the author for the immigration of the poor
and unemployed villagers to far off places of India to earn their bread.

Anand's *untouchable* (1935), narrates a day in the life of Bakha, an outcaste. He suffers a number of humiliations because of his law caste. Bakha, 18 is a proud, strong and able-bodied child of modern India, who thinks that he is superior to his fellow outcastes. However, being an outcaste, he does the work of cleaning latrines. Despite his sincere work, his family is subject to tortures inflicted by the other villagers. The novel was inspired by author's childhood memories of a low caste sweeper boy who carried him home after Anand suffered an injury. However, in return of his good work, the boy was humiliated by Anand's mother for making her son impure by his touch.

Premchand (1818-1936) occupies a unique place in world literature by virtue of raising the issues pertaining to the suffering humanity in his fictional works. He started writing novels and stories at a time when Hindi novel was struggling for recognition. Premchand was the first Hindi writer to represent dalit consciousness and the predicament of the subaltern much before the dalits started writing their own literature. In his novels and short stories, he has realistically portrayed the Indian peasants and dalits. His untouchables are extremely poor and below dignity in status. They are not permitted to enter high caste houses. They are prohibited from fetching water from the wells of caste Hindus besides entering Hindu temples. They have to live under lots of prohibitions and taboos.

The story *Thakur Ka Kuwan* deals with curse of untouchability. Ailing Jokhu, an untouchable, complains of the foul smell in the drinking water. Gangi, his wife, tries to fetch water from Thakur's well in vain. Jokhu is compelled to drink the stinking water. This shows the height of oppression which makes people like Jokhu is left with no choices but to drink water unfit for used for animals.

In Premchand's *Sadgati*, a short story, Dukhi, an untouchable visits a village Brahmin to request him to suggest an auspicious date for his daughter's marriage. The Brahmin exploits Dukhi and asks him to chop a log of wood. While chopping the wood, Dukhi dies of exhaustion. His dead body lies unattended. Late in the evening, the Brahmin ties a noose around his ankle, drags it out of the city premises and sprinkles holy water all over the road to cleanse it of untouchable's touch. Many of his short stories project the sad tale of the
subalternized human beings.

*Godan* (1936), is considered as the greatest classic Hindi novel of modern literature. It deals with the theme of socio-economic deprivation as well as the exploitation of the village poor. The protagonist, Hori, a poor peasant, desperately longs for owning a cow, a symbol of wealth and prestige in rural India. However, Hori gets his cow but pays a very high price for it. After his death, the village priest asks his widow to gift him a cow for the peace of Hori’s soul.

*Premashsam* (1922), another novel by Premchand deals with the exploitation of the peasants by landlords and petty officials. Manohar and his son, represent the spirit of revolt against exploitation. The trouble starts with a trivial incident when the peons of the village landlords demand *ghee* from the peasants. Except Manohar, everyone agrees to the dictate. Manohar’s ‘no’ invites the wrath of the entire machinery of the exploiters. The entire village is subjected to ruthless atrocities of the officers and their goons. Sukhi is sent to prison and Bhagat is flogged by the police. Manohar's wife is humiliated and disgraced in public. Unable to pocket this insult, Manohar kills the agent and then ends his life. Here, Premchand, paints a very harrowing picture of the atrocities committed by the police and officials on the subalternised villagers. Nevertheless, the echoes of resistance are also evident in this work.

Mahasweta Devi, (1926), a celebrated Bengali novelist, shot to sudden fame with the appearance of her masterpiece *Aranyer Adhikar*. She is known for her outstanding work related to the study of the untouchable communities, nomadic tribes and suffering masses of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, M.P. and Chhattishgarh. She often writes about the brutal oppression of the tribals, another significant entity of the subalternzed people of India and the untouchables by the atrocious upper class landlords, money lenders and government officials. Much of her creative writing is characterized by her unfailing commitment to and passion for the poor and the downtrodden. She believes that the real history is made by ordinary people- the subalterns. This is what she publically admits that the reason and inspiration for her works are those people who are exploited and yet do not accept defeat.

Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother* of 1084 (1975), is a haunting story of the traumatic experiences of a subalternized mother. The protagonist, Sujata, has been a witness to the situation during the suppression on Naxlite uprising in which her own son Brati, the corpse No.
1084 takes part and becomes a martyr. Sujata does not remain a passive sufferer. She decides to carry out the unfinished work of her son. Her struggle inspires others to revolt against the establishment that reduces young rebels to the level of a mere number given to the dead only to be identified by their mothers. The novel realistically portrays how the leaders with mass appeal were suppressed and eliminated in the Naxlite Movement. It shows how the economic exploitation and social discrimination in rural Bengal had drawn the landless peasants and the tribals to this violent movement.

Devi's *Bashi Tudu* deals with the plight of the dispossessed and displaced tribals who have been reduced to brutish existence. Bashai Tudu, the protagonist, a tribal revolutionary peasant, fights for the landless farm labourers during the hour of crisis. He wages a struggle for the rights of tribals, agitating for minimum wages, for water from the canals and also for setting free the bonded labourers. He continually challenges the oppressive system. In this novel, Devi artistically portrays gross discrimination, poverty and deprivation of the marginalized sections of the Indian society.

Mahasweta Devi’s *Titu, Mir* projects the tale of a powerful and strong subaltern hero who wages a revolt against the British in West Bengal. Titu Mir is very sensitive to all kinds of injustice. He cannot bear the rich zamidar’s servants or the police atrocities on the poor farmers and labourers. He fights for the rights of the common people—the innocent farmers, peasants, potters, weavers, etc. who suffer at the hands of the Zamidars, British officers and their agents. Titu Mir’s revolt is a revolt of the oppressed against the oppressers.

Three eminent Indian novelists have excelled in the art of story-telling by showing a sincere commitment to the underprivileged and marginalized sections of the society. They have covered a large area of Indian land by picking up the characters and situations pertaining to these classes in different languages. However, they have a deep concern for the suffering humanity by portraying different characters and situations. It is hoped that a deep study of their works keeping in view the subaltern discourse will open up a new vista of research.
Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

(a) To present an indepth critical analysis of the subaltern and examine its scope in Indian context.

(b) To investigate the factors affecting the psyches and the temperaments of the writers in question and the subsequent impact upon their creative features.

(c) To survey the state of the post-colonial novel in India.

(d) To expose the theme of the subaltern in the novels of the three writers.

(e) To evaluate the subalternized protagonists vis-à-vis the political and social scenario in India.

(f) To make a comparative study of these novelists in their approach and treatment of the subaltern.

Chapter-Scheme

1. Introduction: (a) Contemporary Milieu and Polito-Economic scene
   (b) Concept of Subalternity

2. Making of the Artists

3. The subaltern in Premchand’s Novels: Godan and Premashram.

4. The subaltern in Mulk Raj Anand’s Novels: Coolie, Untouchable, and Two Leaves and a Bud.

5. The subaltern in Mahasweta Devi’s Novels: Mother of 1084, Bashai Tudu and Titu Mir.


7. Conclusion.