

. Portrayal of Subaltern Characters in Munshi Premchand's Stories

The research analyzes some selected short stories of Munshi Premchand from the perspective of gender subalternity. Gender subalternity is the term related to contemporary studies that projects the women who are suppressed both gender domination and social domination. Subaltern studies are concerned with lower status of people and gender studies focus on gender inequality and patriarchal social structure. This study includes the following stories from Premchand's collection *The Shourd: stories*.

"Two Graves", "The Farce of Brahm", "A winter Night", "The Co-wife", "Newly Weds" and "The Shroud". The female characters of these selected stories are oppressed by deeply rooted socio-economic, political, religious and cultural biasness. In most of the cases they are equally oppressed by patriarchy and other social background. So, they are doubly oppressed. In the story entitled, "Two Graves" the author symbolically presents the grave of a mother and daughter, named Zuhra and Sulochana who struggled in life for the sake of their social identity. Similarly, the story entitled "Farce of Brahm" Virinda, the main female character of the story talks about Hindu patriarchal socio-economic and religious background. Such socio religious background is responsible for the oppression of women in Indian society. Likewise, in the story entitled, "The Co-Wife" the author highlights the situations of two main female characters Rajia and Dasi who are suppressed by male character, Ramu who belong to subaltern community.

In the same line, in the story entitled, "Newly Weds" Leela and Asha face the problems related to socio-economic and cultural status of the society that dominate them as poor

class women. The story entitled "The Price of Milk" demonstrates the situation of Bhangi women who are considered as the lowest in social status in Bengal. Similarly, the story "The Shroud" focuses on the situation of women with poor socio-economic backgrounds who are suppressed by patriarchal values. The major female characters from each of these stories have been critically examined from the perspective of gendered subalternity which shows that they are the victims of poverty, patriarchal domination, domination and other social cultural structures of traditional Indian society.

The women who are projected by Premchand in his stories live under patriarchal domination in India . This is also an account of the vicious circle of marginalization from where they cannot come out. In that sense, there arises a situation of triple marginalization of gender, economic and race.

According to the Oxford Advanced Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, to marginalize is an act "to make somebody feel as if they are not important and cannot influence decisions or events; to put somebody in a position in which they have no power". History is a witness to suffering of women. Since an ancient time, woman have been treated as slaves and made an object as per males' desire. Women have performed the role of both mother and other. No matter how the world puts it step on the way to change, no matter which country and social system people live, nobody can deny women's marginalization in history. Although women are worshipped in the form of *Kali*, *Durga* and *Shakti* in the Hindu religion yet the orthodox patriarchal society through the means of force and restriction like child marriage, deprivation of education to women, the sati system, put restraint on their movement at social, political and educational levels. In the twenty first century which is the era of globalization that believes the whole universe

as a roof of human, we talk and run different programs about women empowerment and equality but no chance comes up. We are isolated from the actual world. We are influenced from history and give our tops sound for women's emancipation but become mute on the suffering they are facing. Many feminists made their view point and stood against male domination and patriarchy. Among them Simone De Beauvoir who in his, *The Second Sex*, made a philosophy about the females in society who are always referred to as the opposite sex. De Beauvoir calls other' the minority, least favored. She says, "We open factories, the offices, the facilities to women, but we continue to hold that marriage is for her the most honorable career freeing from the collective life".

The concept of gendered subalternity has been of much consequence which implies that women have been doubly subalternized first on the basis of nationalist; the other, on the basis of gender.

Subaltern is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers, women and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic' power. Some of the feminist writers used this terms and go on to elaborate the problems of the categories of the subaltern by looking at the situation of gendered subjects and of Indian women in particular. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her well-known essay.

The ideology of patriarchy tends to reinforce an already entrenched system of exploitation. Gender equations attain threatening dimensions within the framework of patriarchal dominance. Juliet Mitchell sees patriarchy as a dominant feature with cultural rooting and maintained through the operation of ideology. It is perpetuated through a process by which subjectivity is culturally constructed. Gendered

subjectivity can be seen as constituted ideologically, ensuring the continuous reproduction of dominant masculinity and dominated femininity. Patriarchy is not merely an ideology; it is a set of organized power structures with the key positions occupied by man or his supporting mechanism.

The society has identified the woman as a person who belongs to the fairer sex. "It is equal to say that a female is perceived by the society from the point of view of sex. Males and females co-exist in this society for the harmonious growth and development of the nation. They share equal responsibilities in supporting the family but at the same time gender difference occurs even in the family. Females play a vital role in the reproduction process and still they are labeled as the second sex or the weaker sex. De Beauvoir says:

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him: she is not regarded as an autonomous being...The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems waiting in significance by itself ... Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees: thus she is called the sex, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute she is the Other (16).

The concept of the 'Subject' and the 'Other' points to the proposition that only the males have the right to live in this society. Males themselves cannot live in the society, so they consider women as their supporters and treat them as secondary.

Likewise, Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak in her well-known essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", has also discussed the concept of consciousness that also implicitly suggests the notion of gender subalternity. In her opinion, the whole gamut of subaltern studies, particularly, in the context of India is chiefly marked by the agent of change in the life style which highlights this change agent in the following lines:

The work of the subaltern studies group offers a theory of change. The insertion of India is generally defined as a change from semi-feudalism in to capitalist subjection. Such a definition theorizes the change within the great narrative of the modes of production, and by uneasy implication, within the narrative of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Concurrently, this change is seen as the inauguration of politicization for the colonized. The colonial subject is seen as emerging from those parts of the indigenous elite which come to be loosely described as burgees are nationalist. (5)

Through these lines, Spivak highlights the main intention of the colonizers behind politicizing the issue of subalternity. That is mainly to maintain and sustain their hegemony in the society with suppression, oppression, domination and expropriation. Therefore, the issue of gendered subalternity is chiefly concerned with the issue of the relationship between man and woman among the subalterns.

