

Gendered Subaltern in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*

Abstract

*This thesis focuses on the portrayal of gendered subalternity and resilience in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*. Lakshmi's journey unfolds within the brutal world of sex trafficking, providing a poignant exploration of the injustices she faces and her unwavering determination to survive. Through meticulous textual analysis, the paper scrutinizes the layers of her subaltern experience, where innocence collides with oppressive gender norms and exploitation. This portrayal aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subaltern. While initial impressions may suggest her complete lack of agency, a closer examination uncovers moments of resistance and resilience as she yearns for autonomy and strives to protect her family amid dire circumstances.*

Keywords: Gendered subalternity, Resilience, Sex trafficking, Injustice
Exploitation, Vulnerability

Introduction

This research paper in *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, researcher focus on how women are treated unfairly because they are women. In the story, Lakshmi is controlled and mistreated by men like her stepfather, uncle-husband, and others. But as the story goes on, Lakshmi starts to go through transformation. Researcher uses ideas from experts like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ketu H. Katrak to understand how this change happens.

At first, it seems like Lakshmi is weak because of how men treat her, but later in the story, she becomes stronger. This shows how women can fight against unfair treatment by men. This research is about how women are oppressed by men and how they fight for their freedom. These stories can help to learn about the lives of people who often don't have a chance to speak up. One such powerful story is Patricia McCormick's *Sold*. This book shows us how literature can help us understand the struggles people face, especially when it comes to how women are treated unfairly. At its core, this novel introduces us to the harrowing journey of Lakshmi, a young Nepalese girl whose life becomes a prism through which we explore the complex interplay of gender, power, and resistance. In this thesis, researcher explore on a profound exploration of Lakshmi's character, examining her as a representation of the "gendered subaltern" and analyzing her evolution as a symbol of resilience and defiance.

Before delving into Lakshmi's story, it is important for the researcher to grasp the world in which the novel unfolds. *Sold* tells a challenging tale about human trafficking, a deeply distressing issue that affects many girls from disadvantaged

backgrounds, particularly in Nepal and India. Through this novel, a spotlight is cast on this troubling problem.

In this research, the researcher's goal is to uncover the various aspects of Lakshmi's journey, ranging from her early difficulties to her growing strength. The aim is also to gain insight into how the author, Patricia McCormick, utilizes literary techniques such as symbols and metaphors to convey Lakshmi's story in a compelling manner.

Looking beyond the realm of fiction, *Sold* prompts reflection on how women can sometimes face unfair treatment due to traditional beliefs and societal expectations. At the heart of the inquiry lies the concept of the "gendered subaltern," a construct deeply rooted in postcolonial theory and post-structuralist thought. The gendered subaltern represents those individuals who are relegated to the margins of society, suppressed by intersecting systems of oppression that revolve around gender, class, race, and other factors.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ketu H. Katrak have provided valuable viewpoints on the concept of subalternity. Spivak, through her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," examines the ways in which mechanisms are used to silence the subaltern, preventing them from expressing their own experiences within a dominant discourse. On the other hand, Katrak delves into the intricacies of diasporic subalternity, shedding light on the complex intersections of exile, identity, and gender within this discourse.

The researcher's journey takes us to the mountain villages of Nepal. Lakshmi's story unfolds. This is where she grew up, in her home, surrounded by the beauty of the Himalayan mountains. But even in this seemingly peaceful place, we begin to notice that Lakshmi faces unfair treatment just because she's a girl.

Lakshmi's early life in these villages is simple and innocent, like the lives of many people who live in rural areas. However, beneath the calm surface, there are hidden rules and expectations based on gender that shape how she's allowed to live her life. As she goes about her daily tasks, like getting water from the nearby well or helping her mother in the kitchen, we can see how she's slowly being controlled, even though it might not be very obvious. The society she lives in is woven with beliefs that put men above women, and as she grows up, these beliefs become more and more noticeable.

This is where we first see signs of gender-based oppression, a system that limits Lakshmi's choices and opportunities just because she is a girl. These early experiences form the foundation of her story, revealing the unfairness that runs through her life.

As Lakshmi start to speak up and stands against the unfair treatment she faces. This is a crucial turning point in her life, where she begins to express herself and show her courage. It happens in her village home, where traditions and customs have a strong influence on how people behave.

Through this novel, the author presents the impact of patriarchy in its extreme form in the then Nepal and India. McCormick questions those practices through the life-like incidents of fictional character, Lakshmi. The questions that arise in the research are;

1. What are the factors that force Lakshmi to rebel against males?
2. How does she resist patriarchy in order to transit and transform herself?

