

Tribhuvan University

Gendered Subaltern in *The Sari Shop Widow*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

By

Premika Angdembe

Roll No. 520

Symbol No. 281998

TU Registration No. 6-1-202-69-2006

University Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

April 2018

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Premika Angdembe has completed her dissertation entitled “Gendered Subaltern in *The Sari Shop Widow*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from 2072/05/17 to 2074/12/26 B.S. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Shankar Subedi

Supervisor

Date: 2074/12/26

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Approval

This dissertation entitled “Gendered Subaltern in *The Sari Shop Widow*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Premika Angdembe has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Shankar Subedi, Lecturer of Department of English, for making constant supervision and guiding me with regular inspiration, encouragement, and insightful suggestion throughout the study. His vigorous efforts made me present this research work in this form. Likewise, I am also indebted to the Head of the Central Department of English Prof. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi for the precious directions in conducting the research.

I would like to extend sincere acknowledgement to the entire group of Professors, Readers, Lecturers, and the Teaching Assistants of the Department for their valued inspiration. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues and all my well-wishers who directly and indirectly helped me to complete this work.

April 2018

Premika Angdembe

Gendered Subaltern in *The Sari Shop Widow*

This research is a study of how the female characters are taken to the subaltern level in the novel "The Sari Shop Widow." Female characters mostly, the protagonist Anjali Kapadia is being treated as a feeble human being without capacity. She is brave and determined but underestimated. The survey into the degraded plight of the subaltern characters, the perspective of subalternity is wholly appropriate. Subaltern characters are subjected to various harrowing consequences Anjali is an Indian widow in America who wants to uplift parent's business in America; however, she is doomed to face several obstacles from different aspect of super only. Her subordinated, excluded and alienated life prove that she is subaltern under the grip of patriarchy, immigrant, widowship and inferiority in the business. Anjali represents the gendered subaltern whose job, interest and agency have been manipulated.

Key Words: Gender, Subaltern, Marginal, Ideology, Voiceless

This research examines the conditions of gendered characters in Shoban Bantwal 's *The Sari Shop Widow*. In this novel, female characters like Anjali and many others have no better position than subaltern beings. In the society of patriarchy, women are treated as the objects to be possessed, assets to be owned and creatures to be subjected to the brutal practices like assault and confinement. Their subordinated, excluded and alienated lives prove that they are subaltern on account of that, she is a widow in the migrated place and who has to be taken care as a traditional female in the family and Indian society. Present research deals with the specifics of females in *The Sari Shop Widow*, analyzing the strategies the women characters employ in their quest for identity. After the identification of the mechanisms to quest their identity that drive women to confront against identity crisis to dismantle stereotypical images created by the family members in sense that she is an Indian widow. Along with this,

she is an immigrant living in the guidance of family. The research basically hovers around the concern of gender subaltern. Overestimation, underestimation and the gaze of the female body in the novel, uncovers the issue of gender subaltern. She is gazed as a female by American male for the quest of the sexual satisfaction. Along with this, she is an immigrant as outsider. Her deserving capacity and position in the business is not noticed, opposite to that, her parents invite successful business person of the family without her permission for upliftment of shop. So, here the novel presents the feminine gender manipulated by the third world people (American people) and the family members. The female protagonist in the novel represents the feminine gender whose identity has been manipulated by the masculine society. The gender has been made subaltern due to the relative domination that proves the notion of gender subaltern. The notion of gender subaltern in the text has been dramatized through the implementation of the theoretical modality of gender subaltern as postulated by the thinker of gender subaltern Gayatri Chakrawarti Spivak. The book of her *subaltern Studies* gives the insight of the subalternity towards the victimization of subaltern beings. Antonio Gramsci's book *Hegemony and Forbidden Voice* also exposes the hegemony of the voiceless victims. By the same way, next subaltern thinker Ranjit Guha bring the movement of subalternity in *Exploration of Subaltern Movement*. Over all, the thinkers gave the insight on the strength of how the protagonist becomes the spokesperson of the subaltern voice.

Bantwal's women are miserable, owing to their oppression in the home and society. Even after being capable in the life to uplift and run the business, the family and other members of the society are concerned about Anjali's femininity and widowship which is over guided and peered of her activities, which really seems the victims to be a puppet as well as, mother is always voiceless in the novel, who has to

be consent with the subalternity in the family and walk according to the demand of traditional society. Along with this, she is always concerned of the society and Americans. So, that she would be fit in the Indian society, 'The little India' which is a tiny part of America. Anjali Kapadia is an Indian-American who is a widow of 27 years. She is running the Sari shop of parents and living with parents. She devoted herself in the Sari shop and changed the traditional Sari shop into the exquisite tasteful collection. After 10 years of devotion, she stands like a proud 'Maharani'. Suddenly, the shop was in the brink of the bankruptcy. Without her permission, her parents calls the successful business person Jeevan Kapadia from New Delhi. When Jeevan Kapadia comes with a business partners Rishi Shah, the protagonist Anajli Kapadia and her mother don't trust him because there seems some hidden motives. Later on, he manipulates them and tranquilizes Anjali and has sexual relationship with her. He plays with her emotions and body. In the novel, female characters like Anjali and others have no better position than subaltern being. In the novel, Anjali Kapadia is treated as subaltern, owing to her widowship, feminine gender and her lower position in the business, even after being capable for this. These prove the subordinated, excluded and alienated lives of females in the novel. The female gender has been made subaltern due to the relative domination assault, rape and exclusion. The novel is studied using the concept of gender subaltern with the insight from Ranjit Guha, Gayatri Chakrawarti Spivak and Antonio Gramsci.