In "Can the Subaltern speak?" Spivak says:

As object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of

colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (287).

In the outset of gender subalternity, it is relevant to delve deep into the roles of women in the society. In the patriarchal and religious community, the women are denied of the position from which they can speak on their own as both spaces are patriarchies in which women are turned into the object of the male's desire. As Spivak states "there is no space from where the subaltern can speak" (103). Furthermore, she writes that "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and the object formation, the figure of woman disappears. . ." (102). It appears to be hazardous to females than to males of the colonized spaces. Analyzing the problems of the category of the subaltern by focusing on the female subaltern, Spivak views that in the colonial context, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. She claims that the woman is doubly subalternized in the colonized patriarchal spaces.

While talking about the concept of gender subaltern, Spivak has given the references in her witty commentary "*A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's Stanadyini*", she argues that 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 the essay, she has pointed the parallelism between Jashoda the subaltern and Jashoda the divine. The icon of Jashoda the divine is, in fact, used to dissimulate the exploitation inflicted on Jashoda the subaltern. The male perception always wants a woman to be a sacrificial being who can be the expectable of his desires. In truth, the

gaze from below is only male's strategy to hide the traces of oppression he inflicts on his female counterpart through his gaze from above. Spivak states: "Through a programmed confounding of the two kinds of gaze, the goddess can be used to dissimulate women's oppression" (129).

Similarly Partha Chatterjee has stated that the sense of caste and religion is the driving force of gendered subalternity. In his well-known essay "Caste and subaltern consciousness" Chatterjee has stated that "subaltern consciousness in the specific cultural context of India cannot but contain caste as a central element in its constitution". It shows that casteism is one of the constitutive factors of gendered subalternity.

Particularly in the context of subaltern society, casteism is the major cause of socio-economic inequality entrenched in the religious platform of Hinduism. Therefore, gendered subalternity is seen as operating in different forms such as gender discrimination, caste division, and labour categories in patriarchal and religious society. Similarly, it explicitly is exercised in the form of the hegemonies consciousness of the colonized people who take their history of colonization for granted.

As Chatterjee has painted out, this relationship between man and woman among the subalterns is primarily driven by the force of casteism deeply established in the religious dogmas of Hinduism. Due to their blind faith upon the religious dogmas and their bogus pride of holding superior status based on their religious principles, the gendered subalterns are bound to live a very miserable life. In gender subaltern community, women are compelled to bear the brunt of male brutality in the family and the society alike. They are forced to be victimized by male domination, suppression, oppression, and exploitation within their family and society alike. Therefore, there is no

hope for peace and prosperity in the community of the gendered subalternity. Their environment is always turbulent and suffocating at the same time. Poverty, misery, violence, suffering, and untimely death are the common issues of the gendered subalterns. However, the ruling class of people politicize these issues only for their selfish motives and do not reach a common consensus exploring sustainable solutions to herald the dawn of happiness, peace, and prosperity for all in the society.

In this light of the colonial consciousness, Veena Das has stated as follows:

[...] to deny that we write as people whose consciousness has been formed as colonial subjects is to deny our history. However, the consciousness of ourselves as colonial subjects is itself modified by our own experience and by the relation we establish to our intellectual traditions .(234)

Through this statement, Veena Das points out that the subaltern consciousness, particularly, in the Indian context, is constantly being modified. And this modification with subaltern awareness has garnered as sort of constructive and positive social change in the conceptualization of gendered subalternity.

Premchand speaks against the elite hegemony and his characters also follow the same line that Astbury Jese states:

Premchand's stories have a mixed legacy. Seen from a contemporary viewpoint, it is easy to see in his ideal of womanhood the basis for women's continued subordination within the patriarchal family. Examined in their historical context, however, these stories of Premchand were brave pioneers, expanding the frontiers of women's role and consciousness at a time when these frontiers were severely limited. (268)

Above lines show the mixed legacy of Indian society where subaltern people are struggling for their identity and suffered by the various types of dominations such as gender, class, social status religious and cultural domination.

Most of the characters in the selected stories of Munshi Premchand often suffer from poverty and other oppression that often resulted in death. Samdev Banik highlights this issue in his writing, as, "Giving the lie Ingenuity: In Subaltern Resistance in Premchand's short story "The Shroud" stating that "Munshi Premchand is one such writer we can only rely upon for showcasing the whole gamut of subaltern experiences", he further writes there that " His social realistic mode recreates the lived reality of the subaltern exposing pretensions and complacencies of dominant feudal and patriarchal social mores" (180).

The subaltern people also took part in the anti-imperialist insurgency as the members of indigenous elite class and the members of the bourgeois nationalist did. However, their contribution was simply overlooked by the colonialist and bourgeois nationalist historiography. Likewise, the subaltern women despite their potentiality and contribution remained unheard as the way the subaltern insurgents despite their active participation on the anti-imperialist insurgencies did. Spivak, therefore, admits that "woman is neglected syntagm of the semiosis of insurgency" (359). In other words, she aspires to show the complicity between the subjects and object investigation: the subaltern studies group and subalternity. This complicity leads the historians and the theorists to ignore the simple exclusion of the subaltern as female (sexed) subject . . . (359).

