

Tribhuvan University

Museumization of Subaltern Voices in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Selected Stories*

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Masters of Arts in English**

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April 2018

Acknowledgements

This research work would not have been completed without the continuous encouragement and scholarly supervision of Dr. Tara Lal Shrestha, Central Department of English. Apart from giving suggestions, he guided me well from the beginning till the end, frequently checking the contents and structures of the study and correcting mistakes. I express my sincere gratitude to him.

I am very much grateful to Prof. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, Head of Central Department of English, for the approval of this research work. I owe my sincere gratitude to all respected lecturers of the Department who enriched me with their valuable insights during the preparation of this thesis. I express my sincere gratitude to the staff and faculty in the Department for their full support to my research work and formal procedures.

Lastly, my family members for the remarkable affection and encouragement to my study and passion, my colleagues who motivated me to seek more ideas those are interesting.

April 2018

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical discussion over Vietnam War and its consequences. It exposes the excluded Vietnamese refugee's voices in America. It creates many refugees who are silenced and suppressed by the elites. Based on the textual analysis, ideas of different critics and library based materials the researcher finds out that Nguyen's characters like Mr Liem, Parrish, Marcus, Victor, Mrs Beni, Mrs Hua and other fall on the hegemonic discourse of power. Likewise, Victor's family become the victim of war and suffering from trauma. In this thesis, the concept of subaltern study is applied to the Nuguyen's, The Refugees. It is the collection of story, where characters raise their voices against the power hegemony, but the lack of solidarity and unified action leads them nowhere. The characters do not remain silence however they cannot come out from the vicious circle of subaltern position. Hence, the ultimate goal of this research is to give space to the subaltern voices.

Key terms: Refugee, Subaltern, War, Hegemony, Power, Consciousness, Space, Patriarchy, Gender.

This thesis focuses on Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Refugees*, a story collection of Vietnamese refugees in America. It exposes the unheard voices and their suffering in America. This paper explores the sense of insecurity of the marginalized character and no broader unified activities found in their action. Lack of solidarity and unified action leads them nowhere. The researcher proves the subaltern issue which provides voice to the voiceless character like Mr Liem, Parrish, Marcus, Victor, Mrs Beni and Mrs Hua. By bringing different time phase of those marginalized character the researcher proves, *The Refugees* is the authentic museumization of subaltern voices where the character are suppressed by the power, compelled to leave their homeland

and live a pathetic life in America. They lost their national identity and called refugees due to the hegemonic discourse of power created by States. These situations arouse due to the Vietnam War. This thesis is a critical discussion over Vietnam War by bringing different character from the stories to prove the essence.

The Refugees is a collection of eight different stories written over a period of twenty years, exploring questions of immigration, identity, love and family. Among them three have been selected for the research; "Black Eye Women", "The Other Man" and "War Years". This paper examines the issue of subaltern studies and its perspective in those selected stories which carries the ethos of minority voices. The researcher claims that the voices of subaltern are raised properly through the help of those stories. Those three stories draw the atmosphere of Vietnam War and its effect by bringing different characters from different time phase. In the story, the characters interact with the history of Vietnam where different phases of its history and historical events appears and disappear to prove their essence.

The first story "Black Eyed Women" is the story of attack upon the narrator's boat while crossing the pacific, where the protagonist lost her brother. The tale narrates the story of voyage and the ghost of her brother frequently haunts the narrator. It portrays the situation of fear, violence and destruction. Vietnam War created such situation and people are suffering from fear and trauma because their past frequently haunts them. People are suffering from humiliation and they need someone to help them, speak their voice and relief their traumatic situation. Sense of insecurity can be seen even in writer and authentic people. They fear even to tell their own stories and are searching their own land and identity. They do not have their own homeland and their national identity is in crisis because of elite's who suppress and dominates them. The narrator here, presents the voices of those marginalised people

by recurring their past with the help of stories. The voices of the peoples are raised through the help of oral stories. One of the characters, Victor's sister tries to write about the memories of homeland but she cannot write because she only remembers the oral stories, which show that they are still haunted by the war memories. It concludes that they are psychologically and physically fragmented and this fragmentation is the consequences of war. Vietnam War happened between north and South Vietnam in 1955- 75. It was long costly-armed conflict that pitted the communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, known as the Viet Cong against South Vietnam and its principle ally, the United State.

