

**Tribhuvan University**

**Resistance of the Gender Subaltern in Bina Theeng's *Yambunera***

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## Approval Letter

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## Resistance of Gender Subalterns in Bina Theeng's *Yambunera*

### Abstract

*This research examines the resistance of female characters in Bina Theeng's collection of short stories, Yambunera, from the perspective of gender subalternity. The stories by Theeng portray realistic depictions of women and their struggles, particularly the resistance of women from the Tamang communities around the Kathmandu Valley. To analyze the gender subalternity and resistance of women characters in Theeng's selected stories, the researcher draws theoretical insights from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", focusing on the Tamang women characters within their own communities surrounding Yambu (Kathmandu). The research concludes that despite hardships imposed by state authorities, Tamang women of rural areas around Kathmandu Valley sustain their livelihood by producing local liquor (Raksi) and practicing agri-animal farming. However, their resistance to authorities like Nepal police, Nepal army, and power authorities is meticulously presented to voice the marginalized communities. In this respect, Tamang women's resistance to the hegemonic power is made visible by preserving their traditional culture and letting them speak out against social injustice.*

**Keywords:** Subalternity, Gender role, Consciousness, Resistance, Tamang women

Bina Theeng's *Yambunera* is a depiction of the lifestyle of the Tamang people, who sustain their life with the help of their cultural and traditional sort of income sources. Materializing their cultural stuff like producing local liquor, Raksi, and rearing animals, they establish the way of their life and recondition their situation for the further generation. However, the Tamang community has to confront the domination of the government forces. Therefore, the story-collection is a vehement articulation of Tamang women's capability who resist the encroachment and

subordination enumerated by the government, despite being in the vulnerable location of the social domain.

Theeng contends that *Yambunera* represents the false image of new palaces during this era. It embodies the ugly characteristics of a broker capitalist and signifies a state of decay. The people of *Yambunera* experience a sense of detachment due to discrimination based on caste, class, gender, culture, region, and race. This discrimination creates significant challenges for people seeking access and acquisition in *Yambunera*. The state power is complicit in perpetuating this discrimination and refuses to make any changes to history, claiming various pretexts to avoid editing even a single letter in the present day. In short, Beena Thing's "*Yumbenera*" presents how Tamang women protagonists show their resistance power when they are treated as inferior and subordinated by others- authoritative administrations through three stories: 'Seiko-five', 'Yumbunera', and 'ByadBhale'. In doing so, the research incorporates Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranjit Guha's notion of subaltern consciousness and Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony.

The author, a woman herself, depicts her autobiographical experiences of life through her stories compiled in *Yambunera*. Among the selected stories, they feature female protagonists and serve as representative examples of Tamang women characters. Women in Nepali society experience cultural hegemony to a greater extent, while the dominant culture marginalizes Tamang culture and restricts their ideas. To understand the status of people and gender inequality within a patriarchal social structure, this researcher has drawn upon Ranjit Guha's ideas on subalterns in the Asian context. The focus of this study is on Tamang culture, their gender subaltern situation, and the representation of subaltern characters in Bina Theeng's *Yambunera*.

The primary concern of this study is whether subaltern Tamang women

characters have a voice. Hegemony wields significant power, there exist two forms of it: one involves the use of military, police, and direct force to establish control, while the other relies on cultural norms and consent. The researcher aims to examine gender discrimination through the perspective of the gender subaltern. The issue of gender subaltern arises in these three stories, as the protagonists voice their struggles with and experiences of gender discrimination. This theme can be analyzed from the perspective of gender subalterns. The initial tale, "Seiko-five," recounts the story of a single Tamang woman who lacks a precise identity but survives by brewing local liquor. The narrative depicts the struggles of women in society to survive and maintain their lives. The central character in the story is ChhampeniDidee, a lower-class woman who faces subordination from various angles due to her lack of origin, relatives, or husband. She has an eleven-year-old daughter named Krishna and runs a small business selling local liquor with *sukuti* (dried buffalo meat) in Pashupatinagar. Her shop attracts many regular customers who come twice a day to drink, play cards, and gossip about ChhampeniDidee's physical, mental, and emotional traits:

What could be the reason for wearing so much lipstick and collyrium? We never used that much even during childbirth. It's shameful how shameless this woman is. These men are like ants, easily tempted. Our husbands will be lured away by her sweet talk. (33-34)

The local residents, particularly women, make derogatory comments about Chhampeni's impurity and blame their husbands' bad habits of going to Bhatti on her because she is not originally from Pashupatinagar. In this context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says, "Let us now move to consider the margins of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, and the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletarian" (78). Those

who exist at the periphery of the circuit are demarcated by this epistemic violence. This includes men and women from the uneducated peasant class, tribal communities, and the poorest sections of the urban sub-proletariat. Generally, the term subaltern refers to a person who is deprived and occupies a low position in the social, political, economic, or other hierarchical structures. This term also encompasses individuals who have been marginalized or oppressed and is often used to represent the dynamic between oppressor and oppressed.