In the same line, K.P. Singh writes, in his journal article "Premchand and Gandhism" that "He experienced his bitterness towards the feudal system: there is overall change on all sides, so much so that peasants and workers can have their domination, but they still sleep. Nobody knows when this system would be abolished" (49). Furthermore, he writes that "In all his writing, Premchand opposed bigotry. Religious institutions and undertakings of all kinds have been tools for the exploitation of common people and have been controlled by the rulers" (50).

Despite such opinions that exist to represent the different theoretical speculations as they perspectivize in order to interpret this story in the considerable height, this research attempts to reveal the awareness of the people through the central subaltern characters such as Sulochana, Vrinda, Dasi, Rajia, Asha, Leela, Bhungi and Budhiya is still deemed to be a maiden exploration in terms of gender and caste discourse since no scholars have analyzed stories from these perspectives. In the same way, in this regards, Samdev Banik remarks:

What clearly emerges from these literary representations by Premchand is the fact that he grasps the social reality and the problem of his times regarding women extremely effectively. A critique of the reality is also present but the will to transform this social reality is cast in a reformist mould. Thus the solutions and reforms advocated by him are relatively mild, not advocated hastily or aggressively, and are not a shock to prevailing attitudes. He is brilliant in his understanding of the problem and its portrayal but radicalization beyond that does not take place. (170)

Premchand's stories have a mixed legacy. However, these stories were brave pioneers, expanding the frontiers of women's role and consciousness at a time when these frontiers were severely limited. So far as inter-personal relations and male attitudes towards women are concerned; we, at present, have no right to sit in moral judgment over our predecessor

Premchnad projects the situation of subaltern women who are dominated by patriarchal value of the society. In this regard, K.P. Singh says, "Premchand adeptly demonstrates the poverty of conscience created by easily exploited pressures to maintain a society's self-image. His characters lack only freedom from his formulas for this type of social interaction (50). All these stories have inevitably a tragic end. The prostitute and even her daughter are merely sex-objects and in the very process of socialization, they are accorded the lowest of the low status.

Premchand exposes the worst victims of societal values. However, he stops at that point. Though there is an attack on society and men, especially in further radicalization of consciousness does not take place. However, his most impressive achievement was his ability to describe the pain and suffering that accompanied the lot of the prostitutes while simultaneously portraying his subjects as sensitive, loving and high moral character. Through the characters, Sulochana, in "Two Graves", Vrinda and lower caste Muslim women, in "The Farce of Brahm", Bhungi, in "The Price of Milk", Bhudhiya, in "The Shroud", Rajia and Dasi in "The Co-wife", and Leela and Asha, in "Newly Weds", Premchand Munshi explores gender subalternity in these these stories.

Above criticism and comment portrays some aspects of Premchand's short stories. So, this study has focused the gender subaltern issues in detail in upcoming chapters. The

whole study is divided in three separate chapters. The first chapter introduces the concept of gender subalternity in Premchand's selected stories. The second chapter provides a textual analysis of the stories and the final chapter gives a conclusion of the study .

II. Gendered Subalternity and Woman Role in Munshi Premchand's *Stories*

Most of the female characters of the selected stories have been suppressed and living as subaltern identities. Indian societal values and Hindu patriarchal family structure badly oppressed the female characters and they are compelled to live in subaltern position. Anyway, these subaltern women are ruthlessly abused on the grounds of gender parallel with their socio- economic condition and religious background. Their voices are simply ignored in the patriarchal society despite the fact that they also contribute to their male counterparts, family and the society as a whole. However, they are privileged to be heard by their own male counterparts, and are deprived from that opportunity. Female characters such as Sulochna, Vrinda, Dasi, Rajia, Leela, Asha, Bhungi, Budhiya in "Two Graves", "The Farce of Brahm", "The Co-wife", "Newly-Weds", "The Price of Milk" and "The Shroud" almost bear death respectively. Their problems are simply ignored by the society and family. They have no access to speak on behalf of themselves because there were no any such agencies like political parties to aware them against the system and patriarchal continuity and religious dogmas with casteism were the dominant in their society. Therefore, they are doubly under shadow. They got to be represented with appropriate means and strategies. Female characters of Munshi Premchand were double suppressed that resulted in untimely death when women were subject both to gender discrimination as socially privileged people and specific discrimination needs to be taken into account while analyzing any kind of subaltern oppression.

In each story the writer projects the pitiable situation of the female characters who are living with identity of gender subaltern. Overall theme of the story entitled,

"Two Graves" highlights one of the major issues of gendered subalterns which is about the conflict between two different classes of people due to the differences in their cultural practices. In the story, the fictional characters, Kunwar Ranvir Singh, Zuhra, Sulochana and Dr. Ramendra are considered as the representative figures of gendered subalternity who undergo multiple pangs of suffering and misery in life due to the conflict between their aspirations and their socio-economic and cultural practices. Kunwar Ranvir Singh holds the center of narrativizing the issues of gendered subalternity. Even after being blown by the treachery of providence twice, Kunwar Ranvir does not lose his hope of getting married again and building up a beautiful family of his own. He derives such a hope mainly from his culture which encourages men to have plural marriages in case of losing their spouses. On the other hand, he also holds the masculine privilege that rules over the feminine in his culture. Due to these reasons, Kunwar Ranvir happens to marry a beautiful woman to his will, Zuhra, despite his knowledge that she belongs to a clan of prostitutes.

As polygamy is common to men of his culture and his desperate emotion to make physical love becomes irresistible. He does not consider it to be his mistake to get married to a prostitute even though he himself belongs to respectable caste of his society. Alongside this issue, the existence of his earlier two wives who bore no child to him who bore no remains mysterious and hidden in the story, the pain, suffering and misery of women in the patriarchal society often goes mysterious and hidden. In the story, "Two Graves", Premchand points out to this fact as follows:

Kunwar Sahib had married twice, but neither of his two wives bore a child.

