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Abstract

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Voices of the Indigenous Marginalized Community in Bina Thing's *Yambunera*

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The article studies the voices of the indigenous marginalized community in Bina Thing's Yambunera from a Subaltern perspective. Yambunera has included thirteen stories and this article tries to explore the voice of the indigenous marginalized people and their representations only in six stories. Bina Thing attempts to bring into the mainstream literature the cultural dissimilarities prevalent in Nepali society. Characters portrayed in Yambunera are marginalized and silenced because of dominant culture, cultural dominance, poverty and illiteracy. The article intends to argue the ethnic identity issues, marginalization, discriminatory social practices and subordination to the rulers in the selected text. Thus, the study critiques the text from the critical perspectives of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and J. Maggio. Basically, Subaltern Studies explores the voices of the marginal groups in society and examines how the literary discourse represents these voices. Spivak argues that class consciousness is self-alienating the social groups from the others within a domain of exploitation and domination. The article tries to examine issues such as injustice, prejudice, protest, and resistance in the text and intends to shed light on the voices of the indigenous women. Yambunera focuses on the plights of the Tamangs living in Yambu who are perceived as being uncultured, savage and uneducated and, above all, they are silenced. The findings of the discussion indicate injustice, prejudice, protest and resistance in the case of the fictionalized characters in Yambunera. Furthermore, the study reflects the search for cultural identity and the marginalized people's efforts to stand up for the voices. The present article encourages a good understanding of the marginalized voices in Nepali literature.

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES the voices and representations of the marginalized people in Bina Thing's *Yambunera* through the critical lens of the subaltern perspective. It aims to

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examine how the marginalized community is treated and how their voices are represented in the selected text. The study concludes that the characters depicted in the texts are labeled as the subalterns, stemming from socio-economic and political conditioning. *Yambunera* is a collection of thirteen stories written by Bina Thing. It incorporates a variety of issues such as marginalization, exploitation, domination and prejudice prevalent in contemporary time and space. Altogether six stories have been selected for the textual interpretation. Thing's *Yambunera* presents most women characters as the protagonists in the leading roles whose voices are not audible. Interestingly, the events get told through the women's perspectives or views. In the story "*Yambunera*," Sommaya is the principal character who is a young, and uneducated woman. She is thirty. She is a member of the Taming indigenous community. The dominant groups in the society dominate and marginalize her on the ground of economic status and illiteracy. All other characters in the selected stories suffer from marginalization and oppression. Similarly, Sommaya does not continue her education and has to take care of the rest of her sisters because of her poor, sick parents. She provides for her family by cutting the firewood and adopting the traditional alcohol business. She has to struggle with the government officials in the forest. Sapana is another leading character in the story "*Ghadi Phool*", and is an indigenous woman. However, she is badly oppressed by patriarchal ideology. Instead, she gets beaten, and thus suffers from her in-laws' humiliation.

In *Yambunera*, the Tamang people suffer from the hand of the powerful and the state mechanism because all the fictional characters fit in the indigenous woman group. Marginalized people are discriminated based on different religion, color, caste, geography, language and culture. Hegemony, authority and dominance of the ruling class create biases against the marginalized groups. The Lahure culture and his search for the foreign employment impacts Bhagawan. He leaves his primary school because of language intervention. The collection of stories presents a humble character Sapana, who elopes with a Newar boy from Birganj; however her conflict begins after her early marriage. She gives up high school level education and subsequently establishes a marital relationship before appearing in the SLC examination. Consequently, her in-laws mistreat her. Not only that, her husband fails to support her emotionally and abuses her badly. She is afflicted on the basis of cultural biases as Sapana and her husband come from a different culture. She is mistreated and exploited by the patriarchal notion of the in-laws family members. On the other hand, the short story titled "*Gandhe Jhaar*", narrates the story of the two main characters named Chinmaya and Dipesh, who are perceived as the marginalized indigenous. In the beginning, these characters become the classmates and neighbors. They attend the school together but towards the middle of the story both of them take their separate paths in life. He is involved in the student politics and makes his exit to a foreign land to avoid the house arrest. In the village, the aggressive boy Dipesh resists inappropriate actions. Culture, poverty, lack of knowledge and the structural barrier of the state creates the subordination in society. Sommaya and her friends sell distilleries because they have low economic status. Patriarchy marginalizes Sapana. Shantamaya and Sanu are the indigenous but subordinated people. They perform domestic works since they are neither rich nor educated.

