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MAHASWETA DEVI'S HAJAAR CHURASHIR MAA  
(MOTHER OF 1084) AND JHUMPA LAHIRI'S THE LOWLAND :  
A STUDY OF FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NAXALITE  
MOVEMENT IN 1970S BENGAL



Manirul Islam

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most violent uprisings of India is the Naxalite movement of Bengal in the 1970s. The term Naxalite derives from a small village in North Bengal, Naxalbari where the movement was initiated. Driven by the visionary zeal of two radicals Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal and led by the maverick local leader Jangal Santhal, a number of landless peasants in Siliguri revolted against the landlords demanding redistribution of lands. This event sparked off violent reactions in various parts of Bengal and gradually spread to other states of India as well. The revolutionary ideologies of Mao Zedong, more popularly known as Mao Tse Tung, the Chairman of The Communist Party of China, also provided

Abstract

*Movements and revolutions have been integral to the history of human civilization. Some of them have passed into oblivion, but others have left a trailing influence on the people of later generations. While their official versions reveal less and conceal more, fictional works based on them i.e. their narrative versions throw light upon them from an altogether different angle and thus become important social documents. Again, two narrative versions of a single epoch also vary from each other significantly. Factors like globalization, modernization, consumerism and marketability shape the mindset and approach of the writers. One such movement was the Naxalite movement of Bengal in the 1970s. This write-up tries to see through the eyes of two writers—separated from each other by place, time and culture—how the death of the revolutionaries of that movement deeply affects the lives of their loved ones and direct their future course of action. The two novels considered, compared and contrasted here are Hajaar Churashir Maa (also mentioned as HCM) by Mahasweta Devi, one of the eminent literary figures of Bengal, and the US-based Pulitzer winning novelist Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland. These two novels, even while dealing with the same Naxalite movement with certain other things in common, are unique by virtue of their ingenious presentation.*

**Keywords :** Naxalite movement, revolutionary, cultural insider, diasporic outsider, place and subjectivity, state terrorism, presence-absence binary, gender, inter-dynamics of character

Short Profile

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powerful impetus to the movement. These conflicts go back to the failure of the implementation of the 5th and 9th Schedule of the Constitution of India, which limit the exploitation of natural resources and possession of lands by the privileged classes of society and entitle the landless farmers and labourers of the excess lands.

Although the movement left tremendous impact on a large section of people, at least initially, it ultimately failed to rise above a certain level. As the movement was more concerned with the local problems of rural areas, it could not evoke same response from all places. Again, not all of those who flourished in professions other than agricul-

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ture could relate themselves fully to the interest of the revolutionaries. Moreover, the application of Chinese models did not help the movement greatly. The result was that the Govt. fiercely repressed the movement with no great resistance from the masses and subjected a large number of rebels to death and many more to merciless torture in prison.

Alongside this official version of the movement, there is also a narrative version. There are many fictions in several languages based on this political furore of Bengal. While the official version throws light grossly on its factual details with very little or no regard to any individual rebel, its narrative version is focused on telling the story of one revolutionary who is looked upon as a representative of the class. Thus, the narrative version offers us greater insight into the psyche of the characters it deals with. This approach also idolizes the rebels and their revolution. Two such novels chosen for this write-up are set against the backdrop of this movement. One is Mahasweta Devi's *Hajaar Churashir Maa* written at a time when the memory of the violence and cruelty unleashed by the state was still fresh in people's mind, and the other is Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* coming as late as 2013.

*Mahasweta Devi's Hajaar Churashir Maa* is the story of a mother's loss of a son to the violence springing from his adopted ideology, and her subsequent realization of his idealism, love and character as well as of the meaninglessness of her own existence. The novel well testifies to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observation about M. Devi's novels: "Her material is not written with an international audience in mind. It contains problematic representations of decolonization after a negotiated political independence" (*"Woman in Difference"* 105). It depicts one day in the life of the protagonist Sujata Chatterjee—the death anniversary of her youngest son Broti Chatterjee. Her physical and mental journey takes her to different worlds throughout the day. The day starts with her