Kunwar Sahib did not marry again. Then one day, he met Zuhra in a gathering.

The disappointed husband and the unfulfilled young woman came together like two companions separated for years who had met once more. That springtime of life was filled with music and fragrance, but alas! It came to an end in the brief span of five years. The sweet dream disappeared in an awakening full of despair. That goddess of service and faith went away forever, leaving the three year old Sulochana in his lap. (1-2)

Above lines show the fact that similar human feelings and emotions blur the dividing lines of humanity amidst the expressive norms and values of a subaltern community. However, the bond between such feelings and emotions is a challenge of the discriminatory and oppressive subaltern society. It leads the society of gendered subalternity to a state of turbulence disrupting communal peace and harmony which are highly required for the development and progress of any country.

Similarly, Dr. Ramendra happens to marry his own student Sulochana because of similar feelings and emotions of humanity towards each other. Even though he knows that Sulochana is the daughter of a prostitute, he marries her and treats her with tender love and cares as his wife until a superiority complex plagues him. However, Sulochana cannot enjoy the bliss of life as Ramendra's wife because of the black stigma of prostitution she inherits from her mother. It torments her so much so that she often feels like committing suicide. In the story "Two Graves" Premchand has magnified this fact in the following lines:

Sometimes when a gentleman came over in Ramendra's absence, he would try to convey to Sulochana, with contemptible signs, double entendres and deep sighs, that he too was a suitor for her mercy, and if Ramendra had full authority over

her, others too had a right to a few crumbs. At such times Sulochana felt as if she had to swallow poison in silence. (5)

It shows that how women, in subaltern community, are treated by men. It shows that women in subaltern communities they are treated as play things or toys for the pleasure of men. In Premchand's story entitled " Two Graves", this is in contrast to the complicit self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their bodies as sexualities and the freedom to make their decisions. Obviously, she is vehemently different from those other subaltern women in the text. She represents the modern educated woman who can have control over her body, sexuality and freedom. However, she is compelled to represent self representation the average who leaves an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender and third world woman; the ignorant, poor, tradition bounded, domestic, family oriented and victimized woman.

In the story, females have no space to create the environment of their own to enjoy the right to freedom of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness in subaltern community based on religion and casteism. The superiority complex of men always crushes the existence of women in a subaltern community. This is generally considered as an operation of patriarchy that promotes gender discrimination and enjoys the fruit of gendered subalternity.

Therefore, a conflict of gender discrimination arisen between Sulachana and Ramendra divides them wide apart when Sulochana's well wishers come with gifts to congratulate her on giving birth to her daughter Shobha. Although Sulochana feels a sense of delight with closeness with her old associations on this occasion, her husband Ramendra strongly feels offended as he feels that all of her old associations belong to the

custom of prostitution because, which has been ignored by some so called dignified people of his society. Due to this reason, Ramendra feels isolated from his superior status in the society and warns Sulochana not to invite or bring or allow any pretext. His warning goes as follows: "I will not have a public woman come to my house under any guise. Coming alone at night or in disguise will not erase the evil effects. I am not afraid of social penalties, I am afraid of moral poison" (14). This expression shows the imposition of male authority against the freedom of female to socialize with their associations.

Munshi Premchand has further elaborated the issue of gendered subalternity in other different stories through inter-textual connectivity in the collection of short story, "The Farce of Brahm", he has highlighted a similar conflict between husband and wife about their assimilation with the lower class of people that ultimately severs their conjugal ties and sets them apart. The title of the story "The Farce of Brahm" itself is ironical about how men in the subaltern society pretend and dominate, suppress, oppress and exploit women. It also highlights religion as a tool for men to govern women under their selfish motives. In its premise, they reveal their hypocrisy by saying one thing to women and doing exactly the opposite or the other making the farce of religion.

In the story, "The Farce of Brahm", the husband holds a very high opinion of himself in order to dominate, suppress, oppress and exploit his wife, Vrinda. He talks of very high philosophy of equality and justice to hide his weakness of being selfish about making relationship with lower class people such as Muslims and Chamars when his wife, Vrinda criticizes him for forgetting his high status Brahman culture. In this regards he says:

When will that auspicious day dawn when women of this country will be enlightened and will help men in national organizing? How long will we remain trapped in the machinations of Brahmans? when will our marriage system acknowledge that compatibility and uniformity of opinions between a man and woman are more important than caste and clan?.(39)

If this were acknowledged, I wouldn't be Vrinda's husband and she wouldn't be my wife. Our thoughts are as far apart as earth and heaven. Although she does not say so explicitly, I am sure that she is disgusted by my way of thinking. I sense that she does not even want to touch me. This is not her fault it is the fault of our parents who have done us this great injustice. (39)

The above lines point out the philosophical bent of mind of husband, who later on, becomes vindictive and cruel towards his wife, Vrinda when she starts to follow his philosophical teachings to share ideological ground making relationship with the lower class of people. The husband represents the dominating patriarchal figure whereas the wife represents the dominated, suppressed, oppressed and exploited victims from gender discrimination in the subaltern society. The wife, Vrinda, is initially trained to maintain distance from the lower class of people living an ascetic life of the Brahman. But it is her husband who changes her mindset towards the lower class of people that philosophically equal and justice just to clarify and justify that whatever he does and says is right and she must abide by his sermonization. When Vrinda objects to his mingling up with the lower class of people, he blames her to be too religious about their high social caste and considers her to be ignorant about the basic norms of humanity and morality. In this

regard, he acts like a colonizer and gives his following colonizing sermon to conquer his wife, Vrinda's mindset:

