Representation of Subaltern Voices in Indian English Writings
Highlighting the Narrative of Subalternity in Women

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Abstract
Subalternity through literary analysis and theoretical writings envisages neo-colonial discourses, emphasizing a feminist-marxist approach to post colonialism. Reconsideration of subaltern elements has led to capitalistic politics where women have been subjugated by the discursive power of Patriarchy. Patriarchy’s hegemonic character reaffirms the false consciousness in women that they are subordinate or unequal to men. Women protagonists in Indian English novels revolve around the socio-cultural and economic spaces within the realms of nationhood. They staunchly disagree with any type of orthodoxies and idealized identities. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the leading post-colonial critic projects deconstruction of history emancipating the women, asserting legitimate liberation. She visualizes the theoretical problems that internalize post-colonialism, post-modernism, post-marxism and post-feminism through Indian literary works. Communal differences in present day India has had a tremendous impact on women belonging to variant minority and ethno-religious communities. The objective of this paper then is to retrace the feminist historical developments and the concepts of post colonial theory, through Indian English novels. Writings on Indian Women by Indian authors in English is being recognized all over the world, the writings of Salman Rushdie, Kamla Das, Imitiyaz Dharkar, Amitav Gosh, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Namita Gokhale, bring world wide acclaim.
The conclusion stresses a universal humanistic approach that precedes modernity, historiography standing out supremely despite the differences of time, place, culture, gender and ethnicity. The association between humanism and feminism moulds multiculturalism by way of a protest for social justice.

Keywords: Subaltern, Feminist, Patriarchy, Histography, Post-Colonialism, Legitimate, liberatio

Patriarchy
Patriarchy’s hegemonic character creates an image of docile, vulnerable, subordinate inferior, powerless and silenced women. The institution of Patriarchy is universal, the common interests of situations, conditions and stress oriented facts about women have been widely debated recently. Twists and turns in every story in these novels show different ways of reacting and reaching a consensus. Contrasts and Comparisons in these Indian women writings show differences of masculine V/s feminine, tradition V/s modernity and illusion V/s reality etc.
“Women in most countries have not achieved much because they can’t be liberated under the patriarchal, capitalist, imperialist and military system that determine the way we live now, and which is governed by power, not justice, by false democracy, not real freedom”. - Nawal EL Saadawi in ‘Women at Point Zero’. Women have been victimized in Indian patriarch families. Thus they are not able to deviate from the set norms, values and traditions. Diversification of culture in India and its patriarch characteristics have driven the Indian subaltern women to combat the problems of colonial rule. The harsh imperialistic tendencies have been voiced and picturised in Indian English novels. Customs such as child marriage, dowry and widowhood rites have their origins in the pre-colonial era. Women’s Rights and their empowerment have been neglected due to male supremacy or women’s subordinate stature economically, socially and politically.

Feminism in Urban areas

Woman protagonists in English Women Novels project the liberal feminist movement which began from the grassroots anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist peoples’ movement. Feminism began with those movements inability to adapt and accommodate the rapid radicalization of women which took place in the 1960’s and 70’s. The foundations showed immense recognition in moving to support women’s growing impatience with the violence and the patriarch element in their traditional societies. Urban women activists joined movements like the radical, anticapitalism or even the Naxalite movement. Many women did not wish to wait for the revolution as they wanted to acquire gender equality without an absolute urgent and non negotiable freedom in the late 1980’s when the Indian markets were opened up and the liberal feminist movement in India had NGO ised. However being a feminist doesn’t mean you can’t be an “equalist” too or that you can’t focus on other forms of discrimination.

Given the deplorable socio-economic profile of women, their absence in positions of power, and the apprehension accompanied by depression of being endlessly subjected to communal violence, the predicament of Muslim women was not very different. A recent survey on Muslim women, conducted by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, provides some illuminating facts about communal calamities. They point out that with the possible exception of the scheduled caste women, Muslim women probably comprise the poorest, and signify the most disadvantaged group in India. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in their work, “Borders and Boundaries”, observe that while the Partition of 1947 disrupted the lives of millions, particularly women, it ironically, also proved to be liberating in many ways. The need for economic survival coupled with the „breakdown of traditional constraints on their mobility, propelled thousands of women on the path of education enabling them to enter public spaces.