The second story, "The Other Man", reveals the story of marginalised characters like Liem, Marcus and Parrish. The author tries to give voice to the people between two worlds, the adopted homeland, America and the motherland, Vietnam. The protagonist is the young Vietnamese refugee who suffers from cultural shock when he comes to live with two gay men in San Francisco. Here, the protagonist, Liem discovers him as gay. San Francisco is the place where the gay movement started. The culture of San Francisco is different from England and Vietnam. Liem, Parrish and Marcus find two men living together in San Francisco and they too live together which was strange for them and they discover themselves as gay. Parrish is from England, Marcus from Hongkong and Lemi from Vietnam. Many people ask Liem about his story and he tells the edited version of it by making short. While Marcus asked about the story, he again offered the edited version and introduced himself as refugee casting himself as just one more anonymous young refugee. He recounted the drama that began with leaving his parents in long Xuyen last summer, continued with his work in a so called bar in Saigon, and climaxed with the end of war. From the introduction of Liem, we know that he is an anonymous refugee and

the next, he is a gay. Gays are the group of marginalised people who are dominated by the gender hegemonic discourse. They do not expose their voice directly in the society and their identity rooted deeply in shadow. They fall in the brutal circle of subalternity and it was hard to come out.

The third story is "War Years" in which the author tries to explore the psychological consequences of Vietnam War aftermath. The characters are haunted by war memories and they resist against the communist frequently. The protagonist Mrs Hoa is presented as a revolutionist and anti-communist. Her husband and son killed by communist at the time of war. In the story, the government and the local people tortured the refugees. They cannot reveal their feelings and emotions. The only one option left is 'not to open the door to the stranger and not to talk with the stranger'. They are always the subject for the ruling class and they cannot defend themselves. They are compelled to remain silent due to the problem of language.

These all stories present the particular voices of refugees where the author himself is refugee. Even the tone of story is autobiographical. These three stories are about the struggle of the refugees. It explores the hard life between motherland and adopted homeland. Cultural shock, language problem, loss of identity, dislocation, fragmentation and traumatic psychology are their major problems. The voices of subaltern are properly raised through stories because everyone is oppressed. Hence, everyone is a subaltern. Nevertheless, we can also raise the question like who is speaking for those subalterns and how their voices were presented in the form of literature.

The world is always in the process of progress from the beginning of the civilization. In the continuous process of change and adopting new world, we are encountering various wars that stands as a prompt of the change it leaves the past

traces behind and moves further. In other words, there is clear indication of past and present in many of the Nyguyen's stories. It examines the legacy of Vietnam War in literature. The psychological consequences of war, the condition of Vietnamese refugees and the subaltern voices are presented with the help of stories. As a refugee writer, Nyguyen establish ambivalent attitude towards Vietnam War. Through these stories, Nyguyen not only points out the representation of subaltern voices, but at the same time, it presents the history from different point of view. Different critics, reviewers and the magazines have commented on the layers of aspects on the issues that *The Refugees* reveals. However, very few have focuses on the issue of subaltern.

The Los Angeles gives its space to the review in Viet Thanh Nguyen's. It states:

The Refugees, wistfulness is an anthem of displacement which argues that "Black Eyed Women" is imbued with much more melancholy than horror, such woe being proof, and the narrator says that, we did not belong here. In a county where possessions connected for everything, we had no belongings expect our stories (n.pg.)

This shows that the story is full of terror and horror. It is the song of their suffering. Their sorrows and emotion come out as a form of oral stories. "Black Eyed Women" is the story of a voyage where the narrator lost her brother and they live in trauma. They believe in ghost and haunted by memories. They have only their stories and they begin, with in our homeland. This show that, they are traumatic and want to return back to their homeland. *The Los Angeles* further writes "the telling does not come easily Nguyen has said "Black Eye Women" went through at least fifty drafts over perhaps 14 years" (n.pg.). It illustrates that the stories are the representatives of history and to write about history in fiction is not an easy task for all authors. Therefore, he repeats it more than fifty times. The story carries the authentic historical

fact.

Similarly, *The New York Times* writes, “as concerned with the aftershocks of war as with war itself, the refugees mostly elides grisly scenes like the bombing, killing, rapes and tortures” (n.pg.). This statement clarifies the vivid picture of war which is presented through the story "War Year". Refugees are really suffering from the bombing, killing, rape, tortures and they reveal their voices. It further argues, "in Nguyen's super new collection, *The Refugees* men and women displaced from war time Saigon and resettled in California do not say much about the journey. Having practiced many versions of silence—from state censorship to language barriers along the way" (n.pg.). Mrs. Hua, Mrs. Beni and her family are displaced by war from Saigon to California. They do not say much about their journey but they express their anger toward the communist.

