

Presentation of Marginality from the Indigenous Community in Rajan Mukarung's *Hetchhakupa*

Bidur Rai

Lecturer of English

Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Email: bidurrai33@gmail.com

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Abstract

*This article analyzes how Rajan Mukarung's novel *Hetchhakuppa* represents the indigenous people as marginalized indigenous characters from the critical perspective of subaltern studies as furthered in postcolonial India to rewrite the social history of the post-independence period. The major theorists, beginning with Ranjit Guha to Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, state that the people at the bottom tend to get misrepresented and termed inaccessible for the people at the top. However, this study contends that J. Magio aids in our comprehension of the notion that individuals express their voice through artistic creations. Mukarung's *Hetchhakuppa* focuses on the cultural and indigenous identity of the characters, lending a voice to their suffering and marginalization. It implies that indigenous but marginal people are silenced due to the context of socio-political structure, so their voices are unheard and ignored. Thus, this paper concludes that the contemporary Nepali fiction *Hetchhakuppa* depicts the unheard characters.*

Keywords: Indigenous people, marginalization, marginality, representation, subaltern

Representation, Marginality and Indigeniety

In this article, Rajan Mukarung's novel *Hetchhakuppa* is studied for how it portrays marginality from a subaltern point of view, as well as how the indigenous characters are portrayed. All of the characters that appear in the novel are portrayed as members of underrepresented subclasses because of socioeconomic and political conditioning. Mukarung's novel *Hetchhakuppa* begins with Sangen's unending struggle and is marginalized by the dominant groups in the state while he is a young and educated person. Any group that is represented politically or socially is being expressed in a way that either works for or against the group being represented. In this regard the

fictionalized characters Kaman Singh, Ridhum, Nusan, Maila Deva, Sara and Newarni Didi experience marginalization due to their lack of political power, resources, and education. Representation of these ethnic groups constitutes marginality. Marginality in the novel relates to how characters from ethnic minority groups, such as Nusan, Kaman Singh, and Sagen, are regarded in terms of hegemony by elite groups. Likewise, Rithum discontinues his further education because of the Lahure culture whereas Kaman Singh loses identity due to his long engagement with the British army. Utaran Dutta views that the indigenous people are facing oppression and marginalization across the global south (55). Mukarung's novel shows marginalization, domination, oppression and resistance of the characters. It describes subaltern classes, class consciousness and weak voices. If represented politically or socially, this representation works for misappropriation. Sagen, a character of Mukarung's novel, feels several distresses resulting from oppression or persecution when he leaves his birthplace and reaches Kathmandu for his better opportunity. His life does not thrive satisfactorily. To take advantage of the opportunity, he will have to work as an editor while raising his family in the congested and expensive metropolis.

When it comes to marginality, indigenous groups are likely to be segregated or persecuted; therefore, minority ethnic groups reformulate or change their identities to take advantage of opportunities which are denied to these groups. Members of ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities are frequently among those who are marginalized or indigenous. When groups are marginalized, they're figuratively kept on the margins of society, away from the center, where power and privilege lie. Riddum, and Diwahang are indigenous people who are marginalized. They are kept away from access and privilege. Nusan faces many difficulties in the city, as he finds unsympathetic people. Riddum devotes much of his golden time to an army, and ignores opportunities for higher education. He fails to get access in the government sector. As a British soldier, Diwahang fails to get recognition for his singing talent.

Being indigenous is a characteristic of a group's identity that links them to particular geographic areas and exhibits a familiarity with traditional traditions. The foundation for the development of subaltern consciousness is the political and economic system. Politics, ideology, economics, and consciousness are all important components of the subaltern notion. Despite making up a sizeable portion of the population, indigenous peoples have historically been denied access to political and economic opportunities as well as to land, territories, resources, language, culture, laws,

and customs. They have also been marginalized, excluded, subjugated, and exploited. In the novel, all indigenous people are portrayed as oppressed and downtrodden.