My hypothesis is Lakshmi's defiance against male dominance is shaped by a intricate blend of socio-cultural elements, encompassing traditional gender expectations, economic disparities, and her inherent resilience. Her opposition to patriarchy is

evident through a spectrum of transformative actions, spanning from subtle acts of rebellion to assertive gestures, all fueled by her longing for personal empowerment and autonomy.

Many scholars and critics have thoroughly analyzed this novel since its publication. One notable aspect that has been explored extensively is the novel's ambiguity and its propensity to leave its ending open to interpretation. In her analysis, Robyn Sheahan underscores this particular aspect of the book, “but then a lifeline is thrown to her. Will she risk taking the opportunity offered to her? How likely is it to succeed? Will life outside the brothel be even worse than life within it” (2)? The questions presented here, along with the elusive nature of the responses they elicit, serve as a testament to the story's inherent ambiguity and its willingness to invite interpretation from its readers.

In a similar vein, Deepak Adhikari highlights the presence of inter-textual elements within this work, as he aptly observes:

Flipping through the pages of *Sold*, I was reminded of Sandra Cisneros, the Latino author of *The House of Mango Street*. In several vignettes, Cisneros weaves the story of Esperanza, a Mexican-American girl growing up in the United States. The common things in these novels are the methods of storytelling. Unlike Esperanza's, Lakshmi's world is that of deprivation, object poverty and hardships. (4)

Adhikari highlights the comparison between Patricia McCormick's *Sold* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* draws attention to the distinct yet compelling methods of storytelling employed in these two novels. Both narratives share a thematic underpinning of female protagonists navigating challenging circumstances. However, while Cisneros portrays Esperanza's coming-of-age journey in the context

of Mexican-American life in the United States, McCormick's Lakshmi inhabits a world defined by stark deprivation, extreme poverty, and relentless hardships.

This juxtaposition highlights the versatility of storytelling as a medium for illuminating the diverse experiences of girls and women from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, ultimately underscoring the power of literature to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of gender and adversity. Furthermore, Gallo Don says, “In this novel told in brief vignettes that read like free verse, thirteen years old Lakshmi explains how she is sold by her desperately poor parents to what she believes will be work as a maid in the home of a rich family” (112). The narrative's utilization of a free verse style, its portrayal of characters from lower social strata, and its exploration of wealth disparities collectively underscore the presence of postmodern elements within the novel.

Similarly, in portraying the novel's setting and the character of the protagonist, Monika Lakshmanan remarks:

Lakshmi's narrative unfolds within the backdrop of a preordained cycle of destitution, mortality, and femininity. Plagued by financial burdens and the shadow of colonialism, her stepfather ultimately trades her to a human trafficking ring. Lakshmi, under the misconception that she is destined for employment as a domestic worker in the metropolis, is instead sold at a substantial profit to 'Happiness House,' a brothel nestled in the heart of Kolkata's red-light district (99).

The provided lines not only unveil the backdrop against which Lakshmi's story unfolds but also vividly portray her life within the harrowing confines of the prostitution ring, a fate she unwittingly meets. This analysis of Lakshmi's narrative setting and circumstances provides a poignant portrayal of the challenging world she

inhabits. The reference to a "preordained cycle" underscores the grim predictability of poverty, mortality, and the expectations placed on women in her society. The mention of financial burdens and the looming specter of colonialism highlights the socio-economic and historical factors that contribute to her vulnerability.

Similarly, Anita Beaman, while elucidating the narrative patterns and character dynamics within the story, remarks:

Sold, Lakshmi's story, is providing brief glimpses of the poverty of Lakshmi's Mountain village, the love of her mother, and the bleak reality of life in the brothel. This style often leaves me wanting more of the story- more details, more development, but I think it is best for Lakshmi's story, since details would be almost too much to bear. (2)

Beaman highlights that this analysis underscores the delicate balance that the author maintains between providing a comprehensive portrayal of the characters and their environments while being mindful of the potentially overwhelming nature of the subject matter, which deals with issues like human trafficking and exploitation.

The narrative style allows the reader to engage with the story's emotional impact without becoming overwhelmed by its bleak realities, ultimately serving the narrative's intention to convey the harsh truths while preserving the reader's emotional well-being. Indicating the realistic aspect of the novel, Greta Nelson points:

Through the narrative of Lakshmi, McCormick delves into the harrowing reality experienced by numerous women in Nepal and India. By shedding light on this dark aspect of society through the perspective of an innocent female protagonist, whose name resonates with that of the Hindu goddess and symbol of motherhood, the author implicitly suggests that sexual slavery is

emblematic of the persisting gender inequalities and the limited status of women's rights in both India and Nepal. (2)

According to Nelson, the narrative of *Sold* serves as a representative tale encompassing the experiences of economically disadvantaged Nepali and Indian women who are tragically trafficked into Indian prostitution centers, subject to the horrors of sexual enslavement. A poignant irony emerges through the choice of the protagonist's name, Lakshmi, which also happens to be the name of the revered Hindu goddess symbolizing wealth and prosperity. This juxtaposition between the name's divine connotations and the character's grim circumstances poignantly highlights the hierarchy of significance between divinity and humanity, shedding light on the stark realities these women face in a society where their well-being is often undervalued.