According to the villagers, Chhampeni used to be a prostitute in Kolkata, India, and there is a mystery surrounding her presence in Makawanpur district, Nepal. The villagers speculate and make assumptions without knowing the true story. They used to say, “ChhampeniDidee had returned from Kolkata and was involved in prostitution there, and that she had come back to Nepal with various diseases. They also asserted that her daughter Krishna was not actually her biological daughter” (36). In the course of events, Chhampeni is confronted with numerous fears as the Nepalese police could accuse and arrest her without any proof. She lives in close proximity to the location where the incident occurred. One day, SiramanBudha's Seiko-five watch was lost in Pashupatinagar and he was subsequently murdered. As a result, the Nepal police come to investigate the crime scene and conduct a post-mortem examination. Chhampeni is terrified that the police may link the sale of alcohol to the death of SiramanBudha. She has no power or influence to change the system or the people's beliefs, and can only offer verbal resistance. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the subaltern belongs to third-world countries with no agency. It is impossible for them to speak up as they are divided in terms of gender, caste, class, region, religion, and other narratives. These divisions do not allow them to stand up in unity. They speak out against those who treat them unfairly, but the local government has

failed to implement policies that would bring peace to the hearts of these victimized women.

Women are facing crises and danger from various perspectives but, fortunately, they do not face the terror of the authorities. The character SiramanBudha is portrayed as a villain who rapes Chhampeni's daughter, Krishna, using his position of power and greed for the Seiko-five watch and sweet chocolate. He offers, "Oh! boys and girls, do you eat chocolate? He took out a handful of sweets wrapped in red wrappers from his pocket. "Yes', said Radheshyam" (43). In this passage, Theeng depicts a disturbing scenario in which someone offers children chocolate with the intention of sexually assaulting them. SiramanBudha singles out Krishna because she is quiet and has no one to advocate for her except her mother. As the story progresses, Krishna begins to spend more time interacting with her mother and friends, eating and drinking, and focusing on her studies. Chhampeni repeatedly asks her daughter about her thoughts and feelings regarding the situation. She questions, "Daughter, what happened to you? You are not fine. Where do you get pain? What is your problem?" (42). However, Krishna does not answer her mother's questions and shows resistance when she learns about the incident. Unfortunately, her pleas go unheard. As Chhampeni prepares to leave for Pashupatinagar, she discovers a Seiko-five watch that was hidden under Krishna's pillow. It is only when Krishna expresses her pain in an unconscious manner that her suffering becomes apparent., "Chocolate... school... watch... bush after school building. I died mother... SiramanBudha." (44). She remembers the incidents that took place with SirmanBudha in various locations. Eventually, SirmanBudha sexually assaulted Krishna. She endures excruciating pain silently, not sharing it with her mother due to the lack of men in the family. Unfortunately, society tends to view unmarried women in a derogatory and



dehumanizing manner. The character of Siraman Buddha, as portrayed in Theeng, is one of sexual violence. He shows no concern for the age, relationship, or identity of his female victims; his only goal is to derive pleasure from sexual intercourse. The family depicted in the story is also facing a serious threat from predatory men who resemble tigers and lions in their two-legged, hairless, and blunt-toothed appearance, as they are willing to engage in sexual acts with anyone. This signifies that in this particular setting, individuals belonging to the elite class of Nepali society are exploiting for wrongful purposes. As a result, they have committed a crime by sexually assaulting a young innocent girl. This is a prevailing system that has been established by those in power within the elite ruling class, who have the authority to enforce their own preferences.

According to her account of the events, Sirman displayed his greed for chocolate and a wristwatch. He then took her behind the school in a wooded area and forcefully raped her with his desire. Krishna owns a small business called Bhatti, where customers come to drink alcohol. When they drink excessively, they start talking unnecessarily about Chhampeni and her daughter. Individuals belonging to any class or caste often intend to exploit those who lack access and power, particularly those who are economically and physically weak and oppressed by the rest of society. This type of domination has occurred in the case of Chhampeni, where various individuals within the society have taken advantage of such vulnerable individuals. One day, her customer tries to tease Krishna behind Chhapmeni and she expresses her arrogance by saying:

If someone had touched and harassed Krishna, it would have been intolerable for her, and her anger would have reached its peak. Her mother's protective instincts would have kicked in, and she would have become extremely furious.

