

Review Article

Women as Subaltern: A Critical Evaluation of *That Long Silence* and *the God of Small Things*

Niraj Dang*

Assistant Professor, University Dept of English, Vinoba Bhave University Hazaribag Jharkhand, India

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Abstract: Human society has continuously been polarized based on gender and human relations have been founded on the precept of subjugation- of the female by the male. The handiest purpose for this principle winning the recognition of social sanction is definitely the intuition to dominate. There are various elements that have aided the subordination of women- leader of them being the silence and the silencing of them. Social conditioning begins from early formative years whilst women are talented with dolls home-kits and boys are given weapons to play battles. Stereotypes of women as nurturers and men as protectors are instilled as impressions inside the childhood to be consolidated very firmly into maturity. At the same time as the little boys are taught now not to cry even in private, precise little women are exhorted not to ask uncomfortable questions, anywhere, each time. The malady of silence is enforced on them when they are rewarded for being visible instead of for being heard. In additions, they are taught strict lessons in submission, sacrifice and self-abnegation that men comfortably approve of. The prevailing paper describes how the postcolonial women writers like Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy address a neo-colonial society led by way of socio-cultural hegemony. It offers us the peep into how postcolonial has moved from the struggle against oppressive foreign culture to the struggle against native culture.

Keywords: Subaltern, postcolonialism, marginal, patriarchy, hegemony etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of subaltern research emerged within the 70s. Since then, it has provoked both excitement and cynicism. Many scholars have their distinctive viewpoints, on what precisely constitutes the subaltern. Maximum dictionaries define it in its military sense, to mean 'of inferior rank'. Analogically it applies to the proletariat- the working magnificence, which are subject to the financial and cultural hegemony of the ruling class. This may consist of peasants, women, labourers, dalits and others who have been deprived of main stream power and privilege. In postcolonial terms, it is miles the 'space of difference' between the imperialist/ruling classes whose presences and voices were constantly snuffed out of the capitalist/casteist/patriarchal/colonial narrative and the dominant culture perspective.

Subaltern literature emerged as a variety of social criticism that seeks to voice the priority of unequal and uneven processes of representation. It encompasses social issues such as race, gender, and ethnicity to include the representatives of humans

whose lives have been hidden away in private diaries, parish registers or now not recorded at all. With the emergence of subaltern research, not only has the content of history been transformed to re-centre common humanity, but the very methodology of its writing has been turned on its head. This new perspective, particularly, the 'view from below' would include the underprivileged, the oppressed and the marginalized.

Right through Indian history, Indian woman's crucial dedication to her religion, establishments and rituals has enabled her to be portrayed as the steward of culture and faith. Women have been defined as the embodiment of purity and revered as godly beings despite the fact that in reality they have been considered as susceptible creatures constantly requiring the protection of man as their lord and master. The present paper seeks to depict how postcolonial writers Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy confront a neo-colonial society engulfed by using socio-cultural hegemony. It can be visible how postcolonial has moved from the struggle against oppressive foreign culture to the struggle against native culture. The selected two novels

by Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy spotlight conflict for liberation of women now not from the colonial hegemony but from one's personal oppressive neo-cultural set-up.

Shashi Deshpande in her novel *That Long Silence* (1988) recounts the experience of suppressed Indian Women in their domestic world. The title *That Long Silence* owes its origin to the lines in the speech delivered by Elizabeth Robins to the WWSL, 1907: "If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost would think it would make me shade uneasy- the weight of that long silence of one-half of the world" (Quoted in "The Theme of Silence" 1). In this novel the author shows a fascinating image of a regular middle class educated woman. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel lives with her husband Mohan and two kids Rahul and Rati. The story absolutely revolves around Jaya, a married lady. She plays the position of an affectionate mom, dutiful to in-laws, her spouse and children. Deshpande depicts that the husbands in the patriarchal society do not take interest in other haves' feelings, likes and dislikes. The writer expresses the emotion with brilliant info like that of lovemaking, relationship with children and so on. She displays on Jaya's way of life, her function as a wife and her individuality. She poses a question whether women like Jaya are residing their own lives or living for someone else. All through the story Jaya is engaged in looking for her identification as an individual woman other than being a committed wife and a concerned mom. For Jaya, self-realization is a process of asserting an individuality that is often overlooked and denied in a woman's life. Jaya says, "Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real you never emerge. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces" (Deshpande 1). Having performed multi-faceted roles of a loyal wife and tireless mother for seventeen years, silence becomes unbearable. When Jaya moves to a new flat, she introspects within herself and tries to find out her own self. She doesn't want to be like Mohan's mother and sister who continuously compromised. However, she has to submit to Mohan's likes and dislikes as she has been advised not to disobey her husband. She goes through the experience of a stereotyped housewife who is "nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support" (76). The novel is based in the context of contemporary Indian English Writing. Deshpande is a confident voice who explores individual and generic predicaments through the female psyche.