[...] But think how great an injustice it is that we who are all children of one father are degusted by one another, and are busy upholding systems of high and low. This whole universe is the mighty form of that one God. That God's light illuminates every creature. Only this physical form separates us from one another. In reality, we are all one. Just as the sun's light does not become different when it goes into different games, in the same way, God's Great Spirit does not become different when it enters different living beings. (40-41)

These lines manifest the wit and power of the husband's sermonization through which he maintains an absolute conquest over Vrinda's mindset and rules her. This leads Vrinda to an illusion that her husband is right and she is absolutely wrong. It even forces her to confess her guilt of discriminating people in terms of superiority and inferiority of the caste system. Vrinda expresses her confession in the following words:

My husband taught me wisdom which awakened me, I was lying in a dark well. This teaching lifted me up and took me to the radiant peak of the mountain. I have dishonored so many spirits with my ideas of high family origins, my false pride, my arrogance about my pure caste ! Great father, forgive me, forgive the harsh words that I, because of this ignorance, have uttered to my husband at whose feet I should worship, and forgive the disrespect I have shown him .(41)

These lines explicitly demonstrate how women are compelled to confess for the guilt which they have not committed at all. It is the forceful confession pressurized from the side of husband upon whom innocent wife like Vrinda has her genuine faith. Vrinda is so

much innocent that she never doubts on her husband's sermonization before acting upon it. Rather she promptly begins to view the world through the cosmetic lenses of her husband's bogus philosophy that her husband forces her to wear. This makes her a victim of her husband's colonization. In other words, Vrinda's character flaw is that she believes too easily in what her husband says. This is her gullibility.

Therefore, she begins to see divine light or spirit in everyone and endeavors to behave with them equally. She sees no difference between herself and others and therefore, she tries to mingle with the lower class people sharing happiness. However, this transformation in Vrinda's character irritates her vindictive husband in such a way that he feels his ego has been challenged by her total submission to other's will. So, he begins to chide her every moment she tends to mingle with the lower class of people. The more Vrinda submits herself to the lower class people, the more aggressive and violent her husband becomes towards her. Vrinda reports her husband's aggression towards her in the following words:

Stop-to hell with your one spirit! You think the spirit cannot be protected unless you protect it? If God wanted every living being to be equally happy, what stopped him from placing everyone in the same position? Why does he allow differences between high and low since not even a leaf can move without his orders, how can this great social order get disrupted without his willing it? since he is all-pervading, why does he put himself into such loathsome conditions? You cannot answer any of these questions so you should act according the present customs of the world. You will gain nothing but ridicule and condemnation from these senseless ideas. (47)

These lines capture the titular meaning of "The Farce of Brahm" in an explicit way. It is the same husband, who teaches his wife, Vrinda that God is present in every creature and, therefore, we should equally respect all of them. However, he changes his voice about God to dominate his wife. This ridiculous opinion about God and divine light shows the hypocrite nature of the husband and Vrinda deeply feels shattered and repents a lot for getting married to such a hypocrite. These lines also reveal the superiority complex of the husband that was particularly common in men in patriarchal and social structures.

Subaltern women do not have their own world views. They have to abide by social and cultural beliefs for granted in their family and society. In Indian folk practice, where religion had not been externalized and institutionalized Unraveling the historical operation of this gender issue, Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, in their famous essay "Problems for a contemporary theory of Gender" have argued:

Gender analysis, like class analysis, had revealed how the humanist subject and the social worlds predicated on to it functioned in such a way as to legitimize bourgeois and patriarchal interests. What has never been really apparent, however, is the way in which both Marxist and feminist politics continue to deploy other dimensions of the hidden structuring (such as caste or community) of the humanist subject, as well as the premises of secularism- democracy invoked by it. We have been unable, therefore, to critically confront inequalities of caste or community implicit in that subject or its worlds. We have also found it difficult to radicalize the concepts of secularism and democracy to meet the political requirements of our times. (235)

Through these lines, Tharu and Niranjana have pointed out the hidden issue of women's suffering and their struggle to get rid of it fighting against all forms of patriarchal domination, suppression, oppression, and exploitation during the colonial period/ time in India. And here, in this story, "The Farce of Brahm" Munshi Premchand has also reflected upon exactly the same issue. He has excellently exposed that men often ridiculed the values of humanity and morality in the name of God. They did so particularly to dominate, suppress, oppress and exploit women and maintain their hegemony in the society. As a result, gender discrimination is still functioning as one of the gender-currents of violence through gendered subalternity that has been challenging the political institutions of humanism, secularism, and democracy in India even today.

In the story entitled "The Co-wife" Premchand projects the situation of subaltern women who are being victimized by gender discrimination. In the story, Ramu is the patriarchal oppressor who plays with women existence just for his pleasure and selfish motives. He has his pride upon ruling women according to his selfish will. He is such an arrogant male who never respects his wife for all her sacrifice she makes for the happiness of the whole family. Therefore, he brings a co-wife named Dasi not only to exploit and enjoy her youth and beauty but also to disregard his honest wife Rajia and exploit her even more. However, Rajia cannot succumb to the impairment of her sacrifice towards him and the injustice he impresses upon her. She tries her level best to retain her position in the family even though Ramu does not care her sacrifice at all. Premchand has mentioned Ramu's atrocity towards Rajia and Rajia's struggle to retain her position in the family as follows:

