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Transition and Transformation of Gendered Subaltern in Manju Kapur's

*A Married Woman*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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By

Bindu Hamal

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

This research entitled "Transition and Transformation of Gendered Subaltern in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*" has been presented by Bindu Hamal under my supervision in partial fulfillments for the degree of Masters of Arts in English. I recommend this to Research Committee for approval.

Supervisor

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Dr. Shiva Rijal

Central Department of English

Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur

Kathmandu

Date: -----

Tribhuvan University  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Central Department of English

A Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled "Transition and Transformation of Gendered Subaltern in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*" by Bindu Hamal has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. The undersigned members of Thesis Committee have approved it Research Committee Members:

**Members of the Research Committee**

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Internal Examiner

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\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

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Head of the Department

Central Department of English

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

This study on Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* excavates the plight of subaltern women. It raises the issue of the exploitation and domination of Astha, a married woman by patriarchy in India. Although Astha seems to be hegemonized by patriarchal ideology at the beginning and middle of the novel, towards the middle and end of the novel, she becomes stronger and does things using her own discretion because she writes and paints organizing exhibition on her own. Also, she becomes economically strong. Ultimately, Astha does not depend upon others for her agency or voice to be represented. In this way, Astha's emergence as a resistant and strong woman reflects a subaltern woman's transition and transformation.

## Transition and Transformation of Gendered Subaltern in Manju Kapur's

### *A Married Woman*

This research on Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002) highlights the issue of the exploitation and domination of the women by patriarchy in modern India in the twenty-first century. The research examines how the protagonist named Astha, a married woman, makes her constant struggle to establish her individuality and identity in the so-called modern Indian society as she seeks equal opportunities both within and the beyond the threshold of family. Astha wants to break her dependence on others and move ahead on the path of complete dignified human status. But Astha's act causes a threat to her husband, Hemant and his male superiority as he tends to treat her as mere sex object. As a result, she finds herself trapped between the pressure of modern developing society and shackles of society's biases. So, the research argues that though the Indian society has changed a lot over the last couple of decades since its independence from British colonization, the major character Astha in *A Married Woman* cannot go beyond the traditional patriarchal norms and values because she is a subaltern woman in Indian society. She, however, tries to raise her voice through taking on a teaching job, painting and writing poems, which can be analyzed as her attempt to rise above her subaltern position. This marks a transition and transformation of a gendered subaltern married woman, Astha.

As the novel draws the picture of Indian society of the 70s, the research examines the impact of the colonization which divided the Indian society along cultural, religious and gender lines thereby exploiting the people. So, in this backdrop, the subaltern scholars in India focused on poor and underclass people, that is subaltern in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language and culture. Its

main goal was to retake history for the underclasses, for the voices that had not been heard previous. Moreover, the gendered subaltern focuses on the representation of underclass voiceless women in the aftermath of colonial rule in India.

This study aims at exploring the submission and subversion of female character in the novel with the special focus on the issue of Gender Subaltern. Subordination, suppression, discrimination, revolution and rebellion found in the novel shows the issue of Gender Subaltern through the presentation of the Astha. In *A Married Woman*, the focus is on the issue of Gender Subaltern in which there is the subordination and transformation of the female character and her desire. The fiction brings a story about the main character Astha who is exploited and dominated by her husband and finally she becomes helpless and compelled to live alone. Astha is a middle-class girl growing up in late-1970s Delhi. As a young girl, Astha is a dreamy, sheltered and obedient in her parents' house. Her parents are not wealthy, but they have expectation from her. Although her father wants to educate her; her mother just wants to see her settled in a safe arranged marriage as she is totally guided by colonial patriarchal values. She sees her daughter's secure future in a wealthy and good husband. As a woman, she possesses subaltern consciousness.

Subaltern refers to those groups, in the society who are subject to the hegemony of ruling class. Subaltern class includes peasants, workers, women, the marginalized groups etc., who are denied and suppressed by males. So, Gramsci realized the need of revolution to support and place the oppressed people specially women to the privileged position from which they can speak on their own without the help and sympathy of the advantaged groups--males and the elites.

The other women characters in *A Married Woman* are obviously subaltern; they mobilize their politics through traditional organization of kinship and class association. Ascroft Bills, Greath Griffiths and Helen Tiffin assert, “Despite the great diversity of subaltern groups, the one invariant feature was a notion of resistance to elite domination” (217). Subaltern class has less access to means by which they can resist against their domination, “As the subaltern people do not have the means as well as the strategy to get access to hegemony, they need the intellectuals to show them the way. Only then, the subaltern classes can be turned in to revolutionary figure” (22). Subaltern people need some inspiration and motivation to step out their position.