Mukarung's novel has been critiqued from the multiple perspectives of most critics and reviewers. In this reference, no sufficient scholarly reading has been done on Mukarung's *Hetchhakuppa*. Richa Bhattarai views *Hetchhakuppa* as a character from the sacred Mundhum of the Kiratis. Sangen, the protagonist of the novel *Hetchhakuppa*, has parallels to a mythical hero in the Kirati Mundhumi text. Bhattarai states that the protagonist is a representative of numerous faceless and voiceless Kiratis (par. 1). The long years of Sangen's life are spent in the quiet village of Dilpa. Later, he gets entangled in the vicious environment of Kathmandu. Bhattarai observes that most characters mix with Sangen's life and journalistic profession, but she says these indigenous characters organize rallies, complain about political indifference, discuss the predicament of ex-gurkha, and complain of being marginalized (Bhattarai). Events are narrated through the eyes of the protagonist in a novel. However, Mukarung expresses that he breathes life into his Mundhumi culture. His novel conveys society, culture, civilization, and Mundhum in the national geography, and the power of his poetical style arises from these aspects (Mukarung, back cover, English translation is mine). The novel communicates the indigenous people's stories of suffering, oppression, and discrimination based on color, race, or religion in society. Also, ethnic identity issues are explored, showing discriminatory social practices.

Some information is collected from the personal interview. In a personal interview, Mukarung perceives "*Hetchhakuppa*", a text on the Kirati myth, dealing with color, race, and religion (personal interview). The novel exemplifies indigenous feelings and cultural impact from the protagonist's perspective. In the same way, Arun Baral writes that *Hetchhakuppa* is a novel of a new kind, and it is a fine art work and literature, depicting the ethno aesthetics. In literature, the term 'ethnoaesthetics' bears its existence and significance as an alternative discourse (interview). In a similar way, in the published interview with the Kathmandu Post, Mukarung loves books and the Nepali works of literatures, which are becoming diverse and inclusive. He and his teams (also known as 'creative anarchy') intended to introduce the "culture, philosophy, and lifestyle of Janajatis to mainstream literature". He spoke to the Post with strong conviction: "Our identities' narratives were missing in those stories, and our experiences had no mentions. And this wasn't just about our representation; it was about the need to work on literary works that accepted diversity" (Personal interview). Literary texts that accept and represent cultural diversity should come from the perspectives of the indigenous. On a different note, inside a novel, *Hetchhakuppa* is a struggler. He embodies Kirati civilization. He is a character that helps find paths in life and a guide (Mukarung 45, English translation is mine). In the same way, the protagonist in the novel indicates people's lack of access to state mechanisms. Pride in

the Lahure culture, and NGO or INGO investment have made the indigenous people backward.

Basanta Basnet writes that *Hetchhakuppa* stands against racial discrimination in the nation. Characters are anarchic and creative. On the whole, *Hetchhakuppa* is the sum total of what Mukarung has experienced in his life. In contrast, characters in a novel are racists in the sense that they together fight back for identity against hominization in the name of globalization (par.2). In this way, indigenous characters are illustrious examples of the experimentation of an alternative debate in Nepali literary discourse. In Annapurna Post, 13 Phalgun, 2068, Rajan Mukarung states that he has written in opposition to oppression in his racial community. Moreover, racial liberation and racial consciousness are the central focus of his writings. This is what he has written. If it is called 'racist work', it is not a fault. He is a full-time author of Nepali literature (Post, English translation is mine). The fiction writer agrees to write a work of literature to represent his community and their voices and faces in writings of this kind.

According to different scholars and reviewers, Mukarung's novel *highlights the* plights of marginalized groups struggling endlessly. Further, the article tries to spotlight ethnicity, marginalization, and subjugation. From the critical readings of the texts, they have reviewed the novel through its themes, literary artifacts, and contemporary issues. Subaltern studies as a perspective develops an understanding of the representation of marginality in the characters in mainstream literature and the opinions of marginalized, socially excluded groups. Writing about literature from the margin lends space to the marginalized community and their experiences. Though interpreted from different perspectives, the present article explores the representations of marginality from characters of ethnic roots, applying the subaltern lens as a framework of interpretation.