After Rajia had two or three children who died and the first bloom of her youth faded, Ramu's love for her decreased and he became obsessed with the idea of remarrying. He began to quarrel with Rajia all the time. He would constantly seek pretexts to get angry with her, and would beat her. And finally he brought home a new wife. Her name was Dasi. She was fair, large-eyed, and very young. How could Rajia with her sallow skin and weakened limbs, compete with this girl? Even so, she tried to retain her waning authority as long as possible. It was like trying to hold up a falling roof with props. She had built this household with the sweat of her brow. It was not easy to give it up. She was not such a fool as to leave the house for Dasi to rule over. (54)

Although these lines state that Rajia still wants to be a respectable member of her family, the cruelty of her husband, Ramu, forces her to leave her house and live alone nearby village struggling very hard to show her husband that she is able to live an independent life of her own. Slowly and gradually, she becomes successful in leading an independent and respectable life in another village, whereas, her husband, Ramu, goes bankrupt as his second wife, Dasi, cannot manage the household as skillfully as Rajia used to do. As a result, crops in his farm go down, cattle die, and he becomes absolutely bankrupt. Dasi is helpless. Her youth and beauty also start fading. The experiences of woman in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled into a number of respects and both feminist and subaltern politics oppose such dominance. However, there have been vigorous debates on a number of Indian societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is more important political factor in women's lives. This has sometimes led to the political activists from impoverished and oppressed countries, or alternatively, the

two are intractably entwined, in which case the condition of colonial dominance effects in material ways, the position of women within their societies. Eventually, Ramu waits for a very tragic death in misery. Premchand has mentioned Ramu's tragic ruin in the following words:

Soon after Rajia's departure Ramu had realized that the soul of his house had gone, and however much he tried, however hard he worked, he could not reanimate it. Dasi was pretty, pleasure loving and slovenly. When the first intoxication wore off, quarrels began. Those fields began to yield less, and whatever income came in was foolishly spent. He had to take loans. Anxiety and grief played havoc with his health. At first, he ignored his condition. What else could he do? There was no money in the house. Treatment by quacks resulted in the illness taking root, and he hadn't had anything to eat or drink for ten or twelve days. He was lying in bed, moaning, and waiting for death. (62)

These lines describe Ramu's ultimate ruin because of his own stupidity, arrogance, and lack of respect towards Rajia. However, Rajia is bold, determined, and able to counter all the hardships patriarchy imposed upon her. Unlike Ramu, she has a heart of humanity and morality. She never becomes over proud of her success in leading an independent life. Even after leaving alone for a long time, she does not lose her respect for her husband, Ramu. At last, she comes to meet Ramu when he is in his death-bed. Ramu regrets and repents a lot and breathes his last in Rajia's company. Dasi also feels grateful to Rajia's kindness and both of them start living together restoring back their family environment to happiness, peace, progress, and prosperity. Thus, very implicitly, this story shows a conflict between the male and female. Rajia stands for the colonized

whereas Ramu stands for the colonizer. Premchand has mentioned Rajia's victory in the following words:

Dasi put her head on Rajia's lap, and cried a lot. 'Didi, you are my mother. If it were not for you, at whose door would I have begged? There was nothing in this house-the mice ran around, that's all. With him, I experienced nothing but suffering. I have discovered the happiness of marriage, of suhag, only with you. I am not crying from grief. I 'am overwhelmed by God's grace, which has allowed me to live in such comfort. Rajia smiled and wept too. (65-66)

These lines clearly mention how women are able to tackle all the obstacles those males can face easily and live a independent life if they collect their courage to resist the patriarchal social structures with religious dogmas in the subaltern community. And they can also live a life of prosperity.

Similarly, in the story, "Newly Weds" Premchand highlights gender discrimination as one of the major causes of women's suffering in the subaltern community. In the story, Lala Dangamal is the representative figure of masculine superiority whereas his two wives Leela and Asha represent feminine inferiority. A sense of male supremacy consumes Lala to his own misery in such a way that his merchant heart becomes a kind of commodity that can be easily manipulated, sold with material goods and physical beauty. Lala is purely driven by his instinctual feelings and emotions rather than his rational principles of humanity and morality.

Therefore, Lala begins to despise his first wife Leela as soon as she comes of her age and begins to lose her physical beauty, passion and vigor. He gives her no regard for her devotion and sacrifice towards his family. He only treats her from a merchant's

perspective weighing only her material value and ignoring all her virtues of humanity and morality. He becomes too arrogant towards her and does not care even when she becomes seriously ill. Consequently Leela dies of a quite helpless and miserable death. However, Lala is least affected by Leela's departed soul as he gets married again to a much younger and more beautiful woman named Asha. This shows his intoxication towards the mundane world totally forgetting the values of humanity and morality. In the story, "Newly Weds" Premchand has clearly mentioned Lala's sudden transformation with excitement, zeal, and passion into an energetic and enthusiastic young man in the following words:

Lalaji's elderly youth was more intense than the youth of young men, just as electric light is brighter and more suitable for entertainment than moonlight. When Lalaji's friends congratulated him on this metamorphosis, he would say with pride, I have always been young and will always be young. If old age comes my way, I will blacken its face, put it on a donkey, face backwards, and chase it out of town. I don't know why people connect youth and age to years. Youth has as much connection with one's years as religions with conduct, money with honesty, and beauty with make-up. Can the youth of today be called young? I wouldn't exchange one hour of my life for a hundred of their youths. They seem to have no enthusiasm, no pleasures. Life is nothing but a burden to them. (82)

These lines highlight Lala's arrogance towards others in the society. He judges people from his own stereotypical thoughts and ideas. His arrogance always seeks to gratify his selfish motives rather than understand other's feelings and emotions. Therefore, his newly-wed second wife, Asha also feels alienated, lonely and aloof even in his company.