The novel *The Sari Shop Widow* revolves around a bitter man named Rishi and the relationships between Rishi and Anjali. Many of the conflicts in the plot arise because of Rishi's inability to be flexible to the choices that others are making and the changes going on around him. This creates a lot of conflict between Rishi and the other characters as well as conflict within Rishi. It is also evident that Rishi has a

specific schema of the roles that men and women are supposed to play. This is seen with his interactions with Anjali. The other aspect of gender subaltern that is presented in the text is the oppression and objectification of victims portraying as "on the bench" which shows the lower position of her in gender and the business both. She is being objectified on the basis of her only status of being widow and weak position of her in the business so, Rishi's schema of victims role is so narrow. No surprise Anjali is loving caring and is working very hard to raise the Sari shop even though Anjali offers a lot. However it's not concerned by the other members. She is only given the name of weak position in every aspects of her status in business, family and her gender. Rishi Shah has that narrow thought that being subaltern, she can't handle the business alone without a co-partner which gives the insight of her widowship. So, she is victimized not only as a weak woman but as a widow. This is evident in the way that Rishi interacts with Anjali (highly sexual flirting) as well as the fact that Anjali expresses many times that she feels that Rishi is constantly "taking" and never "giving" (35).

In *The Sari Shop Widow*, Bantwal vocalizes the pathetic and pensive voices of the protagonist Anjali. The unknown narrator narrates how Anjali, had to endure unspeakable torture not only from outsiders also from her own father, brother and husband. Unspeakable violence and tortures are poured upon her. Bantwal's depiction of the hellish living conditions of Anjali has done a lot in taking the voices of the oppressed women to the western world. By so doing, the novelist has dubbed significant contribution to the campaign of bringing reform in the position of genders subaltern in the society.

Bantwal is an Indian American novelist who writes about the sufferings and subjugations of subalterns in American society. Bantwal's works are filled with

plenty of social issues and modernist norms. As a novelist, he has carried distinct voice to the English speaking world. Atrocities and injustices that are frequently committed in the patriarchal society are the main focus of her. *The New York Times Book Review* described it in 1989, “a pastoral coed nude rubdown with dry leaves” (7). Robert Richardson makes the following remarks with respect to the distinct personality of Bantwal :

Apart from feminist subject-matter and socio-cultural issues, the novelist has managed to introduce fresh issue of gender and shifting currents of modernization of. Bantwal gives an exhaustive list of laws/restrictions that the government imposed n women. The adherents imposed almost complete ban on women’s freedom. Most of the edicts focused on former female freedom. Women were to remain in their homes. Other than physicians, females would not be allowed to work outside their home, nor would they be allowed to attend school. (55)

It is obvious that females are dominated. Dancing, even at wedding parties, are forbidden. Music was banned everywhere. If music cassettes are found, the owner would be arrested and imprisoned. Female doctors are not to treat male patients. Female patients could only go to female doctors, leading to terrible tragedy when sick women could no longer get any medical help at all. No taxi drivers were allowed to transport women not properly veiled. If a woman was found out alone in the street, her husband was liable to be beaten or imprisoned.

Whether the grand narrative of equity and equality of American democracy exists in utopian of dystopian world of America? What are the hidden dialectics in American society in terms of the colour and race? and ,How the miserable condition that the females undergo are some of the questions, the research raises to solve. This

study on *The Sari Shop Widow* is intended to indicate how a damaged-self in formation which befalls the main character. Anjali, in her childhood has led to her trauma and affected her until her later life. How Anjali's self confidence is damaged and her ways to deal with her trauma are analyzed with the help of theory of characterization and some psychological theories in this thesis. In this point, Julian Claims:

In the story, the protagonist has undergone unpleasant childhood because of being tortured by her friends so that she cannot build her self-confidence. Yet, the most important point to be stuck out in this study is the way to master and banish the trauma. On the one hand, running away from trauma is only meant to delay the trauma not to haunt for a moment. (47)

Through the analysis directed in this thesis, the writer has verified that Anjali, who also copes with her trauma, is at last able to expel her trauma and be a whole person. Losing self confidence due to the traumatic situation of childhood, she is trying to cope with situation, as childhood she is still not having full of her confidence in every sector. She is still scared to live her life independently. She is insecure in the job and there is always a traumatic situation of her to be a widow. Different critics have analyzed the novel from the multiple perspectives which preserves the universal nature of novel. To highlight the unique themes of the novel, taking it as a best novel of the year, John Fleming claims:

Others were upset by the novel's depiction of the male as abusive, uncaring, and disloyal. Other critics felt that Steven Spielberg, then most associated with films like "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial" and "Indiana Jones", was a poor choice for such a complex social drama,

and that the film had changed or eliminated much of the book's defense of lesbianism. (33)

Dave has given skeptic eyes on its trustworthiness. For Dave, the novel has the greater degree of efficiency to present the notion of the truth and reality in relation of the society. The society represent how the victims are given the name selfishness whenever they are to the way against the oppressive society. He further says:

Throughout the book and the author describes how courageous protagonist is and how much she works for the rights of women.

However, I didn't really see any evidence of this - as far as I could see the protagonist was driven by her selfish self-interest and nothing else.

In fact she comes across as a selfish and not very pleasant person. (94)

Thus, the novel is rich in mirroring the real feature of the social and political reality. The intact representation of the social and political reality in the novel adds the effort of social realism. Though the novel is claimed to be one of the truest stories of the world but many critics like Dave have given skeptic eyes on its trustworthiness. Thus, it is proved that though the novel is analyzed from multiple perspectives, the issue of gender subaltern has been yet untouched, which proves the innovation of the research. Another critic Ken Kessay analyzes this novel from the realistic point of view.