The reviews mentioned above have not addressed the aspect of gender-related suffering. It is apparent from these reviews that none of the critics has examined the novel through the lens of the gendered subaltern. Consequently, viewing the novel from the perspective of the gendered subaltern is a novel approach, and it offers a fresh understanding of the plight faced by gendered subalterns and their strategies for addressing issues like oppression, discrimination, patriarchy, and similar challenges.

The limitation is this study analyzes *Sold* from a gendered subaltern perspective, specifically examining issues related to violence, rape, and sex slavery that women endure in a patriarchal society. It delves into how women become targets to satisfy the egos and desires of men in such a society. Additionally, the study explores various forms of resistance against these patriarchal ideologies. It does not address other aspects of the novel, such as the use of myth, agrarian land relations, rural development, feudalism, and similar themes. The primary focus of this research

centers on the portrayal of patriarchal values and their impact on women's lives, as well as their efforts to resist them.

GayatriChakravortySpivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" remains a foundational text in postcolonial studies and feminist theory. Her critique of representation and her call for a more self-aware and reflexive approach to speaking for the subaltern continue to shape contemporary discussions about power, agency, and marginalized voices in literature and society.

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" is an essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that looks at how less powerful groups are treated by those in charge. Although it doesn't talk mainly about women being mistreated, it does talk about how groups with less power are pushed aside and not allowed to have a voice by those who have more power. "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no space for her/his voice in the structure of hegemony" (Spivak 67). Spivak's statement urges us to closely examine the inherent power imbalances in society and understand that the silence of the subaltern isn't due to their inability to express themselves but a result of systemic oppression. It prompts us to think about how we can provide opportunities for the subaltern to express their own thoughts and experiences, rather than trying to speak on their behalf.

Spivak's work has significantly influenced fields like postcolonial studies and feminist theory, highlighting the importance of being more sensitive and self-aware when dealing with the narratives of marginalized groups. "The subaltern is not only a negative and passive space of difference that has no identity, but it also marks the position of a subject who has not entered history" (Spivak 69). Spivak's statement highlights that subaltern voices and identities are often ignored or deleted from important conversations and historical records controlled by those in power. This

exclusion is not because subalterns are unimportant but because powerful individuals and systems decide what gets included in history. This underscores the need to acknowledge and uplift the voices of marginalized groups, letting them share their own stories and perspectives so that we can have a more complete and truthful view of history.

Spivak's assertion also highlights the complex interplay of power within society. It underscores that the ability to speak and be heard is not solely determined by one's capacity for expression but is deeply entwined with structures of power, privilege, and dominance. "The subaltern is not just a classy name for a marginalized social group, nor is it something that can be added on to other identity politics as an occasion for solidarity" (Spivak 87). Spivak's statement confronts the shallow use of the term "subaltern" and underscores the necessity for a more meaningful and autonomous exploration of the lives of marginalized communities. It advocates for a deeper comprehension of the distinct hardships faced by subaltern groups and stresses the significance of authentic solidarity that doesn't relegate subaltern issues to a secondary role within broader identity-based movements.

In her essay, Spivak repeatedly highlights the significance of recognizing the boundaries of representation and the intricate nature of subaltern empowerment. She urges academics and advocates to undertake a critical examination of their own perspectives and intentions when endeavoring to articulate the experiences and voices of the subaltern. "The subaltern is a peculiar subject whose existence is both marginal and liminal, and whose identity is overdetermined by the various fields of power in which it is located" (Spivak 94). Spivak's statement highlights the intricate nature of subaltern life, emphasizing their marginalized position, state of transition, and the various influences that mold their identity. It emphasizes the necessity for a detailed

comprehension of the subaltern subject that takes into account the interplay of power dynamics shaping their existence.

Spivak's larger criticism of representation and the difficulties in fully representing the voices and experiences of the subaltern within dominant narratives. "The subaltern is not a fixed entity, but rather a subject that is constantly in flux and is shaped by the various power relations in which it is located" (97). Spivak's statement highlights the ever-changing and intricate nature of the subaltern subject's identity, emphasizing its continuous evolution shaped by prevailing power dynamics. This perspective encourages a critical exploration of the varied experiences and voices of the subaltern, urging for a nuanced comprehension that acknowledges the dynamic character of their subjectivity. It is consistent with Spivak's wider critique of representation and her dedication to acknowledging the fluidity of subaltern lives within the realm of postcolonial studies.