rumination of the days of her pregnancy and also of the complications that she had at the time of Broti's birth. She also remembers the heartlessness of her mother-in-law who always left her unattended during her pregnancy, and, of course, the undutiful behaviour of her husband Dibyanath Chatterjee who used her only as a tool for producing children. It is to get over this existential crisis that she took up a job in a bank when Broti was just three. These afflicting thoughts, however, give way to a feeling of relief and ecstasy when the memory of 17 January, 1948—Broti's date of birth—flashes through her mind. But ironically enough, this day is now commemorated as his death anniversary. On this day two years ago Broti, a promising youth of 20, was brutally killed for his active involvement in the Naxalite insurgencies. Sujata is a mother of other three children Jyoti, Nipa and Tuli who are either leading or anticipating happy, prosperous married lives. But Broti has remained closest to her ever since his birth, perhaps because her life was jeopardized at the time of his birth or because of the solace and relief he provided her. Dibyanath, however, could not tolerate this affinity between Broti and Sujata and always considered him a 'milkshop', devoid of any manliness.

Sujata goes on to recollect how she was shell-shocked to know that her son had become corpse no. 1084 for his revolutionary ideology and anti-establishment actions. A feeling of hatred for her husband and eldest son fills her heart when she remembers how they started running to and fro to hide the identity of 1084 instead of going to Kantapukur morgue to identify their son. He did not even allow her to take their family car to keep the family prestige intact. Only Tuli accompanied her to the morgue and there they found Broti lying dead with marks of severe torture all over his body. Dibyanath's efforts yielded result; Broti's name was not mentioned in the following day's newspaper report.

Dibyanath also made sure that nothing bearing Broti's memory was kept in sight. Sujata challenged this and spent hours in Broti's room holding his things to her breast. She remembered how Broti's company relieved her of her suffocating experience in the household. She was denied of all the rights of a mother. All the children maintained strict allegiance to the rules set by their grandmother and father but Broti revolted against all these even in his teens. It was, as if, Sujata's own voice of protest that remained suppressed all her life found expression in Broti. No wonder, Sujata is very possessive of Broti even after his death, although he is considered by others "a cancerous growth on the body of democracy" (HCM 29).

The inhuman attitude and lack of respect of the family for Broti is exposed once again when Tuli's engagement with Tony Kapadia, a well-to-do businessman, is fixed on his death anniversary. On this day Sujata meets the mother of Somu, a comrade of Broti and a fellow martyr. This is a soothing experience for both the mothers, more so for Sujata as this gives her an opportunity to unload her heart. Each of the two women tries to console the other. Somu's mother tells Sujata that she has Jyoti to heal the wounds left by Broti. But it is quite ironical that even after living in a busy and wealthy family Sujata is as lonely and helpless as Somu's mother. All her family members seem so distanced from her emotionally that she hates the very idea of sharing her feelings and memories about Broti with any of them.

In the afternoon of the same day another revealing moment comes for Sujata when she meets Nandini, a comrade of Broti, whom he loved. She tells her how Broti and his friends were betrayed by Anindya. She also gives her a moving account of the torture she had to undergo in jail. But this meeting with Nandini is most significant in that it helps Sujata know more about her son. Tears fill her eyes when she comes to know how Broti shared his sincerest concern for her with Nandini, that he was not unaware of his father's extra-marital relationship with a typist. Nandini

informs Sujata that it was only because of her that Broti did not leave the house of Dibyanath Chatterjee whom he considered one of the representatives of those many people against whom they revolted. Sujata now understands why Broti once did not speak to Dibyanath for days and always referred to him as 'Boss'.

Nandini then becomes the mouthpiece of those thousands of victims who felt let down by the sheer negligence and lack of respect of the major section of society to their revolution. She tells her how disheartened she got after her release from jail when she found people trying to live as normally as ever. She even rebukes Sujata for taking everything as normal:

Shanto hoini, hote pare na. Takhono kichui quiet chilo na. Akhono nei. Don't say; sob shanto hoye geche. After all, you are Broti's mother. Sob shanto hoye geche e kotha aapnar bola ba biswas kora uchit noy. Koththeke ei complacency ase? (HCM 75) ("Nothing has become quiet, it can never be. Nothing was quiet then. Nothing is quiet now. Don't say; everything has become quiet. After all, you are Broti's mother. You should neither believe nor say that everything has become quiet. From where do you get this complacency?" –Trans. mine)

Nandini also places some burning questions before Sujata: "Why did they die? Ki shesh hoyeche? Manush sukhe ache? Rajneeti khela shesh hoyeche? Is it a better world" (HCM 75)? ("Why did they die? What has ended? Do people live happily? Has the game of politics ended? Is it a better world?" –Trans. Mine) Sujata's love for Broti is now more intensified and so is her respect for their revolution. At the same time, her so-far-latent revolting attitude to her family, especially her husband Dibyanath is now expecting a sudden outburst.

