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Gender Subaltern in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

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Letter of Recommendation

This is to certify that Gagan Chhinamkhu Rai has completed his thesis entitled “Gender Subaltern in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*” under my supervision and guidance. I, therefore, recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Gender Subaltern in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*” by Gagan Chhinamkhu Rai, submitted to the Department of English, Tribhuvan University has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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Gender Subaltern in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Abstract

Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest raises the issue of the gender subaltern. The novel's portrayal of mental disability is found to be impressive in its avoidance of stereotypes through the representation of its characters as individuals, rather than merely characterizing symptoms of mental disorder. In exploring the novel's investment in individual characters, however, it becomes clear that within the novel, disability and emasculation are intrinsically linked. This creates gender Subaltern of patriarchal undercurrent to the text: Nurse Mildred Ratched's control is a direct result of her continual emasculation and her de-feminized domination of the all-male patients. In contrast, McMurphy is celebrated as liberator despite having been committed for rape. These portrayals of the main characters seem ultimately representative of troubling message in the novel. The text is a genuine demonstration of gender subaltern.

Key words: Subaltern, Hegemony, Gender, Power

Introduction

In Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the author illustrates the subordination of women in society. In the novel, the story presents female characters who are discriminated through the male centric hegemony. Women are always powerless and do not guide over the male society even though it is among the lunatics. This is the real facts where female is in favor and culturally decorated. It is also the cultural hegemony which creates the gender discrimination. The women are in the marginalized they do not have access to rise their voice. The writer shows the hegemony of male to cheat the female. There is the layer of madness to hide the real fact. Actually, it is a parody of the story of the patient to demonstrate the subjugation of American society and of the meaning of madness in that society. In many ways, the text matches to the construction of conventional male myth and asks the reader to accept that myth as a heroic pattern. From a masculine perspective, it offers a charming hero in McMurphy, a figure of spiritual strength and sexual energy, whose laughter restores the men to life and confounds the Combine's machines. However, the struggle between McMurphy and Nurse is the struggle of the centre and the subaltern.

The story goes around a mental hospital in the 1960s, the novel is about the Nurse Mildred Ratched, referred to by the patients as the Big Nurse. The concept of the Big Nurse is the concept of the power relation. Through the text gives power to a female, it is a kind of mock to the situation of the meek and fragile women. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak claims "when we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of subaltern, the notion of what work cannot say become important" (310). Here the focus is that the power for the time being which female gains is not

much important which cannot control even a lunatic patient. The importance lies in their raise of voice which is lower than that of the males in the society.

Chief Bromden is the first person narrator of this novel, a six foot two Indian who has pretended for the past thirty years to be deaf and mute. When McMurphy arrives at the ward, he immediately sets things on edge, mocking the staff policies and joking with the patients. He reveals himself to be a master gambler, who conned his way into the hospital in an attempt to get an easier sentence. Things are not exactly as he expected, however; the men are shy, frightened mice who can hardly chuckle, and who live in constant terror of the Big Nurse and her indirect attacks. McMurphy makes a bet with them: in one week, he can break down her defenses.

It takes him the whole week, but he manages it; by making fun of her every chance he gets, and going behind her back to get changes made in ward policy. He convinces the men to vote to change the TV viewing time so they can watch the World Series. At first the men are too frightened to go along with it, but he drags them along. When the Big Nurse refuses to accept the vote, he and the rest of man sit and watch the television anyway, even if it is just a blank screen. McMurphy holds back on his fights when he learns that the Big Nurse controls when he is released from the hospital. However, he is pulled back in by the suicide of a patient and the needs of the other men. He smashes a fist through the window in the Nurse's station to get at a pack of cigarettes, and when the window is replaced, he smashes it again. Bromden and McMurphy become friends, and Bromden starts to talk again, almost by accident. McMurphy takes him and a number of the men on a fishing trip, giving them a chance to do things most men take for granted, and their fear starts to go away. However, the Big Nurse tries to chip away at McMurphy's reputation every chance she gets.

McMurphy and Bromden are forced into shock therapy after getting into a fight with the black aides.

This novel explores the psyche era of 1950's in the American society various critics have analyzed the text through various perspectives. Holler further asserts that the text is the free play of madness. He places the madness in a situation where a person feels safety. He says the *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is the presentation of a way to be free in the name of madness:

In many cultures mad people are outside of society, they are discriminated against, and suffer from this discrimination, but also enjoy the freedom to live without obligations. There are cultures in which mad people are ranked to be the wise ones or even violate his bodily integrity by beating or killing him? Madness can give shelter against aggression and assure safety. To what degree can people play madness to protect themselves? Is this a viable strategy? Here we will try to find a preliminary answer to these questions by looking into three well-known plays: King Lear, Hamlet and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. (5)

The person who is mad is free from law. In the text there is a kind of rebellion and the rebellion is the empowerment of the subaltern group. So here madness is a process by which the meek and weak minority hide themselves in the curtain of insanity.