Spivak's essay has sparked a lot of talk in academic circles. It's helped us understand better the challenges and ethical questions that come up when we try to represent the voices of marginalized people. Her work has also made us see how gender, class, and ethnicity all play a part in the lives of subaltern women.

To sum it up, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is still a really important text in the world of postcolonial studies and feminist theory. Her ideas about representation and the need to be self-aware when speaking for marginalized groups are still shaping our conversations today about power, agency, and voices that aren't always heard in literature and society.

Additionally, this paper utilizes Ketu H. Katrak's *Politics of the Female Body* as a methodological tool. Within her text, Katrak introduces the term 'internalized exile,' signifying a disconnection that women may feel within their own

bodies. To counter this, they must resist domination and strive to reestablish a connection with their female bodies through various means such as speech, silence, starvation, or illness.

Katrak emphasizes the importance of resistance against the oppression perpetuated by these patriarchal values, employing methods like speech, silence, starvation, illness, or strikes. “The female body is a site of both oppression and resistance, and it is through the female body that the politics of the postcolonial world are played out” (15). Katrak's assertion emphasizes the female body's significance as a pivotal arena where power struggles and conflicts unfold. It underscores that the female body transcends its physicality to become a symbolic battleground where prevailing societal norms, ideologies, and political forces are both inscribed and challenged.

Regarding oppression, Katrak's statement readily acknowledges that the female body serves as a focal point for experiences of oppression. This recognition underscores the widespread prevalence of gender-based discrimination and violence endured by women within postcolonial settings. It highlights how the female body is not just a physical vessel but a locus of control, subjected to the domination and regulation imposed by patriarchal structures. “The female body is a site of contestation, a site of struggle, and a site of resistance” (Katrak 18). Crucially, Katrak emphasizes the female body's function in acts of resistance. It serves as a stage where women can confront and undermine oppressive systems. These acts of resistance can materialize through the exercise of bodily autonomy, the assertion of agency, and the defiance of societal norms and expectations.

In terms of oppression, Katrak's statement openly recognizes the female body as a central focal point for experiences of subjugation. This acknowledgment

underscores the pervasive existence of gender-based discrimination and violence that women endure within postcolonial contexts. It accentuates that the female body is not solely a physical vessel but a locus of control subject to the dominance and regulation imposed by patriarchal structures. “The female body is a site of struggle, a site of resistance, and a site of transformation” (Katrak20). Katrak recognizes that the female body is not inert but actively involved in confronting challenges. These challenges encompass a wide spectrum of oppression, violence, and discrimination experienced by women. The body transforms into a battlefield where societal, cultural, and political influences exert their dominion, compelling women to grapple with these external pressures.

Ketu H. Katrak's statement highlights the ever-evolving and intricate role of the female body in the context of gendered subaltern experiences. It acknowledges that the body serves as a battleground where both oppression and resistance intersect, ultimately leading to transformations driven by resilience and agency. This perspective enriches our comprehension of how factors like gender, power dynamics, and embodiment intersect in the lives of marginalized women.

Katrak underscores the significance of the female body as a hub of resistance. Women harness their bodies as tools to oppose and disrupt oppressive systems and societal norms. This resistance can take on various forms, including asserting control over one's body, claiming agency, and defying societal expectations. “The female body is a site of both oppression and resistance” (Katrak 23). Katrak recognizes that the female body frequently becomes a focal point where various oppressive influences converge. Women's bodies can be subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and regulation, often stemming from patriarchal and societal norms. This

oppression can manifest in various ways, including limitations on bodily autonomy, objectification, and acts of violence.

Katrak emphasizes the female body's significance as a site of resistance. Even when confronted with oppression, women utilize their bodies as tools for defiance and revolt. They challenge societal norms and expectations that aim to confine and control them. "The female body is constituted as a figure of exile and self-alienation" (Katrak 25). Katrak is talking about how society and culture can make women feel like they're not really connected to their own bodies. This happens because society expects women to act and look a certain way, which can make them feel like they're not being true to themselves. It can also affect how women see themselves and their identity. This feeling of not really being connected to their own bodies can be different for women from different backgrounds. So, Katrak is saying that it's important to understand how society and culture can make women feel this way and to create spaces where women can feel more in control of their own bodies.