In the evening Sujata returns home for Tuli's engagement party. When Dibyanath asks her where she has been the whole day, she reacts furiously and surprising everyone refuses to answer any question. Although she behaves

quite normally in the party, she always remains her self. She cannot identify herself with any of the intoxicated members who indulge in all sorts of discussions. They do not show minimum respect for a mother whose loss is still heavy on her and speak cynically of Broti and their revolution. But here Dibyanath emerges as the biggest hypocrite when he tells blatant lies about his relationship with Broti and his reaction after his death. Suddenly Jyoti's wife Bini informs Sujata that Tuli wants her to meet a very special friend of Tony Kapadia. The man is waiting outside the house and does not want to join the party. Sujata goes to meet him and in an instance understands the reason for the man's reluctance to enter the house. It is the DCDD Saroj Pal, the very Officer-in-Charge, who tackled the revolution of Broti and the likes so efficiently two years ago. He did not even hand over Broti's body to the family for final ritual. Soon after the man departs Sujata falls on the floor and then everything goes dark for her. Dibyanath rightly assumes that her appendix which has been tormenting her for so long has just burst.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* is the story of two brothers' fate and will, exile and return, the price of idealism and the meaninglessness of a long-lived life. Born 15 months apart, Subhash and Udayan are almost identical, one often mistaken for the other: "They were similar enough in build to draw from a single pile of clothes. Their complexions, a light coppery compound derived from their parents, were identical. Their double-jointed figures, the sharp cut of their features, the wavy texture of their hair" (*Lowland* 13).

Near their house in Tollygunge there is a lowland with two ponds that remain separate during most part of the year but merge into one after the monsoon. These ponds symbolize the two brothers who, despite their physical resemblances, are characteristically very different from each other. That this lowland is going to play a very crucial role in the novel is made evident in the very opening lines of the

novel where the writer guides us to it with such details that almost befit an expert guide's direction to a new traveller:

East of the Tolly club, after Deshapran Sashmal Road splits in two, there is a small mosque. A turn leads to a quiet enclave. A warren of narrow lanes and modest middle-class homes.

Once, within this enclave, there were two ponds, oblong, side by side. Behind them was a lowland spanning a few acres. (*Lahiri* 1)

Subhash is very cautious and calculative: "His mother never had to run after him. He kept her company, watching as she cooked at the coal stove, or embroidered saris or blouse pieces commissioned by a ladies' tailor in the neighbourhood. He helped his father plant the dahlias that he grew in pots in the courtyard" (*Lahiri* 3). But Udayan has been very restless right from his childhood: "For some reason he had not been secure in her love for him. Crying out, protesting from the very instant he was born" (*Lahiri* 226). He never minds challenging the set rules and practices and pushing the boundaries. He dares to trespass with his brother into the aristocratic Tolly club that virtually remained the other world to most people in the vicinity, though Subhash's role in this adventure is merely that of a 'lookout'. There is an enduring proof of Udayan's transgressions in the form of a trail of his footprints in the courtyard created the day the dirt surface was paved—"A day they'd been instructed to remain indoors until it had set" (*Lowland* 13). His father, however, left the flaw unrepaired as he felt, "it was wrong to erase the steps that his son had taken" (*Lowland* 14).

After completing school education with flying colours, they take their admission in two elite institutions—Subhash in Jadavpur University and Udayan in Presidency College. The differences in their beliefs and ideals that were always there right from their childhood gradually widen. While Subhash is drawn more seriously to his academic world, Udayan is



introduced to the Naxalite movement. He comes in contact with leaders like Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. He visits remote villages of Bengal and is appalled to see the deplorable condition of the poor people there. He actively participates in a 69-day strike in his college over the maladministration of hostels. At home, too, their once-favourite pastimes no longer interest him. He is keener to know about the world affairs on the radio. Subhash does not fail to notice this serious change in his brother and fears that "he and Udayan would cease to be brothers" (Lowland 35).