This anger would have fueled a burning desire to seek justice and punish the offender. (39)

This means that Chhampeni does not tolerate anyone who has negative intentions toward Krishna. She is a marginalized member of society who does not confront those in power. However, she exhibits a fiery determination to resist and fight for her daughter's rights. Chhampeni is prepared to face significant challenges and even sacrifice her life to protect her daughter Krishna from any form of abuse. Her actions represent the profound love and sacrifice of a mother who will go to any extent to safeguard her child's life from inhumane people. As the story progresses, the main characters become victims of mistreatment by villagers and drunken individuals due to the 2046 People's Movement, which also disrupts their local businesses. The movement creates clashes and conflicts between protesters, Nepal police, independent panchayat systems, and the multiparty system in Nepal on the 7th of Falgun in 2046, directly affecting the people of PashupatinagarHetauda. ChhampeniDidee also falls victim to the movement, forcing her to shut down her small liquor hut. When the movement ends on the 27th of Chaitra in 2046, she migrates from the village to protect her daughter from danger. This story portrays the challenges faced by women who give birth to a daughter outside of marriage and how society perceives and judges them.

Likewise, the story “Yambunera” depicts the challenges faced by a Tamang woman named Som Maya Ghising, who resides near Yambu in the northeast corner of Shivapuri village. As the head of her household, she must manage various responsibilities such as crop cultivation, mining, obtaining medical care, and providing clothing for her family. Despite being uneducated and facing economic hardship, she possesses a bold and brave personality. She is fearless and fights against

her adversaries. Another character in the story is Pakhule, who is married and always assists Som Maya. They, along with Som Maya's friends and sisters, venture into the forest to gather firewood. One day, they encounter three women wearing spotted dresses who threaten Som Maya and her companions, resulting in an unfortunate accident. And further, they order them to carry the load of firewood and move to the office. One among the other police officers said, "Oh! Girls, carry your loads! Walk to the police post. Our inspector sir will respect you" (52). The Nepal Armies arrested the Tamang women in the Shivapuri forest and proceeded to scold and threaten them. The soldiers warned the women not to damage the forest by cutting grass, firewood, sticks, or any other materials without permission inside the territory of the National Park.

The leader of the group ordered them to confiscate the ladies' firewood and punish them. The women were threatened by the Nepal army in the forest, which directly impacted their right to engage in agriculture and local businesses such as producing alcohol. The Nepal Army activists arrested the women in the forest because it had been declared the ShivapuriNagarjun National Park, where nobody is allowed to chop trees. Those armies stumble by the force of Som Maya and say, "We are leaving you this time. If we find you next time, we will certainly shoot gunfire" (53). The rule prohibiting the chopping of trees in the ShivapuriNagarjun National Park was established by the government of Nepal. This policy has a direct and adverse impact on the lives of those Tamang women who depend heavily on the forest for their livelihood. The story's protagonist, Som Maya, attempts to resist this rule and its enforcement by the Nepal Army. She said, "You can go ahead and take it. We will see how it goes. If we are punished even for cutting dried firewood, then we are willing to risk our lives. Sommaya clings to the arm of the man with thick eyebrows" (53). In

this context, the female character symbolizes the spirit of resistance against the prevailing rule and power structure. Som Maya's actions illustrate her fearlessness, as she prepares to challenge and fight against the ruling system of Nepal. During this time, Som Maya refused to consider the suggestion made by the Nepal Army. Spivak states, "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with women as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with flourish" (104). This quote suggests that marginalized individuals, often referred to as subalterns, are unable to voice their own experiences and perspectives. The use of women as a symbolic object in global discourse does not necessarily address the root of their oppression. While representation may not be the ultimate solution, it remains an important aspect of addressing social inequality. Additionally, female intellectuals have a specific role to play in addressing these issues, and it is important for them to embrace this role rather than distancing themselves from it.

The observation is that the female characters appear to be highly mentally and physically active. They assert themselves by speaking up and demonstrating their bravery and fearlessness. The other individuals in the village formulated a plan to go overseas to seek employment opportunities and earn money, however. Som Maya says, "I won't go. Perhaps you all understand English. I might get lost on the airport road. Instead, I will continue to gather firewood as long as I can, make *raksi*; liquor and sell it. I know all these activities" (53). Som Maya and Pakhule went to the market to sell *raksi*, and the Nepal police conducted a check on their pots of liquor, confirming that it was *raksi*. The police then ordered Som Maya and Pakhule to accompany them to the police station. Pakhule was unable to speak a word during this encounter. But Som Maya asked the question to them, "Why do we go there, sir? The police asked, "Can

you openly carry *raksi* and walk? Is it legal to sell? He attempted to grab Som Maya's bag" (55). Som Maya comments that she relies on selling local *raksi* to support her family's needs and does not have any other source of income.