Similarly, in the preface, the author dedicates the story to all the refugees everywhere “for all the refugees, everywhere” (n.pg.). Though, the stories are about the Vietnam War and its aftermath but its express the feeling and emotion of all those refugees over the globe. Writing about war and memories James Fenton states, "It is not your memories which haunt you. It is not what you have written down. It is what you have forgotten, what you must forget, what you must go on forgetting all your life" (n.pg.). The memories of war haunt the character frequently in the story. "Black Eyed Women" is the story of ghost and they were haunted by the death of Victor and the memories. They have to forget it but they cannot.

Moreover, Scholars Yen Le Espiritu argues, "public historians and the media have repeatedly documented Vietnamese bodies during and after the war have not be recorded the same humanity and dignity given to Americans bodies"(1). We can find many documentary and books related to Vietnam War but also it lacks the public

discussion due to the lack of power. He further adds "absent in public discussion of the war, Vietnamese refugees become visible and intangible to Americans as grateful beneficiaries of united states-style freedom; as successful, assimilated, and anti-communist new comers to the American melting pot" (1). Power plays the major role in public. *The Refugees* is also the public discussion of Vietnam War where the author tries to address the marginalized.

Another scholar Robert Only Butler analyse the stories as the strange story. He states, "not only Viet Thanh Nguyen's bring a rare and authentic voices to the body of American literature generated by Vietnam War, he has created a book that transcends history and politics and nationality and speaks to the enduring theme of literature: the universal quest for self, for identity" (2). The stories transcend history and politics not only that we can argue but it is alternative history or the history of marginalized. It traces the history of Vietnam War from different perspective. It raises the issue of identity, self-consciousness, and nationality.

Although, the critics earlier provided the variety of lenses to see the stories from different angles, the researcher finds the issue of subaltern studies quite interesting and relevant. There are various incidents that drag researcher to conclude the text as subaltern voices. The text gives space to the subaltern to raise their voices. The researcher exposes the refugees as major subaltern group. In fact, the whole text is the museumization of subaltern voices. The consequence of Vietnam War creates many refugees in America. The refugees are the major subaltern people. American people do not show the humanitarian attitude towards refugees. Their suffering, fragmented psychology, their problems in America and their will to go back to homeland are vividly portrayed. Through the help of the fictional character, the researcher proves them as authentic voice of subaltern.

The stories of displacement and exile, homelessness and fear, fragmented psychology, identity crises and cultural hegemony are presented through text. Giving focus on these points, the researcher explores how the subaltern voices are presented through the text. This paper explores the voices of subaltern; characters who were trapped in the elitist culture of America. It also deals with the interaction of particular war history and its effect upon character.

Concentrating upon Gramsci's notion of 'Hegemony', Guha's notion of 'History, Politics, Economics and Sociology of Subaltern' as well as Spivak's concepts of 'Deconstructing Historiography' this thesis explores the pathos and emotions that are documented as a historiography of marginalised people. By analysing these major concerns of the research, the researcher uses the methodologies of Subaltern Studies and Subaltern Consciousness bringing the different ideas of different theories.

Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci in *The Prison Notebook* defines the term subaltern as, "it refers to any person or groups of inferior rank and situation, weather because of race, class gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion" (208). From the point of view of Gramsci, we can understand all the inferior people are subalterns and the refugees are the major subaltern groups. All the characters presented through the stories are the subaltern peoples because they lost their identity and their land. Gramsci define them as 'low rank person' or the group of those 'people who suffer from hegemonic domination from the state'. The refugees are the group of people who suffer from the power hegemony of the state they become powerless and displaced from the homeland.

Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines subaltern as 'voiceless' who do not have their own voice. It is simply unheard voice; if person's voice is not heard, it is

subaltern situation. Nevertheless, we can raise question like who is speaking for them, and on what intention and how do they speak? Spivak declares in her essay "subaltern cannot speak" (36). Subaltern are the voice less people and we need agency to listen their voice. In the story "Black Eye Women" the characters are forced to suppress their voice. They raise their voice through the help of writer by hiding their name.