Udayan gets more and more involved in the movement. During this time his life takes a new turn when he meets Gauri and falls in love with her. He continues to woo the girl but never losing focus of his greater aim. Meanwhile, Subhash earns a scholarship and flies to Rhode Island in the US for a Ph. D. programme. A correspondence is made between the two brothers through letters. Udayan writes to Subhash that he has married Gauri and also sends him a photograph of hers. Just when Subhash starts believing that his brother might have started to return to the mainstream of life after his marriage, he is mortified to know through a letter from his parents that Udayan has been killed. He returns home, hoping to pick up the pieces of a shattered family, and to heal the wounds Udayan left behind—including those seared in the heart of his brother's wife.

On his return Subhash is rather disappointed to find his parents too cold to him. But their indifference and negligence to Gauri, Udayan's pregnant wife hurt him more. Although his parents do not tell him anything about Udayan's death, Gauri narrates to him in detail how brutally he was shot dead by the police in that very lowland near their house. Partly because of his compassion for his neglected and grief-stricken sister-in-law mixed with a sense of gratitude for being told the truth about Udayan's death and partly because of a desire to give a meaningful life to Udayan's wife and their baby,

Subhash decides to marry Gauri. His parents, especially his mother fiercely opposes this decision. But Shubhash pays no heed to this and manages to have a registry wedding. However, the same urge for this marriage is never felt from Gauri's end: "She had married Shubhash as a means of staying connected to Udayan. But even as she was going through with it she knew it was useless, just as it was useless to save a single earring when the other half of the pair was lost" (Lowland 153).

After coming to the US Gauri gives birth to a daughter Bela whom Shubhash loves very much. But Gauri who has always been an ambitious girl fails miserably in her duty as a mother. Her eyes are rather set on an academic life. Whatever she does for Shubhash and Bela is just out of a sense of gratitude. But this filial poverty on her part is amply compensated for by her second husband who maintains an astonishing balance between his professional and personal life. Another death—this time of his father brings Subhash back to Tollygunge again. He also takes with him Bela who comes to know a lot many things about the place where her parents once lived. Subhash still finds his mother going to the place where Udayan was killed. She takes some flowers with her and feels to be in Udayan's company for some time. Even after many years of his death, Udayan's presence continues to be felt everywhere—in the courtyard, in the room they shared and, of course, in the lowland.

When Shubhash and Bela return to Rhode Island, they find that Gauri has left them. She has left behind a letter for Subhash in which she admits her failure as a mother and a wife. Thus she only proves her mother-in-law's prediction about her to be true—"she is too withdrawn, too aloof to be a mother" (Lowland 137). This incident leaves a serious impact on young Bela's mind. She becomes quite withdrawn and gradually distances herself from Subhash. She starts living a life of her own. After her college education she moves about places

helping people in their agricultural projects, returning home once in a while. During one such stay with Subhash she breaks a shocking news that she is pregnant and also announces to his great dismay that she is not going to marry. She is rather intent on being a single parent like him. The thought that Bela is making him her model hurts Subhash more than her pre-marital pregnancy.

It is at this time that Subhash reveals to Bela the biggest truth of his life that he is not Bela's father, that he is at once her uncle and her step-father. This is too much for her to digest and she leaves the house or rather Subhash in fury. But soon she returns home with greater love for the person who never let her miss her mother. But she cannot forgive Gauri and hurls harsh words at her when she comes to Rhode Island to finalize some legal proceedings with Subhash. Bela gives birth to a daughter, Meghna and finally finds someone who is very eager to give Meghna a social identity and heal Bela's wounds—"a reenactment of Bela's origins" (Lowland 322).

The novel ends with all the principal characters getting some shelter in the company of persons who love them, understand them and care for them—Subhash in Elise, Bela in Drew and ,of course,Subhash's dead parents sharing the same space with their darling Udayan. In the end "the characters in The Lowland—with the qualified exception of Gauri—become fully human ;driven not by one identifiable trait (like duty ,anger or rebellion) but by a full spectrum of feelings, and capable not only of rage and vexation but also of forgiveness and hope" (Kakutani "A Brother long gone").Only Gauri is left nowhere. She even tries to commit suicide when she returns to Kolkata after four decades but she fails. Bela's words to her sum up her existence: "You are as dead to me as he is. The only difference is that you left me by choice"(Lowland 383).Although a note from Bela later on seeks to take away the stings from this outburst, the cloud of guilt and remorse never subsides from above Gauri's head.