In this connection, the silencing of the voice of the marginalized groups is referred to as the subaltern issue in the discourse of literature. Spivak views that the subaltern is described as social groups of the lower status. The influential critic remarks, "The most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the "subaltern"(Spivak, 1988, p.215). Similarly, Maggio, commenting on Spivak's notion of the colonial subject, says that this is the role of European intellectuals to "discloses and know the discourse of society's other" (p. 419-420). Social groups excluded from the hegemony of the ruling classes are the subalterns. The subalterns as lower classes and social groups are at the margin of a society in Postcolonial theory. It stands for the subordination in South Asian society as the con-

cept of subaltern operates in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way. It studies the binary relationship of the subaltern and ruling classes as dominance and subordination act together in colonial systems.

The word “Marginalization” relates to as social exclusion, which follows when certain groups of people are denied access to opportunities and resources of society. Likewise, being marginalized means being obliged to live on the periphery of things, rather than in the center. This exclusion occurs due to differences. For example, if you speak a different language or belong to different religious group, exclusion begins. Marginalized people suffer biases due to the economic status. People belonging to lower strata of society are perceived as subordinated, marginalized communities than others. In the anthology, indigenous women characters are the marginalized groups, sometimes viewed with hostility. Also, the article adopts a subaltern concept as a theoretical parameter to substantiate the argument. Thus, the analysis claims the depiction of voices of the marginalized people and their representations as subaltern characters in Bina Thing’s selected stories.

Review of Literature

The study makes a review of the basic concepts and theoretical insights from the Subaltern perspective and reviews the criticisms of the author and the primary text: Bina Thing’s *Yambunera*. In the first place, Kshitij Chaurel (2022) writes that the short stories allow us to understand and experience the marginalized community that the state has ignored. Most stories are worth reading but some lack development of plot and characterization. Although the collection does not stick to the literary elements, the stories offer to present an overview of the plights of the marginalized people living in Yambu. Similarly, critic Prakash Thapsuhang (2079 BS) writes that power ignores the culture of the marginalized community. This anthology describes the situation. Sommaya’s adamant nature is a strong resistance against cultural invasion. The marginalized community and culture are impacted by power structure. The protagonist’s role is to protest the domination. Differently, Babu Saheb (2020) writes that many people are socially oppressed, and subjugated. Community shares rhythms of life. The anthology talks about pains and complaints about social injustice. Forgotten and unheard people have not been mentioned in a narrative for ages. The anthology simply depicts the injustice, domination and subjugation of the marginalized people.

Ramchandra Shrestha (2077 BS) observes that the people living a life near Kathmandu have been excluded from the state. The marginalized people suffer and cannot separate themselves from the center yet are not included. Shrestha points out the sufferings of the marginalized people so the state ignores them. Inclusion of the marginalized people in the state machine is overlooked. In the same way, according to Gauri Tamu (2077 BS), the Tamang have experienced a story of the sufferings, exploitation, oppression and discrimination, and it is long and reflective. *Yambunera* depicts the plights of the Tamang women being marginalized from the state and the community. The Tamang people are vulnerable races. In contrast, Praju Panta says that Thing digs out pain, struggle and the state’s domination in her story but she communicates about anger and the characters’ uneasiness. (Interview, Trans. is mine). Thus, the anthology stresses the continued struggle of the marginalized community and focuses on sufferings.

Tulsi Acharya (2077 BS) maintains that the story shows the human nature, emotion, and instinct artistically; these stories are excellent as per the subject matter. Their voices would never be heard and read if not composed in Nepali literature. The story realistically portrays society and characters ignored by the state power. Thus, Acharya focuses on the voices of the characters involved that the state ignores. On a different note, Anvesh Thulung (2078 BS) states that the

Kathmandu valley used to be called Yambu which from the Tamang's view would appear to be another world for the other people. Calling such people as vulnerable race, the rulers continued to exploit these folks socially and economically for centuries. In this way, Thulung closes that if such people are vulnerable races, they are likely to face exploitation. Janak Karki (2078 BS) says that Thing's stories deal with the voice of the marginal and helpless, society, religion and culture, tradition and rituals. Thus, Karki stresses that the anthology merely portrays the voices of the marginalized and helpless people living in Yambu.

