

Role of Subaltern Men in Subjugation of Subaltern Women : A Critical Study

ATUL RANJAN

Abstract. This article is written in context with a different perspective about how acts and actions of subaltern men are responsible for the suffering of subaltern women. I have taken two instances from the novel of Mahasweta Devi's *Outcaste*. One story is about a widow girl who was *Dousadhin* by caste and was forced to turn into a prostitute for survival. She was pregnant by upper caste zamindar of the village who were called '*Mishras*' or '*Deveta*'. The younger Mishra lured Dhoul into love and later betrayed her after sowing the seed of a child in her womb. Another story deals with a tribal girl who was sexually abused and exploited in the lieu of a 'better life', and finally, she had to kill herself to save the future of her husband and child from being 'an outcast'. These two stories show one perspective of the subjugation and exploitation of people who are residing in power such as capitalists and the upper class. Readers are shown reality in a fabricated way, the voice behind closed doors is never heard, but a whimpering murmur is heard with a great deal when it comes to upper-classmen's subjugation and domination of subaltern women. The question here arises about the eyes being shut on the actions of these subaltern men. This paper intends to show the actions of Sarjom and men around Dhoul, who put their women into jeopardy of the upper class and let them come into direct contact with exploitations of hegemony. The story itself mirrors and reveals how subaltern men play a very important role in the exploitation of their female counterparts. The motives, ambition of power, and search for utopian imagination of subaltern men lead subaltern females like Dhoul and Josmina into exposure and later into abuse and exploitation.

Keywords : Fabricated reality; dual standards; outcast; sexual exploitation; voice within the voice; voice behind the closed door.

Voice behind the closed door

Dhoul was a young girl, who was married at an early age but was kept at her parent's house before sending to her in-laws. Dhoul belonged to the '*Dhusadh*' caste in the village, which was the lowest in the social hierarchal order, they were called untouchables, and were also denied access to places where '*Mishras*' or '*Devata*' who were upper caste would go. They had miserable life which was dependent upon the mercy of Mishras.

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After Dhouli's *Gauna*, was sent to her in-law's house which was of her caste and also belonged to almost the same social condition. Her parents could only find a 'better' husband for their daughter who was abusive, illiterate, used to beat Dhouli, and also forces her to submit to his conditions, now the most interesting part here in this picture are two words that we all are quite familiar with in our society as they are abusing and beating. Most scholars and critics only relate this term to a particular caste or strata of people who are residing in higher social order and position, writers often to draw these words with people who are at top of hegemony and have power, money, and position which they use to exploit and force women to submit to them and their needs. But Ironically, neither Dhouli nor his husband belonged to the 'higher social order' and they were also not in a position of some huge fortune yet she was tortured by her own man without mercy. Beating a woman is often related to which man who is weak, submissive, and who couldn't raise his voice in hegemony, he feels power in his hands when he uses his body parts to submit and harass girls like *Dhouli* to their feet.

To mention, Dhouli never rebelled against or raised any voice against her 'man'. Neither critic asked Dhouli to speak nor did another man of her caste said to do so. This is not a reason of interest but in my opinion a reason for ignorance from the side of critics. Mahasweta Devi could have easily omitted the beating and exploitation of Dhouli by the hand of her husband and would have shown only the exploitation of upper caste men on lower caste women, which has now become a kind of ritual for today. She could have hidden it easily but she didn't do it as she also wanted her readers to listen to 'the voice inside of marginalized woman/girl like Dhouli. Devi's insight on Dhouli showed us how this subaltern man wants power to harness women to maintain their place in hegemony. Dhouli's father died, husband died from the disease. I would say that they put her into jeopardy of survival and on the mercy of other men, now she was widow, she was thought to be cursed and now even more untouchable not only to Mishara's but also by her own society. This dogma was created by those residing in power but this power was practiced by those subaltern men more to outcast her and throw her out of village.

The story proceeds so do her misery, now she was pregnant by one of 'Devta' and her condition was now into girth to survive. More names were added to her. *Randi* was her new articulation to recognize, *Randi* is term used for women, who sleeps with more than one man usually for money. Dhouli till now never did something like this to survive. She

was duped, cheated in the name of enchanting love from Mishras/Devta. My question here to readers is that do you really want to blame a young girl? Her society did, they blamed her for believing in promises of Devta, Nevertheless, she had child in her womb, she was now a mother, a creator and most beautiful a believer in imaginative world of 'hope', but this wasn't understood by other *Dhusadhs*, *Ganjus* and *coolies*. They saw a girl which could be pregnant by *Deveta* could also be easily handled by them, she was starving had no food to eat. She was left with no option as she wanted to survive, now no more promises, hope, life, she accepts collies for money, food and clothes, she buries her soul, her body was no more palace of love which she was known for. Everything stops for her, most of those coolies belonged to her caste or even were of her same condition, they came one by one at her and quenches their soul until they wanted. Not a single tear was dropped from Dhoulis's eyes, neither she enjoyed nor denied this processes. She was now officially a prostitute a girl who just want to survive to feed her child.