Manju Kapur is one of the famous Post-Independence Indo-English writers. She is a feminist writer as she writes about the pathetic and oppressive situation of Indian women in all her novels. Her novels deal with the Indian women’s socio-cultural predicament caused by their entrapment in the male dominated, patriarchal society. In her novels, the women face struggle for freedom, identity and equality with men and space of their own. Their suffering and suffocation in the family and the marital relationships are clearly reflected in her novels. In this regard, Gayathri Devi. L. notes that Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individuals "caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity" (4). It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they are able to carve an identity for themselves. The protagonists pass through a phase of growth, self discovery, which leads them from innocence to knowledge.

Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* has been widely discussed as a novel about the search of the human rights and independence by the female characters fighting against the male hegemony. In the case of Astha both the aspects of sexual freedom can be evident, particularly extra-marital sexual relationship in new dimension of rebel feminism. She seems to have challenged the constraints of the middle class existence and the established notions of heterosexual relationships with Pipeelika. In this regard, Ashok Kumar says:

Manju kapur has exposed a woman's passion with love and lesbianism, an incompatible marriage and ensuing annoyance with passion to revolutionize the Indian male sensitivity, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish in for their triumph. (165)

Here, Kumar views that Kapur has represented bold women who dare to maintain their lesbian identity. They find an outlet to their inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than the society demands them to be.

Through *A Married Woman*, Kapur fully strives to undo this titled and distorted image of women whose cries for freedom and equality have not been heard in the patriarchal world. In this way, when denied the freedom to act and choose on their own, women remain solely inside the field of vision, mere illusion to be dreamt and cherished. This novel gives the inner workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in the society. Astha is such a person who is in search of her identity and the one who could be helpful to her in her pursuit. She does not become satisfied with the traditional roles of women. She gradually begins to assert her aspirations in her relationships with her husband and in-laws even though she earlier blindly obeyed them. She wants to be

a modern woman. So, she develops many relationships with different people as Sushila Gunjan notes:

She represents the whole woman race, the changing Indian society where the upper-middle-class educated woman who, although financially independent, is still facing the problems of adjustment between the old and the new, between appearance and reality and between theory and practice. It explores the space of such women through Astha and boldly presents a new perspective. (97)

Manju Kapur builds the story on the concept that women of the present day society stand on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. This novel gives voice to women's frustrations, disappointment, and alienation in a patriarchal world. It is a novel which provokes our thoughts as to how Astha, a married woman in search of her identity, registers her protests against existing patriarchal set up and emerges as an independent woman. Amar Nath Prasad observes in this context: "Women are no longer flowers of the pot for only decoration; rather they are fragrant flowers of the open garden diffusing aroma to all comers, braving the storms and rains" (qtd. in Gunjan 98). Although these critics have analyzed the novel from the perspective of traditional feminism, the present research analyzes the novel from the perspective gendered subaltern as the women characters in the novel represent low class Indian women.

In fact, the woman characters in the novel represent the group of subaltern as this project undertakes to explore in this study. In the Indian society women's role is undermined. Due to the colonialism women have doubly subalternized in India. So they cannot do anything on their own; rather they have to depend on the males be it father, brother or the husband. On the one hand, women, like their male

counterparts are suppressed as colonized subject and on the other hand, their own male counterparts also dominate them. It means colonialism appears to be more hazardous to female than male. In this response Chakrabarty gives the example of self-immolation and white men's response as, "White men save the brown women from the brown men" (93). It means white men want to prove their superiority over the brown men. White men without knowing the cultural significance of the Indian culture, they criticize the culture as savage and barbaric. While doing so they themselves hide white women's role in the western society. "If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, subaltern as female is even deeply in shadow" (2203). According to Spivak, subaltern women are subjected to oppression more than subaltern men. They do not have proper representation, and therefore, are not able to voice their opinions or share their stories. No one is aware of the daily struggles they face; subaltern women are ghosts in society. "I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting, in order precisely to be more effective in the long run" (2207).