Place plays a determining role in both the novels in consideration. In Hajaar Churashir Maa Broti is placed in a family where his very ideals and beliefs are seen as signs of rebellion. If he lives with some hypocrites who provide necessary spark for his revolt, Somu's life is shown in bitter antagonism to the oppressors of the outside world. The Lowland is set in the still-developing Tollygunge. There is a golf club meant exclusively for the aristocratic people. A childhood experience inside the club premises makes both Subhash and Udayan aware of their marginalized existence in the town. The heroes in both the novels come to realize that there are two conflicting worlds even in their small town. These factors mar their differences as individuals and turn them into social subjects or products who are ready to go to any extreme to make this world a better place. They associate themselves with the exploited class of the society and challenge the accepted social ethics. Thus in these novels personal becomes social; personal becomes political.

The nude form of state terrorism is exposed in these novels. In trying to repress one form of violence, the state went to its extreme level. In Hajaar Churashir Maa Nandini reveals how ruthless torture in jail gives a prisoner the feeling of being confined in a solitary cell. In other cases the revolutionaries were killed with limitless cruelty unleashed against them. It is, as if, death was not a sufficient punishment for them—it had to be the excruciating process of death. Often their bodies were not handed over to the family for final ritual, as in Broti's case. In The Lowland Udayan is shot dead in the lowland, in close proximity to their house offering the family a nightmarish sight. It is a punishment not only for Udayan but also for the rest of the family members who are haunted by this memory till the last days of their life.

These novels show how the absence of dear ones strongly influences the lives of those closely associated with them. As one critic pertinently comments,



Lahiri's delineation of the narrative events purports to show how the absence of the loved ones becomes potentially a haunting presence within the subconscious mind of the affected characters directing their own overt actions to their consequential ways of life through which they are goaded on. (Pius "Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" 100)

Throughout *Hajaar Churashir Maa* Sujata's thoughts, actions, feelings and realizations—everything centres around Broti. She never lets herself be in a place, either physically or psychologically, where Broti's presence is not felt. In *The Lowland* Udayan's death haunts almost all the characters in the novel. If his parents go almost dumb taking no serious interest in anything, Gauri is driven to a secluded corner where she remains companionless for the rest of her life. She had hoped in vain that her marriage with Subhash would provide respite from her agonizing life after his death. But she cannot free herself from his presence even in the busiest life in a far-off country—the US. Again, Udayan's death is primarily the reason behind Subhash's decision to marry Gauri and bring up a fatherless child. Thus the dead heroes of these novels remain strongly present in the psyche of the affected characters and shape their course of action.

Both these novels depict the affliction of bereaved mothers who survive almost to the end of the novels to discover the sheer negligence and disrespect of the larger section of society for their sons. They find repose in the company of their sons even when they are dead. However, their bereavement gradually transcends their personal spheres and they attain universality. The sons, on the other hand, turn to their mothers in moments of loneliness and crisis. Both Broti and Udayan had sound academic background, which is an indication of the fact that the movement of the 1970s was an idealistic one and not any rash reaction of the frustrated and otherwise disillusioned youths of Bengal. Again, Saroj Pal of *Hajaar Churashir Maa* and Nirmal Dey of *The*

*Lowland* are the representatives of the brutal forces of the state who curbed the unrest of that time most 'efficiently'.

In the narrative version of the Naxalite movement the revolutionaries are glorified. They are presented as heroes who are out on a mission against some devilish opponent. Thus Broti in *Hajaar Churashir Maa* is far more superior to all the characters in the novel, save only his mother. The presence of dead Broti is felt throughout the novel and is oftentimes a threat to the existence of his living brother and sisters. As for Udayan, Jhumpa Lahiri's hero in *The Lowland*—his short life is more meaningful and worth living than his elder brother Subhash's long-lived life.