“Purdah” by Imtiyaz Dharker is seen admist the environment of Islam when the Arabian countries were torn by turn out and social strife. Imtiyaz Dharker with her social and cultural growth has lived experiences spanning three countries – Pakistan, England and India. Imtiyaz Dharker belongs to that generation of post independence women, feminist consciousness and language representing a spirituality and sensuality in their writings. The efforts of several generation of Indian authors writing in English have resulted in international success, particularly since the publication of Midnight’s Children (1981) by Salman Rushide, the Indian novel in English was finally been accepted as an important literary endeavour.

“The God of small things” highlights Arundhati Roy’s opinion of the status of women folk in India. It presents before us the constant struggle of women against their incessant exploitation, torture and struggle which they undergo because of a male dominant orthodox, dogmatic environment. She mentions three generations of women in her novel. Each of them born and raised under different circumstances and conditions. Starting from the oldest generation, there is Mammachi, then the generation of Ammu, and the youngest generation is Rahel. These women live according to the prevailing customs of Hinduism. Susan Wadley and Doranne Jacobson conclude that according to Hindu culture, there are dual views on women. First, a woman is considered benevolent and a bestower, the second view is that a woman is aggressive, malevolent and a
destroyer. In the novel, Arundhati Roy depicts the worst social and economic conditions of women. Ammu is divorced and lives with her parents and brother, Chacko, who treats her as well as her children in a terrible manner. Ammu is divorced and a divorced woman has no respectable place in society. Her brother is also divorced, but he is totally unaffected and not shunned in society. This demonstrates the dissimilar conditions for man and woman in the same society. Chacko takes charge of the whole Ayemenem House and asserts his right over the whole property and even deprives his sister of her share.

Simone de Beauvior in her famous work “The Second Sex” remarks, “woman has always been man’s dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality”. Commenting on the condition of the married women, Beauvior avers, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society”. She further says in her work “The Second Sex” as “One is not born’ but rather becomes, a woman” (445). The extention of the tradition of purdah resulted in wearing a ‘Burkha’. Coercing a women out of her burka is as bad as coercing her into one. The issue of Identity, a battle of props and costumes carries on. This is what allows the US government to use Western feminist liberal groups as moral.

‘Violence’ and ‘Change’ in History resulting towards Women’s Liberation

According to Michel Foucault (1969), women’s writing unfolds like a game that imaginably goes beyond its own boundaries and its own limitations. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian literary critic, refers to herself as a “practical Marxist feminist deconstructionist”. Born in India, she first observed the oppression people face specially women”. She thus emphasizes passionate derogations inflicted on women. Colonization resulted in subjugation of the subaltern women. They do not have a voice due to assimilation from the colonial rule. In “Can the Subalterrn Speak”, Spivak mentions how Britain believed that they were “saving” Indians and not ruling them. In the book “Can the subaltern Speak”. Spivak asserts that “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” ([Spivak 2203]).

Urvashi Butalia in her book, ‘The Other Side of Silence’ has been one of the most influential books in South Asian studies of the past decade”. She brought forward the stark reality of the partition which occurred in the shadow of the independence of Pakistan and India in 1947, and resulted in the largest mass-migration in human history. The “Holocaust”, by Elie Wiesel is very much a “living history,” not comparable to any initiative undertaken in India. Tens of thousands of women were abducted at that time, and forcibly married into households of men belonging to another faith. Some women were later returned in a rather poorly-conceived fashion through an agreement between the two governments. Many were converted and then proceeded to conceal their former identities. Butalia also referenced the violence against Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, in the wake of the murder of Indira Gandhi. Her participation in the relief efforts were what initially started her on the path towards the “Other Side of Silence”. Rather than drawing out or clarifying particular histories, collective psychology potentially makes everyone a victim. Urvashi Butalia has raised special alternative issues to the women who had joined as militants during the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. She wrote special writings of women suffering during October 2002 elections and messy border disturbances between India and Bangladesh. These Indian women writings portray a ‘change’ which becomes a means to empower and transform the individual by making the views of women known globally but evolving socially.

The minority women are a prominent figure in the narrative borne out of the ravishing aggression and brutality in 1984, 1992-93, and 2002. Raj Kamal Jha’s novel “Fireproof” (2007) fictionalizes the realities of the 2002 Gujarat disturbance. “Shabnam” is a survivor of the 2002 violence, who lost her parents and barely escaped being raped, Shabnam’s ordeal is chronicled by Ms. Glass in the form of an e-mailed document. Jha’s use of e-mails as testimony can be termed as a brilliant narrative play. In the terrifyingly repressive atmosphere of the state, it was almost impossible for people, let alone women, to come out in the open and share their
stories of horror with the world. In post-colonial era, the partition had stamped a mark bringing about violence in the novels.