In the Indian society women's position is marginalized because of the male hegemonic tendency. The primary objective of this research is to throw the spotlight into the married women's victimization in the Indian society. Women in the patriarchal society are dominated because of the social and economic conditions. They are deprived of the economic and social access. To overcome their suffering they need the help of intellectual. But while being represented from other, they may be misrepresented. So for the end of their real victimization, intellectuals from their own groups are needed.

In the Asian society women are deeply in shadow. The patriarchal attitude and rigid culture devalues the role of women, result in the wide spread occurrence

of violence against women. Women of south Asian society have been facing the threat of multiple forms of violence including: sexual violence by family members, strangers and agents the status; domestic abuse including spousal murder; being burned; disfigured with acid, beaten and threatened. The image of the Asian women has always been shrouded in mystery due to the lack of information on the part of most of the writers. Patriarchal values support female inferiority on the Indian sub continents. They preached that education for girls should be stopped, they should be prohibited from public life and most restrict themselves to their homes. A wife ought to respect her husband as God and serve him faithfully. Marriage is arranged by parents: they lose their identity as an individual or as a member of community and become more like a commodity which could be bought and sold.

This research does not only show the domination of the subaltern women, but also searches and their conscious marching towards the libration. In this regard, Deepash Chakravorty in his essay "Invitation to a Dialogue" by drawing upon Levi Strauss clears:

Conscious is not just the reflection of the economic base of a society but is constituted as a result of the interaction of several institutions and structure . . . so conscious has a certain degree of autonomy with regard to the economic base of a society, but ultimately determined by the by objective historical forces . . . society is thus divided up between an 'economic infrastructure and a political –ideological superstructure. (368)

In the male biased society, women's contribution is simply overlooked by the colonialist and bourgeois nationalist historiographies. Subaltern women can contribute a lot to bring this better fact disported by elite historiographies. For the

subaltern women, despite their contribution and potential, remain unheard the way the subaltern insurgencies. Spivak, therefore, asserts "Women are neglected syntagm of the semiosis of Subaltern of insurgency" (359). In this connection Gayatri Chakravorty shows how women are denied their voice. According to her, in the male dominated society whether the women are looked from above as merely a sexual object or from below as a goddess, she is reduced in to the object of the male's desire. The hegemonic males refuse to perceive women what they desire the latter to be.

Spivak, in her most famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" asserts that the subaltern classes cannot represent themselves. Because of the lack of adequate means and strategy to be represented themselves they cannot represent. The elite intellectuals tend to undertake the responsibility of representing the subaltern classes investigation tends to be filtered through his/her elite intellectual perspectives. As a result, there cannot be a representation of Subaltern class perfectly. The elite representative emerges as the master of subaltern people. In such case, there is high chance that the elite intellectual overshadow the subaltern people whom he/she represents.

The women form a subaltern class, and problem of representation, the privileged position of elite intellectual scholars that let them as a spokesperson of the marginalized women. In other words, the representation of the subaltern is a kind of representation mediated through the perspective of the elite. Therefore, the representation fails to become the true voice of the oppressed women which means the subaltern group should be representing themselves from their true representation.

According to the general thrust of Spivak's argument in her essay, her final assertion that the "subaltern cannot speak" denies the gendered subaltern the ability to represent herself and achieve voice agency. Spivak's contention that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" also precludes the possibility of others representing the subaltern woman as a blank or empty space. This presentation of the gendered subaltern as completely inaccessible, and more crucially, incapable of agency or resistance leads to a problematic conclusion that woman lack agency to speak for themselves.

To represent themselves in every sphere of social life, an intellectual is needed. In this connection, Spivak asserts:

The concept of an unproblematic constituted subaltern identity, rather than the subaltern subjects' ability to give voice to political concerns. Her point is that no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of essential subaltern subject entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks. (349)

The above mentioned connection means subaltern group doesn't have their own language and own strategy to speak but they can use the dominant groups language and strategy to present their voice through which they speaks. In the same manner Kamala Viswsran says, "Women are not accepted as proper subjects, but it does register and seek to contain their agency. She, however, believes that it is at the point of erasure where the emergence of subaltern is possible" (124).

Rosemary Sayigh, in her essay "Gendering the Nationalist Subject, Palestinian Camp women's life Stories" shows how women become subalternized

in their house and outside the house. By taking the issue of nationalist movement she asserts:

The male nationalist subject is doubly constrained, both by the barriers that obstruct her entry into political action, and by the obligation of eventual return to the home and resumption of the symbolic and reproductive roles associated with essentialized nation of women. (176)

It means in the nationalist movement too women's role is made passive by the male counterpart. Women are confined within the domestic sphere. Their role is undermined and marginalized. Their role is guided by the male domination.