In *Sold*, McCormick focuses on the challenges faced by women. She chooses Lakshmi as the main character to show the difficult life of women in rural Nepal. Many of the characters in the story are also women. McCormick explores various issues concerning women, such as the discrimination they experience during menstruation, the horrifying incident of a girl being raped while intoxicated, and the fear that a wife feels from her husband. As a woman herself, McCormick provides a realistic portrayal of the marginalized group in society, which is women.

Lakshmi's story starts in a nice place, but it quickly turns dark when she gets kidnapped and taken to a place where she's treated very badly. The author, McCormick, uses simple and honest words to tell Lakshmi's story. Reading the book feels like you're inside Lakshmi's head, understanding her thoughts and feelings.

From *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, the author provides a glimpse into the significance of a tin roof in the context of Lakshmi's rural Nepalese village. The tin roof symbolizes several essential aspects of a family's well-being and social status in this setting. A tin roof represents economic stability within the family. It suggests that the family has a father who is responsible and doesn't squander their income on gambling. In impoverished rural areas, where resources are limited, having a steady source of income is crucial for survival: "A tin roof means that the family has a father who doesn't gamble away the landlord's money playing cards in the tea shop. A tin roof means the family has a son working at the brick kiln in the city. A tin roof means that when the rains come, the fire stays lit and the baby stays healthy" (9). Spivak's theory seeks into the structural inequalities that perpetuate subaltern conditions. The narration highlights the socioeconomic disparities in Lakshmi's rural village. Families with tin roofs have achieved a level of economic stability and social standing, indicating the presence of structural hierarchies. Lakshmi's own family, lacking this symbol of stability, is vulnerable to exploitation, showcasing the impact of these inequalities.

Spivak's work prompts us to question how subaltern voices are represented and who gets to speak on their behalf. In the narration given above, the representation focuses on the material aspects of a tin roof but doesn't seek into the thoughts, desires, or struggles of those it signifies. Lakshmi's story, as depicted in the novel, aims to give voice to the experiences of girls like her, who often remain unheard and unseen in society.

Lakshmi's aspiration is to journey to the city, where she hopes to find employment as a maid. Her primary motivation is to provide financial support to her mother and younger brother back home. However, her mother is hesitant to grant her

permission for this endeavor. In a touching moment, Lakshmi's mother, affectionately referred to as "Ama," lovingly caresses her daughter's cheek. "Lakshmi, my child," she says. "You must stay in school, no matter what your stepfather says" (9). This conversation shows the relationship between the daughter and her stepfather is marked by evident conflict, as the mother urges her daughter to continue her education, a stance in direct opposition to the stepfather's views. This situation underscores the tension within the family regarding the daughter's academic pursuits.

Within their challenging circumstances, Lakshmi finds solace and happiness in the simplicity of her life nestled in the embrace of the Himalayan Mountains. Even within the constraints of their impoverished rural abode, Lakshmi discovers joy in the breathtaking vistas of the Himalayas, the presence of Krishna, her promised love, and the tender care she dedicates to nurturing and selling cucumbers at the local market.

Her contentment resonates through her connection with nature, as the majestic Himalayan landscape offers her a sense of wonder and tranquility. The budding romance with Krishna adds a touch of optimism to her life, providing a glimpse of hope and companionship amidst her struggles. Additionally, her dedication to cultivating and selling cucumbers not only represents her industrious spirit but also symbolizes the resilience that defines her character, even in the face of adversity:

We drew squares in the dusty path between our huts and played the hopping-on-one leg game. We brushed each other's hair a hundred strokes and dreamed of name for sons and daughters and in the fall, when the goatherds came down from the Himalayan meadows, we hid in the elephant grass to catch sights of Krishna, the boy with sleepy cat eyes, the one I am promised to in marriage.

(11)

Krishna, the boy promises to marry Laxmi it represents another aspect of the subaltern experience. The arrangement of her marriage reflects the lack of agency that often characterizes the lives of subaltern women. Their futures are predetermined, and their voices are seldom heard in such decisions. Krishna's description as "the boy with sleepy cat eyes" conveys a sense of resignation, as if he, too, is bound by societal norms and expectations.

This narration from *Sold* provides a glimpse into the world of the subaltern, where simplicity, solidarity, and constrained agency define their existence. Through these everyday activities and relationships, we witness the resilience and human spirit of the subaltern, even in circumstances that might appear limiting and oppressive. Spivak's theory encourages us to recognize the depth of their experiences and the need for a more inclusive and equitable society.

In Lakshmi's society, girls are treated as expendable commodities whose worth is determined by their usefulness. Once they are no longer deemed valuable, they are discarded without regard for their well-being or dignity. This harsh reality underscores the deeply entrenched gender-based discrimination and dehumanization that persists within her community.