Ruth Sullivan, in her article "Kesey and Freud," jumps over this external look and focuses on the merits of the work from a deeply psychoanalytical view. Sullivan states that:

Cuckoo's Nest defines the relations among its major characters in terms of Freud's Oedipus complex, in which a son acts out adult

relationships with his parents as part of growing up. In Kesey's model, Mc Murphy is the father; Big Nurse [Ratchet] is the mother, and Chief Bromden and the other inmates are the sons. Kesey's use of such Freudian comparisons is ironic since the novel otherwise characterizes the psychoanalytical process as negative, dehumanizing, and without merit. (168)

Its significance stems from showing how literature has the power to change our society because modern concerns can be anticipated and addressed to varying degrees in literary works. And its lesson is, we have much to learn from the past, which literature sum up, and we can never know what the further grasp.

Edward Shorter, a critic relating the text with sanity and insanity argues that the sexuality is the vita part of our life without which life becomes like a lunatic in the hospital. He further says that the text is the demonstration of the guilt regarding sexuality. He comments the sexuality is "also a part of life-even in an institution . . . adolescent controlled by his mother, to lose his virginity to smuggled-in prostitute during a drunken . . . for Billy, things under control, shames him into extreme guilt. Fearful of his mother, he commits suicide" (86). Thus, though Shorter relates the text from the perspective of sexuality, there is power struggle between male and female through sex. This is the depiction of the domination and marginalization of women in the field of sex also. The suicide of Billy Bibbit is the true example of this fact.

In regards to the study of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, cultural critics seemed to mostly concentrate on the novel as a whole and apply the novel's setting and to a certain time period or cultural aspect. The prime example of this school of thought is found in the writings of Robert Rosenheim who wrote a book and about one dozen journal articles specifically discussing Kesey's masterpiece in terms of the

culture of the 1950s and 1960s. In his article "Out of the '50s, into the '60s," Rosenwein writes that the "attitude and values portrayed in *Cuckoo's Nest* have their roots in the "beat" generation . . . Their vision of the 1950s America as a repressive, conformist society that persecuted the individual was taken up by Kesey in portraying society as a mental hospital that overpowers and controls its citizen-inmates" (118). Continuing in the article, Rosenwein defines the beats and their power and influence. He argues that the culture of America was portrayed through Kesey's stark, controlling, and oppressive mental institution. Only with the entrance of the Beats, or in Kesey's case of *McMurphy*, can society find redemption, and eventual freedom (120). Therefore, according to Rosenwein and any cultural critic, without an understanding of the culture and period in which the novel is set, one would not be able to understand the true meaning of the work nor its balance and parallel with the real world.

Dr. Walter Freeman critic argues that the book *One Flew over Cuckoo's Nest* is the demonstration of the real history of American medicine and lunatic hospital. He argues "One very accessible work taught in the literature and medicine genre is . . . identify and to treat mental disorders . . . the mentally ill, roamed the streets, were confined by relatives, or were thrown into prisons with criminals . . . aberrant behavior, moral movements to control the environment were tried" (62). In the late nineteenth century so called "rest cures" became popular with the rich to cure their nervous disorders, and in the early twentieth century, during the Eugenics Movement, individuals were forcibly sterilized for feeble-mindedness and many types of unacceptable behaviors such as alcoholism, promiscuity, criminal acts, epilepsy, and

even as punishment for running away from home. It was all done, of course, for the greater good.

Through the various critics analyzed the novel through various perspectives, it is the depiction of the raise of the voice of the marginalized women. *Cuckoo's Nest* is as applicable in today's scenarios and circumstances. The parody of the mentally ill patients is the method to show the effects of gender subaltern.

The term 'subaltern', refers to the people of lower status, lower strata people of not conversant peasantry, under represented, under taught, non-canonical and the subordinated group who are always directly or indirectly, prejudiced by ideologies of dominant class, in English literary criticism and theory: an introductory history, defines subaltern as "military term which means 'of lower rank' initially used by communist activist and thinker Antonio Gramsci to refer to the plebeians the working class, the term is appropriated by postcolonial theorists and put in wide circulations", Nagarajan contends, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential essays, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (276).

Subaltern refers those groups who are marginalized from the mainstream society, history. The current research deals with the gender subaltern showing the rise of the voice of voiceless women in the society in the form of the resistance of the mentally ill patients. The subaltern literature challenges the maker of their own history. It means they have a strong sense of resistance.