Regarding the realistic feature of the novel and its characters' credibility Ken claims:

If an author decides to write a realistic novel, they can use the first person perspective only for one character if they don't want to lose credibility. If they use it for a second character as well, they must introduce a third character or an institution who or which brings the two accounts together in a plausible way. Someone can find two

diaries or a confessor reveals the secrets he's heard from two people or
I'm wondering again what editors get their salary for. (84)

In Kessay's view *The Sari Shop Widow* is realistic novel. As a realistic novel it would be better to use the first person perspective to only one character to establish the credibility of the character. It shows that first person perspective helps to establish the credibility of the character. If the writer uses the second person perspective at that time he/she needs to introduce a third character or an institution that makes the story trustworthy and brings the two accounts in a way that is more true.

Although, all these critics have raised different issues in this novel, the issue of the gender subaltern is not noticed by any of them. The notion of gender subaltern is, thus, fresh and innovative in the sense that it deserves serious scrutiny. In the novel, *The Sari Shop Widow* many women are subjected to serious brutalizing and ruthless practices. For Spivak the term 'subaltern' is useful because it is flexible. It can accommodate social identities that do not fall under the reductive terms. As she asserts:

I like the word 'subaltern' for one reason. It is truly situational.

'Subaltern' began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism 'monism,' and was obliged to call the proletarian 'subaltern.' That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor. (76)

Spivak's emphasis on the complicity of western intellectuals in silencing the voices of oppressed groups may also appear to repeat the very silencing which every subaltern theorist discusses. Indeed, critics such as Benita Parry argue that Spivak "effectively

writes out ‘the evidence of native agency recorded in India’s 200 year struggle against British conquest and the Raj’ (46). Her view is far from being completely pessimistic about the histories of subaltern resistance and the possibilities of political agency.

Spivak’s refusal to simply represent non-western subjects comes from a profound recognition of how the lives of many disempowered groups have already been damaged by dominant systems of knowledge and representation. And it is deconstruction that provides Spivak with a critical strategy to articulate this recognition. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak states about the marginalizes condition of subaltern. Spivak questions the socialist, democratic promises made to the people by leaders of the anti-colonial resistance movement during the struggle for national independence in India. More specifically, Spivak suggests “that the mythology of Mother India that was invoked by anti-colonial insurgents during and after the struggle for national independence perpetuated the rigid class system established” (127) under the British Empire.

In the novel, the main female protagonist Anjali, sometimes has been presented as a voiceless female and sometimes as mute who cannot resist misbehavior of other while being behaved as outsider lower gendered and the female without a husband. She was voiceless when the family members gives her the weak status in the business, her parents invited the uncle for the support in the business even if she is a deserving character. Parents being protective towards her represents that they are pitying on her widowship and feminine gender making her feel to be weak and submissive. She cannot resist the gloating look of Rishi Shah who was really in quest of her sexuality. He started gloating her and tranquilizes her for physical contact purpose. She cannot resist him. She cannot raise voice against him. Apart from these she is an outsider living in the USA. Originally belongs to Indian society. The

American Kip Rowling is very easy using Anjali Kapadia sexuality. Kip has sexual relationship with Anjali without any emotional attachment. She has been used only to fulfill the sexual thirst. Instead of speaking, she performs as her wish and finally fulfills his goal. She is moral, strong, confident, talent, courageous who takes different skillful trainings but society doesn't recognize her skills. To show how courageous, famous and reputed Anjali is. Narrator makes clear us:

The boutique that Anjali started, was earlier her father's shop that was not very flourished neither was doing too good. Anjali, after doing her degree in Apparel Design and Merchandising decided to convert her father's orthodox shop into this boutique. She never accepted her parent's idea of going for remarriage as most of the candidates were either widowers or divorced. (5-6)

It becomes clearer that though she does not speak against domination and rude behavior she believes in her own feet, ability, brain and walks her own way of her life who does not depends on any male support for her daily life. Rather she has one adoptee Komal whom she affords. Sometimes she also affords some money to her mother who lives lonely. She has adopted an orphan boy Kemat, from Jersey and affords to his expenditure. These all evidences are the signs of successful life of Anjali. But the society where she is living pretend that they do not listen what she has been spoken rather they mocks at her and threatens her to thwart her investigation work but she does not care whatever they bark at her, and whatever they threaten. She never drops her risk work instead goes on and on. Finally, she reaches at her goal by the well determinism towards her goal through the very danger and difficult situation. In the novel the main female protagonist Anjali represents the feminine gender whose job, interest and identity has been manipulated by the society, she is living.

The subalterns by definition are groups who have had their voices silenced; they can speak through their actions as a way to protest against mainstream development and create their own visions for development. About the subaltern, Ranjit Guha writes “Subaltern” is “a name for the general attribute of subordinate, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any way” (27). Explaining the aim of Subaltern Studies, Guha writes, “The aim of subaltern studies is to promote the voice of margin” (480).

Bantwal reflects on the conditions of women in America. He dwells upon the issue of women’s freedom. *The Sari Shop Widow* highlights miserable plight of Anjali who is set with plenty of hurdles and harassment despite of her courage and knowledge. After uncle from India arrived to help Anjali's family to get them out of their financial crisis. Her uncle Jeevan came along with a man named Rishi Shah, who was his business partner, and was a few years older than Anjali. This man sprouted a new kind of feeling in Anjali gradually and for the second time in her life she started falling in love with this man. He was already having live-in relationship with a beautiful girl. He was handsome but never showed any indications towards Anjali and stayed aloof and cool all the time.