Presentation of Marginality in the Indigenous Community

Mukarung's novel *Hetchhakupa* centers on social marginalization, dominance, oppression, and resistance prevalent in society while simultaneously beginning the debate on the representations of the communities with different ideologies, cultures, and consciousness, and the inclusiveness of the writings from the margin. The protagonist, Sagen, who runs parallels with the mythical character Hetchhakupa in Kirat Mundhum, undergoes several trials and tribulations in his life, traveling from Dilpa Bhojpur to Kathmandu for a better opportunity. With infinite dreams, he enters the crowded metropolitan city, Kathmandu, but he has to struggle. He has insufficient means and manages to feed the hungry mouths in his family. He works in a media house called "Aawaj," funded by the ex-Gurkha Soldiers' Organization, as

an editor-in-chief. However, he finds it extremely difficult to sustain himself in the city. While struggling, the protagonist describes his experiences in the city: "Days were spent in Kathmandu while tutoring, reporting journalism, and proofreading. Sabitra, his wife, follows after Sangen with her son; a year later, he has settled in Kathmandu. Man is a creature that faces problems. Sorrows come and go in life" (Mukarung 38, English translation is mine). When Sangen struggles in Kathmandu alone, his wife and son connect him. Expenditure increases, and he cannot meet the needs of the family. Life passes with trials and tribulations. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak observes that the term "subaltern" designates nonelite or subordinated social groups" (213). Subordinated social groups are identified as subaltern since the same term problematizes humanist concepts of the sovereign subject. Thus, as a marginalized individual, Sangen, the novel's protagonist, asserts his voice against the hegemony of the dominant groups, but his voice is unheard and unapproachable toward the state. As you observe the Kirati tradition, people perform all the rituals while narrating the fine stories from the Holy Scripture "Mundhum" (par. 1). In this way, in the novel, the protagonist is a struggler, but he does not get cooperation from everyone and gets exploited. In summary, the protagonist represents himself as a subordinated group that takes the form of marginality.

Similarly, indigenous citizens suffer in the country as they lack skills and abilities, and discriminatory attitudes exist in society. They are entangled in several filters of society in such a way that the people cannot escape them, though they are capable and raise a voice. For instance, Sangen travels from his village to Kathmandu to become the editor of a newspaper. He faces noncooperation from the people. As the narrator observes:

Sangen arrived in Kathmandu to further his studies. After earning his BA, he was given the duty of working as a newspaper editor. Everyone, with the exception of his mother, relocated to Kathmandu. Both his family and friends gathered at the same time. He burrowed himself beneath the bonds of his in-laws, the affection of his son, and the busy heart of Kathmandu (Mukarung 38; my translation into English).

The protagonist, as an editor, runs his family in a busy but expensive city, yet his life does not succeed sufficiently. In the rented home, he struggles to provide for his family. In his observation, Gyanendra Pandey writes, "The term 'people,' the root of 'popular,' commonly refers to working men and women; the unemployed, the disadvantaged, and the marginal; those who are not members of the elite or members of the dominant classes" (411). Working people are often said to be the unemployed, the disprivileged,

and the marginal; they are not members of the dominant classes. In summary, Sangen faces obstacles and tolerates noncooperation from members of society because he is weak and voiceless. This is a representation of the indigenous groups from the margin.

Nusan got married to Salmaya, a woman from a Dalit community, a couple of years ago. Conversations about the caste system break out in a whole village, and racial discrimination becomes a heated debate. He leaves his ancestral village within two weeks of his marriage to avoid such social criticism and goes to Kathmandu. He attends the post of a peon and spends the days with much difficulty. Although he wants to go overseas, he has no good educational background or working experience. Nusan travels from his ancestral hometown to Kathmandu and faces various difficulties in the crowded city, where people are not sympathetic to the destitute. "You have neither solid credentials nor prior work experience, claims Mukarung. You are given a cleaning position in a foreign country" (44). The character is not educated and is jobless. Since that time, he has lived in the huge city, struggling for a payable job. He cherishes the dream of earning money by going to a foreign country. It is impossible to find highly paid jobs because of a lack of a good education and job profile. In this sense, Ranjit Guha states that in either case, the intertwining of the two strands of elite and subaltern politics invariably resulted in explosive situations, showing that the elite-mobilized masses managed to escape their control and impart the distinctive stamp of popular politics on campaigns started by the upper classes (*Subaltern Studies* 6). In the extract, elite and subaltern politics provoke explosive situations where the common people fight for liberation but break away from authority. Consequently, the upper classes influence these campaigns, which bear the imprint of popular politics. In short, the subaltern people suffer at the hands of the powerful in society. Nusan gets victimized and exploited because of his low profile. His representation as a marginal being is understood.