Gender subaltern raises the issues of those women in the society who are oppressed and ignored very badly by the males. It gives the power to those women who are meek in front of men, who cannot arise their head at the face of the males, and who are marginalized and made voiceless. Gender subaltern gives a voice and a history by excavating the history of deprived women. The concept of gendered

subaltern was developed by Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak to deal with the matter of the colonized female in the time of colonization in India. Her article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" speaks clearly and directly to the difficulty of expression. The concept of gender subaltern always speaks about the connotation of gender in the information of societal unfairness. Judith Butler a feminist critic, who usually comments the male centric tradition in society, explains that "sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations," and that "the population of a normative sexuality that is 'before', 'outside', or 'beyond' power is a cultural impossibility" (30). In contextualizing regulated gender roles and sexuality within a matrix of power relations, Butler talks reference of Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak criticism of gender subaltern to strengthen his claim that the limited possibilities for expression of gendered identity include the female subaltern's capacity for expression.

Similarly, Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak claims that the subordinate's female. Men are responsible for female's effacement. Their presence as agency destroys the female's position she writes: "the agency was always male; the woman was always the victim. The dubious place of the free will of the constituted sexed subject as female was successfully effected" (298). She charges male for female's society marginalization. According to her, females are agency to suppress women. They always remain victim for male. Their gender subjectivity as female is destroyed by male. The prey upon female and wounds them. In the novel *Santiago* as an agency destroys Angela the victim. She furthermore asserts the position of third world female between patriarchy and imperialism. Their subject constitution and object formation vanish their figure into a violent manner. They are challenged between culturalism and development tradition and modernization. The imprisonment causes them to remain as displaced figure.

Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” speaks about the complications of expression of subaltern identity. In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses the “self-immolating woman” (299). In her analysis, and describes the Indian practice of sati as one where a widow’s choice to join her husband in death is associated with the definition, rather than the cessation, of a woman’s identity (299-302). Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak interprets this system as an extreme symbol of women’s subaltern. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak’s example of the following of sati is an extreme example of the subjugation and silencing the women who are being voiceless. It is the extreme where the amplified expression of gendered identity in the form of the devoted widow keeps up a correspondence to suppression and silencing. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak compares this ritual tradition with the example of a woman who wished to prove that she did not decide to end her life because of an unwed pregnancy, but rather did so for political reasons, and committed suicide during menstruation so that there would be no misinterpretation of her action (307-308). In this instance, menstruation as an indicator of female identity was acted upon to expose silence.

Subaltern, according to Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak is the oppressed peoples who are marginalized or those inferior groups who are inferior rank and being victimized by the ruling class groups. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that there are various literary writers who raise the voice to the subjugated people. There is a strong sense of resistance and rebellion in their writing. The group focuses their study in south Asia especially the women who are extremely excluded from the mainstream history. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak comments:

The stated objective of this group was to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian

Studies. Further they described their project as an attempt to study the general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in term of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way. (312)

Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak says that the concept of subalternity is the things to analyze the colonial discourse which is produced to support the economy of the colonizers. In the gender subaltern, the essential and the challenging question are: can the subaltern represent herself and be heard in Western discourse? The subaltern is best characterized by the economically dispossessed individual whose identity is his/her difference from the elite group. Spivak gives the example of illiterate peasantry, tribal members, and generally “the lowest strata of the urban sub proletariat” (313).

In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak deals with the question – how the white men and brown men neglect her subjectivity by expressing their sympathetic desire. They degrade the women set herself on fire to death because of her love and devotion towards her male counterparts. White and brown men never pay any serious attention towards her pain and suffering. Rather they ignored women’s subjectivity. She disagrees with the white men’s claim-they claim that sati custom a barbaric without understanding its significance. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak criticizes white men because they want to prove that Indian males are barbaric, and white men are superior and powerful to protect brown women whether it is the west or in to east, women are ignored from the position from which they can speak on their own. East and west, both are the space of patriarchies where women are always treated as an object of male’s desire. According to Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak: “Such would be the property to representation, that repression

functions well as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, affirmation on non-existence; and consequently, agates that of all this there is nothing to say, to see and to know” (304). She always concerns with the female’s issues. Her claims is in the colonized patriarchal society women are doubly subalternized.

Due to caste hierarchy, women are suppressed, their voices are ignored, pains and sufferings are unheard. In Hindu caste system, Brahmin women regarded as higher and superior but Dalit women are treated as inferior. Ranajit Guha says that women are more dominated; they are more suppressed. According to Guha:

Again, it was the domination of the upper-class landed elite over this community which made Bagdi women prey to male lust; and yet they figured in patriarchal lore as creatures of easy virtue all too ready to make themselves available as objects of sexual gratification. . . .