In the novel, there is one another female character namely Mary Daley who is oppressed, powerless, poor and servant by profession. She an assistant of Anjali whose condition is also no different than Anjali. Daly's position is oppressed by profession because of her feminine gender and her inferior position in the job. It becomes by the telephone conversation where Daly herself discloses that: "Mrs Hudson said you might be needing someone to take care of your son" (Bantwal 166). Daley is servant so that she is powerless and poor in front of Anjali and Pamela. She

is compelled to work as a servant of the Anjali because of her poor economic condition. She is doubly victimized here as a servant and a financially weak female.

Anjali narrates how her sisters, nieces and other female relatives had to endure unspeakable torture not from outsiders but from their own fathers, brothers and husbands. Unspeakable violence and tortures are poured upon women. Though women in the west are enjoying huge and high degree of freedom, women are still forced to live in a hell. By so doing, Bantwal has dubbed significant contribution to the campaign of bringing reform in the position of women. Anjali and several other girls are subjected to the terrifying living conditions. Anjali is a girl who is deprived of a sense of recognition by her own father. Her father does not give her parental love. She tries her best to win a dose of fatherly love. But she is left in the lurch. Disillusioned and agitated at her vain endeavor to win fatherly love, she decides to take a different course of life.

Anjali is a girl who marries a man named Vikram whom she loves. Her marriage crashed disastrously after the death of her husband. Her husband does not care her and enjoy with another woman though superficially he pretend to love her. The following lines from *The Sari Shop Widow* exemplify Anjali's unhappy marital life:

Vikram took her in his arms. 'Great idea.' He reached behind her and curved his hands around her hips. He started to undress her.' Do you know you have a great body? "All the fellows tell me that, ; Anjali said. 'It's the talk of the town. Are you planning to get undress?' 'I'm thinking it over.'" Do you know you're a hussy? (76)

Anjali is not asked for her consent and view on her forthcoming marriage with a man who is the friend of her father. She does not have any idea of marriage. She

wants to cultivate her individual sense of freedom and career. But her father compels her to marry a man against her will. By knowing that the marriage of Anjali with a man would be disastrous, Anjali's father compels her to marry him. At last, the consequence turns out to be exactly as it was anticipated in the very beginning. The condition of Anjali represents the conditions of many women in the world. Women are treated as though they were the liabilities and chattels of males. Girls do not have any freedom to decide whom they can marry and whom they can reject.

Etymologically, subaltern means a person in lower rank or subordinate. It was first used to denote a commissioned officer below the rank of captain in British Military. The term subaltern is used in postcolonial theory. Others, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak use it in a more specific sense. 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 difference" (271).

In this way Spivak differs the term from the postcolonial view as well as Marxist view that everything that is oppressed is Subaltern. It is simply unheard voice; if a person's voice is not heard, it is a subaltern situation. A person without lines of social mobility is a subaltern figure. Subalternity is not vague and limited like the Marxist or other political ideologies.

Anjali's father is irresponsible. He does not love her affectionately. She hankers after her father's love and affection. But father is too niggardly of giving fatherly love. Father is careless of her decisions. He does not care her business decision. She is always thought inferior and useless in the business, even after she stands like Maharani in the society. She is dominated not by caring her effort and her decision in the business and her lower financial status. As a result, Anjali is depressed

and psychologically restless. She turns away from the optimistic side of her life. The idea of marriage is alien to her. But her father interferes into her personal decision. Her father, compels her to marry a man who has the worst and dehumanized attitude towards her. The following lines describe attitude towards subaltern:

When Rishi Stone had gotten in that morning, General Booster had been waiting for him. Rishi, I have a feeling that Anjali bitch is a trouble maker. I want you to start a file on her. And keep me in the loop.' I'll take care of it.' Only there's not going to be any loop. And he had sent flowers (145-46).

Anjali's husband is a fierce and formidable who has the worst and condescending attitude towards subaltern being. Anjali as a housewife, who is in the level of subaltern. She is taken as a puppet to be conquered and possessed. Her feelings, emotions, pains were like Nothing to be noticed rather she has been used only as a conquered object. She has been colonized and made voice less owing to her physical and intellectual weakness. The narrator narrates about his nature.

He orders. Were they orders to bring more chests? Observation told the chief that they were orders to board immediately, not to unload more chests. A fight ensued. When it was over some of the hunters were dead and many of the tribe were dead. Some men of the tribe were also injured. Among the dead was Anjali's father. (33)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is one of the most influential figures in contemporary critical theory. Spivak is perhaps best known for her overtly political use of contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the legacy of colonialism on the way we read and think about literature and culture. Always cutting-edge, always provocative, Spivak champions “the voices and texts of those marginalized by

western culture and takes on many of the dominant ideas of the contemporary era. This volume examines her work through the issues of style, deconstruction, the subaltern”(56). Anyone interested in contemporary cultural theory should read Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Anjali faces the multitudes of the problems in the course of reporting are evident from the following lines:

For many days Anjali stayed in the village, leaving only to obtain more food. Then, suddenly she decided to leave the village permanently. She counted her steps one by one, making a change of plans impossible. She moved to a safe place on a headland. There was a very large rock there where she could safely sleep. The dogs could not reach her when she was on the rock. (33)

Anjali is not concerned with storing food because she believed that the ship which took her friends away would return for her. Instead of food, she was interested in her goal of reporting. She knew that it is not easy to be involved in certain job being a subaltern.