Unlike Leela, Asha has a different temperament and penchant for life. She loves to live inside the home for pleasures. This difference with Asha not only astonishes Lala but also irritates him very much. Therefore, he downplays and criticizes Asha's personality when she comes out in a simple dress to accompany him in an outing after he keeps on insisting her that she should also go with him. In the story, "Newly Weds" Premchand has highlighted Lala's masculine attitude towards Asha in the following words:

This irritated Lalaji. He had remarried to enjoy life, to pour oil into a flickering lamp and make it burn brightly again. If the lamp remained dim, what was the use of filling it with oil? Why was she so colourless and dry, like a tree planted in barren soil which however much you water it, will not bear green leaves? She had baskets full of jewellery inlaid with gemstones from Delhi, from Calcutta, from France. She had very expensive saris not one, but hundreds. But they lay in trunks, ending up as food for moths. This is the problem with girls from poor families. Their vision remains narrow. They can't enjoy eating well, wearing fine clothes, or giving fine gifts. Even if they found a hidden treasure, they would not be able to enjoy spending it. (85)

The above lines highlight the arrogant and dominating male attitude towards women in the subaltern society. These lines also reveal how the subaltern world itself is plunged into the vortex of gender disparity and discrimination because poverty and deprivation become the compelling submission factors for women to the selfish motives of men in the subaltern communities.

In the story, Asha has been portrayed as a housekeeping wife sharply contrasted to her individual zeal of enjoying the outside world mainly because of her compelling

marriage with an elderly widower Lala. She manifests her inner dissatisfaction with such her marriage in an implicit way when she works with her servant, Jugal in the kitchen. Jugal is a young boy of just seventeen who does not know how to make rotis and lentils in the kitchen. Yet Asha likes him very much and helps him teaching in the kitchen and in a sense, makes him her friend to spend her time working in the house instead of going out with her much older husband Lala. Even Jugal has a sense of mismatch in their marriage, and in a very sporadic manner, criticizes their mismatch. Asha feels helpless for her miserable condition although she does not explicitly reveal it through her behavior in the house.

In the story, "Newly Weds", Premchand has mentioned Asha's inner suppressed dissatisfaction over her unsuitable marriage in the following words, "Asha could no longer keep up the pretence of anger. Jugal had forcefully struck a chord in the depths of her heart. Despite her best attempts at self restraint her heart's sorrow emerged. She said 'Fate counts for something too' (95). The lines suggest that subaltern people are fatalist as well. They believe more in fate than in their own actions or thoughts. In this sense, Asha submits herself to Lala's selfish motives in life.

Apart from patriarchy and gender discrimination cultural and religion also play vital role to suppress subaltern women in Indian society. Premchand also manifests superstition, ignorance, poverty and deprivation as the defining traits of gendered subalternity in some of his major stories. In the story, "The Price of Milk" Premchand has highlighted the suffering of lower class women from upper class people in the name of religious practices in society. Babu Maheshnath has a son after three daughters, but mothers does not have milk this time for some reasons. When the three girls were born

she had so much milk that the girls got indigestion. So, Bhungi is both midwife and wet nurse who works in Maheshnath's house for a long time. The mistress convinces Bhungi to suck her breast to the newly born son which Premchand has stated in the following :

The mistress would say, 'Bhungi, raise my child, and you won't have to work a stroke the rest of your life; we will feed you. I'll give you five bighas of land to cultivate for free. Your grandchildren will live in comfort. (109)

These lines reveal that how the tribal women are exploited by upper class. The exploitation by higher class and caste has been one of the major sufferings of women in the traditional society. The upper class and caste people always look down the lower class and caste people. Particularly, women are the real victim of the sufferings.

Similarly Bhungi is now served had and foot at Maheshnath's house. She gets different nutritious food items given to nursing mothers according daily schedule. Bhungi is now second in command only to the mistress. The maids, the cook, the servants, all obey her. To see this, Mahishnath said, "What ever else changes, Bhungis will remain Bhungis. It's difficult to make humans of them". This remark opens the discrimination between the upper class and caste and lower class and caste. Mean while Maheshnath stops Bhungi to suck her breast to his child after Moteram Shastri reminds him of religious rules in Brahman family and society.

Then, Bhungi has to descend from her throne giving some presents instead of breast feeding to the child and she begins to do cleaning the gutter at Maheshnath's house. Now Bhungi is deprived of breast feeding to her son, Mangal. He looks a dwarf as her does not suck his mother's milk in his childhood. The Bhungi woman who nurses Suresh, the child of Maheshnath with her milk dies of a snake bite, and her son Mangal

becomes orphan who is completely ignored by everyone in the society. He is even beaten by some mischievous boy in the society. A dog named Tammy becomes his real friend to cling onto the remaining thread of his life. This precarious life of Bhungi woman shows that subaltern women are highly oppressed people who are marginalized by the state policy of equality and justice all over the country. They are used by the rich and powerful ones when necessary and deserted in a precarious condition when not necessary. In the story, "The Price of Milk" Premchand has stated this fact as follows:

Bhungi's reign could not last beyond a year. The Brahmans objected to the child continuing to drink a Bhungi woman's milk, and Moteram Shastri even proposed that penance be performed. The milk was stopped, but the question of penance was laughed off. (110)

This shows that religion is the main cause of misery of the subaltern women in the society. It is the dividing factor between people as the touchable and the untouchable ones. Besides, superstition in the religion of Hinduism is also the prominent one. When Maheshnath objects to such as hypocrisy of religion, Moteram Shastri clarifies him the hypocrite nature of the religious rules they all have to follow in their subaltern society. Shastri says:

Rules are different for the king and for the subjects, for the rich and for the poor. Kings can eat whatever they choose, eat with whomever they choose, and marry whomever they please. There are no restrictions on them. They are powerful men. Rules are for the middle classes. (110-111)

These lines clearly reveal how hypocrite the people are in subaltern society. They say one thing and do exactly the opposite of it. They are the real culprit of society who always

mislead others for their personal benefit. Premchand has thus pointed out the hypocrisy of the so-called religiously pious people to be the main cause of women's suffering in gendered subaltern communities through the story.