Substantive concern for the politics of the oppressed which often accounts for Foucault’s appeal can hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the “concrete” subject of oppression that, in fact, compounds the appeal. (144)

Guha realizes the upper-class domination upon Bagdi community that consequently forced women of that community to surrender sexually before the elite lust. They never found human beings’ respect and position. They were treated as creature. This means they were taken as human shaped object for their use.

Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that subaltern female cannot be heard and read. Subaltern classes cannot represent themselves and in different types of mythical construction of society and culture, females are in subordinate position they are misrepresented. According to Spivak: as long as the woman (as wife; sati) does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband, she is never released (mucyate) from

her female body (striates i.e. in the cycle of birth) (299). Many writers with the help of myth have attempted to depict women as subaltern and they generalize that they cannot speak, because of such reasons writers can speak on its own.

History is the construction of power. It is written from the view of superior. It vividly describes the issues related to sophisticated people, elite class, powerful person and capable personalities. It favors them and gives them wide space in the history. Their view, society and culture are high valued. On the contrary, history does not favor subaltern people. It mentions them only to show sympathy. It raises the issue of pain, suffering, suffocation, exploitation and marginalization of subaltern people. Then they express sympathy to show urgency for their rescue. They show a need to advocate on their behalf. But it does nothing in practicality; it remains just like a leap service. Moreover, subaltern always remain subaltern. Women's happiness in superseding in the impetus of radical aggression may be interpreted in different ways - from subversive, to reactionary, to dissenting. However, women's literary voices resist the impact of colonial oppression by illuminating the need for social change that emerges with awareness, combines emotion with intelligence, and recognizes the political relevance of personal experience. Women's role in society was still defined by traditional values, though some changes had begun to occur. Women's roles in society were being actively questioned, though challenges to equality remained.

Gramsci theorizing out of this experience of work among the people, remarks, and the history of subaltern groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly dose exist a tendency to unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of ruling groups, subaltern groups are always subject to the actuality of ruling groups, even when they

rebel and rise up, only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination. David Ludden quotes Guha in reading subaltern studies: critical history, contested meaning, and the globalization of Asia where subaltern is addressed as "community other than elite cultural groups of dominates foreign groups included all the non-Indian that is mainly British official of the colonial state and foreign industrialists, merchants, financiers, planters, landlords and missionaries" (53). Subaltern is a group of marginalized people whose history is conspicuously excluded from national history.

It is in above sense that the subaltern's intervention of subaltern studies group of historians into Indian history turns out be a metaphoric representation of the subaltern metaphoric at the level of epistemology: that the subaltern can speak as opposed to the ironic representation of the subaltern by the poststructuralist post-colonial theorists who believe that the subaltern cannot speak (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). The work of the subaltern historians does offer a real alternative to traditional historiography about Indian in their attempt to rethink history from the perspective of the subaltern.

The subaltern historiography approach spearheaded by Guha challenges and rewrites imperialist and nationalist constructions of the colonial period in Indian history. In addition, 'subaltern studies' has become the global concern. It has gone a new domain: feminism. While pointing out the vulnerable points of subaltern, she made it clear that SS, as a discourse to speak on behalf of marginalized groups, has not paid as much attention women as it should have. She is amazed at its "indifference to the subjectivity, not to mention the indispensable presence, of the women as the crucial instrument" (358). Despite the fact that it is scrupulous in its consideration women "the core members of the group ignore the impetus, the concept metaphor women provide in the functioning of their discourse. Instead, they, not unlike male

subaltern, saw to “have the common assumption the procreative sex is a species apart, scarcely at all to be considered a part of civil society” (358).

Obviously, the strategy of presenting the women as subaltern clarifies her position in the imperial as well as patriarchal society where women’s voices and deeds always remain unheard. So, her position appears to reflect the meaning of the subaltern at best. This is one of the reasons why the women issues are so widely discussed in subaltern studies.

Thus, subaltern studies deals with the plight of subaltern people and tries to centralize them. Gender Subaltern too always concerns with the subaltern peoples’ plight especially with the position of women. Besides that, it basically concerns with the ignored women whose voices are unheard, who are in suffocation and neglected in the society. Buried voices of the females are raised and females are made aware of their rights in the society. Moreover, it focuses on the equality between males and females thus it advocates the voices of females.