She also mentions that she needs to purchase medicine for her mother, which adds to her financial burdens. She asks, "Why is it not allowed to be sold? Packaged *raksi* can be sold in the market, so why can't we sell ours? After a while, they both pull the bag from the opposite side and, unexpectedly, the pot falls and its lid comes off, causing the *raksito* spill" (56). It seems that an incident occurred involving alcohol being spilled or poured, as indicated by the statement "then the alcohol flow everywhere." Som Maya's eyes are described as shining with anger in response to this situation. Som Maya cursed, "Is this your father's property? Scoundrel! Sinner! Liar! The murder of the poor!" Her legs shook like earth during an earthquake, as she was filled with rage. However, the police were unaffected by her words" (56). Som Maya has demonstrated a strong resistance to the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and perceptions that exist near surroundings of *Yambunera*. She is a character who represents a broader struggle. The conflict between Som Maya and the Nepalese police reflects the ongoing struggles of women to promote fairness and equality, challenge male-dominated systems and rules, and establish new positions of power and authority, particularly in relation to issues of gender and caste. Spivak writes in her journal "Can the Subaltern Speak?" "The link to the workers' struggle is located, simply, in desire. The connection between the workers' struggle and desire is straightforward.

The idea suggests that the motivation for workers' rights is rooted in a basic human desire for fair treatment and compensation. By recognizing and addressing these desires, it is possible to create a system that supports and values the labor force.

Ultimately, this can lead to improved working conditions, higher wages, and a more equitable distribution of resources. Elsewhere, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have attempted an alternative definition of desire, revising the one offered by psychoanalysis and that says:

Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is lacking desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject except by repression. Desire and its objects are a unity; it is the machine, as a machine of a machine. (67- 68)

The concept of desire is characterized by its completeness and self-sufficiency, as it requires no external object to complete it. Instead, it is the subject that may lack the desire or the desire that lacks a clear subject, and any attempts to impose a fixed subject are essentially repressive. The relationship between desire and its objects is an inseparable one, with the machine itself acting as a machine of a machine. In essence, desire is a self-contained force that resists any attempts to impose external limits or boundaries upon it. Yambu serves as a metaphor for the marginalized communities that reside within it, and Tamang women in particular are subject to even greater suppression. Due to their lack of access to education, politics, and the economy, they are forced to live their lives in accordance with strict sociocultural norms and rituals. Through the character of Som Maya, the author Theeng sheds light on the struggles faced by women from various ethnic groups across Nepal.

Som Maya's struggle is defined by the concept of desire, which is self-sufficient and lacks nothing. She employs this concept by utilizing her mother's ring to purchase goods and pay off debts. In the face of losing everything, she generates alternative means of maintaining her possessions, searching for other resources if necessary. Despite being forced to abandon her job of making alcohol due to

harassment from authorities, she feels a responsibility to provide for her family's medical and other needs. She buys essential items like wheat flour, drums, food, and medicine from the market, as well as collecting firewood from the forest. Again, "the blue van stopped near the neighborhood. Police constables exist out from the van. They pour water in the fire. Break pots. Pour the *chyang*. Patali becomes nerves" (48-49). Despite facing political and racial persecution, Som Maya, as a representative of Tamang women, does not lose hope and strength. Instead, she persists in her efforts to sustain her household and fulfill her family's needs. She goes to the market to buy the necessary supplies to make local liquor and even sells her ring to pay off her debts and continue her work. Despite the obstacles placed before her, Som Maya's determination and resilience remain unbroken.

In a similar manner, the story "ByadBhale" is a feminist tale that portrays a rebellion against the practice of men marrying multiple wives if their previous wife fails to bear them a son. The story exposes the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society in Nepal. In Nepali society, women are often victimized and marginalized. Despite this, female characters in the literature demonstrate bravery and courage as they fight against patriarchal and male-dominated systems. Syangmendo, the protagonist, has successfully created new ways for exploited women to survive and thrive. Unfortunately, she faces repression and oppression from conservative patriarchal institutions such as government policies and cultural hierarchies. The term "gender subaltern" is used in contemporary studies to refer to women who face suppression due to both their gender and social status. Subaltern studies are focused on exploring the experiences and perspectives of those who occupy a lower position in society. The protagonist, Syangmendo, lives with her sister-in-law, father-in-law, and mother-in-law in her house. She spends her days cutting grass for the family's goats and buffalo.

