

## ABSTRACT

In recent times, the construction and operation of violence, both material and ideological, and the resultant production of victim lives and their life narratives, both oral and written, all over the world in general and the Third World in particular have come under serious critical scrutiny. Within the culture of violence and human rights, and in the context of increasing circulation and reception of victim life narratives, a collective responsibility has been sought to critically address violence and suffering by rethinking and reworking the very idea and operation the “human” subject. Informed by this theoretical optic and drawing on the recent critical work in life writing studies and using insights drawn from new materialist feminism and critical posthumanism and ethical scholarship of Derrida, Levinas, Butler, Spivak, and Freire, the study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to interrogate the productive potential of the oppressed subaltern lives and their “marginal” testimonial (auto/biographical) life narratives in contemporary South Asian cultural contexts which have received cursory critical attention in postcolonial scholarship. The study considers five South Asian subaltern women’s testimonial life narratives as case studies: Phoolan Devi’s *I, Phoolan Devi: The Autobiography of India’s Bandit Queen* (1996), Bama’s *Karukku* (2000), C K Janu’s *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu* (2004), Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006), Mukhtar Mai’s *In the Name of Honour: A Memoir* (2007). The study argues how the life narratives of the oppressed subaltern lives as dehumanized Others of the “humanist” norm have critical bearing on the larger community to take up the “human” question, especially when such victim lives demand “our” ethical recognition and critical intervention. The study further examines the pedagogical value of subaltern life writing, specifically, the way subaltern lives/life narratives offer critical space for an alternative education – learning to learn from the Other and otherwise – that is fundamental to the making of the “human” subject as a collective project. By situating the neglected subaltern lives/life narratives within the larger discourse of “posthuman,” the study aims to make critical intervention in life writing scholarship in postcolonial studies.

**Keywords:** Violence, subaltern, subject/ivity, Other, testimonial life writing, new materialist feminism, critical posthumanism