

Perspective of Gender Subalternity Reflected in Indian English Novels.

Dr. Sujata G.Patil Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, Jaysingpur College, Jaysingpur

Email-sujatagopatil@gmail.com

Abstract-

The history of the world reflects the struggle for dominance in binary relationship of superior-inferior, rich-poor, upper-lower, men- women and centre-periphery covered in terms of class, caste, colour, religion, ideology, language, and gender. The ruling class always represents as the self and the latter as other. The dominant group suppresses the subaltern by placing them on the periphery of the social structure. The term 'Subaltern' was used by Antonio Gramsci as an umbrella term for the subject of the hegemony. They are subordinate class of workers, proletariat, peasants, poor and women. Ranajit Guha, the leader of Subaltern studies Group, shifted this political term to the historical paradigm for the neglected group in historiography. Gayatri Spivak stressed woman as gender subaltern for her double subaltern on the level of class and gender. Women are portrayed as subordinate, other, second sex and consequently voiceless and downtrodden. Indian English novels portray women as the mute sufferers of patriarchy, gender discrimination and silenced in the Indian social hierarchy. Great Indian authors have presented women as gender subaltern who are oppressed in the name of religion, caste system and culture. The narratives of Indian novels depict the issues of women like patriarchal pressure, early and failed marriages, domestic violence, gender discrimination and lack of education for women and sexual exploitation in patriarchal society. This paper explores the perspectives of gender subalternity in Indian English novels.

Keywords: Subaltern, patriarchy, culture, gender, exploitation, voiceless.

Objectives:

1. To relocate and reflect the subaltern representation of women in Indian English novels.
2. To analyze gender subalternity on different levels through the selected novels.
3. To study the changing image of woman and her identity through literature.
4. To appreciate the new literary trends in representing woman in patriarchal society.

Introduction:

The concept of Subaltern is originally derived from British Military, signifying the lower or subordinating rank of soldiers in military. The Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of noun Subaltern as 'an officer in the British Army below the rank of captain, especially a second lieutenant,' the adjective 'subaltern' is used to indicate a person 'of lower class'. Etymological meaning of subaltern is 'having inferior position, subordinate'. It is originated from Italian word 'subalterno'. Subaltern is generally considered as subordinate class, lower in hierarchy or order of class or rank. Antonio Gramsci used this euphemistic word in his Notes on Italian History (Quaderni in Italian) for the working class, proletariat, non-capitalists, peasants and common people who are non-hegemonic in economic and social perspectives. Subaltern studies began in England in 1970, as an intellectual discussion on historiography of South Asian countries by a group of scholars from India and other countries called as Subaltern Studies Group with Ranajit Guha called as 'Marginalized Academics' Subaltern Studies influenced by the theory of 'history from below' intended to discover the agency or participation of subaltern group which is shunted in the nationalist archives. Gayatri Spivak asked to Subaltern Group an important question about the

representation of subaltern women in Indian historiography in seminal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ which is supposed as the groundbreaking text of post-colonial study. Her intervention in the subaltern group was path breaking who raised the critical question of speaking or voicing of subaltern especially women in colonial India. Her essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speaks?’ posed the problem of women's identity in political as well as in literary subjugation. Spivak criticizes feministic analysis of the Third World women's position on the basis of individual experiences of women from different countries propagate and perpetuate the human values and construction of idealism through imagination. Novel, the new genre in literature emerged out of the sensibilities and real experiences of common man, took a new contour in the twentieth century literature.

The writings by Indian authors destined to voice the harsh realities of exploitation and sufferings of subaltern in India who are excluded from the centre by different levels as colonized, class and gender. The marginalized and excluded identity of women represented by the Indian author is reclaimed throughout the world. The writers like Salman Rushdie, Kamala Das, Amitav Ghosh, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gita Hariharan and Arundhati Roy are prominent figures in subaltern literature. A universal urge of victims for social justice is reflected throughout the fiction of these humanitarian. Women are marginalized on many levels as colonized, lower caste and inferior gender. Patriarchy, violence, silence, oppression, voiceless, change and freedom in sexuality are represented through these novels. The perspective of gender subaltern in Indian literature can be studied with the reference of following novels by Indian women writers..