She feels uneasy and uncomfortable, and memories of her own family and birthplace often flood her mind. Although she is married, her husband is not with her, and her village is far from town. Syangmendo longs to wear sandals on her feet, but such items are not available in her village. To purchase salt, spices, jewelry, and clothing, villagers must travel to Yambu since these items are not available in their village. Syangmendo often visits Pradhan's shop to buy cigarettes and smokes while gazing at the sky, feeling sorrowful and grieving over her lack of a husband. She frequently observes the physical appearance of Pradhan's grandsons, particularly their legs, hands, sandals, clothing, and youthful bodies, sometimes even being drawn in by their physical attributes. This may be due to her husband's absence. Additionally, she has a habit of indulging in sweet chocolates. Her daily routine includes cutting grass in the field, measuring the distance from the field to her home, and caring for her buffalo, which was given to her by her mother upon her marriage. Since her village lacks essential commodities like salt, spices, jewelry, and clothes, she and her fellow villagers must travel to Yambu to purchase them. Syangmendo touches the pregnant buffalo's belly and longs to experience pregnancy herself. After washing her face at the tap, she returns home and prepares for the day. She combs her curly hair with a bamboo comb while her snoring father-in-law sleeps nearby. The roosters and hens begin to make noise and she lets them out of their cages to feed them corn. She notices that the hens are not interested in eating and realizes they need ByadBhale. Sometimes, Syangmendo becomes emotional and jealous upon seeing the attachment between the roosters and hens, as well as the pregnant belly of the buffalo. This reflects her desire to experience her youth with her husband, Iraman, who is impotent.

Despite being married, Syangmendo lives with her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law, and spends her days cutting grass and working in the fields.



She also takes care of the cocks, hens, and buffalo. Syangmendo plans to visit her own parents and prepares tasty liquor as a gift. Her husband abandoned her due to her perceived unattractiveness, but she still hopes to reunite with him. When she meets her parents and brother, her brother has news about Iraman. The news is, “Your husband is in Kashmir, sister. He does not like you and he will never come back if you still stay at that home” (146). This exclusion is a deliberate attempt to prevent these individuals from having agency and a voice in colonial politics. According to Gramsci, the term subaltern encompasses anyone who is subordinated due to their community, social class, caste, race, ethnicity, physical characteristics, gender, sexual orientation, and other similar factors. Upon hearing the news from her brother about her husband's whereabouts and feelings towards her, Syangmendo's mood darkens and she feels as though shadows are looming everywhere around her. She tries to calm herself down and reflects on her husband's attitude and behavior towards her. Mother weeps and curses him, “The mother is weeping and cursing, saying "My daughter, who was like a flower bud, has had her honor ruined by him. He is a sinful and lazy person!” (146). On the other hand, the father advises his daughter, “Stay at home as long as you can, and if you cannot, then marry the boy you like” (146). After hearing her parents' words, Syangmendo felt a mix of emotions in her heart. She confided in them about her joys and sorrows and eventually made the decision to return home. She lamented her fate and cursed it for the situation she found herself in.

As she was leaving, she remembered that her own ByadBhale had been missing for three weeks and offered one to her mother as a token of appreciation. Her parents were pleased and lent her a ByadBhale. However, upon returning home, the ByadBhale suddenly died, causing her more distress. She decided that she could not stay at that home any longer. Her father-in-law also advises her, “daughter- in law, he

had died already for you. Do not wait for him!" (150). In a deep voice, he curses Iraman. Syangmendo then marries Agni, a boy from a neighboring village, and starts a comfortable life with him. They have four children and a loving relationship, which makes her happy and confident in her new married life. Syangmendo takes a deep breath and expresses her relief, saying "Fortunately, Agni is not impotent like Iraman. During the meeting last week, he was full of vigor and passion, just like his name suggests. At least now, I can have confidence in marrying a man." (151). In this reference, Antonio Gramsci introduced the term "subaltern" to describe the cultural dominance that leads to the exclusion and displacement of certain individuals and social groups from the socioeconomic institutions of a society. They are a group of people who are considered inferior and often struggle, but their efforts are unable to bring about significant change for the oppressed class. To overcome this, Gramsci suggests that the subaltern should unite and revolt against the oppressive elite structure. To achieve this, intellectuals play a crucial role, and there are two types of intellectuals - traditional and organic. Both of these types of intellectuals may directly or indirectly support the oppressive elite structure. The way Syangmendo ties the knot to Agni at the end of the story is an act of revolt against the dominant patriarchy.