Normally, it is said that numbers make unity but what was wrong with men of that village was that they themselves wanted to practice power in their hands, Mishras declared Dhoulis as outcaste but this was more practiced by men of her own caste, they couldn't feed a girl who was widow, nor could provide shelter to her after she bore a child but these men were much interested into opportunity rather than into helping Dhoulis. In my opinion Dusadh men were equally responsible to be blamed as of Mishras were of her condition. Rules are made in society often by men to women, men of any class want power, without power they feel worthless yet they are suppressed by power above them. It takes top down improvised filtration here, where people residing at bottom feels the wrath much more than people above them. Men of Dhoulis's village were people at lowest position in social strata, they wanted to practice power, they were like vultures looking for prey and Dhoulis was there for them to be hunted. Already widow now becomes prostitute, guess who were her customers? Her own men of her own society. These were the same men who creates rules for girls like Dhoulis and make them outcasts and label them as a prostitute.

Voice within voice

The narrative of Sarjom and Josmina was also not a fairytale. Sarjom a tribal boy bought home Josmina after the love he had for her, perhaps an established archetypal love story. Their tribe had a ritual of giving presents from the male side to the female. Sarjom wanted Josmina at any cost so

for that, he borrowed money from Nandlal Shahu to pay the bride price for his love. He for that gave *three cows* (*Outcaste*, 58) to Josmina's father. Josmina was with him now, Josmina never knew about the money he lend from Nandlal Shahu, she wouldn't have cared either if she had known. Love blinds everything, and when you had a bride like Josmina 'bubbling and lively as river koyena in the monsoons' (58) no one would have had cared either.

Sarjom put thumb on the blank sheet of paper for his ambitious efforts of brining Josmina at his house for any cost. He made mistake, yes he did a mistake not only for himself but also for Josmina, his actions of lending money did not limit to him but now they both had to suffer in the hand of Nandlal Shahu. 'Ho' tribe had their self respect, they never left any debts unpaid. Sarjom started working day and night in the fields of Nandlal to repay and he came back home with '*paila of makai*' (59), while Josmina collected roots and tubers from the forest they both, were content with their life and the way life was proceeding, they had son named Masidas looked all on track but life never remains same, times changes everything so does it changes the water of Koyena into vapor. Starvation was everywhere and time was hard for both, Nandlal saw an opportunity and lured Sarjom into false promise of 'better life', a better wage. Yes an improvised imaginative life, a utopian dream. Sarjom who was already in a debt to Nandlal did one more mistake of trusting his words again. Actions and ambitions of Sarjom puts Josmina in jeopardy with him. Josmina a content wife, with no unnecessary dreams, living peacefully with her child, doing all chores with hard labor she could bore. Let me remind you here that Josmina never asked or demanded anything like Nandlal's wife did, as Nandlal's wife was greedy and ambitious women who wanted two stories pukka house to maintain her standard of living, this demand forced Nandlal to earn more money through other defective and crooked means.

In proceedings, we see that Sarjom accepts the proposal of Nandlal as he was promised to have 'plenty to eat, four hundred a month, enough clothes', this articulation ends all doubts of Sarjom – "*baap re baap*". Sarjom was convinced and now it was time to convince Josmina, he did convinced her too. As a reader I feel pity yet have to maintain my composure. I assure you that Josmina had no choice, she couldn't be blamed at all as she never knew where Punjab or even Ranchi was, all she knew she had to be with Sarjom in all his times of life, she asks him '*What about me*' (64) leads them into unknown roads of life.

Nandlal sold them for four hundred rupee and their journey of omniscient experience starts on the farm of Niranjan in Punjab, he was rich farmer. They were given tiny room, and fed well, Sarjom was given duty of taking care of the cows, buffaloes from four to eight in the morning than to fields to irrigate the sugarcane and wheat fields, they were paid eighty rupees instead of hundred, it was less than what Nandlal promised. Due to greed and over hyped imagination of Sarjom now Josmina was also trapped, she was paid 40 rupee a month (69) for sleeping with Niranjan. Sarjom never knew what to be done now? "I can't figure it out, Josmina:" shows his helplessness for situations. This line ended all the hope for Josmina of better life, they knew they were trapped. A week man who couldn't decide and see concise pushes his female counterparts also into jeopardy. Josmina had faith on Sarjom's decision if this was not for Sarjom than she would have never came out of his village. Few days later the process of hegemony's subjugation begins as *Malik* came to hut and stripped her naked in front of baby Masidas. She had to bear this pain, she knew it was consent of her man as he had plan of escaping and told her to 'dance on their tune for a while'. This procedure continued for days, it made her broken, ghost ridden. But day came and with the help of 'Sukhram' they escaped.