Patriarchy is a male dominated binary social system which projects women as vulnerable, docile, subordinate, and voiceless characters. The writings of Indian women reflect the contrast and comparison in gender and caste. The double standard policy of patriarchy places women on the lowest level of hierarchy. *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur is a distinguished writer whose *Difficult Daughter* has three female protagonists, Kasuri, Virmati and Ida. They are confronting with societal, cultural and political suppression. The changing stages of gender subaltern in Indian society are seen through the life of Kasturi, a mute sufferer victimized by patriarchy and political power. She is forcefully sent to school by her family to grab a good husband which shows her submissiveness to the power of patriarchy and society. The change in gender subaltern identity of women is shown through Virmati, the second difficult daughter who refuses to marry with Indrajeet. Her denial resulted into her confinement in the godown by the family. Her voice for education is suppressed and the third difficult daughter Indumati is brought under emotional pressure where she has proved herself as the mute subaltern by following the parental aspiration. Thus Manju Kapur exposes the causes and reasons of suffering of gender subaltern. All of them are defeated by the hands of religion, patriarchy and society. She has depicted the psyche of gender subaltern through *Difficult Daughters*.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* highlights gender and class discrimination in the society. The double standard treatment by patriarchy is the major theme of this novel where women don't have identity and the question of existence of women is marked by the author. Ammu is the central character who is treated inhumanly by her family because she has dared to break the social hierarchy of class by marrying with a Bengali man. After his death she has to work in her brother's company as a worker. Her illicit relationship with Velutha, an untouchable claims her

criminal and exploited by the police for her insurgence against castism. In a patriarchal society, women's have no choice and patriarchy rejects their individual feelings and identity.

The God of Small Things highlights Arundhati Roy's opinion of the status of women folk in India. It represents before us the constant struggle of women against their incessant exploitation, torture and struggle which they undergo because of a maledominant orthodox, dogmatic environment." (61 Dhand)

Bama's Sangati at once takes us to the subaltern and gender subaltern platform where women are double subaltern first on the basis of caste and second as inferior gender. She suffers as victim of Varna system in Indian culture and as vulnerable sex. The novel explores different incidents where men Dalit men who are exploited by the hierarchy again carry the chain of exploitation to their home. They treat their wives as slaves and bolt out their anger of humiliation inside the house over women of their family. Women are suffering from disparity on different aspects private and public. They are always under the threat of sexual harassment by upper and lower class male. Dalit women have to continue the social customs like devadasi system designed for the exploitation of women from scheduled class.

The violence and exploitation of women in patriarchal structure is multifaceted which is sugarcoated by respect and idealization of women in the name of Indian goddess to restrict women in the circle of culture and tradition. Anita Desai is a prolific writer. She registers her protest against patriarchy through her women characters like Maya in Cry, the Peacock, Sita in Where Shall Go This Summer? and Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain. They are haunted by fear, insecurity, depression, anxiety and worries of personal life. Maya in Cry the Peacock is living disappointing married life whose husband is indifferent towards her fragmented identity. Her husband is older than her who loves her but does not take her seriously that creates uncomfortable communication in them. His negligence and indifference towards Maya as a woman reflects the bitter aspects of patriarchy. Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? is the representative of suppressed women community. Repressed with the burden of patriarchal structure, she retreats herself and return to home scarifying all feminine aspirations. Women as gender subaltern are victimized in the name of race, religion, region, community, caste and gender and even ideology of Hinduism.