Riddum, the son of a British Gurkha pensioner, spends four years' time in an attempt to get enrolled in the British army, yet he spoils his study. He fails in higher secondary education. His age exceeds the age bar for eligibility in the army. The habit of studying declines. Spivak argues, "The task of the "consciousness" of class or collectivity within a social field of exploitation and domination is thus necessarily self-alienating" (224–25). Thus, Riddum, as an indigenous person, fails to get access to the government sector easily. He chooses to separate himself because of his consciousness of class or collectivity. Subaltern consciousness alienates him from elite ideology. The narrator observes, "You do not need to remain hungry; you get your share. You satisfy your hunger one or the other way round. Your self-pride does not allow you to get employed in a small post" (Mukarung 47; English translation is mine). The indigenous

youths continue trying in either the British or Indian army and squander much of their golden time, and best opportunities because of a lack of education, ability, and reliable contacts with the state. To explicate the logic, the writer reveals that marginalized characters are indigenous. They discontinue education because of their high pride in the Lahure culture. Thus, Lahure culture, class consciousness, elite ideology, and ethnicity have created marginalization.

In the novel, characters such as Ninam, Newarni Didi, Krishna KC, and Sabitri arrive in Kathmandu for a number of reasons and continue to struggle despite the price hike, complex lifestyle, and high expenditure. The narrator reflects on contemporary politics:

The bourgeois feudalists and lords trap and ensnare the middle-class feudalists and lower-class landlords when they are unsure of their course of action. These persons have been influenced by race, religion, culture, and tradition at some point in time (Mukarung 67, English translation is mine).

One tends to achieve political power through the interaction of the societal classes, and thus characters in the novel hold strong impacts of race, religion, culture, and tradition. As Dipesh Chakravorty in his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* maintains, "Modern social critiques of caste, oppressions of women, the lack of rights for laboring and subaltern classes in India, and so on—and, in fact, the very critique of colonialism itself—are unthinkable except as a legacy, partially, of how Enlightenment Europe was appropriated in the subcontinent" (4). Nobody thinks about criticisms of Hindu social class as casteism, oppressions of women, and the rights of subaltern classes in the framework of India and Nepal, since the idea is partially a legacy. It is presumed in the fashion of Enlightenment Europe. To conclude, Diwahang, Sabitra, Ninam, Newarni Didi, and Krishna KC, as fictionalized characters, have been subordinated in the societal power structure. By manipulating the influence of media powerhouse companies and organizations, the dominant people rule these subordinated classes of people.

Media powerhouse companies and their wealthy organizers dominate the subordinated class. Diwahang is exploited. His talent is not given any recognition. So elite people discard and humiliate Diwahang of indigenous origin in society. Diwahang tries to get his songs recorded in the studio, but when he returns home on his second vacation, his album is ready and released in an expensive hotel. He manages snacks and lavishes himself sufficiently to satisfy his hunger for musical albums. The protagonist articulates:

The guests enjoy the party and debate vehemently in a drunken state. Breaking and smashing furniture and dishes takes place. The newspaper, magazine, or FM radio writes about Diwahang's album and plays his recorded album. After some time, the media stopped playing the musical album and writing about his singing talent. (Mukarung 62, English translation is mine).

The extract reveals the exploitation in the case of the indigenous group. Media people and organizers play with the sentiments of a character like Diwahang in the novel; he is naive and defenseless.

Ignorance, poverty, and a bad system allow the marginalized to suffer. Such people are prone to victimization and oppression in societal structures. In the novel, Sara Tamang and Geeta are represented as the subordinated groups struggling for livelihood in the busy, heartless city. Today's global political economy, as Spivak suggests, determines the family's role in patriarchal social relations. The family's role is diverse. Nobody breaks this frame, though they try substituting the family in this difficulty (278). The economy has a big role to play in patriarchal social relations. Two female characters have different roles to play for sustainability in the novel. For example, Sara runs a tea stall to sell varieties of food items and earn her livelihood. Usually, the drivers, conductors, and cleaners of the mini micro and gas tempo are stationed at Koteshwor, and at a stall, she serves the consumers snacks, breakfast, and liquor. She has hard times doing the small job out of compulsion. At this point, the narrator notes, "This is Kathmandu. Many people are initially marginalized by it. It intrigues a number of people. It separates and discriminates against those who live in a country with a single racial, linguistic, religious, and cultural policy" (Mukarung 82; my translation into English). A talk about language, religion, and culture policy segregates and discriminates against the people, so such monolithic laws are feudalist in colonial discourse.