**Silence as a Reaction to Women’s Independence**

The vulnerability of minority women in contemporary India is also sharply etched out in ‘Beethoven Among the Cows’ (1994). Like Githa Hariharan, Rukun Advani uses silence as a motif to delineate the troubled psyche of Ms. Susan. On their train journey to Agra in December 1992, the narrator encounters two women—Mrs. A. Sen, an old lady from Calcutta and a young Ms. Susan, who they surmise is a nurse from Kerala. Ms. Susan’s silence exposes the paranoia of minority communities which exist in a realm of insecurity and fear. Githa Hariharan’s novel “In Times of Siege” (2003) contains a portrayal of two women belonging to minority groups—Jasbir Kaur and Mrs. Khan. Jasbir Kaur was pregnant when both her father and husband were brutally killed in the “84 riots, completely devastated by the appalling tragedy, Jasbir miscarried a week later. However, she convinces other Sikh women victims, who were tired of repeating their ordeal to perfect strangers, to speak fearlessly and share the horrors faced by them. She speaks: “I have lost so much—I have nothing left in my stomach but anger. I also have a hunger that says, tell your story, tell it again and again to whoever will listen” (34). Githa Hariharan’s novel “Fugitive Histories” (2009), too, explores the paradoxical effects of the chilling violence of 2002 on women, which later results in silence.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel ‘A Matter of time’ is a continuation of her exploration into the many facts of feminine experience in writing. In this novel, she has displayed the themes of silence, gender differences, passive sufferings and familiar relationships into much deeper realms. In her novels, three types of suffering women characters reoccur with subtle changes. The first type belongs to the protagonist’s mother or the mother figure, the traditional woman and the woman who believes that her place is with her husband and family. Saru in Shashi Despande’s “Dark Holds No Terrors” is torn between two worlds—one formed by the values and norms imposed by the patriarchal structure, and the other, her indomitable will to realize her self-worth on the face of all those traumatic experiences. Cognitive organization alongwith socialization aid children in learning their cultures and/or societies. They define their roles as men and women. This knowledge is then internalized as a gender schema. During her young days, Saru, the protagonist is a victim of discrimination as her brother enjoys a privileged position. She pursues her medical career against her mother’s consent, she falls in love with a low caste poet and her marriage meets with disapproval from her parents, as she leaves home to marry Manohar who belongs to a lower caste which makes her parents disown her. As Saru progress in her career her marital life becomes difficult. Manohar’s brutal sadism is a result of the patriarchal belief that in a man-woman relation the man is always superior and the woman is inferior. Saru leaves her husband’s house and seeks shelter at her father’s place where she reflects on her past life. She realizes that she will wash away all the guilt and will now go with her husband with a new found self-confidence and assertiveness. Sarita presents herself as moving away from normative processes that construct the woman.

Manju Kapur in a “Marred woman” projects the story of an artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Manju Kapur describes through her protagonist (Asthana) and reflects, “A woman should be aware of self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.” Astha liked to have a break from dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses a threat to Hemant and his male superiority. Manju Kapur in ‘Difficult Daughters’ presents the image of suffering women. Colonial and Patriarchal oppression during the post colonial period is projected in Manju Kapur’s character Nisha in “Home”. The third generation woman in her family, Nisha, is different from the rest in more than one way. She does not enjoy cooking and other household jobs. Even her silence and withdrawal fails to draw attention to her mother who tries to indulge her in observing ‘Karva Chauth’ (fasting for husband’s longevity) and the likes. Nisha’s marriage
and motherhood is achieved but not without struggle. She realizes the value of asserting her own self and thus regaining her self-esteem.