The devaluation of girls speaks to the broader issue of gender inequality and subjugation, which is a central theme in Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold*. It highlights the urgent need for societal change and the empowerment of girls and women, who continue to be marginalized and mistreated in many parts of the world. Lakshmi's story serves as a powerful testament to the resilience and strength required to navigate such a challenging environment and, ultimately, to overcome it. "A son will always be a son. But a girl is like a goat. Good as long as she gives you milk and butter. But not worth crying over when it's time to make the stew" (16). The statement

draws a stark contrast between sons and daughters, emphasizing the inherent bias against girls. While sons are celebrated and deemed to have enduring value ("a son will always be a son"), daughters are equated to livestock, specifically a goat.

In essence, statement given above epitomizes the pervasive gender discrimination and devaluation of females in Lakshmi's society. It highlights the deeply entrenched cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate the subjugation and mistreatment of girls, casting them aside once their perceived utility diminishes. Lakshmi's journey in Patricia McCormick's *Sold* serves as a powerful exploration of the struggles faced by girls in such environments and the urgent need for gender equality and empowerment.

McCormick's depiction of the characters and the conditions in the remote regions of Nepal is vivid and detailed. Through the voice of Lakshmi, the protagonist, every aspect of her life is meticulously described. She takes us on a journey from a rural Nepali village to the heart of India, revealing that the challenges faced by women, whether in villages or cities, remain the same. They fall victim to poverty, exploitation, and dominance, with little agency to act according to their own desires. Instead, they become instruments to fulfill the desires of the privileged class. McCormick gives a voice to these marginalized characters in society, with Lakshmi serving as a poignant example. Lakshmi's portrayal also extends to her stepfather's role in her life:

My stepfather's arm is a withered and useless thing. Broken as a child when there was no money for a doctor, his poor mangled limb pains him during the rainy months and gives him great shame. Most of the men of his age leave home for months at a time, taking job at factories or on work crews far away. But no one, he says, will hire a one-armed man. (16)

Lakshmi's portrayal of her stepfather's shriveled arm highlights the stark challenges posed by poverty and constrained prospects within her rural community. His physical disability, originating from an absence of medical care during his youth, not only inflicts physical suffering but also burdens him with profound emotional distress. In a society where manual labor frequently represents the sole avenue for sustenance, his impairment leaves him unable to engage in typical employment that necessitates the use of both arms.

Lakshmi's depiction of her stepfather's withered arm offers insight into the harsh realities of poverty and limited opportunities prevalent in her village. His physical disability, stemming from a lack of access to medical care during his childhood, not only inflicts physical pain but also carries a significant emotional burden. In a society where manual labor often constitutes the primary means of survival, his disability restricts him from pursuing common jobs that require the use of both arms.

Lakshmi and her mother find themselves in a profoundly distressing situation. Despite being just thirteen years old, Lakshmi shoulders the responsibilities of both an older sister and a mother, caring for her younger brother and managing all the household chores.

Her mother's marriage to her stepfather was not driven by romantic or personal desires but rather by the pressing need for protection in a patriarchal society where the presence of a male figure is deemed obligatory for security and survival. This arrangement underscores the harsh realities faced by women in their community, where gender roles are often dictated by societal norms and the need for protection takes precedence over personal choice or happiness. "She is around thirty but when she is standing upright to scan the sky for rain clouds, my Ama's back is stooped"

(13). In the context of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Subaltern theory, the description of Lakshmi's mother, Ama, with her stooped back carries significant implications. Ama's physical posture reflects not only her age and the toll of hard labor but also signifies the subaltern condition of women like her in their rural Nepalese community.

Ama, who is approximately thirty years old, personifies the subaltern woman who bears the weight of entrenched gender norms and societal demands. Her stooped back serves as a symbol representing the oppressive burden endured not only by her but also by numerous women in her community. Spivak's theory underscores the frequent silencing and marginalization of subalterns, leaving them subject to the dominance of those in power. In this particular context, Ama's bodily posture becomes a tangible representation of her subaltern status, illustrating her limited agency and control over her life.

McCormick provides a vivid depiction of the local calendar, intricately tied to the labor and hardships endured by women in the region. Unlike the conventional months designated as Baisakh, Jestha, or January and February, this calendar is characterized by the struggles and tribulations experienced by the women. It signifies that the passage of time in this community is not measured by traditional months but by the relentless suffering borne by its female inhabitants:

This is the season when the women bury the children who die of fever. In the dry months, the women collect basketfuls of dung and pat them into cakes to harden in the sun, making precious fuel for the dinner fire. They tie rags around their children's eyes to shield them from the dust blowing up from the empty riverbed. (18)

The story of *Sold* vividly illustrates the challenges and hardships faced by women in the community. The passage portrays the difficult conditions endured by women

during different seasons, emphasizing the extent of their struggles. Child mortality is highlighted as women bury children who succumb to fever, underscoring the vulnerability of both mothers and children.