On the contrary, life in the crowded city is too tough. Geeta, as a female, rents a house and works at a restaurant, but she has to struggle alone in the Kathmandu valley. She always escapes the male gaze as the bystanders view Geeta as a sex object. Geeta does not need to pay the travel fare because the driver refuses to collect it. At Koteshwor, Geeta and Mr. Pokhrel are caught having an illicit relationship. Society criticizes Geeta severely. Equally, Mr. Pokhrel is a wealthy member of the community, so Geeta is found guilty more than this rich man for the same immoral act. She becomes the accused in patriarchy. In the event, Pokhrel's wife angrily vows to punish Geeta, "Why shall I spare you for this act of wrongdoing?" Shame on you! (Mukarung

96, English translation is mine). In this logic, patriarchy dominates Geeta, who is represented as a subjugated woman. At this point, a critic named Spivak asserts, "The construction of a consciousness or subject" adheres to the effort of "imperialist subject constitution", and associates "epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization" (295). Subaltern subjectivity is created with epistemic violence that originates in knowledge and development. Geeta's identity as a female is generalized because she is marginalized by patriarchy.

Similarly, the Gurkha soldiers are merely fighters and fail to receive the highest promotions. Kaman Singh, an ex-Gurkha soldier, has a realization of being cheated by the British regime. Even after having served in the British army for many years, he gesticulates that Gurkha soldiers have been discriminated against in the case of military facilities and pensions. Both parties receive unequal distributions. He had bitter experiences with discrimination as a soldier during his service in the army. Kaman Singh, a character in the novel, exchanges his words of dissatisfaction with the narrator and speaks about his loyalty, "And you didn't protest, did you? Who dared in a battalion? Kaman Singh blinks his eyes and says, "Editor! A lahure is like a blinkered horse. He follows what the white instructs" (Mukarung 112, English translation is mine). The extract reveals Kaman Singh's loyalty to his master and his gullible nature. An Indian historian and critic, Gyan Prakash, views, "Modern colonialism, it is now widely recognized, instituted enduring hierarchies of subjects and knowledges—the colonizer and the colonized, the Occidental and the Oriental, the civilized and the primitive, the scientific and the superstitious, the developed and the underdeveloped" (3). In the colonial framework, the colonized are identified as primitive whereas the colonizer is civilized. Thus, colonialism creates hierarchies among the citizens. On the whole, Kaman Singh is represented as the colonized. Like Kaman Singh, the ex-army men share tales of pain and suffering, which presents a dehumanized picture of most fighters in the battalion. The ex-army man, a representative of the indigenous, is marginalized. Furthermore, all the characters portrayed in the novel are subjected to marginalization and exclusion from mainstream Nepali literature.

Concerns for the Minority Communities

Mukarung's novel "Hetchhakuppa" paints a realistic portrait of the ex-military personnel who go to foreign countries in search of employment but who regret losing many of their political opportunities. They have to work hard to find their identities since they are first-class citizens at home or abroad. People from Nepal should fight for their cultural identity if they migrate to foreign countries and settle there for international work. Other native languages are naturally displaced as a result of language policy implementation. Indigenous cultures always seek self-dignity despite being ignorant of their own language and culture. High culture and religion appear to

overshadow indigenous representations since the state's rules on religion seem to be unchanging. The native population perceives a threat.

The paper explores a representation of the indigenous community from the margins in Mukarung's novel. It identifies social groups as representations of marginality. In this connection, most fictional characters conceive of social groups of ethnic origin as excluded from the dominant power structure, and these groups in society fall prey to the hegemony of the ruling classes. These social classes consist of peasants, workers, and women and are denied access to the state mechanism because of the hegemonic power of state ideology. Mukarung's novel spotlights marginalization, domination, oppression, and defiance. Equally, representations of the communities that connect shared ideology, culture, and consciousness need references in works of literature from Nepal. The inclusiveness of writings from the margin has become a topic of debate in mainstream literature. Finally, all of the imaginary characters in the novel—Sagen, Diwahang, Nusan, Kamansing, and Sara—are indigenous people who are ignored by the dominant and elite classes. The political system of the state denies ethnic people their cultural identity as elitists exercise political control over and influence. In this text, narratives of cultural hegemony from critical perspectives of Cultural Studies can become another area of further research.

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