Gramsci highlights the need for a new type of intellectual that functions as a collective force to assist in the liberation of the subaltern. It is only this type of intelligence that can truly support the subaltern's cause. His idea inspired the development of subaltern studies in India, which emerged forty years after his passing. Influenced by Gramsci's concept, a group of intellectuals from India and Western countries such as America and Europe, including Indian scholars and historians, collaborated to establish the subaltern studies movement in 1982. Spivak's seminal work, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), offers a comprehensive analysis of

the subaltern concept from a theoretical standpoint. In her essay, Spivak argues that the subaltern is unable to speak, and creating lists of global issues involving women is not sufficient. She acknowledges that female intellectuals have a specific role to play, which they must not disregard. However, she notes that despite the efforts of historians in India to amplify the voices of subaltern groups, they remain unable to speak. In particular, women who belong to subaltern groups are even more silent.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak argues that subaltern groups in Hindu and Asian societies are marginalized in various ways. Spivak cites the example of Bina Theeng's stories, where three protagonists from the Tamang community face oppression on multiple fronts - cultural, economic, and regional. These individuals live on the margins of society and lack the education and support to speak out and improve their lives. Spivak's assertion that it is almost impossible to give voice to women subalterns is accurate, given that the media, state mechanisms, police, army, local authorities, and even historical constitutional values do not favor them. These subaltern groups have always been excluded from positions of power and marginalized within society. They have been displaced, and their employment prospects are severely limited. Their survival often depends on selling local liquor, working as potters, or cultivating small plots of farmland on the outskirts of the city. Despite these challenges, they continue to resist and fight for their rights. While Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak, this is not entirely accurate, as these marginalized groups are indeed speaking out and fighting for their voices to be heard.

Gramsci employed the term "subaltern," which means of an inferior rank, to refer to the working-class people in the Soviet Union who are subjected to the hegemony of the ruling classes. These subalterns may comprise peasants, workers, and other groups who are denied access to hegemonic power. The female characters

depicted in Theeng's stories live in Tamang communities in Nepal and experience patriarchal domination. When one is expected to conform to the dominant discourse, it becomes impossible to claim agency. This is the problem addressed by Bina Theeng in her story Yambunera. In her critique of agency and power, Spivak refers to the story of BhubaneswariBhaduri's suicide note, which was widely misunderstood. Spivak uses this incident as an example to analyze the complete absence of the subaltern's voice, particularly within Western discourse. Bhaduri, a young Indian woman, was forced to hang herself because she refused to participate in an assigned assassination. However, the political act of her protest was completely negated, and the story was rewritten by her family and society. Spivak uses this event to illustrate the denial of agency and voice among the subaltern.

The idea of gender subaltern is significant as it suggests that women are doubly marginalized due to their gender and ethnicity. The term subaltern, coined by Antonio Gramsci, refers to those groups in society who are oppressed by the ruling classes. In her essay, Spivak argues that the female subaltern is silenced and cannot be heard or read. Within patriarchal and imperialistic societies, women are subjected to the constitution and object formation, causing their figure to disappear into a violent erasure, which is the displaced figurative representation of their oppression. Spivak is deeply troubled by the erasure of the woman's presence, which she explores and challenges in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The essay can be interpreted as a radical postcolonial work that addresses the question of whether the subaltern can truly have a voice.

Som Maya is a character who resists political oppression, power structures, and the Constitution. Despite attempts by those in power to marginalize her and her Tamang culture, she maintains her customs, norms, and values. Local liquor

production, selling it in the market, farming, and raising animals for meat are all integral to her community's identity, existence, and history. However, the power mechanism seeks to erase Tamang history and culture. In this context, Som Maya continues her profession despite the risk of arrest or destruction of her products. For centuries, Tamang women have been involved in the local business of selling *raksi*, a traditional alcohol, which has been affected by the ban imposed by local authorities. However, the character in the story refuses to accept the authority's rule as it is not considered legitimate by the Tamang and other ethnic groups. *Raksi* holds significant cultural value for Tamangs, as it is used in festivals, rituals, celebrations, and other occasions. It is considered a symbol of Tamang tradition and identity. If its production is banned, it would lead to the destruction and collapse of Tamangs' cultural identity. Bina Theeng portrays justice and upholds the right and freedom of Tamangs through the character of Som Maya, who is suppressed and dominated by the government, law, and policy of the state.

A subaltern refers to a person who holds a low position in a social, political, economic, educational, or other hierarchy. Som Maya is a female character in the story *Yambunera* who falls under the category of subaltern. She faces oppression from the politics, power, rulers, and governors of Nepal. She lives near the Shivapuri forest and lacks the means to live in the central city. She is a peasant and a poor landlord. As a member of the Tamang community, she has a long-standing history in Nepal. The Tamang community is considered a lower-class caste group that has been marginalized and undervalued, often being relegated to doing the same job for generations. Those who have power and access occupy the center of Kathmandu Valley. The affluent and high-caste individuals create policies and regulations that are enforced upon the impoverished Tamang community. The government does not offer

employment prospects to Tamangs, and those from aristocratic backgrounds gain access to education and other opportunities to live a comfortable life. Som Maya represents the struggles of the Tamang community against elitist prejudice and exploitation. Tamangs are not inherently destitute but rather have been rendered poor throughout history by the Nepalese government.