This thesis is the study of Vietnamese refugee's selected stories from the perspective of Subaltern Studies to give voice to voiceless people who suffers from the hegemonic discourse of power. Nugyyen's stories do not describe about how was the war but it shows the result of the war and the researcher tries to explore how the Vietnamese had suffered during the time of war. Henry Kissinger in his book, *Ending the Vietnam War* states:

The conflict in Vietnam had begun in the 1950s in the land then known as the French colony of Indochina. A Vietnamese struggle against the French had sparked a civil war a cause fire had temporarily divided the country into Northern and Southern regions. The North did not accept this division, viewing it as an arbitrary border imposed by outside forces: supported by allies in the Soviet Union, the communist regime in North Vietnam began sending troops to South. (23)

According to this historical fact, it is said that, officially the war fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. There are other countries like Soviet Union, China, United States, South Korea, Australia, and Thailand were involved directly and indirectly in the war. It is the war between communist and anti- communist. The official history only puts the date and number, time and period, the loss and the death but they forget the pain, suffering, fear and trauma.

The pathos and emotions were documented while deconstructing the official history. The official history writes how the Vietnam War ended and how the leaders play their role to stop the war by making many negotiations. After reading *Ending The Vietnam War* by Kissinger; Heather Lehr Wagner writes in his review "The meeting on August 4, 1969, did little to alleviate the conflict in Vietnam. Each side essentially restarted its official position. The only real commission made was an agreement to consider holding additional meetings. It would not be until February 1970 that a second meeting took place" (13). Though there held many meetings and negotiations officially but the war never ends we find the traces of war still in the life of people. Subaltern studies also break the official history. It gives voices to those voiceless people and it gives space to those unheard stories through the help of literature.

Additionally, we find many books and researched related to Vietnam War and its memories. We can find many historical documents, which give the clear picture of war. The war was the power tussle between the Vietnam and United State and it formally end with the negotiation and agreement:

The war would drag on for many years, claiming countless Vietnamese and American lives, before Kissinger and his North Vietnamese counterpart, by Than Le Du Tho, could claim to have a cease-fire treaty. Meeting near Paris in January 1973, the two sides finally reached an agreement. (13)

However, the war ends in the historical document but still we find the traces in the psychology of people. The effects of war still affect American and Vietnamese people, which make many people life less and voice less. Many writers' tries to narrate the war history through their writing but the author of *The Refugees* tries to give voice to those voiceless people.

The Refugees is the story collection of alternative history where the unheard stories were told by the victims. Vinayak Chaturvedi in *A Critical Theory of Subalternity: Rethinking Class in Indian Historiography*, states, "according to Ranjit Guha's words such history are called unhistorical, blinkered and one sided because they do not focus on minority groups and the victim" (9). Definitely, the mainstream histories are unhistorical because it lacks many things and cannot document the feeling and emotion of the victim.

Similarly, in the selected stories the "War Years" official history does not focus on minority groups and victims. Mrs Hoa is unsatisfied by the communist and the communist are failed to address the problems of subaltern. Mrs Hoa is collecting money to fight against the communist. In this context, she narrates, "I am collecting funds for the fight against the communist, my dear" (35). It shows the revolutionary character of Mrs Hoa and she is fighting back with communist and she believed that Communist creates the Vietnam War so, she becomes anti-communist. Her character shows the anger towards communists she expresses:

The communist had marched from North Vietnam in 1975 to invade South Vietnam, driving us out, all the way across the pacific to California... A guerrilla army of former South Vietnamese soldiers was training in the jungles of Thailand, preparing to launch a counter attack in unified Vietnam. The plan was to stir the unhappy people against their communist rulers, incite a revolution, and resurrect the republic of south. (33)

This shows that people were displaced by war and became refugees in America. The psychology of people is still haunting by the war memories. The protagonist Mrs Hoa suffers from the communist strategy. In this regard, Mrs Hoa announces, "The American sent my younger son's division to Laos in 1972. He never returned. As for

my eldest son, he was in the army, too. The communists killed him. I buried him in Bien Hoa in 1969. My daughter wrote to tell me the communist scratched the eyes out of the picture on his grave” (45). This type of suffering is compulsion to endure only to the citizen and this is not addressed in mainstream history. To address the whole suffering of people and to challenge the mainstream history Guha established the Subaltern Studies group. He further adds:

Guha founded the Subaltern Studies project in collaboration with Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman and Gayendra Pandey with the specific aim of providing a corrective to the historiography by combating elitism in academic research and writing. Starting in 1982, the collective began publishing thick, detailed essays in a series called subaltern studies in which the subaltern classes were at the centre of history writing. (9)

Subaltern Studies group always tries to address the issue of marginalized groups and the subaltern were at centre of history writing which means the history from below or the alternative history. Guha not only talk about elites and bourgeois but also about cast, ethnic and culture. Vinayak Chaturvedi again writes:

He argued that the subaltern condition could be based on caste, age, gender, office or any other way, including but not limited to class. Guha further states that he was centrally interested in interpreting the culture that informed subalternity, while also addressing concerns about history, politics, economic and sociology. (9)

Aforementioned lines portray the history and politics because politics and power play the major role to create mainstream history and it always displaced the stories of subaltern. *The Refugees* is also a story collection to challenge the official war history of Vietnam. Guha only talks about caste age and gender but he forgets the refugees he

forget the displaced people and about those people who do not have particular gender as male or female. Refugees are those people who lose their homeland and become displaced. They do not have any national identity and they become exile from their own homeland.

This thesis claims that we can figure out more space for the representation of subaltern. Explaining the purpose of Subaltern Studies, Guha writes, "The aim of subaltern studies is to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian Studies" (49). The term subaltern becomes very much complicated in the field of literature. We can trace subaltern not only in South Asia but whole over the world in any form. The issue of subalternity is discussed everywhere at present. Likewise, *The Refugees* is also a discussion of subaltern people in America.

The term 'Subaltern' becomes very much controversial and later on the discussion and research are held in this issue. Subalterns can speak themselves if we give space to them, their voices can be heard if we try to listen to them. In the story, Victor's sister narrates; "His eyes, though, were the same, curious, as were his lips, slightly parted, always prepared to speak" (5). He is always eager to speak. Nguyen's stories are the voices of subaltern. On the case of subaltern, one can speak from inside or outside of text, where Nguyen tries to speak from inside the text. Anyone can speak on the favour of subaltern but the inner politics like for whom they are speaking is difficult to find out.

The Refugees is an authentic voice of those subaltern people where the author is also refugee so he presents the real situation of those victims. He is very much closer to eternalize the situation of all those refugees over the world. The author in the acknowledgement of his book *The Refugees* writes:

Thanks to my older brother, Tung, the original refugee's success story, seven years after arriving in the United States ... Thanks Lan Duong, my fellow refugee, writer and partner. A reader of my words, she has shared both the suffering and joy. Thanks to our son, Ellison, for reminding me of childhood. By the time this book is published, he will be nearly the age that I was when I become a refugee. (n.pg.)

From this statement, it is proved that Viet Thanh Nguyen is a refugee. He came to United State as refugees and later settled in camps for Vietnamese refugees. He is also the voice of subaltern people, through his writing he tries to address the issue related to subaltern. Significance of the voices of subaltern can be understood from the purpose of writer or the speaker. A person without lines of social mobility is subaltern figure. However, Nguyen tries to come out from such situation; he breaks those lines. Their suffering and feelings are vividly portrayed in those stories through the help of characters. The sorrow of displacement and exile and the suffering they face in the camp are documented. *The Refugees* is the authentic museumization of subaltern voices. However, the war ends in written history but it never ends in the psyche of people.

The collective consciousness of community develops only after they are suppressed. In the story "War Years" Mrs. Hoa develop consciousness only after her son and husband were killed by the communist. She is fighting back with communist. Talking about the subaltern consciousness, Spivak in her essay collection *In Others Worlds* states:

To investigate, discover, and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project- a project which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to some things that can be

disclosed. This is all the more significant in the case of recovering a consciousness because, within the post-enlighten tradition that the collective participates in as interventionist historians; consciousness is the ground that makes all disclosures possible. (7)

As a speaker of marginalized groups Spivak is provoking to uplift the subalterns through the ground that can disclose the possible voice of those groups. Self-consciousness is a significant aspect of understanding others. To be aware about the self-one had to understand others. In the story, characters become aware about who they are, how they are suffering and, what their problems are. To establish subaltern consciousness is a positive vive towards them, which develop their self-steam. Mrs. Hoa shows how the collective consciousness can be develop through activism; they are able to find their actual self, able to gain the consciousness that they are oppressed and marginalized.