Toru Dutt (1856-77) was the first Indian woman poet to write in English, and her work depicts archetypes of Indian womanhood, such as Sita and Savitri, showing women in suffering, self-sacrificing roles, reinforcing conventional myths in a patriarchal manner. (Verse Translations and Poems’ 1876). Kamla Das is one of the most powerful voices of post colonial era, belonging to the Indo-Anglican poetic era. Kamla Das’s poetry finds the best expression of feminine sensibility and its suppression in a male dominated society. Her writings though confessional and autobiographical universalize the sufferings shared by the subaltern. An “Introduction” and “Stone Age” are two of Kamla Das’s poems where she projects the Indian women to be rebellious. Kamla Das represents the natural Indian women with all aspirations of being a feminist. An “Introduction” by Kamla Das is a polyphonic text. The opening statement, “I do not know politics” has an indication of suffering cawed by the ignorant, poverty driven women who are necessarily living without an identity and nationality. The poem “Stone Age” belongs to Kamla Das’s third volume of poetry, the entire poem being in the form of a monologue from the mouth of a woman who finds neither love nor happiness in her relationship with her husband asserting a future in conjugal relationship expressing feminine sensibility and its suppression in a male dominated society. The poem is divided into two distinct parts. The first part showing the treatment that the women persona receives from her husband. He treats her not as a human being but merely as an object for beautification placed in some corner of the house. Then she becomes a stone object – a bird or stone or a granite dove. Her husband was very indifferent towards her. Instead of love she started to beg kindness from him. The image of a fat spider settled in the mind of the wife highlights the sinister nature of man. In turn, it also shows that his love is like the web of a spider that works as a trap for its victim and helps the spider to suck up the vitality from its victim and make it lifeless. This is a process that makes her completely dependent on the wish of the man. He pays little heed to her comforts and discomfords and even disturbs the serenity of her mind with his beasty behaviour: “Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind Old fat spider, weaving webs of beholder. Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, A granite dove” (The Stone Age http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/thestone-age-2/). Thus dissatisfied in married life, the woman is unconsciously drawn towards illicit relationship in search of pure and true love. The women is invariably pushed back into her expected gender roles: wife, cook embroiderer etc

Women Writings of the Post-Colonial Era

Ashapurna Devi traces the progression of the feminist movement from colonial to postcolonial periods in India. She finds that the contemporary, educated and economically independent women, like Bakul in Bakul Katha, the last part of her trilogy, have become more self-centred than, the women of earlier generations, like Satyvati and Subarnalata in Pratham Pratishruti and Subarnalata respectively. More importantly and ironically, Ashapurna Devi finds that their freedom has not brought them closer to other women. Mahasweta Devi’s revisionary feminist short story “Draupadi” (1988), captures the experiences of a subaltern woman within the context of the historical juncture of the “interregnum.” The central character Draupadi or Dopdi, as she is often referred to in the text, is involved in a social movement—the Naxalite movement in India. While Dopdi is presented as a strong woman from the outset, it is at the very moment that she should become the “silenced victim” according to traditional schema that she instead emerges as an agent.

Ismat Chughtai, the other prominent writer attracts our attention with her novel ‘The Hearts Breaks Free’. She brings the story of oppressed people like ‘Bua’. Chughtai shows the youthful, vivacious and bold Bua who is in trouble, physically and in spirit, as she submits the so-called reforming control of the traditional family. Chhaya Dattar and Popati Hiranandani try to create self-authenticating reflective spaces that liberate by ignoring their women characters from their patriarchally constructed social ties. Chhaya Dattar, in her autobiographical story ‘In Search of me’, describes...
her experiences as a social worker in the tribal world. While recording, the collective activities of the farm labours, who are mostly, women is seen. These women are totally neglected temporarily from their own feminist problems. Dattar’s vision of feminist liberation provide directions for engagement with their denial of dependence and self-sacrifice. Freedom, in the writings of both the authors, is primarily a mental phenomenon where women think to prepare for a transformation of consciousness. Dattar provides glimpses of feminist subjects, actively creating their own destinies and these images which are hightly in contrast to the idealist Indian woman.

Bharti Mukherjee, another post colonial writer was born on July 27, 1940 at Calcutta focusing on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expectation as well as an Indian women and their struggle. Her important works are ‘The Tiger’s Daughter 1972’ and ‘Days and Nights’. The Tiger’s Daughter is a story about a young girl named ‘Tara’ who ventures back to India after many years of being away only to return to poverty and turmoil. The second phase of her writing encompasses works such as ‘Wife’, ‘An invisible woman’ (Essay), ‘The Sorrow and the Terror’. In ‘Wife’, (1975) Mukherjee writes about a woman named Simple who has been suppressed as she attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife. Out of fear and personal inability, she murders her husband and eventually commits suicide. In her third phase, Bharti Mukherjee wrote “Leave it to me” (1997) where she tells the story of a young woman named Debby Di Martino who seeks revenge on her parents who abandoned her.

Another renowned novelist of the modern Indian fiction is Kamala Markandaya who is known for writing about cultural clashes between Indian urban and rural societies. Markandaya published her first novel, ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ (1955). Losing her sons and seeing her daughter become a prostitute, Rukmani still stands strong.