Through the story of a mental hospital Kenny Keys depicts the reconstruction of the gender issues. He has put forwarded the story from the perspective of a Big Nurse of the ward. Through the stories always shows powerful male the writer represents the voiceless women having a strong voice. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak claims:

The notion of finding a representation for the subaltern, but the problem she finds is that no intellectual field recognizes subaltern knowledge, logic or modes of thought. The question becomes, “How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak claims one must recognize and render

visible the material which, hitherto, intellectuals did not recognize as having a moral, aesthetic, or historical value. (301)

It is clear that although it is an attempt to write the literature giving power and strengthening the women's role in the society, there is still lack in the representation of the meek gender.

Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, expresses similar view regarding female's silence in her essay "can the subaltern speak?" she discusses about the history writing process of colonialist where women are neglected. She writes:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation insurgency, or the ground rules of sexual division of the labor, for both of which there is "evidences". It is rather, that, both as object of colonialist of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (297)

Here, her assertion is about the ideological construction of gender. This construction always privileges males and keep them dominant she says that history neglects the subaltern. In this counts, females are doubly effaced. On the one hand history ignores them and on the other hand, subaltern gentleman too ignores them. For her, when subaltern has no history and they cannot speak, subaltern women are more intensely not needed. They cannot lift up their right to be heard as their tongues are cut.

Stereotypically speaking males are hardened authoritarians and women are passive non-aggressors. In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* these roles are inverted, showing the inhumane, chaotic world of a mental institution. Nurse Mildred Ratched, Mrs.

Bibbit, and Vera Harding are the three main power figures of the novel that demonstrate how this is accomplished.

Nurse Mildred Ratched is the head nurse of her ward. Unlike the other head nurses of the mental hospital Nurse Mildred Ratched thrives off the power that she holds, and demands control of every aspect of her patients' lives. She is also able to control her superiors, such as Dr. Spivey, head of the mental hospital, through sheer intimidation. By many patients, especially by Randel Patric McMurphy, the protagonist of the novel, Nurse Mildred Ratched is referred to in blatant sexual terms. This is because of her rather large breast, which seems to be out of place on such a cold woman that is a symbol for the sexuality that she tries to hide. This fact is significant because it compares to how man try to hide emotion. Chief Bromden, a schizophrenic and narrator of the novel brings attention to this when he says that “A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what otherwise would have been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it” (11). While most women are comfortable with sexuality Nurse Mildred Ratched tries to hide her sexuality just as a stereotypical man tries to hide signs of emotion. This is good example of how gender roles are reversed in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Billy Bibbit, a patient of Nurse Mildred Ratched's ward in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, has always lived in the shadow his mother's control. Here the mother is not the mother; she is the father figure who always dominates the women.

The female characters in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* can be divided into two extreme categories: “ball-cutter” and whores. In fact, they are the female subaltern. In Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak's term they are “dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels” (296). She asserts that individuals in this category act “in interests of the dominant all Indian group and not in conformity to interests

corresponding truly to their own social being” (297). The former is represented by Nurse Mildred Ratched, Harding’s wife, Billy Bibbit’s mother, and Chief Bromden’s mother. Each of these women are intent to dominating men by weakening them, whereas the whores Candy and Sandy are dedicated to pleasuring men and doing what they’re told. Despite the obvious nature of this observation, Kesey aims higher than asserting male dominance over female acquiescence. His goal is to assert those qualities identified as feminine to undermine those qualities considered masculine. Here Kesey give a female perspective to the narration. Each character is strong and has power to control the males. It is “an understanding of perspective and experience as part of a larger social setting” (98).

In between the two female extremes of ball cutter and whore is the Asian American nurse in the Disturbed Ward who bandages McMurphy. She represents an ideal middle ground a compassionate, intelligent, nurturing woman who is nevertheless powerless to save McMurphy. McMurphy flirts with her after he relates Nurse Mildred Ratched’s history to him. She does not succumb to his advances, presumably to display that Kesey realizes that women are more than sexual playing things. Her presence in the novel is short lived, however, and McMurphy is quickly returned to the machinations of Nurse Ratched. “We are victims of a matriarchy here” (112). “Harding acknowledges to McMurphy after McMurphy characterizes his first group therapy meeting as “a peaking party”. When Harding protests that Nurse Mildred Ratched is not some kind of giant monster of the poultry clan, bent on sadistically pecking out our eyes”, McMurphy responds, “No buddy, not that she aim’s pecking at your eyes. That’s not what she’s peaking at”. (112) However, McMurphy acknowledges that not all ball-cutters are women when he continues:

No, that nurse ain't some kinda monster chicken, buddy, what she is a ball-cutter. I've seen a thousand of 'em, old and young, men and women. Seen 'em all over the country and in the homes people who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to and the best way to do this, to get you to knuckle under, is to weaken you by getting' you where it hurts the worst. (36)

By polarizing the battle between repression and freedom as a battle between feminization and masculinity, machinery versus nature, and civilized versus wild, Kesey offers a simplified mythology much like the comic book heroes he reverses. The war is not between the sexes, but an archetypal battle between the more positive masculine qualities and the more negative feminine qualities. This motif suits his purpose because it allows Kesey to express a world view of good against evil in which one of the cardinal virtues of McMurphy's world is masculinity. The masculine virtue engenders nature, spontaneity, sexual freedom, and rebellion against the feminine to give the females of the text a strong voice which can replace the hegemony of the power centre people.