Collective consciousness has been situationally developed through characters. Victor's sister, her mother, Mrs Hoa, Mrs. Binh, Parrish, Liem and Marcus are able to develop their collective consciousness. Spivak further argues, "The strategy become most useful when consciousness is being used in the narrow sense, as self-consciousness" (35). She defines the self-consciousness as narrow. For her, the broader subaltern consciousness is more important for the up-liftment of subaltern as well as to raise the voice of subaltern. Self -consciousness in essential to make it as broader subaltern consciousness. Spivak's argument is applicable in the case of Mr Liem where he develops his self-consciousness and found his identity as gay, when Marcus give him the shocked and had sexual relation. Parrish and Marcus were living together as couple which give shock to Liem "Parrish lowered the volume on the radio and said, ' there is something you need to know about Marcus and myself we are

a couple'; Parrish announced" (18). They are couple in romantic mood but Liem react it as normal even after he gets shocked. This story reveals the stories of those subaltern groups who were outcast by the society and they live out of their homeland. The colour of the house, their living style and the language gave Liem frequent shock. Liem had a different story than other, "he and the other refugees had been rescued by seventh fleet destroyer in the south china sea, taken to a makeshift marine corps camp at Guam, and then flown to California" (20). This is a story how he enter America but he never told about these all to his parents. Liem dream about speaking proper English language, which show language and culture problem. The pain of displacement and those emotional bonding towards his homeland is expressed as:

in a warm bed under three blankets, remembering dreams in which he spoke perfect English then he opened his eyes to see a faint blue glow filtered through foggy windows, the murky and wavering shimmer reminding him of where he was, in a distance city, a foreign place where even the quality of light differ from the tropical glare he'd always known. (20)

These lines describe the inner suffering of Mr Liem, his emotional and physical bonding towards his homeland, his expectation in San Francisco and the reality he faced there. His language problem is notice time and again "don't say I am hungry, say I'm hungry. You have to learn how to use contractions if you want to speak like native" (23). Marcus caught his mistake repeatedly. Displacement creates the language problems and it is hard for them to adopt another language.

Liem discovered himself as gay after living with them. Marcus and Liem had physical relation after Parrish left them. Marcus make clear about Liem's situation "A year from now you will be the one hearing other men say they love you, Marcus said 'they'll say you're too pretty to be alone'" (28). Liem became clear about his own

identity and his situation at last. Discovery of the self is the main achievement of Liem in San Francisco. Subaltern people become conscious and it is the great achievement for them "at one time he would have thought the two men could only be friends, now he say they could easily be lovers" (31). In this story, Viet Thanh Nguyen gives voice to the lives let between two groups, two worlds, Homosexual and heterosexual. In the story, "The Other Man", through unknown narrator Nguyen narrates:

Can you just wait a minutes?' Mrcus said, turning around and hooking one leg over Liem's body. 'Don't you think you're overreacting?' 'No', Liem said, trying to unpry, without success, Marcus's legs, honed by countless hours on the treadmill and the squat machine, 'I need to go to the bathroom, please'. 'You just caught by surprise sooner or later you will figure out loves just a reflex action some of us have. (28)

Now, he discovers his identity, his desire. For the minority groups to be aware about their self is very much necessary to move ahead. Likewise, the next character Mrs. Hua tries to develop the broader subaltern consciousness through her activism. She tries to convince other people to fight back. Lack of solidarity and lack of unified action can be seen in their struggle. Due to these lacks, they are problematic and their voices are suppressed so their struggle leads them nowhere.

Subaltern studies come as a social theory to speak against colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. The focus of subaltern studies is on the consciousness of the subaltern classes. Spivak's Introduction to Select Subaltern Studies IV about subaltern consciousness and the colonial subject as the basis of theorization perceive there as making a theory of consciousness or the culture rather than specially a theory of change. She further says:

Subaltern consciousness is subject to the elite that are never fully recoverable that it is always asked from its recovered signifiers indeed that is effected even as it is disclosed that it is irreducibly discursive negative consciousness is conceived of having historical stage peculiar to subaltern rather than grounding positive view of consciousness. Should not be generalized as the groups' methodological presupposition. (339)