Additionally, the description of women collecting dung for fuel underscores their responsibility for securing essential resources, even though physically demanding labor. Moreover, their protective acts, such as tying rags around their children's eyes to shield them from blowing dust, demonstrate their determination to safeguard their families in adverse environmental conditions. communities, where they often bear the brunt of daily adversities.

McCormick's portrayal of Lakshmi's life is a harrowing depiction of her enduring agony and suffering. Words struggle to convey the profound tragedy that envelops her existence in the brothels. Lakshmi's sale to an unknown woman for a mere 800 rupees, with half the amount paid upfront and the rest promised in the future, exemplifies the heart-wrenching betrayal by her own father, who effectively trades her like a commodity. In exchange for his desires, she is bartered away for items as mundane as a hat, a carton of cigarettes, a bag of sweets, and a bottle of rice wine. Up to this point, Lakshmi's agency appears dormant as she bears the weight of these dehumanizing transactions. However, a glimmer of her agency emerges when she independently decides to purchase something for her mother, an act that fills her with a sense of pride and self-determination. This moment signifies a turning point in her narrative, where she begins to assert her autonomy amidst the dire circumstances surrounding her.

While he is busy haggling with Bajai Sita over a watch that has caught his eye, I place two things in the basket: a sweater for Ama and a coat for the baby. It is a rich and happy day for our family, an 800rupee day, a festive and

auspicious day, and so I add one more thing for Amaa costly treat that only the headman's wife can afford- a bottle of Coca-Cola, the sweet drink that people say is like having tiny fireworks in your mouth. (63)

In this narration the act of Lakshmi purchasing a sweater for her mother, a coat for the baby, and even a luxurious treat like a bottle of Coca-Cola represents a significant moment of subaltern agency within the narrative. While her stepfather is engaged in haggling for a watch, Lakshmi seizes the opportunity to make these purchases independently, showcasing her emerging autonomy.

Spivak's subaltern theory underscores the significance of acknowledging the agency of marginalized individuals, especially women, who frequently face suppression and subjugation within patriarchal systems. Lakshmi's choice to pick out items for her family, even amidst their dire circumstances, serves as a testament to her ability to make decisions and assert her autonomy. Importantly, she opts to prioritize the well-being and happiness of her family, demonstrating her resilience and unwavering commitment to their care and support.

McCormick also shows life in the brothel is very grueling and full of agonies, and the girls are compelled to live a hellish life. In the author's note, McCormick writes that each year, nearly 12,000 Nepali girls are sold by their families, intentionally or unwittingly, into a life of sexual slavery in the brothels of India. Lakshmi provides a chilling account of her time at the Happiness House, where she was confined to a room that resembled a dark and cave-like space:

A corner of the room is curtained off with a length of cloth from an old sari.

On the floor, a plastic bucket sits next to a hole in the floor.

I can tell from the stink that this is privy.

I sit on the bed and try to picture Tali's little pink nose.

The mists dancing around the swallow-tailed peak.

The tawny grain fields. Ama's crow-black hair.

Krishna's sleepy cat eyes. (103)

Within the brothel's walls, a peculiar mix of elements coexists gods and movie stars share significance with living spaces and toilets. In this complex environment, Lakshmi finds herself reminiscing about cherished memories, from her goat's beautiful nose to her mother's dark hair and Krishna's enchanting eyes. However, this nostalgic reverie takes a stark turn when she confronts the grim reality of her present situation. Lakshmi is not alone in her suffering; she is accompanied by other girls who share her plight. These young girls are brought from remote regions of Nepal and India to the brothels of Calcutta, marginalized and overlooked by society. They represent an underrepresented, undereducated, and subordinated group, perpetually subjected to the prejudices of dominant ideologies. Whether in Nepal or India, the plight of women remains strikingly similar.

McCormick portrays the sorrowful existence of women in the brothel, a marginalized enclave. While Lakshmi yearns for freedom and attempts to revolt against her circumstances, the oppressive forces at play silence her cries for emancipation, further highlighting the systemic suppression of female voices:

She flings me onto the bed next to the old man. And then he is on top of me, holding me down with the strength of ten men. He kisses me with lips that are slack and wet and taste of onions. His teeth dig into my lower lip. Underneath the weight of him, I cannot see or move or breathe. He fumbles with his pants, forces my legs apart, and I can feel him pushing himself between my thighs. I gasp for air and kick and squirm. He thrusts his tongue in my mouth. And I bite down with all my might. He cries out "Aghh" and I am running. (11)

Ketu H. Katrak's *Politics of the Female Body* provides a critical lens through which we can analyze this narration. The narration from the novel vividly portrays the harrowing experience of Lakshmi, who is subjected to sexual assault within the confines of a brothel. Katrak's framework allows us to examine this incident in the context of the politics surrounding the female body.