The representation of the other destroys the subalternity of the subaltern. By giving the example of sati Spivak clears: "The subaltern as female cannot be heard or speak" (104). Sati was understood either through the English, as the slaughter of innocent women or, through the male Hindus who speak for the subaltern women, as a voluntary act. In other words, the subaltern in this instance, the Indian women, have no voice.

This research gives the glimpse of hope; the subaltern group also can make their identity under the patriarchic domination. Set in the post-independent India, Independence, *A Married Woman* is a story of search for women's space. In this way, the main aim of this research work is to demonstrate the real scenario of the female characters in the post-independent India, who are seeking independence not only from colonial rule but also from male dominance. How the protagonist of the novel Astha, as a married woman, ends up being an object at the hands of her husband, Hemant.

Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* with a particular focus upon the silence of the subaltern subject--especially the gendered subaltern. The study undertakes an in-depth look at the main character, Astha, a married woman, who struggles to find her own sense of identity at the time when India had gained its independence and was moving towards prosperity and modernity. So, the thesis argues that though India has been able to free itself from the clutches of colonialism and moving on the path of progress and modernity, it has not been able to get rid of elitist patriarchal colonial mentality. As a result of which, women have fallen victim as they have been forced to live within the four walls of house catering to the whims of the male desires and looking after the children. In the novel though Astha behaves submissively in the beginning, she gradually struggles to search for her space, which reflects her transition and transformation from being submissive to resistant.

The very first sentence of the novel foreshadows the doomed life – low ranked (second status) – of Astha as a subaltern subject. As is the situation of women in India, parents have sufficient fear for their daughters' predicament. As Kapur writes, "Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear. One slip might find her alone, vulnerable and unprotected. The infinite ways in which she could be harmed were not specified" (1). Here, the writer hints at the destiny of Astha as women have been treated as secondary beings in India. The initial fear that Astha's voice would remain silenced throughout her life has been indicated at the very beginning of the novel.

As a subaltern woman herself, Astha's mother is a traditional Indian woman who cannot think beyond the narrow gender biased roles of the patriarchal society. She has completely internalized the patriarchal ideology, so she cannot speak for

herself or she has no voice in the terms of Spivak. For her daughter's good future, Astha's mother wishes to perform her daughter's marriage ceremony at the proper time. Her mother teaches and trains her how to live and adjust in the in-law's house, how to be obedient towards her husband and to respect him as a God like figure like traditional Indian women have been doing. So, her mother advises her: "When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the Shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth? (1). This attitude of Astha's mother shows that she cannot think of progressive things for herself and daughter. She has only internalized the patriarchal ideology and its oppressive apparatuses.

As she is educated girl, Astha has her own dreams and desires. She has her own romantic world. But, her desire for freedom and equality cannot materialize as she lives in the surroundings in which males are always dominant and women are considered as secondary beings or objects to be consumed. She tries to enjoy the freedom and equality by developing love affairs with a couple of boys but they only take advantage of her and desert her after using her body. As women are generally treated as unimportant beings in Indian culture, Astha's affair meets tragic end. She joins the college where she falls in love with Rohan, a son of professor of the college. As she truly loves him, she establishes physical relations, but Rohan refuses to marry her. She cannot raise her voice strongly against him. As a result, she suffers silently. She is hegemonized by colonial middle class values and she has to accept her fate.

Finally, she agrees to marry Hemant, who is chosen by her parents for. Hemant is a well settled, foreign returned man who belongs to an elite bureaucrat family. The couple settles down at the aristocratic area of New Delhi. But Astha

does not become happy because she is not satisfied with her married life. She gets fed up with the boring and dull life as she has to live alone at home for the whole day. She has to wait for long hours to be a part of Hemant's company. She is trapped in the traditional role of a wife, daughter and daughter-in-law. As she thinks: "What was she to do while waiting for Hemant to come home? Her in-laws were not demanding, for the housework they had help, and supervision, no matter how painstaking, still left her with enough free time to be restless in" (46). Astha discovers that her husband always treats her as a sex object only. He never regards her as a companion. His desire for physical relationship at any time without Astha's consent reflects that she has been turned into an object of male's desire. This is shown in the novel, "Hemant wasn't really listening. Astha stopped talking about creative writing as he got up to lock the door, 'they are waiting,' objected Astha; 'just quick one,' said Hemant" (51). Astha, as we can argue, from Spivak's perspective, is either "gazed from above as a sexual object or from below as a goddess, a sacrificial being"; either way a woman is reduced into the object of the male's desires. Although she is a consciousness woman, Astha, as guided by her mother, tends to perform traditional feminine roles because she has internalized the forms of patriarchal oppressive values.