Some critic use the term Subaltern in a general sense to refer to marginalize group and the lower classes a person without agency by his her social status. Spivak uses it in a more specific sense. Similarly, in the selected stories the author Nguyen portrays the character who really represent from the group of marginalised people. They are not able to create their own identity because of the power hegemony and the patriarchal society itself. In addition, she argues:

Subaltern is not just a classy word for oppressed, for other, for somebody who is not getting a piece of the pie. In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism in subaltern—a space of differences. The working class is oppressed. It is not subaltern group in the real sense of the term. Many people want to claim subalternity. They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They are within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak. Use hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern. (271)

Spivak tries to differ the term 'subaltern' from the postcolonial view as well as Marxist view that everything that is oppressed is subalterns. According to her, the unheard voice is subalterns and not the oppressed one and also they should not have called themselves as subaltern. Nevertheless, the researcher here tries to departure

from the Spivak's argument proposing a counter argument that every oppressed one is subaltern whether they speak or not. The characters in the stories are oppressed so they are subalterns.

The term subalterns are groups who have had their voice silenced. They speak through their action to protest against mainstream development and create their own visions for development. Subaltern groups have been creating social movements, which contest and disassemble western claims to power. The characters in the story speak through their action. Mrs Hua is fighting with the communist and the gay character Mr Lemi, Parrish and Marcus are fighting back with the hegemonic discourse of gender. They are conscious about their situation. They are unidentified refugees, hopeless and struggle to escape from such situation but are captivated within subaltern situation.

The characters in the stories fall inside the vicious circle of power hegemony. They are captivated inside the circle; being hopeless, voice less and powerless but their action shows that they are struggling to come out from such situation and trying to make their voice heard. The stories strongly raise the voices for the subaltern people to come out of such situation because they are the subaltern of 'the subaltern' called as 'refugees'.

According to Spivak, subaltern women are subject 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 daily struggles they face; subaltern women are taken as negative in the society: "I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting, in order precisely to be more effective in the long run" (207). The oppression of women is taking place around the globe. They fall in the power hegemony of the patriarchal society. The characters in the story are

oppressed and they do not have their freedom. In the story “Black Eyed Women” the narrator’s mother narrates:

There was once a woman deeply in love with her husband, a soldier who disappears on a mission behind enemy lines. He is reported dead; she refuses to believe it. The war ends and she flees to this new country, eventually marrying again decades later. She is happy until the day her first husband returns from the dead, released from the camp where he has suffered as a secret prisoner for nearly thirty years. (13)

The woman is oppressed by the patriarchy and the government do not inform about the real situation of her husband. She is compelled to believe the lie. She has to sacrifice her happiness and marry with another man. However, that happiness does not remain for long time. In this way, women are oppressed by the patriarchal hegemony in the society. They do not have any freedom of choice and happiness. Most importantly, the long established male hierarchy and the social dogmas of males have paved the way to the victimization of the women. They are victimized not only in the particular place but whole over the globe. Refugee women are the major subaltern in the stories.

In the story "War Years", the protagonist Mrs. Hua tries to arouse the consciousness in other people. She is an activist who has a dream to change the difficult situation of refugees in California. In fact, through her works, she has been encouraging the marginalized to speak themselves for their own sake, and has indeed been giving them the opportunity for the same through her activism. She is an activist and raising her voice directly towards the communist. Subaltern people do not have access to the discursive power and their contribution, and their sacrifices are rarely mentioned. The dominant discourse is exclusionary. That is why the subaltern groups

hardly get a forum to raise their voice, so the literature becomes the agency for them.

Gramsci argues in his Prison Notebook, that subaltern groups are always the subject to the elites group and the powerful groups. According to him "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only permanent victory breaks their subordination and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves" (55). In the story those refugees are the subject to the ruling groups. They become inferior in front of power. They were torture by the government and the local people repeatedly. A mother figure narrates her story "in our homeland there was a reporter who said the government tortured the people in prison. So the government does to him exactly what he said they did to others. They sent him away and no one ever sees him again. That's what happens to writers who put their names on things" (1). People are being humiliated and this situation was created by war. Psychological terror and horror can be seen in their expression. They rebel and try to rise up but they cannot. Lack of unified action is found in their activities. They are fragmented and dislocated.