Gaiyatri Chakravorty Spivak claims that the people especially the colonizers and the male do not give voice to the voiceless subaltern as in the text the females are voiceless and powerless and trying to gain their speech in the power politics. She asserts:

The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with woman as a pious. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribe task which she must not disown with a flourish. . .the politics of the subalterns constituted an

autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. Subordination in its various forms throughout subsequent volumes the whole concept of subalternity underwent various shifts. (308)

From Spivak's claim it is clear that the female subaltern groups are those groups who cannot speak in the politics of the male dominated society.

In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey the women are depicted as powerful and threatening figures that emasculate and belittle men. In Ken Kesey's *One Flew over a Cuckoo's Nest* centers on a mental ward where gender roles are countered to the roles in a patriarchal society. Women take control over the patients and the men in the asylum become "victims of a matriarchy" (61). For example, Bromden and McMurphy, the protagonists of the novel, describe the hospital supervisor. Such dominating female characters are negatively portrayed as threatening and overpowering figures that emasculate and damage men. This theme can be exemplified through the female characters of Nurse Mildred Ratched, McMurphy's past love, Harding's wife, and Billy Bibbit's mother. Through the relationships between the men and women, sexism is apparent in this novel; the author seems to favor the traditional roles of femininity and masculinity.

Kesey tries to assert qualities that can be identified as feminine and thus undermine the qualities the qualities considered as masculine. For example, kesey portrays that masculinity engenders spontaneity, sexual freedom, and rebellion against women where the author expresses his view on the more positive masculine qualities and the more negative feminine qualities. In the novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, women are depicted as powerful and threatening figures, which emasculate and belittle. "It was better than she'd dreamed. They were all shouting to outdo one

another, going further and further, no way of stopping, telling things that wouldn't ever let them look one another in the eye again. The nurse nodding at each confession and saying yes, yes, yes" (89). Big Nurse is the dominating character in this novel. She manipulates the men in the mental ward to spill all their secrets during Group Therapy. In efforts to keep the ward under her control, Nurse Mildred Ratched strategizes to turn the men against each other. She keeps the men insecure and indigent under repression, stripping their masculinity of independence and rebellion.

In the text when the nurse talks about the group in an aggressive way the voice of the subaltern women is clearly depicted. "Mr. Harding has been heard to say that she 'damn well gives the bastards a reason to stare'. . .he has also stated that his wife's ample bosom at times gives him a feeling of inferiority" (43-44). In this quote, the big nurse is talking to the whole group about Harding's problems with his wife. Harding constantly felt uneasy through his whole relationship with her because his wife always made him feel inferior of her. This is related to the domination of women and arises of their voice. The theme because this is yet another woman in this book who takes away a man's masculine façade. The writer further writes: "Mother, I' th-thirty-one years old!" "She laughed and twiddled with weed. Sweet-heart, do I look like the mother of a middle-aged man?" (295). From this line it is clear that it demonstrates how Billy's mother, through over-protection and condescension, has managed to make Billy powerless in dealing with the real world, displaying her dedication to maintain power over her son.

Regarding women subaltern, Gaiyatri Chakaravorty Spivak and other theorist criticized subaltern studies for supporting that there could ever be a single authentic subaltern consciousness; this assumption originally led to a neglect of gender and other forms of diversity within subaltern groups. She further notes that the "British

Colonizers were the first to consider subalterns as a particular class of subordinated people. As a result, attempts to give voice to the subaltern might only reinforce the unfair distinctions between subalterns and elites” (103). Yet Gaiyatri Chakaravorty Spivak famously holds open the potential for further research provided that scholars recognize that the concept of the subaltern is simply a strategic essentialism, a type of necessary evil used to make practical advances.