Males in the patriarchal society have the right to lead a promiscuous life, on the other hand, they expect women to observe chastity and ethical life. Males are always free but females are bounded everywhere. As Ranjit Guha clarifies:

For the response of a samaj to sexual deviance was not the same for both genders. Since the prestige of a caste was higher or lower according to the degree of its purity – and the physical construction of women as well as their cultural construction as objection as

objects of male lust made them, in men's eyes, potentially the more polluting of the two sexes – a maiden's virginity, a widow's chastity and a wife's sexual fidelity to her husband were all highly valorized by a samaj. Any violation of norms in this respect could pollute all of an offender's kin. (156)

In the society women's identity is created according to purity but males are always pure. If any woman establishes extramarital relation, she would be ostracized from the society. But the man whose role is equal in the act walks free by raising head in the society.

In the course of talking to Astha, Hemant tells her that he wanted "an innocent, unspoilt, simple girl", a "virgin" (41). When Astha retorts, "suppose I had not been one?" (41). At this, Hemant believes that as he saw "blood on the sheet," she was a virgin. This shows how males consider themselves as free being, on the other hand, they expect women to be innocent and pure. This is the double standard attitude on the part of males. But women in general have internalized this attitude and do not raise their voices.

Although there are no external factors that force Astha and other female characters in the novel to make them behave subserviently towards males and they do not strongly revolt against males, the female characters have internalized the patriarchal ideology. In this regard, Gyatri Spivak has argued that gendered subalternity is not only a product of the external constraints imposed on women by male domination and exploitation, but most importantly, of women's internalization of these forms of oppression. A woman becomes unable to escape her subjugation under patriarchal law when the discursive 'gendering' imposed on

her by the dominant system is internalized as constitutive of her subjectivity. The prevalent discrimination in society makes women subjected to the internalization of their own exploitation. In her translator's preface to three of Mahasweta Devi's short stories, Spivak foregrounds this predicament:

Internalized gendering perceived as ethical choice is the hardest roadblock for women the world over. The recognition of male exploitation must be supplemented with this acknowledgement. And the only way to break it is to establish ethical singularity with the women in question, itself a necessary supplement to a collective action to which the woman might offer resistance, passive or active. Douloti [the protagonist of Devi's short story "Douloti the Bountiful"] as a subject is a site of acknowledgement. (xxviii)

A crucial dialectic that informs Spivak's understanding of gendered subalternity is highlighted here. Although the female subaltern is without agency or volition, through "internalized gendering" she may often perceive the choices she makes to be 'ethical'.

Astha's condition in rich elite's house makes her search for her individuality. In order to dissipate the dullness of life, she decides to do the job of a teacher at St. Anthony's School. Her job brings her a change in her life and she starts involving into the external world and comes to know about the problems and limitations around her. Now she has changed her status from a housewife to a working woman. She has started to come out from the four walls of the house. She is no more a caged bird but starts to live like a free bird. This is the beginning of her search for identity. Like a traditional Indian woman, she tries to balance her personal and professional duties. But, like every Indian wife, she performs dual duties of a

dutiful wife by serving her husband and a teacher. As Kapur describes, "He [Hemant] sat down on the sofa, and Astha knelt to take off his shoes. She unlaced them, and pulled off his socks, gathering the day's dust in her lap" (48). Besides, she performs her all household duties like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, caring children, husband and in-laws. As she does all this, she realizes her subordinate position in her husband's house. Through the character of Astha, Manju Kapur exposes the position of thousands of traditional wives who are considered as the 'subservient' to their husbands. As Astha feels:

Astha's desire receded. She felt cold, dreary, and distanced from him. She had been waiting for him all day, thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated. He was a criminal, destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. Her subservient position struck her. She had no business kneeling, taking off his shoes, pulling off his socks, feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet. (50)

In Indian culture, for a woman giving birth to a child is very important. It is a matter of life's honour for a woman. The life of a woman can only be fulfilled when she gives birth to a child. Astha also wants to fulfill her life with the dream of a child. For this reason, she tells her husband to have a child. In the course of time, she gives birth to two children: Anuradha and Himanshu. Astha becomes involved with the upbringing of the children. She becomes confined within the boundary of the house.