"In Indian patriarchal set up with man as 'other', the woman is towards the margin. Man believes in conquering and subjugating. If unable to use his power outside, he satisfies his ego by wielding it at home. Ultimately, it is the woman at home who has to bear the burnt of his frustrations."(78 Sandhu)

In Fasting, Feasting, Anita Desai exposes male dominance and gender discrimination in Indian family. Uma's education is terminated after her brother's birth and forced to child caring. She is married on as per parents wish, lives unsuccessful life, divorced and finally living with her parents as parasite. Women in Indian culture are supposed to be docile, submissive, ideal house wife performing multiple roles only to please the male. They are not given even rights over their bodies confirming as the property of their husband. The unbearable burden of arranged marriage thrust women characters of Desai like Anamika in Fasting, Feasting and Monisha in Voices of the City in the dungeon of harassment physical assault, mental torture and exploitation. The customs laid down by patriarchy are burdensome and rigid for women and if they oppose these customs patriarchy diminishes their identity. Ila Das in Desai's Fire on the Mountain, is a social worker who

fight against child marriage but the tyranny of patriarchy ruin her life by raping and killing by villagers who find Ila as the threat to patriarchy.

Mahasweta Devi is the insightful Bengali writer and social activist who gave voice to the unheard stories of subalterns on all level, especially gender subaltern. Devi's work dexterously defines the culture and social structure of India and strongly advises to reshape it with subalterns as the centre. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak translated Mahasweta Devi's three stories under the name Breast Stories. The physical peculiarity of woman's breast imprison her in the subjectivity, projects her insecure by that organ which feeds and strengthen as well as please the male. Man is the 'Self' and woman as 'Other'. Three women in Breast Stories have to suffer from all type of oppression and humiliation for being women. In her novel The Mother, Sujatha is the female protagonist is facing all ills of Indian society as tribal woman. She is subjugated, discriminated and victimized by social, political and cultural norms which are male centered. The women in her short stories and novel are portrayed as oppressed by the society and devastated by man's selfishness and greed for power over women.

Kamala Markandeya has brought out gender issues in her Silence of Desire through the story of Dandekar and Sarojini which reveals the gender inequality. Dandekar is free to express his spiritual views as a man whereas Sarojini is subservient to Dandekar for her views. Her suppression of feelings reveals the gender subalternity of her women character. Sarojini's silence in this novel represents silence of Indian femininity without voice. The women as margin are kept away from the centre only to follow the decisions made by male.

Shashi Deshpande has put in massively in the region of gendered subaltern by depicting the plights, problems, trials of middle-class Indian women who are oppressed by the norms of the patriarchal society. Almost all her novels revolve around the pathetic and heart-rending suppression, suffocation of women between tradition and freedom. In her The Dark Holds No Terror (1980) she tells the story of Saru, the protagonist's mental and sexual suffering only because she belongs to the weaker sex. Unwillingly she surrenders herself in her parental house and in her husband's house also. The novel focuses on women's-imposed compromise to sustain the secure life under patriarchy. Bharati Mukharjee, the post-colonial strong writers focused on the theme of, subordination, exclusion from agency of nationalism and subaltern women in her novels The Tiger's Daughter, Wife, Leave It to Me, Days and Nights. Amitav Ghosh has presented his female characters as realistic who suffers from patriarchy and exploitation but they have established their identity as radical feminists.

Conclusion: Women have marginalized position and their inhuman treatment in the patriarchal society is reflected through novels by Indian authors. They portrayed women as other, voiceless victims of the system which poses the question of Indian women's identity. The analytical depiction of women as the gender subaltern in Indian novels provides the critical lens to study the power dynamics on gender.

References:

1. Chaudhary, Paramita, Indian Women Writers in English, Ritu Publications. Publ.2014.
2. Gramsci, Antonio, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, 1971.
3. Guha, Ranajit Preface, Subaltern Studies I, Oxford University Press, 1982
4. Ludden, David, A Brief History of Subalternity: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia, Permanent Black, 2002

5. Naik M. K. & Narayan Shamala, Indian English literature 1980-2000, Pencraft International, 2001.
6. Sarkar Dipti, Post-Colonial Women Writers, Ritu Publication, 2014.
7. the Globalization of South Asia, Permanent Black, 2002
8. Talat, Qamar, et al. Subaltern Voices in Indian English Novels, Yking Books, 2016.
9. Tandon, Nivedita (ed) Expressions of Marginality in Indian Writing in English, Roshani Publ.2014.