Gayatri cites about subaltern consciousness and the colonial subject as the basis of theorization. She perceives there as making “a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specially a theory of change” (4). points out about subaltern consciousness as “the peasant consciousness” (72). This research is mainly concerned

In addition to that physical and emotional weakness is observed for the oppression and domination towards the subaltern beings males take part in the game of chasing girls. They run after girls in a most ignominious way. While traveling in India, Anjali happened to see the males sexually after an eight year old girl. They can go to any extent of molesting even a girl of eight. Because they are emotionally and physically weak. Moral ignominy, deviant passions and chauvinistic arrogance of men

like become stumbling block on women's quest for freedom, dignity and self-esteem. Because of the physical and emotional low strength, the virginity of girls is obsessed and they are dominated in every aspect of society. When a girl is born, her parents begin to think about her marriage. Rather than thinking about the education and sound upbringing of girls to empower them their parents only think about getting rid of subaltern. The following lines reveal the truth regarding this facet of issue; "The moment a girl is born in lands, the parents immediately begin to think of an appropriate marriage. With the idea of future allegiance, suitable families with eligible sons are studied keenly. While a girl remains unmarried, she must stay a virgin" (25). A woman as a subaltern is affected by the attitude of family members attitude, seniors in the post of business, outsiders and those who are physically and emotionally strong.

Bantwal also to a great extent talks authoritatively about South Asian women in *The Sari Shop Widow*. The cultural background or the South Asian descent gives her a certain authority to speak about South Asian women. In such kind of a fictional narrative, there can be exaggerations as well as misrepresentations of South Asian women and fixing of South Asian women into certain stereotypes. Anjali's longing to start indulging in the outside world was an outcome of her boring and disappointed domestic or family life. *The Sari Shop Widow* depicts this loneliness and disappointment of the orient woman who is displaced and thus isolated from the society around her. Even six months after moving to Iowa, Anjali's contact outside the home remain limited to waving to a tattooed, white woman at the window in the neighbourhood flat and occasional visits from other Bangladeshi women. The first instance of Anjali's entry into the public sphere is a turning point in her life. For the first time, in her migrant life, she feels happy to interact with people from outside her

domestic sphere. After a long walk through the streets of Iowa “She began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something” (*The Sari Shop Widow* 57). This incident in the novel *The Sari Shop Widow* should be recorded not just as a lone exploration of Anjali, but as her first step into the public sphere of life, that too posing a challenge to her dominating husband. However it does not remain for long. She goes on suffering in cosmopolitan environment of Iowa as an Immigrant.

Gayatri Spivak, indicating that the identity of a woman is not fixed rather it keeps on changing, depending on historical, cultural, geographical and local contexts. Language is the medium through which people interact and thus have social contacts. So in order to participate in social affairs around her Anjali needs to have access to the language which is completely foreign to her. Vikram is shown as a ‘typical South Asian’ who discourages his wife from learning English. Considering language as a tool which is necessary for power, here the ‘male’ who is an Orient is afraid of his wife getting that power which can eventually lead to his losing of power and dominance. Since English is not Anjali’s language, her learning English language means getting into the public sphere of the foreign land. Entering into others’ domain might distance her from “her own” domain, which might be problematic for her patriarchal husband. As long as his wife is ignorant of the language he can dominate her and deny her from having a social access. It is a subtle form of oppression inflicted by Vikram, an educated and “modern” South Asian husband. Razia, another Bangladeshi woman, is seen as a threat to this denial to his wife that he has designed as she constantly inspires and encourages Anjali to learn English. In this context it is important to note the incident where Anjali asks Vikram’s permission to learn

English: “Razia is going to college to study English ... will it be all right for me to go to the college with Razia for the English lessons?” (75). Vikram replies:

You're going to be a businessperson.Will that not keep you busy enough? And you can't take a baby to college. Babies have to be fed; they have to have their bottoms cleaned. It's not so simple as that. Just to go to college, like that (75). Vikram's reply exemplifies the depth of reinforcement of a construction about South Asian men. The author, instead of challenging certain stereotypes tends to reinforce them. poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimised, etc.” (Mohanty 1988)

Anjali is only one of many ordinary immigrant women coming from an Eastern culture in the guidance of their husbands. As a result of her traditional family background, Anjali has always accepted the idea that it is meaningless to “kick against fate” (Bantwal 22). “She appears to conform to the teachings of her mother, who instructs Anjali that it is a woman's role to accept her suffering with indifference” (Hussain). So, she adopts all the roles which are imposed to her by the others. While being an immigrant in America is already difficult, Anjali's situation as an oppressed woman makes the situation worse and unavoidably makes her feel double alienated. In this respect, it is important to define the alienation of Anjali firstly as an immigrant and secondly as a woman in a multicultural society. The immigrants, who feel alienated because of being seen as the other as a result of having colonial background, not being white or Christian, being exposed to prejudices and racial discrimination, and having socio-economic problems cannot adapt into the life as they do not feel belonging to the society they live in.. Although Anjali is aware of

her isolation and position, she accepts it as it is the destiny of immigrants. That oppression continues for a long time. Her miserable condition is reflected as:

I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads . . . every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Ever'body wants a little piece of lan'. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. (154)

Anjali and other Asian women, are similarly caught in the trap of identity crisis. The more they desire for recognition the more they are frustrated and they feel alienated . Anjali's family, who has come to America as a traditional Indian immigrant, has faced the pain of being a member of America's earlier colony and still they are the victim of the same racial practice.

Race, in particular, is the classification of the human beings into distinguishable groups that are based on physical characteristics (i.e. skin color, hair texture, eye shape). There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of race. The socio-historical categories are employed to differentiate among groups. These categories reveal themselves to be imprecise if not completely "arbitrary" (Winant 172). Orientalism misbehavior of a group of people on the basis of color. It is a blinker hatred, envy or prejudice. Orientalism is founded on the belief in one's racial supremacy over other. It involves a generalized lack of knowledge or experience as it applies to negative determined. Therefore, it is inherently unchangeable. The concept of race was originally introduced in the field of natural history merely "as a convenient way to refer to groups of human beings in different

geographic locations not with the intention of separating human beings into physiologically distinct groups” (Eric M Benjamin 27).