In the text, when McMurphy was only 10 years old, he lost his virginity to a nine years old girl and in doing so, she took his innocence. McMurphy’s naivety about sex made him feel the need to announce, it but the girl was humored by this idea and instead left her dress with him. This incident highlights the theme of female empowerment and led McMurphy to fear emasculation by women. As: “so my colors were flown, and from that day to this it seemed I might as well live up to my name dedicated lover and it’s the God’s truth: that little nine-year-old kid out of my youth’s the one who’s to blame” (257). During the development of the plot the writer shows the powerful nature of the Big Nurse in the hospital. As the writer writes about the activities of Nuresse Mildred Ratched and the scenario of the hospital:

What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren’t Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronicles with catheter tubes run direct form every pant leg to the sewer under the floor. (30)

From this line, it is clear that Nurse Mildred Ratched’s has the absolute power in the ward. It also reveals her persistence in obtaining what she wants. She will manipulate everyone in the ward until she has the staff under her control. This is an attempt to

give the women the power by the writer. So, we can call the text a true subaltern literature. But the process of giving power to the voiceless is incomplete. At last, when the male's lunatic rebels she is fails to control. She becomes somehow meek and weak to have total control over the patients so there is the politics that the women are powerful outwardly but in fact they are submissive to the male dominated society who are always in the center.

In the ward, the men do the cleaning instead of the women. The Big Nurse only makes sure they clean it well enough. The men in the ward don't like how Nurse Mildred Ratched is in charge and tells all the men what to do and when to do it. They think they should be able to do whatever they want when they want to do it. The men think that Nurse Mildred Ratched, a woman shouldn't be telling them what to do. "Tell me, Mr. McMurphy how does one go about showing a woman whose boss, I mean other than laughing at her?" (70) ". . . and he grins at her like he knows he's got her whipped now" (143). This line is significant because it shows that McMurphy thinks he has power over Nurse Mildred Ratched when she is the one deciding how long he stays at the ward and if he goes up to the disturbed ward or not. In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* women are feared by men. The book's central ideas are that any man can be emasculated by a woman no matter how masculine they were before they entered the ward. Ken Kesey's book is frank about what its saying. It was first published in 1962, too early to be a condemnation of gender subaltern, but amazingly, it is perfect for the job. Kesey's view was that the march of civilization ultimately tramples the masculine spirit, that the demands of good order are finally incompatible with the anarchic strength the creativity the risk-taking spirit that so defines what it means to be a man Kesey was clears that quality of civilization is itself women subaltern and at odds with the male.

At the beginning of the narrative the Combine is viewed by Bromden as being an elusive entity that has the power to permeate and control everyone, but he starts to understand the limitations of the Combine by listening intently to the chronic patient Colonel Matterson's ramblings. Bromden realizes that Colonel Matterson is describing the labeling practices in society as a system of symbols, where objects are assigned qualities which define their meaning in human culture. It is at this point in the narrative that Chief Bromden realizes that by being able to "read all the sign" (131) that he can empower himself by asserting control over the Combine instead of vice versa. This change of position is demonstrated when Chief Bromden lifts his hand in a vote to change ward policy: "Just by the way the nurse is starting at me with her mouth empty of words I can see I'm in for trouble, but I can't stop it. McMurphy's got hidden wires hooked to it . . . he is doing it no. That is not the truth. I lifted it myself" (136). This act of acetic resistance is the point at which Bromden starts to both exercise power over the Combine, and understands that the Combine is a social process. During the narrative, Bromden develops, moving from a position of paralyzed fear of the Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high ranking official for them" (181). This leads to a position of autonomy of the instead of the female in the ward.

The ward presented in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is run by Nurse Mildred Ratched, who is described as "being at the Centre of a web of control" (26). From her position of power, in an office behind a glass window, Nurse Mildred Ratched runs the most effective ward in the hospital, being awarded a certificate that describes her ward as "one that exemplifies the rationality of modernity, controlling the most amounts of patients with the least amount of staff (17). "Ratched's modes of power and control are her gaze" (31) and "Black Orderlies that perform her bidding"

(29). From this position of power, she is and embodied signifier maintaining mechanistic control over signified in the story. The ward itself, therefore, represents the boundaries of possibility available to the signifier and signified with Nurse Ratched's window symbolizing the luminal margin of cultural separation.

Chief Bromden's main fear originates from the existence of a system of control that he labels the Combine and which he claims Nurse Mildred Ratched is a member of (26). He states that "it is a huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as she has the Inside" (26). And that these adjustments are enacted through a control panel. Bromden state that:

I've watched her get more skilful over the years. Practice has steadied and strengthened her until now she wields a power that extends in all directions on hair like wires too small for anybody's eye but mine, I see her sit in the center of this web of wires like a watchful robot, tend her network with mechanical insect skill, know every second which wire runs where and just what current to spend up to get the results she wants. (26-27)

Chief Bromden indicates that the Acutes are responsive to adjustments in "the control panel" (17) and that McMurphy makes the dials in the control panel twitch with the sound of his laughter. The narrative contains many references to the Combine describing it as a web that both joins and controls people in society. Bromden describes it as "existing in industry" and "reaching out of television programs" (76).