Next destination in the escape from better life was house of Karnal Singh in Johan village, he bought them for two hundred rupees. Karnal Singh took Josmina every 9 in the evening and do what was to be done, she kept silent in search of better life. Would you still blame hegemony for this? most of reader would get an idea now how the actions of subaltern men in search for better creates problem for woman around them or related to them.

They ran once again from this 'better life' as this time was Pritam Singh and than Gyan Singh. Work, abuse and work was now part of their life, the life which got stuck into no where. The next stop was Sarban Singh, he treated him with care and fed them nicely, but faith of Josmina couldn't last long as his son Dileep Singh grabbed Josmina but now Josmina was habitual of this procedure. The seed was sowed, and they finally reached Rajbhasa, and the search for a better life came back to starting. But the trouble for Josmina never ended as it was time for other subaltern men to commence their power practice of 'outcast'. Josmina didn't bleed for two months, now she knew what was going to happen. Yes, an 'outcast' carrying a 'Bikus' child was not permitted by those men and her society. These were the same men of her tribe who would have physical relations with other women, would make them pregnant yet they

would not be outcasted from their society for Josmina it was either to be outcasted or to end their life, she chose to end her life to save her family from suffering. Her bare naked body washed by the waters of clam river Koyena (83) looked so innocent and pure.

Conclusion

This article contains two stories of two different females of two different social orders, as a writer I have tried to pick out points from the stories to reflect what is happening behind the 'closed doors of subaltern women'. Most scholar writers and readers are shown the reality of fabricated certain perspectives. The reality to them is that only men of the upper caste and capitalist class are involved in subjugation but this view differs from the fictitious world created by them. I have tried to draw a whole new dimension through two stories with this article.

The narrative of subaltern men is quite different and hypocritical when it is seen closely. These men are already weak, fragile, and subjugated by hegemony and other substances in social order and by those who are in power. They are mistreated, manhandled, and given the status of subhuman by upper-class men and other dominating classes. It seems to us that they are in sense true subalterns in society, and all theories, articles, works, and stories need to be written and focused on them. It might be true from one perspective of narration yet on narrowing it down and enhancing our looking angle into literature carefully, we see that we are being diverted, duped, and blindfolded by the actions of these subaltern men. To say this in layman's terms 'Looking behind the closed door' we see that there is the cry of voice waiting to be heard. Now the question arises who are these voices and if these voices are already on the stage then what else needs to be heard? the question might seem to be very normal for readers but truth is that there is 'voice within voice'. The story of Dhoulī and Josmina concludes here that they both were common, simple girls, discharging their duties of parents and society, they both were ambitious less or could be better-said greedless. They were happy and content with their faith but things started to get worse for them is a matter of grave and keen interest to us. In the very first story of Dhoulī, we see her widow, her husband, and her father both die of diseases, husband tortured her, and abused her but she kept the composure of the ideal wife and never raised a voice against her husband or in-laws, she suffered all in the name of marriage but when her husband died the problem started for her, she could have stayed at her in-law's house but this elder brother-in-law saw the opportunity as she was a

widow and started harassing her, not to forget this his elder brother-in-law was also subaltern. His actions drove her out of their in-law's house. Now she had no option but to return to her house of parents in the village but as a widow, she was not accepted by the men of society. When Mishras/Devata got her pregnant and she carried Dikus child in her womb, all other men of her community saw an opportunity to practise hegemonic domination. These men had no power and position in society, they were deprived of basic life yet they had position for practising pseudo power on their own females. Dhoulis was outcast, became prostitute to fulfil her need of food. The ironical thing was about her being prostitute was that her own men of community were her customer. Orthodox and liberal scholars have had practised a brilliant manipulation, the technique of blaming and framing only men in power. Yes I agree they were the subjugator and exploiters but what about these subaltern men? Their actions were no less than these capitalist men. What they did to Dhoulis and Josmina is an example of the actions that they practice on these women.

While concluding Josmina's story, we saw that she was no other girl, like Dhoulis she had no desire for a better life, she was happy with her goats and tuber collection from the forest yet the greed of her husband put her into the ditch of that life. Sarjom at the very start took money from Nandlal puts him into bondage and a trap of debt, a usual debt that makes him pro neto exploitation, the main catch here is that lending money not only puts Sarjom into the trap but also Josmina unintentionally went into the clutches of Nandlal Shahu. Sarjom's actions put her life in jeopardy, she was raped by different men, and became a hollow ghost-ridden female, nothing was done, all was the fault of Sarjom. When Josmina knew she had a child of Sardar, she knew instantly she had bought trouble for her family. As strong man could have saved her life and would have fought society for her but she knew Sarjom wouldn't be doing anything like that so, she had no option but to kill herself to save future of her child and husband for being an outcast.

Atul Ranjan

Research Scholar, Department of English
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi

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