Cultural exoticism itself is not the criterion of inferiority or superiority, but the presumption of color is. People impose feelings on skin color and categorize people according to skin-color. To Anjali the skin color of people matters a lot. It is not an enjoyable idea for her to categorize Indians into the same group as Africans. Working among the white people, she has many opportunities to experience Orientalism. Cultural exoticism can be a barrier to further development in her career. He tells Razia about her thoughts of not getting success in her business, for which she has high expectations at first. Obviously, Anjali accepts all his ideas of racial discrimination. She tells her friend, Razia:

My father says they are racist, particularly Mr Dal. He thinks he will get the promotion, but it will take him longer than any white man. He says that if he painted his skin pink and white, then there would be no problem. It is what Vikram has concluded about the phenomenon of the hybridization of culture from all his decades of working among the white people. (72)

There are two interpretations of Anjali’s opinion. The first is that the reality is just like what she has said. The white people are not willing to promote a non-white person because they are not of the same color. For the white people, Indians people are inferior. The saying “it will take him longer than any white man” may be just another way to say that it is impossible for the Indian people to get a promotion if there is any white man are doing business. There must have been a number of signs showing prejudice in his working environment as Anjali reaches this conclusion of racial discrimination. However, the second interpretation is the opposite of the

assumption about the working environment. They have shown no racial discrimination against Anjali rather gender discrimination.

Subaltern Studies come as a social theory to speak against colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. Dipesh Chakravarty, in his seminal essay, "Invitation to a Dialogue" points out about subaltern consciousness as "the peasant consciousness" (72). Once Anjali was traveling to India. Anjali decided to take a canoe and travel to the place to explore new facts. She went to where the canoes were stored and found that they were still stocked with provisions. She decided to take the smallest canoe because it would be the easiest to handle, the easiest to maneuver into the water. She filled the water basket with fresh water. As soon as she had the canoe in the water, she left on her voyage. Anjali removed the water that splashed into the canoe. But, after a while she noticed that water was getting into the canoe through a hole in it. Then she noticed another hole. She was still closer to her island than "she was to her destination" (Bantwal 234).

According to Gayatri Chakravorty 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" (227).

Loneliness, seclusion and alienation are the part and parcel of lives of the women married to wealthy elite men. Their husbands were often outside on business. Their sons and daughters are away from their houses for study. So mothers are always alone and solitary. There are neither husbands nor children at home. That is why women often turn to alcoholism. Anjali expresses her lonely situation while travelling

to India. She tells that when her father left her and husband laws dead , she felt terribly lonely. The painful sense of loneliness weakened her immensely.

The social dogmas have not only made illusions of the illiterate and lower class women but also the educated and economically sound. They are to be called hegemonized if readers take the words of Antonio Gramsci(6). Gramsci comparatively familiarizes the history of the subaltern groups as being as complex as the history of the dominated class and their struggles. Even when they raised their voices against the complacent elite group, the subaltern were still subject to the activities of the elites. He opines that the history of subaltern class has less access to the means and social and cultural institutions by which they can construct their representation.

Anjali eventually comes to Iowa to search a doctor for her treatment , where meets unnamed military official. He promises with Anjali to help her, but she must first get him out of Iowa, as someone is attempting to kill him. Anjali accepts, and he leads her to closed town . After disguising Anjali as a prostitute and going in with her, he efforts to abuse her. The following lines throw light on this sort of extreme subordination of women; "He shrugged. 'I'm sorry. Without an appointment –Anjali held on to her temper. 'I have an appointment.' He looked at her skeptically. ? He picked up a telephone and spoke into it for a few moments. He turned to Ginny. 'Third floor', he said reluctantly. 'Someone' will meet you" (293).

The above cited extract shows that women do have subaltern position in the society . It is really deplorable that men do not treat their wives as equal partners. The idea of reciprocity in man-woman relation is alien to aggressive and belligerent males .This kind of extreme subordination and subjugation of women prove that the plight women is that of subaltern people.

David Ludden says that the meaning of subalternity in Subaltern Studies shifted as the framework of study increasingly stressed the clash of unequal cultures under colonialism and the dominance of colonial modernity over India's resistant, indigenous culture. Ludden claims:

Methodologically, recuperating subaltern subjectivity entails the analytical and rhetorical liberation of Indian culture from its domination by the colonial archive and by modernity. Ingenious methods for uncovering fragments of subaltern nationality became the project's particular specialty. (12)

More specifically, Spivak has argued that “the everyday lives of many third world women are so complex and unsystematic that they cannot be known or represented in any straightforward way by the vocabularies of western critical theory”(175). In this respect, the lived experiences of such women can be seen to present a crisis in the knowledge and understanding of western critical theory. For Spivak, this crisis in knowledge “highlights the ethical risks at stake when privileged intellectuals make political claims on behalf of oppressed groups”(176). These risks include the danger that the voices, lives and struggles of third world women will be silenced and contained within the technical vocabulary of western critical theory.

Anjali is then forced into a cat-and-mouse chase from India to the United States, finding out that several people that she trusts are working to kill her. She is ultimately able to elude her enemies, but the Hudsons trick her into coming to their house after claiming they have Kemal, who, after realizing his nanny is also trying to kill him and Anjali and is feeding him sleeping pills, was able to escape the apartment, but was tranquilized and brought to the Hudsons. Anjali goes to the Hudsons' house in the hope of saving Kemal, but finds it was a trap and that Kemal

had already been left for dead in a burning school. She comes to realize about the risk of her life. Following lines describe her pathetic condition.