Kiran Desai born in 1971 is an Indian author who is a citizen of India and a permanent resident of the USA. Her novel 'The Inheritance of loss' won the 2006 Booker prize and the National Book Critics Circle fiction award. 'The Inheritance of Loss' opens with a teenage Indian girl, an orphan called Sai. A Cambridge educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, in the town of Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas stays with her. Sai is romantically involved with her Maths tutor, Gyan, the Descendant of a Nepali Ghurkha mercenary, but he eventually recalls from her obvious privilege and falls in with a group of ethnic Nepalese insurgents. This work tries to reinforce the feminist movement through different projecting issues and problems of women writers from tribal and rural areas. The variety of subjects, they have touched upon is a great contribution in creating an awareness for the modern women all over the globe in the Indian environment. These multilayered fictions can be read as counter narratives that challenge the unity in diversity rhetoric underwritten by the nationalist/dominant narratives and taboo socio-political circles.

Amitav Ghosh presents his women as overt radical feminists nor as the stereotypical images of Sita and Savithri. They are the characters of real life and in his novels portray the women characters in a realistic manner. For example “The Glass Palace”, “The Hungry Tide” and “Sea of Poppies”. Amitav Ghosh’s fiction portrays the two images of women: women as a life-giver, sustainer and continuer of the race as against women in search of an identity.

Anita Desai, the other great novelist of the Indian English fiction was born in 1937. Anita Desai is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indian - English fiction writers. She holds a unique place among the contemporary women novelists of India. Some of her women characters, like Tara in ‘Clear Light of Day’, do achieve fulfillment in their marriages, Through Bimala, Desai points to a kind of feminist emancipation that lies not in limiting women to their traditional roles but in expanding and awakening them to several other possibilities. Bimala aspires to become a heroine. From an early age Bim, like her brother, Raja looks forward to adventures chasing out his own destiny. Bim defies all patriarchal limitations As a lecturer in History; Bim is economically self sufficient and takes care of her retested brother and aged aunt. Her altitude in life move’s from involuntary to voluntary, silence
from repression to distancing. However in the end she realizes, that her own house contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences. Anita Desai's first novel, 'Cry, The Peacock' revolves around its chief protagonist Maya and her problems. As a young sensitive woman, Maya wishes to love and to live. Maya loves Gautama passionately and desires to be loved in return; but Gautama's coldness disappoints her.

**True Sexual freedom depicted by Indian writers**

Ila Das in Anita Desai's "Fire on the mountain" is a victim to sexual politics and colonial/patriarchal oppression. In patriarchal set-ups male and female children are looked after discriminately. Women face discrimination right from their childhood. Girls are encouraged to be home-bound and shy. The parents of Ila Das discriminately sent their three sons to different foreign universities like Heidelberg, Cambridge, and Harvard for proper study. Anita Desai exposes the hollowness of the gender difference.

Paro in the novel “Dreams of Passion” by Namita Gokhale exercises power through her sexuality. Paro spends her childhood in the hostel of a remote public school. She is sexually abused in her teens and this experience leaves an indelible scar on her psyche. Paro, in her adulthood, asserts her individual independence by entering into a live-in relationship (not yet acceptable in traditional India). Paro who lives with Lenin, flirts with Suresh, marries Loukes and commits suicide in the end. Paro's death seems to suggest that enormous freedom when not managed for a meaningful purpose leads to destruction. The novel emphasizes the value of equivalence of power. It also powerfully expresses the experience and feeling of a whole segment of such radical women population. Paro then is a reactionary feminist promoting an ideology of vengeance.

**Equalism and Humanism towards Feminism**

“Humanism is at the foundational core of counseling and psychology” (Harina & Bemak, 1997). Early humanist like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow rejected the prevailing medical model and its biological determinism as it existed during their times. Today, many humanistic-oriented counselors and educators continue the humanistic tradition, emphasizing practices that focus on healthy human development human strengths, and an understanding of people in their environmental contexts (Lundin, 1996). The term Humanism arose during, the 18th century, referred to as a movement promoting reason, ethics, and justice. There's a strong and energetic humanist movement today that draws its roots from that time, commitment to human rights and a non-biased worldview. It doesn't specifically focus on gender equality issues. So one can be a humanist and a feminist, but one doesn't really substitute one for the other. Finally, a feminist perspective on humanistic psychology can itself be critiqued as being insensitive to issues of power and social context. "Woman's" philosophy extends the themes of feminist psychology by focusing on the centrality of community, mutual caring and family, and it challenges us to move beyond experience to liberation and transformation. (Leslie, 1999; Jacklin, 1987).

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