The novelist has tried to deconstruct the numerous degrees of patriarchal and sexist prejudices which can be employed towards women in Indian middle class society especially in a marriage or within a family. She has stated that "her novels are rooted in the presumption that a woman is an inferior being, of

carrying the burden of being an unwanted female child, of having to battle an ingrained, deeply entrenched patriarchal system- all of which give rise to problem specific to their sex."

The novel presents an insightful and realistic dramatization of the marital status of Jaya and her husband Mohan. Her father named her Jaya which means 'victory'; after marriage her husband calls her 'Suhashini', which symbolizes soft smiling, placid and motherly lady (15-16). Jaya is one of the women who are trapped between structures of tradition and modernity. Despite her education and exposure to liberal western ideas, she finds Indian tradition and culture deeply binding. She has been taught to be an ideal wife who never questions her husband. Vanita Mami, her aunt tells her before her wedding, "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies" (32). Jaya once again recollects that probably Vanita Mami too had been similarly counselled as a bride: "If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it" (32). This is the attitude of traditional women in our society, who think that a husband is an embodiment of God, whose will and interest should readily be carried out without questioning. Deshpande presents a typical Indian house where a girl child is grown with the feeling that she is the 'other', has no right to question: "Look at you- for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?"

Jaya's husband Mohan is a traditionalist, firmly rooted in customs. He in no way pitied his mother for her struggling; instead was proud that she submissively followed the dictates of her husband. He says, "My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her" (83).

Mohan never commends women losing temper. Jaya could read an unusual reaction on Mohan's face when for the first time she lost her disposition: "He had looked at me as if my emotions had made me ugly...later, when I knew him better, I realized that to him anger made me unwomanly" (83). He further adds: "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated..." (147-48). Deshpande has placed the social construct of Indian society which is mainly patriarchal where woman is merely a subaltern who has to fulfil the desires of male individuals. Jaya resigns to Mohan without revolting. She takes on silence as a mode of showing her frustration. The metaphor of silence indicates her sign of retreat. Commenting on the mechanical rapport with her husband she says, "Nothing between me and Mohan. We lived together but there have been only emptiness between us" (105). Her views are just like those of Beauvoir. She writes, "Marriage leads to a

woman's life to aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose".

The place of a wife restricts, subjugates and enslaves. It circumscribes women's progress. The position of a mother does it no less. Jaya questions herself, "Who am I? Mohan's wife, Rahul's and Rati's mother, she is everyone else but not myself" (69).

Under the impact of Kamath, a companion of Jaya, she is prepared to give vent to her creative impulse and inventive passion. That is her manner of unleashing herself from suffocating and repetitive home and social roles. But her stories are rejected for lack of real passions. She keeps away the clamouring voices of women for worry that they may ruffle her home lifestyle. She feels her identity effaced: "I was exactly like other. I was almost invisible" (142). By means of the image of a woman crawling into a hollow, Deshpande describes her woeful plight: "Oh God! I had thought, I cannot take any more. Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into, I had mine- as Mohan's wife, as Rahul's and Rati's mother" (148). The novel, however, ends on the note of hope and change for the better: "We don't change overnight. It is possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope: (193).

Like Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winner has also depicted the oppression of women with a sense of indignation and unpalatably presented their struggle. *The God of Small Things* (1997) is the debut novel of Arundhati Roy. It is a tale of the childhood experiences of fraternal twins whose lives are annihilated by the 'Love Laws' that lay down "Who must be loved, and how, and how much". The story primarily takes place in a town named Ayemenem now part of Kottayam in Kerala state of India. The temporal background shifts backward and forward from 1969, when fraternal twins Rahel and Estha are seven years vintage, to 1993, when the twins are reunited at the age of 31 years. Despite the fact that the book is tragic; it is a lovely love story. The beauty of Ammu and Velutha's love for one another is that which is forbidden. It is miles a wild and threatening love. That is what offers it its unique flavour and intensity. Roy offers the reader a deeper knowledge of the diverse dimensions of love.

The novel is also interpreted as a commentary on Indian history and politics. For example, Roy's novel assaults the brutal, entrenched and systematic oppression at work in Kerala, illustrated via symbol of power including Inspector Thomas Mathew. Roy is likewise highly critical about the hypocrisy and ruthlessness of the conventional, traditional and moral code of Pappachi and Mammachi. Besides, she evaluates the Indian postcolonial complex, or the

cultural attitudes of many Indians towards their former British Rulers. After Ammu calls her father a '[shit]-wiper' in Hindi for his blind devotion to the British, Chacko explains to the twins that they come from a family of Anglophiles, or enthusiasts of English tradition, "trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps", and he goes on to say that they despise themselves due to this. An associated inferiority complex is clear in the interactions between Untouchables and Touchables in Ayemenem. Vellya Pappen is an example of an Untouchable so grateful to the Touchable elegance that he is inclined to kill his son while he discovers that his son has broken the most crucial rule of class division- that there be no inter-class sexual affairs.