How there have been dogs on the island as far back as she can remember, both wild ones and ones that belonged to the men of the tribe. But, when the men were killed their dogs joined the wild dogs and the pack became bolder. After the men died and before the remaining members left there were plans developed for getting rid of the wild dogs “The dogs were now led by a dog that Anjali thought had been left by the Hudson. He was different than the rest of the dogs.

One difference was that he was larger. (3)

Within cocoon of comforts and luxury, women are living like caged birds. Family, religion, system of governance and other so-called graces of life exclude confine and enervate women of spirit and energy. Even the dominant social institutions like marriage, family and cultural centers have contributed to the subordination and subjugation of women. Within material comforts and luxury, women are doomed to languish emotionally and psychologically. Their position is no less than the position of a subaltern victim. Even the organizations with proper authority are biased in their dealing with women . Police are always ready for arbitrary investigation leading to punishments ever unheard in any society. The punishment would be arbitrary and inhumane at the hands of Secret Police. The following lines illustrate the point:

The fundamental duties of the police are: to be constantly mindful of the welfare of the people, to enforce laws that protect people and property, to defend the weak against oppression or intimidation, and to safeguard the constitutional rights to equality and justice of all men

and women. A police officer is expected to obey the laws of the land, remain non-partisan and honest in thought and deed, and never to permit personal feelings, prejudices and animosities to influence his decisions. But do policemen in normal societies enforce the law courteously and appropriately without fear or favors, malice or ill-will.

(189)

The agents of government never employ force or violence and never accept gratuities. They remain true to the ethics of the police service. There is mostly a discretionary action by the police.

Sometimes disobeying daughters are beaten black and blue by their fathers. Those daughters' dare to reject grooms selected by their fathers are intimidated, bullied and threatened with physical punishment. For instance, Anjali "said that her father had threatened to beat both her mother and herself if she dared to open her mouth in protest about her engagement" (45). This sort of evidence regarding male domination exemplifies the fact that women are living in purgatory.

In the novel, there are plenty of evidences to expose how women are brutalized and incarcerated. Anjali and Daly went to gather evidences in Alaska. After they had gathered information, they went fishing. Then, a young man spotted the giant devilfish that Anjali had promised herself she would catch. By now she had fashioned the proper equipment, so she was ready for the encounter. But, while she was eventually able to kill the devilfish, she was not able to get it out of the water. By the time it was dead, her strength was gone. She was exhausted. At the end of the chapter, Anjali says that this was the last devilfish that she tried to spear.

One day when Anjali was asleep near the sand spit she woke up to what sounded like thunder. Immediately she noticed that the tide was lower than she had

ever seen it. She saw a giant wave moving toward her. She ran and ran. She knew that she did not have time to climb up via a trail. She climbed directly up the cliff as best she could. The crest of a wave moved below her. But, another wave was approaching and she could not climb higher. Then she saw that the second wave was slowed by the first wave, which by then was moving back out to sea. But, the second wave did eventually wash over her as she clung to the face of the cliff. Afterward, she climbed down and slept that night at the base of the cliff. There she encounters Booster who laughs at her action. Anjali's efforts seem as a matter of joke for him. The female protagonist in the novel represents the feminine gender whose identity has been under dogged and manipulated by the stronger elements in the society.

David Ludden says that the meaning of subalternity in Subaltern Studies shifted as the framework of study increasingly stressed the clash of unequal cultures under colonialism and the dominance of colonial modernity over India's resistant, indigenous culture. Subalterns in India became fragments of a nation; their identity and consciousness reflected India's colonial subjugation. This approach has organized an impressive collection of enduring scholarship on colonial texts, vernacular resistance, bureaucracy, police, factories, communalism, ethnography, prisons, medicine, science, and related topics. It has also enabled Subaltern Studies to speak as India's subaltern voice:

Methodologically, recuperating subaltern subjectivity entails the analytical and rhetorical liberation of Indian culture from its domination by the colonial archive and by modernity. Ingenious methods for uncovering fragments of subaltern nationality became the project's particular specialty. Critical readings of colonial texts, oral histories, and ethnographic techniques are employed to reveal India's

cultural roots in subaltern subjectivity. Subaltern Studies thus becomes a post-colonial critique of modern, European, and Enlightenment epistemologies. (12)

Bantwal mentions another case of how subaltern beings are reduced to the deplorable condition. Anjali felt that bitter damage was done by the patriarchal society upon her. She does not even get chance to investigate murdering incident freely what she wants in the sky of freedom. Some superior characters have been very terrified with Anjali's investigation mission because she is going to uncover the mystery of Winthrop family murder case therefore they threatens her very harshly to stop her investigation mission. They even do not want to see Anjali in public place. If they see they treat her very rudely. However she ties her hope. She does not stop to collect rays of hope following lines exemplify her strength:

Before she finished building a canoe, a ship arrived at the island. When she saw that it was not a ship, she was eager to contact the people on it. When she went to Coral Cove to meet it, the seas were rough. One of the passengers came ashore and seemed to call to her, but, did not see her. Neither did he see her when she went into the ocean after him. The ship left and she remained on the island.(54)

Academic work on subaltern themes quickly detached subalternity from its various inventors. Migrations of reading dispersed research on subaltern themes connected by circulating terminologies, arguments, and texts. Outside forces molded the project itself, and its own institutional boundaries have always been permeable. Its internal coherence has been less intellectual than personal and more formal than substantive. Intellectual cohesiveness has never been a project priority, and it has appeared primarily in solidarity against critics. Outsiders have built outer walls for Subaltern

Studies and landscaped its environment to dramatize its distinctiveness. As Eric Stokes claims “Respondents, interlocutors, interpreters and translators have worked with Subaltern Studies material. They redefined it by writing about it differently. Insiders have become outsiders” (71). Outsiders have become insiders. Outsiders doing independent work on subaltern themes have embraced Subaltern Studies as a kindred project.