In the story Yambunera, Som Maya is a subaltern due to her caste, class, and race as Tamangs are discriminated against in various social and cultural aspects. The rules and policies of society are constructed to dominate and suppress politically powerless and economically disadvantaged groups. These systems are designed to prevent any attempts to challenge or reform them. Theeng portrays a formal sense of resistance by using a typical Tamang tone in the Nepali language in Som Maya's dialogue. However, when she is victimized by power and authority, she opposes in colloquial language. This provides a reflection of the cultural hegemony of Tamang. Theeng writes that although Tamang women speak out against the policy mechanism, their voices are being silenced. They continue with their work despite being oppressed by the rule, which is their compulsion and has been done since ancient times. Tamangs have a long history, but it is not allowed to be written, even though they are witnesses to that history.

In her story Yambunera, Bina Theeng portrays the suffering, grief, and struggle of the marginalized Tamang community through the character of Som Maya Ghising. When Som Maya asks questions, in revenge for their questions, “Why to enter in my home? She stands up at the door. Police laughs hahahahaha of black moss on her face” (59). According to Antonio Gramsci, one way for the proletariat to resist such oppression is through the use of organic intellectuals, who serve as deputies of the dominant group and exercise subaltern functions of social hegemony and political

government. Their role in society involves organizing, administering, directing, educating, or leading others. These specialized cadres, formed through education and the working-class political party, are responsible for organizing, administering, educating, leading, and directing others.

Gramsci's analysis of hegemony and the subaltern reveals that Tamangs are considered the proletariat due to their culture, while those in power who make rules, control the system of education, and organize institutions for their own benefit are recognized as the bourgeoisie. Therefore, Gramsci calls for reforming the power mechanisms and political system to provide justice to all people without discrimination based on caste, class, gender, culture, or ethnicity. The government of Nepal must create laws to protect every caste, language, culture, custom, specialty, food, dress, festival, and ceremony, as these factors demonstrate the identity of each ethnic group. As Kumari Lama says:

Bina Theeng's 'Yambunera' visualizes the plight of an indigenous Tamang woman Som Maya, who is affected by the authority's decision of banning *theraksi* (local house wine) since it is the only source of income to run the family. The power bloc strategically rejects Som Maya's indigenous knowledge related to brewing house wine and consistently intimidate her for producing and selling it. (7)

The Nepalese police force operates under the guidance of the government, and in their efforts to crack down on the production of local alcohol, they are causing harm and heartache to innocent Tamang women. Unfortunately, the government has not provided alternative employment opportunities for these women, forcing them to continue with their traditional occupations for their survival. The actions of the police are destroying the livelihoods of these women and exploiting them due to their

involvement in the production of local liquor.

The struggle between Som Maya and the Nepal police is emphasized by Theeng in Yambunera. This event represents the victimization of a subaltern woman by the ruling system and the power structure of government authority. Som Maya's character forcefully speaks out against their extreme exploitation, representing a form of resistance by women in Yambunera to protect their ideology, ethnicity, sovereignty, and social and cultural beliefs. In this context, Spivak, in her article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' writes, "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in the insurgency, or the ground rules of a sexual division of labor, for both of which there is evidence" (82). The subaltern subject's journey is obscured, and the role of sexual difference is also hidden. There is evidence of female involvement in insurgency and the rules governing the division of labor by sex, but these issues are not the main concern. In her work, Theeng argues that the construction of gender perpetuates male dominance, both as a subject of colonialist historiography and insurgency. The subaltern female is even further marginalized and silenced in this context. Theeng strives to challenge the social hierarchy and introduce questions of gender and sexual difference in her writing. The division among Tamang women based on gender, class, caste, region, religion, and other narratives makes it difficult for them to speak up and stand in unity. However, Theeng's idea is the opposite in the case of gender subalterns. She urges Tamang women to write their own history, assert their rights and freedoms, and challenge the instructions and principles formed by the elite or politically powerful to create a hierarchy. Som Maya, as a marginalized and minority character, actively resists such oppressive structures in Theeng's work.

In Som Maya's story, resistance is demonstrated by her ability to diminish the



effectiveness of the Nepal police's techniques and abilities, such as reducing the power of their manipulation or nullifying it altogether. This event shows her bravery and ability to provide for her family, not just for herself. She invokes the identity, culture, race, and tradition of the Tamang community. Through these actions, she emerges as a character who seeks to establish and record Tamang's history. Theeng also supports these women in their efforts to empower themselves and rewrite Tamang history, which has been ignored and invalidated by the state government.