People with mental illness have fought against exposure to unwanted lobotomies or forced treatments such as those depicted in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Here the fight of the centre and margin, colonizer and the colonized, and male and female. Everything worked diligently to foster self-esteem

and instill the vital will to live in a society that views disability as a fate worse than death. The disability is the disability of females in the society. The disability is their weakness, their meekness, fragility and dependant. The patients die that disobey the rules of the big nurse is the punishment of the women who breaks the role of women in the society. European cuckoos lay their eggs in other birds' nests and build on nests of their own. The baby cuckoo is raised by parents of different species along with their own babies but usually grows more quickly than its non-cuckoo nest mates and pushes them out to die. If someone is called cuckoo, they are being called crazy. In the text the cuckoo is the big nurse. The patients call her crazy, cruel and so on. So, the labeling of the term crazy clearly supports the claim of the Gaiyatri Chakaravorty Spivak and other gender subaltern theorist.

Narayan Mukharjee talking about women subaltern says that there is always power relation among the male and female. The female tries to gain more power by any means in subaltern movement. He argues that there is a huge gap between the power of male centric society and to the women's society. He comments:

Subaltern Studies joined debates about insurgency and nationality at the breach between popular unrest and state power. The breach was widening at the time, in part because, despite rampant crises, dominant state institutions had managed to survive as though secure inside a mountain fortress high above the plains. Looking back from 1980 into the decades before 1947, historians were busy exploring disconnections between official nationalism and popular movements. Gender subaltern speaks about the same breach between the phallogentric culture and the meek feminine races. (62)

As Mukherjee comments, it is clear that the concept of gender subaltern is the power relation among the male and female. In the text, also we can see the power relation between male and female. Though the females are made powerful for the time being, they are powerless at the end. It means the story is only a parody of the power of women.

We can see the empowerment of the subaltern in the given lines. Kesey clearly describes the gap in the power relation of the two genders. He talks about old power of the big nurse while controlling the mentally ill patient. In fact, this old power is the old power of males. If the women are getting power in the society it is not very old like that of male's power. So allegorically it is the power of the males. He writes:

Some was she has regained all her old power in a few short minutes just sitting there, smiling up at the ceiling and not saying anything. She here taken control again and made anyone aware that she's the force in here to be dealt with . . . I didn't think the nurse had the say so on this kind of thing . . . she has taken control again and made everyone aware . . .” (153)

These lines show the nurse, the woman, is in charge. She takes control and cares for all the men in the facility. Through she seems powerful having a strong voice, it is only a parody. She is not able to control even the rebellion of a lunatic at a mental hospital at last. “The Big Nurse tests a needle against her fingertip. ‘I’m afraid’-she stabs the needle down the rubber capped vial and lifts the plunger that is exactly what the new patient is planning: to take over” (27). This line shows the power relation among the males and females in the ward. It is significant because it shows that a man is coming in to take over rather than a woman. It also shows the role of a man and a woman by telling that the man should be the head of the ward. “And when the Big

Nurse gave in to the black boys' frustrated pleading and came in to check
McMurphy's cleaning assignment personally. . ." (160). Somehow the text blurs the
boundaries of the tradition between male and female.

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest gives primary focus on the issues of
females. Though female's characters are in the significant position, they still need to
fight for their rights. It parodies the patriarchal society and its systems. They are able
to control the activities of the males but the irony is that all of the male members who
are controlled by females are lunatic and out of normal life. This also hints that they
cannot control other male members, who are in normal condition. Wherever the place
lunatic hospital or other-their position is shown higher than that of their male
counterparts and thus subverted in the so-called male dominated and patriarchal
society.

Thus, this research concludes, the text *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is the
depiction of the gender subaltern through the allegory of a mental hospital and a
powerful nurse among the male patients. In course of the development of the plot at
the end, Nurse Mildred Ratched finds Bill with Candy, she warns Billy to tell his
mother which is the symbol of power for the patients. After that Billy becomes out of
control and commits suicide by cutting his throat. This is the demonstration of
controlling to the subaltern group from bad forces and form negative things. It is clear
and straightforward fact of showing the women subaltern meek and weak even before
the lunatic. All the patients are transferred to other wards and feel themselves that
they are out of the hospital. Bromden choke McMurphy in his bed, enabling him to
die with some dignity rather than live as a symbol of Nurse Mildred Ratched's power.
Bromden, having improved the enormous strength that he had believed lost during his
time in the mental ward, escapes from the hospital by breaking through a window.

Thus, through the writer gives some sort of picture of the empowerment of the women, it makes the male centric society powerful.

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