Here, Astha, the woman as gendered subaltern creates a complete victim and in turn makes the oppressor an all-powerful force. A conception of the subaltern woman as "an (empty) space, an inaccessible blankness," implies a notion

of identity as fixed and unchangeable (Gilbert 102). Spivak's views that women cannot speak on their own has been proved here because of Astha's subordinate inclination.

The internalization of traditional patriarchal norms and values is seen in the major character. Astha stays at home; whatever she has to do, she does for their family's sake or happiness. Her husband is outside, for work. In the Indian society that family is called happy family where everyone performs their duty, where all the family members are happy, god blesses in such house. A woman is expected to remain docile and submissive by patriarchal society. She internalizes the male expectation and praised for being good qualities characteristics of Hindu traditional woman. If a woman is perfect at household, taking good care of children and husband, doing the washing-up and the dishes, complaining of nothing, she is a good wife. Astha, as a housewife and only caretaker of her two children, is taking care of them and her husband. So, Astha takes pleasure in household activities. Astha submerges herself in the role of daughter-in-law and wife, experimenting in the kitchen, completely fitting into the pattern of a woman and mother. Her time is spent visiting and shopping in the morning and more:

Back in Delhi, Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law and wife. The time spent in the kitchen experimenting with new dishes was time spent in the service of love and marriage. Hemant's clothes she treated with reverence, sliding each shirt in his drawers a quarter centimetre out from the one above so they were easily visible, darning all the tiny holes in his socks, arranging his pants on cloth-wrapped hangers so there would be no crease. With her mother-in-law she visited and shopped in the mornings, the memory

of the night past, and the expectation of the night to come insulting her from any tedium she might otherwise have felt. (43)

Engrossed in the marital happiness and her attempt to give her husband every satisfaction, Astha spends her time without any recognition and identity. But soon the dullness and monotony starts ruining her life. Although Hemant earlier helped Astha in the care of children, he finally thinks of it as the job of women. This shows the subordination of subaltern women, which is shown through the following between Astha and Hemant:

"It's your job, he said.'

'That's not what you thought when we had Anu, replied his wife. 'I can't do everything myself. It's tiring.'

'It's woman's work,' said Hemant firmly. 'Hire somebody to help you, or quit your job.' (70)

Thus, her married life changes and she becomes fed up as Astha thinks: "I haven't really lived, thought Astha, till now I did not know what life was all about. She felt a woman of the world, the world that was covered with the film of her desire, and the fluids of their sex. A few months and dullness began to taint Astha's new life" (46). Traditional patriarchal Indian society limits woman's individual development and growth. So, as a subaltern woman, she has to abide by many rules and restrictions as she is controlled by man throughout her life.

In patriarchal society, male are the main causes of the women's suppression and domination. In this society, the identity of women does not exist in patterns beyond the boundary fashioned by the elitist ideologies. A women's identity has been shaped and molded within the rigid patriarchal discourse. In this way, women in the Hindu society cannot live their own life. They should always live for other,

in the father's house, before marriage, father controls her. In the husband's house, she lives for husband. Likewise, she should obey her son after husband's death. Her life is lived by others rather than herself.

In the beginning, Astha plays the role traditional woman as she limits herself in household activities. It means in the Indian society women's role is to take care the family and keep them happy. But man's duty is to support financially by working outside home. Male is financial supporter as he is the bread earner. On the other hand, Astha's husband Hemant always keeps himself busy in manly business out of the home, so he gives more emphasis to his business and does not care for Astha and children. In fact, he refuses to help her in the nourishment of children. Because of the treatment of Astha as a secondary being, and changed attitude and carelessness of Hemant towards Astha, their married life does not move smoothly. Astha is always dissatisfied with the attitude of Hemant towards them. This disturbed relationship destroys the happiness of the house. Even though she manages everything, both inside the house and outside of the house, she has been claimed by her husband for mismanagement, wastefulness, inefficiency and incapability. She cannot find the same care, warmth and attention from her husband as she had been acquiring in the past. Now she feels that when she is with Hemant, she feels like "a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who notices nothing . . ." (287). Astha cannot find some way to come out of the situation and therefore she finds her own remedies to relief the feelings of insolence and loneliness in writing poems as well as involvement in sketches. Drawing and painting are the source of relief for her. Kapur writes:

She continued with her sketching, but found herself scribbling  
poetry, her father's encouragement more firmly in her mind now than

when it was first given. She wrote about gardens and flowers, the silent dark faces of gardeners tending plants and never getting credit. She wrote about love, rejection, desire and longing. The language was oblique, but it was her own experience endlessly replayed. (79)

Writing alleviates the heaviness within her, which she had been finding it difficult to deal with. As she finds any argument with her husband distant and miserable, she finds temporary relief by expressing herself through creative work. Here, Spivak's conclusion that the subaltern "cannot speak" holds true for Astha (104). It is primarily through her narrative that the predicament of subaltern silence is explored in the novel, and Astha is centrally concerned in the text with dramatizing her courageous struggle to recover a voice to 'speak' through her unleashing creative poems. .

Astha lets out her pent-up feelings and emotions through the mediums of art, that is by writing poems and drawing sketches. She expresses her pain, suffering, anguish and grief. Through, the character of Astha, the writer wants to reflect the hard and struggled life of an Indian woman. In the patriarchal culture, woman does not have her own identity. She is like a caged bird without wings who does not have the right or favourable environment to fly in the limitless sky independently. Indian woman has to follow and obey the instructions of male. She has to satisfy his whims and desires at the cost of her own desires. Before marriage she has to obey her father and after marriage she has to obey her husband. She doesn't have right to select the path of her wish. Under the particular pressure and control, woman has been suffering a lot till the present day. She is discriminated and biased because of her sex. Here, she reveals the secondary position of a woman in spite of her quest for equality and a worthy member of the patriarchal society.

Wife is always forced to follow the husband while the husband does not care for the feelings of wife. Astha's feelings and emotions are not taken into consideration by Hemant. Astha feels that somewhere the way Heman's attitude to Astha has changed. She tells herself it is only slightly, but it "oppresses her. As Astha complains and Hemant expresses his disgust:

"Hemant, why is it that we never talk anymore?"

"We talk all the time."

"About the business, the house, or Anuradha. Not about ourselves. Like we did before."

"Grow up, Az, one can't be counting forever."

"Is it courting to be interested in the other person? Their feelings?"

"Why are you so childish? I work hard all day, and when I come home I want to relax. If you are feeling something, tell me. I have no time for all these games." (66)

This passage shows how males in Indian society expect women to serve males and children at home, while they get involved in outer world. They want women to be uncomplaining and ideal.

Another female character in this novel is Astha's mother. The novelist very tactfully portrays the character of Astha's mother. She is a typical Indian woman who strongly follows the patriarchal norms like a traditional Indian woman. She is habituated to live under the male dominance and she personally favours the male dominance in the family. She also advises Astha to worship her husband like God. That is why, when she sells one of her plots, she hands over the large amount of money to Hemant, not to Astha. When Astha asks her about it, she replies: "He is a man, he knows about money. He will invest it for you and the children" (97). Both

the characters are in sharp contrast with ideologies. One represents the typical Indian woman who has internalized the patriarchal ideology and the other represents the modern or new woman of the twenty first century with new thoughts and ideologies. Astha gradually raises her voice against the male dominance and fights against the family and the society to establish her identity as she transforms herself. Like an Indian woman she does not want to turn her face from the familial responsibilities of a wife, daughter-in-law and a mother but she wants to participate in all the decisions of the family.

Women are represented rather than representing themselves; they do not have their own voice and agency. Spivak concludes: "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (307). Even in the Subaltern Studies project, a project whose concern is particularly the marginalized and exploited people, the male subaltern is privileged. By investigating and opening the discussion of the gendered subaltern, Spivak "expands and complicates the established concept of the subaltern" (59).

The subaltern is imbued with the negatives at all levels, be it social, cultural, sexual or personal. The subaltern is the one who is denied an authentic presence. He/she is the one bereft of voice or dignity: one who is a mere zero, a cipher with no essential meaning or a sense of being. The gravity of the situation is intensified when the subaltern is a woman. She is even denied a subject position. Being at the precarious juncture, criss-crossed by multiple forces of oppression, she is the one who occupies the lowest position in the social ladder. Her presence is not even authenticated; if at all it is done, it is only to enforce the superiority of the male counterpart. She is the deviant, the deformant, signifying all the lacks, the voids.