Likewise, the framework of interpretation includes the concepts of subaltern studies from the scholars, and critics who have devoted sufficient time and discussed the subaltern issues. The very idea of the subaltern signifies the people of the underclass or the subordinated social groups on whom the dominated group applies its hegemonic power. The subaltern begins from the subaltern and of elite politics. Ranajit Guha (1982) writes that in the domain of subaltern politics, mobilization was achieved horizontally while the same was recognized vertically in the field of elite politics. This mobilization was intense and spontaneous. It was understood in the peasant revolts reflect this same idea (p, 4). The organization of the social groups becomes violent and spontaneous when uprisings occur, so it is a matter of politicization.

Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) remarks, "The most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the "subaltern" (p.215) and suggests that the peasants' politicization is activated by the dislocation (p. 217). She further adds that the "imperialist subject constitution" blends "epistemic violence" that develops through "learning and civilization" (p. 295). Spivak views the subaltern as the agency of change that stimulates the social movement, and states that imperialist subject formation is a matter of epistemic violence shaped by knowledge.

Gyanendra Pandey (2005) argues that the word 'subaltern' can be used in a situation of colonial rule by a distinct group of foreigners. If the people are ruled, oppressed and discriminated by the elite groups, they are identified as subaltern subjects. Also, factors such as the caste, race, occupation, class, age, and color depict the subaltern perspective. Moreover, the subalterns want their voice heard and represented appropriately but they are silenced by the power structure. In society people of the dominant culture use authority to dominate the subaltern classes. On a different note, commenting on Spivak's notion of the colonial subject, Maggio (2007) says that these European scholars are presumed to "disclose and know the discourse of society's other" (p. 419-420). The subalterns are such social groups ignored by the hegemony of the ruling classes.

After reviewing Bina Thing's collected stories from a multiplicity of interpretations, the text offers portraiture of the marginalized women, and advocates for the voice of the marginalized women. Because narratives of the anthology are conceived to articulate the concerns of the indigenous people, Thing uses the anthology as a space for marginalization. The characters fight against the existing ideology. Finally, the anthology establishes the claim that the voice of the indigenous people is faintly heard and silenced. Thus, the article adopts the critical perspective of Subaltern Studies to critically analyze the voice of the marginalized people.

Depicting Voices of the Marginalized Community

Bina Thing's collected stories uncover the suppressed voices of the marginalized people all of whom have lived on the native land, and claim rightful representations. In "*Yambunera*", Sommaya's has several obligations in her mundane life. She has weak and poor parents. She does not complete her education because of having many younger sisters in the family. She sacrifices for her sisters. Poverty and lack of skills compel her to collect firewood in the forest and prepare liquor so that she can earn little money and meet her daily needs. She has no other options

than cut down the trees for firewood to distill. In this sense, she as a subaltern has to suffer from the hand of the powerful and the state mechanism since she is both a woman and an indigenous group. She is doubly marginalized. Thing writes:

For collecting firewood, her friends either went to a foreign or got married. Sommaya was left alone as she neither married a man nor went to a foreign country. Her marriageable age exceeded. Her friends left her alone. However, responsibilities gripped her. Consequently, she had to collect firewood, prepare liquor, sell them, purchase the food to feed and buy medicine for sick parents. (p. 46)

The plight of the protagonist is unbearable because poverty grips her and forces her to suffer a lot. Ranajit Guha (1982) holds, “Elitist historiography should be resolutely fought by developing an alternative discourse” but the same discourse should be based on the “recognition of the coexistence and interaction of the elite and subaltern domains of politics” (p.7). The protagonist Sommaya is the victim of the interactive forces of politics. Power displaces the culture and marginalization so resistance should begin against cultural attack. In this context, the female character is forcefully ignored and subjugated. Thus, poverty, tradition, cultural practice and lack of knowledge in the Tamang community make Sommaya a marginalized character.