Kumari Lama argues:

Banning local wine brewed by ethnic women could be no issue to fuss about today, but it definitely erases one of the unique knowledge of indigenous communities. Som Maya struggles to carry on her work, which could be taken as a courageous step of illiterate Tamang women, who fights in her own manner against the dominating structural power to preserve her cultural knowledge. (8)

The state authority becomes increasingly oppressive towards Som Maya, imposing unfavorable rules that ban the local liquor which is a crucial source of income for her community. However, she challenges the authorities repeatedly by questioning their actions, which shows her resistance and challenges Spivak's claim that "The subaltern cannot speak." In reality, each marginalized character possesses a spirit of rebellion that can erupt unexpectedly. Despite her difficult socio-economic circumstances, Theeng's portrayal of Som Maya showcases her defiant nature.

Resistance Women is a captivating and unforgettable tale of regular individuals who are determined to oppose the ascent of malevolence by risking their lives and liberty to combat injustice and protect the oppressed. Gramsci's notion of hegemony was formulated within the context of the anti-capitalist and anti-fascist

struggles of the first half of the 20th century, and this notion appears to be embodied in the character of Som Maya in Theeng's *Yambunera*. Som Maya challenges the authority of the state and maintains her traditional occupation. Despite facing repeated attacks from Nepal's army and police, she becomes strong and fearless. She explicitly rejects the ruling and political systems and desires to live life on her own terms. She is not inherently inferior; rather, she has been made to feel inferior and unsuccessful by Nepal's laws, which have persisted from ancient times to the present day.

Ignoring the importance of feminist and antisexist projects is a political gesture that has been around for a long time. As Spivak puts it this way:

Though all feminist and antisexist projects cannot be reduced to this one, to ignore it is an unacknowledged political gesture that has a long history and collaborates with a masculine radicalism that renders the place of the investigator transparent. (90-91)

It collaborates with a masculine radicalism that aims to make the investigator's place transparent. However, it should be noted that not all feminist and antisexist projects can be reduced to this one issue. It is crucial to acknowledge and address this problem to create a more equitable and just society. Archival documents, which primarily reflect the views of the elite and literate classes, neglect the voices and experiences of the illiterate and subaltern. Therefore, it is crucial to question and analyze such systemic and documented biases in order to fully understand the subaltern. In *ByadBhale*, Bina Theeng provides a realistic portrayal of working-class people, particularly women, who are victimized from various perspectives. Syangmendo's story is an example where she is forced to live with her family members while waiting for her husband to return, who eventually ignores her due to the political and power dynamics at play. If the Nepalese government were to enact inclusive policies that

promote equal rights and freedoms, develop a just society, and preserve the multilingual, multi-caste, multi-religious, and multi-cultural identities of Nepal, then people of all castes, religions, races, classes, and genders could enjoy peace, security, and freedom. However, due to the vulnerability and marginalization of Tamang women, they are subjected to inhumane treatment and compelled to submit to the unjust rule of authority.

In the three stories of Seiko-five, Yambunera, and ByadBhale, the main characters are women who struggle to make a living and provide for their families. When conflicts arise between the Nepal police and Tamang women, the female protagonists stand up against the police and their actions. According to the subaltern studies, particularly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has presented the references in her commentary “*A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi’s Stabadyini*,” “she evokes that the woman subjectivity and their voice are denied upon male’s desire. Whether a woman is looked from above merely as the sexual object or from below as the goddess, she is reduced into the object of the male’s desire” (123). In Bina Theeng's stories, the female characters are speaking and even attempting to resist the authorities and police. They are courageous because they have been fighting for their rights, benefits, and the opportunity to represent their traditions, cultures, norms, and values for centuries. The discourse on subaltern studies often presents two perspectives: one that portrays subaltern characters as vibrant, dynamic, heroic, and brave individuals who contribute significantly to the nation and sustain economic activities. Bina Theeng's stories feature such subaltern characters who work as potters, produce goods in the village, and sell them in the market. They are always active, useful, and essential members of society. On the other hand, Spivak's declaration that the subaltern cannot speak is not entirely wrong, as the subaltern characters in

Theeng's stories do speak up, fight, and raise their voice against those who oppose their traditions. Despite facing oppression, these characters are courageous and take action to defend their rights and identity.

Although the characters in Bina Theeng's stories are fighting for their rights and livelihood, they lack the power to bring about significant change in society and the authorities. Their struggles are focused on preserving their culture and traditions rather than restructuring society and changing the rules and regulations enforced by the police and government. Despite this, these characters continue to resist and fight for their survival, producing goods and liquor that are central to the Tamang identity. Living on the outskirts of Yambunera is a reflection of the political structure of the nation, which marginalizes certain groups, including the Tamang people. Due to historical discrimination, Tamangs were excluded from positions in the army and Nepal police and treated as semi-untouchable, leading to their relocation away from centers of power.

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