Due to her all these activities, it is not possible for her to pay attention to the family and house. So Hemant becomes angry and advises her to give up all these activities. But Astha refuses as she wants her own identity, self-independence and self-fulfilment. It is clarified when she utters, "I want something of my own . . . my own money" (148). As a conscious person, she wants to have her own possessions. But Hemant tries to stop her from working as a teacher, "You can't do everything. Leave your job . . ." (148). Hemant never considers her wife equal; in the name of showing love for her he tries to keep her in inferior position. Her words "I need more space . . . I was thinking of something more specific. You know, a place to work in peace, spread my stuff about" (156) are important to understand Astha's search for freedom from male encroachment. Here, Astha's search for space refers to independence and individuality thus marking her transformation.

In Indian society, the conventions of the patriarchal society allow males to act as per their wishes and women are not treated as his equal by him. In the novel, though once Hemant asks Astha not to worry about money, he later tries to control her. When Astha and Hemant plan a family trip to Goa, the ticket is arranged by the money earned by the sale of one of Astha's paintings. But Astha's desire to buy a carved silver box was unfeelingly dismissed down by Hemant as shouts: "You earn! What you earn, now that is really something, yes, that will pay for this holiday" (165). The tone of refusal hurts her. She has, of course, become an earning woman, why could she not have desire fulfilled with her own money. On the other hand, she never says anything when Hemant chooses to waste money on several unnecessary items. The reason for Hemant not allowing Astha to buy a box she likes can well be attributed to male dominance:

Nine thousand five hundred rupees spent on one of the worst weeks of my life, though Astha, as she stepped into the hotel bus for the airport. She thought hopelessly of all the things she could have done with that money, of the beautiful silver box she could have possessed and admired for ever. But their money spending was decided by him, not by her. (167)

That is why, Astha desires a space of her own. She also wants to enjoy her life not only within the house but outside the house. So, she decides to go to the meeting of the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch to protest and condemn the decisions of building up the temple of Lord Rama at the place of Masjid outside Rashtrapati Bhavan. But Hemant and her in-laws refuse it. Ignoring them, Astha decides to go to Ayodhya as the Manch insists her to deliver a speech on the public meeting as she makes up her mind to fight against old taboos of the patriarchal society. She visits Ayodhya where she meets Aijaz's wife Pipeelika. They come close and understand each other very well. They share common pain and suffering and at last establish intimate relationship. As Ashok Kumar narrates:

Astha likes to have a break from dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses in threat of Hemant and his male superiority. Although, she finds herself trapped between the pressure of the modern developing society and shackles of ancient biases she set out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. (134)

Astha finds solidarity and satisfaction in the arms of Pipeelika. Unlike her husband, Pipeelika seems to be more understanding, caring and loving towards her. Her association with Pipeelika gives a new turn to her quest for identity. She feels that

being a wife and a mother, she cannot deny her responsibilities of the family. Astha decides to leave her home, husband and children for her individuality. Though Astha has sought outside help in the society, she cannot get complete freedom the patriarchal society, its tradition and her husband. As a woman, she cannot get freedom from her marital life and home though she tries to pursue the path of freedom by writing and involving herself in social activities.

The predicament of the female subaltern is the most miserable of all in third world countries. It is a fatal to be a subaltern a woman. Astha's life, dreams, hopes and the basic right to a dignified survival are spoiled by multiple forces of oppression. She is a victim of the primarily subjugating ideology of patriarchy. The dream of transcending the threatening powers of oppression rather remains elusive for her. Even more pathetic is the fact that the dominant powers have so naturalized the subjugation of women that she often fails to recognize the drawback that she is in. She tries to get out of the confinement through her search for individual independence.

In this way, although Astha is an educated woman, she acts by remaining within the parameters set by the patriarchy in the beginning. She serves her husband and in-laws submissively. She obeys their dictates without complaint even though they try to confine her within the house. But she realizes gradually that she needs an assertion of her right over her life, body, assets, and action. She develops a growing intrinsic capability, greater self-confidence and an inner transformation to overcome opposition from private and public spheres. Gradually, Astha grows assertive, and asks for a separate space to write and paint as she involves herself in public spheres. She, literally, wants a space for herself for writing and painting in privacy. Astha insists on acquiring both for her creative work as well as for her

independent selfhood. By the end of the novel, Astha has gained agency, resources, and achievements, and thus, empowerment. This marks a subaltern woman's transition and transformation.

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