Similarly, Pyakhule and Sommaya are good friends and neighbors but they meet the same fate and have to struggle in life. They trade distilleries because of their low economic status. For instance, as he is a male character, he escorts Sommaya to the forest. As Thing mentions, “You are highly paid for liquor. Pyakhule, you just manage such a contract like yours for me” (p. 49). In this context, Sommaya and Pyakhule often take a contract on liquor to fulfill the needs because they are unskilled, uneducated and poor. They are indigenous; they are economically and educationally backward and left behind the other races. In fact, they are subordinated people. Quoting Dipesh Chokravorty, Spivak (1996) argues, “The self-consciously socialist discourse of the left sector of the indigenous elite is attempting to displace the discourse of feudal authority and charge it with new functions” (p. 215). A displacement of feudal authority by the socialist discourse is the subaltern consciousness of the indigenous community. The indigenous people are excluded from the mainstream texts. Likewise, Poonam and Sanu have to distill and earn little money, collecting firewood from the National Park. However, they express their complaints about not being able to get firewood and sell liquor because of strict surveillance of the Forest officers. They show dependency on the foreign employment and are tempted to go to the foreign nations with the view of economic benefit yet ultimately their choices make them voiceless in their own country. In conclusion, all the characters as portrayed in “*Yambunera*” become marginalized because of culture, poverty, lack of knowledge, and the structural barrier of the state.

Another story “Bhagawan Niwas” presents the protagonist Bhagawan whose father tells him to build a house of his own. He earns money, by going to Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, he builds his house with money but unfortunately the house collapses into debris from the quake. Education, skills and wealth are connected so without these aspects Bhagawan becomes the victimized. The protagonist argues, “I have studied in grade III from this school. I quit school because I neither speak nor understand Nepali” (p. 67). Bhagawan is disadvantaged in education because of the one language policy in the state. Dipesh Chakravorty (2009) observes, “Different non-Western nationalisms would later produce local versions of the same narrative, by replacing “Europe ” with a locally constructed center” (p. 7). The eastern nationalist agenda creates the local narrative, replacing the term Europe with a locally constructed center. Thus, discriminatory acts continue to happen because of the monolithic narrative. Bhagawan Tamang, who loses property from the foreign employment, unnecessarily bears sufferings because he lacks knowledge and ability.

Beliefs in the Lahure culture encourage the indigenous people to seek the foreign employment. Language interference is another reason for the drop-out of the primary school. The Tamang community has its distinct language, culture and religion. They are perceived as docile, meek and straightforward races. Further, they are not only poor and uneducated but backward. As Thing argues, "Bread, cloth and shelter satisfy you. I have experienced the scorching heat in Saudi Arabia for six years" (p. 66). Bhagawan is compelled to seek foreign employment because of poverty and lack of skills. Guha (1982) argues, "Elitist historiography helps us to know more about the structure of the colonial state, the oppression of its various organs in certain historical circumstances, and the nature of the alignment of classes which sustained it" (p. 2). Thus, the indigenous community experiences sufferings, exploitation, oppression and discrimination.

In "Ghadi Phool", Sapana struggles unimaginatively after she has got married. Her in-laws maltreat, insult, humiliate and exploit her simply because she is a woman, a daughter-in-law and a housewife. The patriarchal practice in society segregates and marginalizes this poor woman, but she does not resist against the patriarchal attack. As Thing writes, "She had appeared in District Level Examination during the restoration of the multiparty system. Afterwards, she eloped with a Newar boy from Birgunj before the result was published" (p. 8). Her early marriage is the cause of her sufferings as she has not attained her maturity. She marries a man without completing her higher study. Spivak writes, "To question the unquestioned muting of the subaltern woman even within the anti-imperialist project of subaltern studies is not to 'produce difference by differing'" (p. 295). The illiterate women are silenced in patriarchy. She fails to literally resist against the patriarchal mindset. Therefore, oppression and marginalization arises because of the protagonist's female weaknesses; she tolerates injustice without protest as she lacks knowledge. The patriarchal mindset in Nepali society victimizes the weak women so Sapana bears sufferings.

In "Gangaram's Saikal", Sapana as an indigenous member of her community cannot be imagined in nation-building. For example, she feels prejudiced as much from the perspective of the rulers as Gangaram from the hilly people in the capital. Sapana is a female and a representative of the indigenous community but her identity is ignored in the nationalist paradigm from the way Gangaram as a Madheshi is treated. Like Gangaram's representation in the national politics, Sapana is insulted and then disrespected. Thing writes that she is delighted when Gangaram leaves her house but this idea of his departure upsets her instantly. She frequently calls him a Madhesi to insult him.