Since, there is always presence of subaltern in Literature; we can say that their voices are raised through literature. Subalterns can speak themselves if we listen to them. They are not 'the voiceless' but they are 'oppressed'. The powerless people were always suffering from the power tussle. In the story the character suffer lots at the time of war they share their measurable condition "they burn the baby with cigarettes until the mother showed them where she hid her money" (5). They are compelled to remain silent at that time but later on, they speak. They share their stories to the writer and journalist.

Although subaltern studies cover a wide range of postcolonial ideas, the

researcher have been specific on the aspect of refugees as subaltern and the inter-connection with other theoretical insight and the Vietnam War. In the Southern Asian countries, it is easy to associate subalternity with the lowest socio economic classes, social caste, and peasantry. The social expectation of women allow for the presence of subalternity in all classes. Theorist of subaltern studies have noted that gendered subalternity is particularly complex. The restraints of gender transcend class is allowing subalternity to exist outside of the lowest socio-economic section of society. Likewise, in the story, Lemi, Marcus and Parrish are gay and they are minority group of people whereas there are many female characters who fall under the category of gender subaltern. Many theorist and researcher talk about gender subaltern issue. New concept, philosophies, and consciousness are seemed to be more effective and it leads to the possibility of new finding. The gay movement of San Francisco, the anti-communist movement and the anti-colonialist movement shows that the history of subaltern begins from the earlier phase of time.

Arguing about the history of subaltern social groups Gramsci states:

The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of ruling groups; it is therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in success. (35)

For Gramsci, history of subalterns is always in a fragmented form means they are not in a linear pattern as the official history. The unification tendency of the subaltern historiography is interrupted by the ruling class people. The roles of subalterns are always devalued and excluded in the history-making process. We can find some glimpses of subaltern history only after the completion of official history. Therefore,

as Nguyen's, Gramsci is also making an argument on the inclusion of the subaltern historiography in the process of creating mainstream history. Subaltern should be provided with proper roles and importance as they are also the part of society, performing significant roles in the historical events.

As researcher has already mention, these subaltern character are fragmented and cannot united, they are psychologically fragmented, physically displaced. Lack of unity leads them nowhere. Such types of activities were being held throughout the history. In the selected stories, the fragmented nature of the plot is presented that is more or less related to their fragmented history. Sense of insecurity, terror and fear can be found in their action. Marxism and communism are supposed to speak about the marginalized voices but in the stories the communist are fail to address those minority group in fact, they are the one who give them trouble Mrs. Hua states, "You see how the communist weren't satisfied with killing my son. They killed him twice when they desecrated his grave. They do not respect anybody, not even the dead" (46). Such situations were faced by them. Her voice is urgent and full of anger she cannot speak any more. She is haunted by death and others were haunted by living. Their struggle for living and fighting for each penny portrayed the real situation of refugees in America. Nuguyen's stories are able to address the minority groups, their feeling and suffering through the help of literature. Not only from the South Asian countries but writer over the world are giving spaces to the subaltern voices at present. They give concern to the marginalized and create a discourse from centre to marginalize, which proves that subalternity is very much complex topic for discussion in cannon.

Nuguyen's stories reflect upon the process of displacement, migration and unemployment as well as the psychological suffering of the people. Addressing the

issue of Gay, war victim and those refugees, he tries to give justice to them and to make their voice heard. The stories of Nguyens is searching for identity, language, homeland and family, and. It is a huge exploration of human identity, family ties, love and loss.

In this way, Nguyen's story collection, *The Refugees* explores the subaltern voices and their suffering, struggles for living in America. The researcher examined the issue of subaltern studies and its perspective in those selected stories. The major thrust of the research is to find out how the subaltern voices are presented in those stories and to show how the excluded group suffer from the power hegemony of America. The author provides enough space to the subaltern voices but lack of solidarity and unified action leads them nowhere. They are subalterns at present and remain subaltern until last in the stories. They cannot come out from the vicious circle of subalternity. Subaltern can speak and being human we have to prioritize subalternity over nationality and this is the main agenda of this paper.

To sum up, this thesis proves that *The Refugees* is the authentic museumization of subaltern voices which explores the question of immigration, identity, love and family ties. Nuguyen's character Mr Liem, Parrish, Mrcus, Victor, Mrs Beni, and Mrs Hua are suppressed by the hegemonic discourse of power. This research explores the different time phase of Vietnam War and at the same time brought different theoretical terms and theories to prove the statement. Thus, the finding of this research is the marginalized character in the stories raises their voices against the power hegemony but lack of solidarity and unified action leads them nowhere.

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