



Against All Odds : The Unknown World of the Subaltern



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Research Paper :

Literature is one such a way to know the life of people that life is unknown to other. The writings of authors give us insight to read in between the lines, hear the unheard and unsaid. The contemporary literary theories help the reader to interpret and understand the various aspects of literary work. After the introduction of deconstructive theory in academy, the role of the critic is pivotal in making the statements about literary work. G.C. Spivak arouses many questions in relation to subaltern as woman. Her essay 'Can the Subaltern Spivak?' is responsible for propagating the term *Subaltern* in academic domain. For her, the woman is doubly marginalized and cannot be hard and interpreted. Today, the meaning of the term *Subaltern* has been widened to include the various oppressed, marginalized, exploited groups of society on account of class, caste, poverty and gender.

The autobiography of Kishor Shantabai Kale (*Kolhatyache Por*) translated by Sandhya Pandey as **Against All Odds** represents the unknown world of the

predicament and callous reality of disregarded life of *Kolhati* community, especially women. The text unfolds the darker side of society that has been unknown to many. The text raises many questions about the exploitation and toiling life of subaltern woman in *Kolhati* community. One of the striking facets of the writing makes the reader numb and restless from within about the vulnerable condition of women who have been exploited and sold by their own father and brother. Pandey says: 'The women of the community were trained in dance and music and forced to entertain men and earn money, while the males of the community lived on the earnings of their womenfolk. However, through the men made their sisters and daughters dance to their selfish tunes, their wives were never allowed to do so' (ix). Besides, the book sketches howling life of protagonist with irremovable stamp of illegitimacy. The *Kolhati* community is one of the nomadic tribes who travel from places to places for livelihood. Due to the poverty and unwanted in the social structure, the tribe is attracted towards the art form of *Tamasha*. By the by, the place of woman in *Tamasha* is at centre. So the woman becomes the source of income in the family. Having caught in such condition, the life of woman has been reduced to inhuman level. As if born as a girl in the family of *Kolhati* community is a punishment forever because they have been forced to dance and tried with many men for the sake of money. Kale morns:

The *Kolhati* community forces its women to dance to attract male attention. Young, teenage virgins are given to men in a ceremony called 'chira utarna' with all the trappings of a wedding, but none of its sanctity. The man pays a prefixed price for her virginity. (4-5)

This kind of exploitation of woman gives the way of suffering, dejection and havoc of many lives especially the children who take birth out of such relationship. If the child is a girl; she has the same fate as her mother and if the child is a boy; he has to live the life with the stamp of impurity and illegitimacy. Besides, they are not accepted in any society.

The life narrative of Kale gives the plight of his own life, at the same time many lives have been represented especially the women. It also signifies no-

win situation of tribal; they have been placed at such a stage where they have to sell their own daughters and sisters. Naturally, the question raises- who are responsible for the condition of tribal? The society, government and stakeholder of society are still unconcerned about the upliftment of the tribal. The women in the text like Jiji, Shanta, Susheela, Rambha, and Baby are the most marginalized and exploited characters.

The tragic life of Shanta is more painful who seems to be puppet in the hand of her father and the owners. The fate of Shanta is being decided as a Tamasha dancer because of her beauty and personality. Initially, her marriage is fixed but the cunning father exchanges the bride with another daughter so that the father can make use of the beauty of Shanta for his selfish purpose. Shanta is received the reward of her beauty as life imprisonment of sexual, psychological, physical harassment and exploitation. During the course of time as dancer, she has been sold at teenage to a politician (MLA) Jagtap in return the father gets money to live the life lavishly. She has been the victim of Jagtap's carnal hunger and the hunger for money of the father. The result of the same act, she becomes pregnant. The climax of tragedy is started in her life after pregnancy. She could have aborted the child and kept away from the disastrous life. But the father is more interested in money and property that never allows her to abort the child. *'Let the child grow,' said Kondiba. 'It is a politician's child, might be useful to let it live'* says the writer (16). Besides, the owner stops visiting to her because of expecting claimant of his property. In such circumstance, she has to pay for it; both the owner and the father are unconcerned about the emotional turmoil of the women and the child. At last, after long waiting of the master, she has been forced to abort the child but it was too late. She has to carry the child in her womb. Despite, she has been sent to dancing to fill the belly of other member of the family. Kale pens the reality as:

Shanta started dancing again even while she was pregnant. If she had not returned to the tamasha. Her family would have starved. None of the men in her family, neither her father nor her brothers, thought of

finding some work.....So, Shanta continued to dance through her pregnancy. She toiled all night and travelled from place to place in bumpy bullock carts until she was eight months pregnant. (17)

The suffering of the protagonist has begun in the womb of mother. Enduring execration in the womb, the child takes birth in unlawful world to suffer without father and emotional love of mother. The protagonist at the age of two months is left in care of Jiji, a grandmother. The mother does not have time to feed and look after him. The narrator cries:

Bai had no time to spare for me. All night she was on the stage singing and dancing, all day she rested and dealt with the men who visited the group's rooms. A tamasha dancer has no time for her own children. Bai often had no time ever to breast-free me. Jiji used to get some milk in a bowl, dip a piece of cloth in it and squeeze the drops into my mouth or let me suck on the cloth. (18)

This is a tragic condition of the woman. What is a fault of the child? He has been denied the very basic need and kept hungry. What about the mother, she is just like a machine to work for all member of the family. This is extremely tormented and disgusted life of the Kolhati woman. Here, one can mark that the pet animal deserves some kind of affection but in the case of Kolhati women; they have been treated beyond the place of the animal.

After few days pass, Shanta has been sold to another elderly alcoholic man from Dharur for the sake of money. This is the second time that she has been acted as a keep as a result she gives the birth another child named as Deepak. The thing is never stopped here, after the death of the second owner; she has been left for the same fate with another child to suffer. Once more, she has to dance on the tune of the family need to get join Tamasha. As if her life puts into grinding machine to suffer and be a cause of illegitimate children's suffering. Besides, the father also throws remaining daughters in the same profession.

The next daughter Susheela has been handed over to a rich man at very young age. After the birth of a daughter, the father breaks the relation with

the man in one stroke. Susheela could have lived normal and secure life but the father does not get the enough economic benefits. Both the daughters work for the father and brother. They have same fate to suffer. After deadly hard work and exploitation, they do not possess any money and property. Shanta gets fed up of the dejected life and wants to be free. So she elopes with Nana and leaves two children to suffer. This is pathetic situation of the woman who has to go through psychological trauma to get separate from young ones because the lover does not accept the children. As Susheela rightly says-'Has a woman no right to her own life? Is the only aim of our lives to provide a livelihood for our fathers and brothers? It is a sin to be born a beautiful woman in a Kolhati family' (43-44).

The protagonist has been left behind to suffer by his mother. He has not been treated properly by the family member. In fact, he is unwanted in the family. The protagonist goes through the agony of impurity and without the name of the father. Being rejected by the father, mother and unconcern of the family members, the protagonist's flight of torture at every stages of his life has started in the family and the society. Despite many hurdles, the protagonist raises in his life to get rid of the beleaguered life. However, he spent his whole life for betterment of the downtrodden.

Kale exposes the darker side of society especially towards Kolhati women. He poses a number of questions to the stakeholder of the society. The Kolhati women have still been living the same lives. The life of women in the text like Shanta, Shusheela, Ramba and Baby are assiduous and disturbers the reader from within. The author through his autobiography unfolds the reality of unknown world of the Kolhati community.

Works cited:

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