The novel additionally violates with the revolt opposition to the biding native culture. She highlights the conflict for liberation from one's own oppressive tradition. She manifests the Indian society constructed on patriarchal perception. She offers three generations of women as protests in opposition to the double marginalization of the Indian women, on the one hand by means of binding native way of life and on the alternative by way of patriarchy.

The first generation of women is represented via Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. They are complacent of their subordinate lifestyle and silently approve of male sovereignty. Mammachi is the conventional, subjugated Indian woman, engrossed in a monastic ideology. She bears with 'mute resignation' her husband's bodily violence. In Ammu's version it is "Fahter Bear beat mother bear" (Roy 180). Ammu is also fully aware to Pappchi's cold calculating cruelty. She quite evidently develops a "lofty sense of injustice and the much mulish reckless streak that develops in someone small who has been bullied all their lives by someone Big" (181-82).

The binding native culture is such that Mammachi shows partiality in her attitude towards her son Chacko and discrimination against her daughter Ammu. Nurtured in an androcentric society, Mammachi advocates this inequality in academic policy. She denies higher education to Ammu as "a college education was unnecessary expense for a girl" (38). Whereas, Chacko is dispatched to Oxford. Roy is critical of parents who baselessly deprive their daughters from earning higher education. The essence of the notion may be better illustrated through what Meena Usmani writes: "The issue of violence against women has become the public problem as the women are discriminated at work, home and are denied their due in every field. The constitution of India promises freedom, equality, opportunity and protection to women and give them several rights. In spite of that they enjoy an unequal status" (Usmani 13). Even though Mammachi has suffered as a female, she

fails to demonstrate any empathy to Ammu when she is compelled to return to Ayemenem after her divorce. On the contrary she presents a cozy state of affairs in Ayemenem to Chacko who too is a divorcee.

The second era is represented by Ammu and Margaret Kochamma. They are attempting to rebel against patriarchy but at the end only spend their force. They cross all limits of sexual codes imposed by patriarchal and socio-cultural norms. Ammu is obsessed with Velutha and defies the "Love Laws" prevalent in her community. Her misdemeanour of margins of the caste, class and faith mount a revolt that marginalizes her as a woman. In order to get away the torturous lifestyle at Ayemenem, Ammu enters into marriage. However, this marriage proves to be equally disastrous. She returns to Ayemenem to be considered as "a wretched man-less woman" (Roy 45). Despite her bold rebellion towards such social establishment of marriage, Ammu a subaltern both economically and socially marginalized, later on dies exiled. Margaret Kochamma puts aside her meaningless association with Chacko as she gets bored to death along with her domineering attitude. Her second marriage also has a disastrous end, she returns to Ayemenem 'to heal her wounded world' but becomes 'shattered like a glass' like any other Indian widow.

The third generation is represented by Rahel. She inherits the rebellious mindset of her mother, but unlike any other 'female' in a patriarchal society, she too "drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge" (18). She is married off to Larry and taken to Boston like a 'gift' for her husband. The marriage culminates in a divorce. She returns to Ayemenem without regrets over her tragic marriage. Rahel could be the new-woman, non-traditionalist, non-conformist but can she speak?

The two novels- *That Long Silence* and *The God of Small Things* exemplify how the post colonialism has moved from the struggle in opposition to oppressive foreign culture to the conflict against oppressive local culture. Each of the novels could be treated as non-colonial discourse that vibrates with the rebellion towards biding native tradition. They highlight how the Indian society constructed on patriarchal

awareness paperwork a bondage to all the female characters. The subaltern as female can hardly be heard as Gayatri Spivak -In Part Four: The Subaltern- points out: "Sexual difference is doubly affected, if in the context of colonial production, subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow".

The message that these two novelists put forward for the readers could well sum as Sujatha makes to the audience in *Mother of 1084* (Hazar Chaurasir Ma): "speak for heaven's sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence?" (Five Plays 42).

In this paper an effort has been made to establish that the Indian English fiction has addressed the issue of canonicity and otherness in non-Western culture in a very moving and telling manner. It highlights how the struggle in the Indian society has shifted from imperialist oppressor way of life to the conflict against oppressive native way of life. The native's resistance towards the colonial power witnessed the emergence of the Third World Literature which Fanon has described as Fighting Literature (231) with the goal 'to cease all exploitation and oppression'. The Postcolonial writers in India are confronted with a neo-colonial society engulfed by a socio-cultural hegemony wherein woman has been rendered as 'voiceless other'.

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