In this narration we witness the brutal violation of Lakshmi's body, emphasizing the vulnerability and objectification that women, especially those in marginalized positions, endure. The description of the old man's actions underscores the power dynamics at play, as he exerts dominance over Lakshmi, rendering her helpless and voiceless. His forceful advances and the taste of onions on his lips create a visceral sense of repulsion and violation.

McCormick's portrayal of Lakshmi's life in a Nepalese village is strikingly authentic, capturing the harsh realities faced by women in that setting. Her representation of female experiences is both justifiable and an attempt to amplify the voices of those who often go unheard. However, as Lakshmi's journey takes her from Nepal to India with a man referred to as Uncle Husband, McCormick's narrative takes on an ambivalent tone. There's a noticeable Americanization of the story, with America being depicted as a liberating force. This portrayal suggests an underlying white American perspective in McCormick's storytelling, which becomes evident in her descriptions of the challenges faced by Lakshmi and her companions in the so-called Happiness House.

In Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold*, McCormick introduced Lakshmi, a young girl who becomes the embodiment of suffering and resilience in the grim world of sex trafficking. Through a careful analysis of her story, researchers have explored

the layers of Lakshmi's harrowing experiences and her unwavering determination to survive.

The heart of the narrative lies in Lakshmi's abduction, a horrifying tale of vulnerability and betrayal. At the outset, we meet Lakshmi in her peaceful Nepalese mountain village, seemingly shielded from the world's cruelties by its breathtaking landscapes. However, beneath this facade, the seeds of gender-based oppression are sown. These early moments set the stage for Lakshmi's subaltern experience, where innocence clashes with oppressive norms.

Lakshmi's descent into the abyss of sex trafficking shatters her world, exposing her to unimaginable horrors. McCormick's stark prose forces readers to confront the brutality of her exploitation. The first-person narrative immerses us in Lakshmi's thoughts and emotions, making her suffering palpable and real. The story unfolds relentlessly, painting a world where women and girls like Lakshmi are treated as commodities, subjected to the capricious demands of the sex trade. This is a world defined by dehumanization, violence, and relentless oppression. Lakshmi's experience resonates with the broader context of gendered subalternity, where individuals are systematically silenced and marginalized by patriarchal structures.

This analysis has revealed the interplay between agency and powerlessness in Lakshmi's life. While it may seem that she is entirely devoid of agency, closer inspection reveals moments of resistance and resilience. Lakshmi's yearning for autonomy and her determination to protect her family, even in dire circumstances, attest to her agency.

McCormick's portrayal of Lakshmi's agency aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of the subaltern, which underscores the importance of recognizing resistance within marginalized individuals. Though Lakshmi's voice is often silenced,

her actions and inner thoughts reveal a complex inner life and a desire for self-determination.

The story also lays bare the insidious nature of gender discrimination and violence in Lakshmi's society. From the devaluation of girls to the normalization of child marriage, the novel paints a stark picture of the systemic oppression faced by women and girls in the region. Lakshmi's journey from innocence to experience is a poignant commentary on the loss of agency that often accompanies gender-based violence and exploitation.

Throughout her journey, Lakshmi encounters a diverse cast of characters, some perpetuating exploitation, while others offer compassion and solidarity. This complex web of relationships reminds us that individuals within marginalized communities are not uniform; they possess diverse perspectives, motivations, and capacities for both harm and empathy.

As Lakshmi crosses into India, the narrative expands to reveal the global dimensions of sex trafficking and exploitation. McCormick deftly navigates the intersections of gender, class, and nationality, illustrating how these forces converge to maintain the subaltern status of women like Lakshmi. The introduction of American characters prompts reflection on the global North's role in perpetuating or alleviating subaltern suffering.

Lakshmi's eventual return to her village, marked by physical and emotional scars, raises questions about healing and resilience in the face of trauma. While the novel doesn't provide easy answers, it suggests that the subaltern, despite enduring immense suffering, can find strength in connections with others and unwavering determination to assert their humanity.

In conclusion, Patricia McCormick's *Sold* serves as a poignant exploration of the gendered subaltern experience. Lakshmi's journey from innocence to victimhood and her resistance offer insight into the harsh realities faced by women and girls worldwide. The novel underscores the urgency of addressing gender-based violence and exploitation and calls for collective efforts to amplify subaltern voices and agency

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