The narrator describes the adventures that Anjali experiences, Anjali Evans has just returned home from India with her adopted twelve year old son Kemal. She has not settled in good before she understands that her good friend Gary Winthrop has been shot point blank when surprising burglars intent on stealing his precious artwork. What seems suspicious in this case is that the burglars did not take the most expensive paintings, neither did they touch any of the jewellery or money in the house. Anjali decides that she must investigate what has happened to the Winthrops. She sets off to Europe to do some investigations, leaving her adopted son in the charge of a baby sitter. Anjali plunges headlong into her investigation. In this cat and mouse game, she confronts betrayal and horrific shocks as she tries to outdo the group of men a who are trying to stop her from learning anything about the Winthrop .She gets sexual harassment, threatening and molestation in the course of her investigation. Even her assistant Dally suffers from the same problem as Anjali faces.

Thus it is fair to say that most of the female characters as subaltern beings are living in hell like accursed figures. The society takes great delight in the subjugation and exclusion. The lot of these women shows that they are no less than subaltern figures. Bantwal has truly presented the dark life of gendered subaltern where the basic human rights to women are still a dream. Rather subaltern are treated, molested and given harshest punishment through police investigation and law of the region.

The law Peninsula is male oriented and anti women as the latter are forbidden to testify in criminal proceeding. It also elaborately expresses the different types of punishments that are in store for them.

The major thrust of this research is to show how the different elements of society has reduced inferior people to the position of subaltern beings. In *The Sari Shop Widow*, female characters like Anjali are oppressed and dehumanized in a shocking way. So, Anjali feels increasingly alienated and lonely. The sense of loneliness troubles her.

Due to the self-centrism and arrogance of superior beings many subaltern are suffering from loneliness and domestic isolation. Though they have no scarcity of material comforts and luxury, they are seriously and psychologically handicapped. Behind the outer gorgeous lives of these subaltern lies agony, isolation, mistreatment, dehumanization, confinement. These subalterns sometimes protest but their protests seldom produce effect.

Majority of women are forced to remain in the lower condition. In the era of modernization, feminism and human rights, women are still living confined and subjugated lives. They hardly have access to owning material assets. They themselves assume that they are their men's objects of possession.

In the mainstream society, they are no less than subaltern figures. Though the position of subaltern is still deplorably miserable, changes and reforms have been occurring gradually. Certain degree of change is felt in the gender relation and social exposure of women. But the author, Bantwal portrays women as though they are so oppressed, exploited and excluded that they have no power to resist.

Most of the males in *The Sari Shop Widow* appear to be impulsive, aggressive and irrational. Bantwal portrays the society as though it is an exotic and inscrutable

land which will hardly be penetrated by the light of modernism, feminism, human rights and other liberal thoughts. Though women in the west are enjoying huge and high degree of freedom, women in patriarchal society are still coerced into living in a hell. Bantwal 's depiction of the hellish living conditions of women has done a lot in taking the voices of the oppressed women to the western world. By so doing, she has dubbed significant contribution to the campaign of bringing reform in the position of subaltern .The superior characters in the *The Sari Shop Widow* are represented as belligerent. They are dictatorial and callous.

The subaltern is thus created, burdened with the subordinated dimensions always on the right side of the binary oppositions. The subaltern is imbued with the negatives at all levels, socially, culturally, professionally, sexually or personally. The subaltern is the one who is denied on authentic presence. Anjali is the one bereft of voice or dignity. She is 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 women. 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 deformatant, signifying all the lacks, the voids.

The predicament of the female subaltern is the most miserable of all oppressive states. It is a lethal combination for the subaltern to be a woman. Her life, dreams, hopes and the basic right to a dignified survival are thwarted by multiple forces of oppression. She is a victim of racism, classism, and most importantly, 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 pitfall that she is in. She wails in that dungeon forever, often taking it as her ordained destiny to be always the erratic, the aberrant and the abnormal.

Works Cited

- Ali, Monica. *Hub of Excluded Subalterns*. New York: Rutledge, 2004.
- Alter, Robert. *Pathos in Gender Narrative*. London: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Bantwal, Shoban. *The Sari Shop Widow*. London: Bantam Books, 2002.
- Benjamin, Eric M. *Racial Theory and Practice*. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- Cappo, Emily. *Feminist Upsurge: A Review*. London: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Hegemony and Forbidden Voice*. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Guha, Ranjit. *Exploration of Subaltern Movement*. London: Cannon Doyle Publication, 2003.
- Henderson, Martin. *Subordination and Silence*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008.
- Ludden, David. *Elements of Modernity: A Comparative Study*. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Discourse on the Effects of Islamism*. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- Mark, Anthony. *Normalizing and Negotiating Patriarchy*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- Mehta, Vijay. *Formalistic Aesthetics in Bantwal 's Works*. New York: Norton, 2006.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.
- Nelson, Cary. *Modernist Glimpse in Bantwal 's Fiction*. New York: Cannon Gate, 2009.
- Smith, Andrew. *Debate and Entropy*. London: Harper Collins, 2008.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Subaltern Studies: A Reflection*. London: Vintage Books, 2004.
- Stokes, Eric. *Reflection on Subaltern Problem*. New York: Cannon Gate, 2007.

Ticktin, Miriam. *Fiction Studies: Pornography of the Oppressed*. New York: Ginn, 1999.

Wood, Marcus. *Structure and Motif in Bantwal 's Novels*. New York: Macmillan, 2005.