In novels dealing with this subject the female characters are generally marginalized as compared to the powerful male combatants. In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel no character, either male or female, stands a chance of comparison with Udayan. Although his wife Gauri is the second most important character in the novel, her portrayal here is not free from criticism: "As a minor character, or as a full-on study in cruelty, Gauri might have been interesting. If there were an ounce of irony or humour in her portrayal, or of unabashed wickedness in her spirit, she might have been fascinating to follow" (Lasdun). Mahasweta Devi's novel is a rare exception in this regard. Here, the hero's mother is the protagonist. She is no less combatant than her rebel son, although her fight is not against any enemy of the outside world but against her own family. This novel is a tale of the rediscovery of her own self and of her son as well.

The heroes in these novels, irrespective of the society's attitude to them, remain darling to their parents and are loved more than their other brothers and sisters. In *Hajaar Churashir Maa* Sujata behaves as if she had only one son whom she has lost. Although she hardly falters in her maternal duty to other children, she never feels the same bond with them as with Broti. In *The Lowland* Bijoli, Udayan's mother, continues

to love her dead son till she breathes her last. In sharp contrast to Hajaar Churashir Maa, here Udayan's father, too, loves him very much. Even after Udayan's death, they are so engrossed in his memory that they behave with Subhash most casually and without any warmth of feeling when he returns home from the US after years. This love of the parents for their rebel sons may be seen to be generating from the soft corners of the writers themselves for these characters. The fact that Mahasweta Devi chooses the year 1948 for Broti's birth just strengthens this argument, for her own son Nabarun Bhattacharya was born in the same year.

Notwithstanding these commonness and similarity, the approach of the two novelists to the Naxalite movement of Bengal is not the same. A cultural insider that Mahasweta Devi is, she is more idealistic than practical. Her hero Broti never dreams of a marriage or personal happiness even though she has a girlfriend Nandini. Nandini, on her part, respects Broti's sacrifice and refuses to accept anything as normal after being freed from jail. But Jhumpa Lahiri, a diasporic outsider, is more logical. Her hero Udayan marries Gauri and impregnates her just days before his death. This Gauri who once became Udayan's accomplice in supplying him information about a police officer shows minimum reluctance to Subhash's proposal for marriage and ultimately agrees. We are also surprised and at times pained to see Gauri immersed in her professional world, with her roots completely severed from Calcutta or from Udayan's Bengal. She does not even hesitate to leave Bela, Udayan's last memory, to Subhash's care and separates. This journey of Gauri is symbolic of the progress that the once-turbulent Bengal made towards normalcy in the later years. There has also been significant change in the inter-dynamics of Broti's mother, the protagonist in Mahasweta Devi's Hajaar Churashir Maa, but Udayan's mother in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel does not undergo any such change in the course of the narrative. Bijoli, Udayan's grief-stricken mother

feels the same pangs for her son till her death, but she fails to rise above her morbidity. As for Broti's mother Sujata, it is almost a case of revelation after his death. It is only after meeting Nandini that she rediscovers her son and tries to break the shackles which have reduced her life to a meaningless existence in the household. It is, as if, the ideals and beliefs of Broti against the hypocrite and dishonest society find a new outlet in her mother's voice. Even her postponement of the surgery in her appendix may be seen as a revolt against her family members who are very keen to get that surgery done. In the last evening of her life she unleashes furious attack on her husband and feels the load of her heart taken off. This rebelling spirit causes an explosion at the sight of the unpardonable police officer Saroj Pal. But unfortunately enough, the explosion takes place inside her own body and she dies. Thus, unlike, Bijoli, she dies as a figure fitting for the mother of a revolutionary.

The relevance of reading novels like these in this age of globalization and extreme consumerism cannot just be overemphasized. True it is that the Naxalite movement is now some decades old ; the young generation may not be able to relate themselves fully to this. But if we take only the essence of the movement—a popular resistance to the exploitation of the underprivileged by the economically and politically powerful class—we are bound to appreciate its enduring appeal to the common mass. Even in our time there are many who are worshipped by a large number of people as heroes and, at the same time, condemned by others as threats to society. What these novels do is just remind us that ours is a society of class struggle, exploitation and injustice, which give birth to movements and revolutions at different times. Again, the approach of two writers, separated from each other by a span of three decades, to a common problem shows how place and time determine the marketability of a fictional work. A comparative study of these

novels also shows that a diasporic outsider has to put in conscious effort to evoke emotional response from a reader whereas to a cultural insider it comes spontaneously.

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