In another story "Gandhe Jhaar", Chinimaya narrates the event. Chinimaya's perspective is used in its story. Chinimaya and Dipesh belong to the ethnic groups, they are classmates, and they go to school together. An aggressive boy Dipesh dissents the school managing committee. He emphasizes reformative works in education. Joining the Students' Organization, he gets responsibilities and attends several meetings. They infrequently meet each other. During the internal conflict, the police search for Dipesh. Multiple troubles such as social criticism, ridicule by the neighbors about his father's disappearance, economic crisis, school drop-out, his sudden escape to the foreign county and his active involvement in contemporary politics transform Dipesh completely. Thing writes, "placing the pan on the stove, she bakes dry bread and grinds chilies. She carries the baked bread in soft cotton cloth to the farm field" (p. 114). The lowly social and economic status of these characters thus depicted in the narrative has brought both into marginalization. As a result of this, he gets angry and complains about the wrongdoings. On the other hand, Chinimaya is a poverty-stricken indigenous woman but she occupies little space in the narrative of the story. She is a meek, sensitive character who expresses her growing concern for him. Spivak (1996) argues that the parallel of class-consciousness rather than race-consciousness seems historically, disciplinarily, and practically forbidden by Right and Left alike (p. 294-295). In this

way, the Right and Left political faction exclude the similarity between class-consciousness and race-consciousness as far as the difference between the subaltern is concerned. Thus, in the story, the socio-political power structure drives Dipesh and Chinimaya to the margin. The consequence of this is that both characters need to antagonize the existing ideology and conventions of the society.

Another story “Aayam” portrays Shantamaya, aged 30, who is a married woman. The visit to the Domestic Employment Office engages this indigenous, destitute woman in the domestic work in the house of a retired married couple. She has a very hectic job in her master’s house from morning to evening. She has to have accepted domestic work because of her illiteracy and poverty. This widow suffers from her first husband’s demise and she remains as the housemaid due to financial inability. Her second husband Sanu supports her. In this sense, as they are neither wealthy nor educated they are preoccupied with manual works. Thing writes, “I got married, Miss. He loves me passionately. He and I work in the same house” (p. 76). Their second marriage brings joys and happiness to these newly married couples. Spivak (1988) observes that they are considering consciousness in the case of the subaltern and culture, and the subaltern is operating in the theater of “cognition in the case of the elite, culture and manipulation” (p. 218). Class consciousness is the resulting factor of the subaltern but the subaltern functions in the form of the elite, culture and influence. In summary, Shantamaya and Sanu are culturally the indigenous and economically disadvantaged social groups. Illiteracy, the low economic status of these characters, and the influence of cultural hegemony marginalize Shantamaya and Sanu who come from a vulnerable community. Thus, from the discussion above, all the characters have become the embodiment of the marginalization because of ideology, cultural hegemony, structural barriers, subaltern politics and consciousness.

Conclusion

The study investigates how the indigenous are ignored, unheard and disadvantaged. Within the text, the indigenous people are denied access to opportunities and resources of society. Marginalization obliges the Tamang people to live on the periphery of things. Significantly, the Tamang community represents their worlds embedded with their ethnic experiences and aesthetics in their distinct community. The protagonists as the marginalized characters fight for their cultural identity and existence in the form of resistance. The voice of the indigenous people is silenced by the ruling class in the fictionalized narrative. The power center oppresses and dominates the marginalized groups with the use of repressive guidelines. The state power remains silent in sensitive events of the disadvantaged people within the power structure. Obviously, society, religion and culture represent national identities but they unquestionably shape the ethnic identity. The study indicates that debates on religion, culture, tradition and rituals educate the indigenous community politically. Timid nature, submissive temperament, dependency and lack of education have strong impacts on the indigenous women who cannot resist against domination. Patriarchy plays a discriminatory part in matters of the indigenous women because they speak louder enough but they are unheard. The community has to pursue financial security by going to foreign lands. In finality, the study tries to explore the quest for self.

On the contrary, the study uncovers the plights of the sidelined indigenous women because of the state mechanism. Thus, these social groups are marginalized. Therefore, the fictional characters appear to have experienced marginalization, domination, and oppression based on race, color, region, culture and language. Essentially, these people cannot reach the political posts and the decision-making body. Arguably the interplay of domination and subordination leads to the marginalization of the Tamang community, perceived as the excluded, subordinated groups. The

study finds the reasons for the identity crisis as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of knowledge and consciousness of the indigenous women.

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