The story entitled, "The Shroud" presents the horrible crudities of poverty-stricken subaltern life that seems beyond the imagination of elite people. Ghisu and his son Madhav are the typical subaltern characters from the lowest caste known as Chamar. They are portrayed as the real victim of poverty and deprivation. However, they are quite used to their precarious way of life and rejoice it taking as a gift of providence.

Describing their poverty-stricken life, Premchand has mentioned as follows:

It was a strange life they led. The only possessions in their home were a few clay pots. They covered their nakedness with a few tattered rags. They were free from worldly worries but laden with debt. They endured abuses, even beatings, but had no sorrows. They were so pathetic that people would lean them something or other although there was absolutely no hope of its being returned. When peas and potatoes were harvested they would pull them up from others' fields, roast them, and eat them. Or they would uproot five or ten sugar cane sticks and suck them dry at night. For sixty years, Ghishu had survived this way and Madhav, like a good son, was following in his father's footsteps, and even out doing his father.

(130)

These lines reveal how the destitute subaltern people like Ghishu and Madhav are bound to live a very precarious life in poverty and deprivation. There is no hope that their lifestyle would ever change because of the prevailing social customs and their despicable economic condition.

In this story, Budhiya is the most important character based on gender subaltern, who is the wife of Madhav and at starting of the story we found that she is pregnant and in pain because her husband and father -in -law have not money for her treatment and finally she died.

Death is very common for Subaltern community. Ghisu and Madhav have no money at all to conduct her funeral rites covering her dead body with a shroud. So, they beg for some money with the landlord as loan, and later on, also from other merchants and well-wishers, they collect as much as five rupees with the promise to buy a shroud or kafan to wrap up her dead body for cremation. To everyone's surprise, Ghishu and Madhav suddenly change their attitude towards the need of the shroud for cremating her dead body. They think it is useless to give an expensive piece of cloth to a dead body. , representation is always fictional or partial because it must imaginatively construct its constituency and because it can inadvertently usurp the space of those who are incapable of representing themselves.

In conclusion, Premchand has satire on the subaltern society through the characters when Budhiya died and Madhav and Ghisu become more selfish to cover death body with 'Kafan' buying with money they collect and spending it on their food and drinks. Furthermore, Premchand satired on the blind belief and customs in the subaltern society where someone who did not even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when he is dead. It shows that for the subaltern society, the customs and tradition was much important than the persons.

Feminist critics protest the use of essentialist strategies by identity based group being to succumb to naturalization of essential categories or when they are used to

describe a group as a undifferentiated totality. These critics argue that the overlap between patriarchal, economic and racial oppression has always been difficult to negotiate, and the differences between the political priorities of Indian women have persisted to the present. They argue that subaltern operated very differently for women and for men, and the double suppression that resulted when women were subject both to general discrimination as subaltern subjects and specific discrimination needs to be taken into account in the analysis of any oppressed subaltern. Even in the practice of feminism 'native' women as quietest and subordinate. Hence to analyze the Premchand's stories it is necessary to proceed with the assumption of the voice of female characters.

Through overall textual analysis of the stories most of the female characters of these selected six stories were living in gender subaltern identities and explores the issues of superstition, ignorance, poverty, and deprivation in patriarchy and orthodox religion as the defining traits of gendered subalternity that are often camouflaged with the palimpsest of backward community.

III Gendered Subalternity and the Failed Resistance

Over all analysis of the role of female characters projects the situation of women who are living in double suppression , of patriarchy and subaltern. All of them are from poor class family. So they are economically and socially marginalized. More than that the patriarchal family structure compelled them to bear gender domination. For the textual analysis, six story have been selected and the role of female characters has been analyzed and found their situation as victimized women subaltern characters. These women characters are from the common people who are very innocent, illiterate and superstitious where they have no awareness because there are not any agencies like political parties to lead them towards the independence in the country. Moreover, they do not have any freedom to escape out the vicious circle of patriarchal and religious social structures because they are illiterate, conservative, traditional and naturalized with the social norms and values established by the patriarchy in the subaltern community. They believe on the responsibility to continue the social and religious dogmas naturally.

That's why; they are compelled to live under the extreme exploitation, social oppression and injustice in patriarchal society. As a result, they suffer from untimely death. Socio-cultural and economic awareness is highly required for the people of gendered subalternity to redeem their predicament in the stories.

The author suggests to struggle for the basic rights otherwise the situation of poor women is similar to the characters of his story. Therefore, this research is believed to have made significant contribution in these areas of caste, exploitation and conscience of critical concern. The study focuses the situation of lower caste women characters in "Two Graves" and "The Force of Brahm" respectively. More than that the study shows

what types of socio-economic, religious cultural framework compelled female characters as gender subaltern character.

Likewise, this research has started with the explanation of the subaltern characters in the stories. In "Two Graves" Sulochana commits suicide wishing to be reborn in a respectable man's family as she is the daughter of a prostitute woman who gets married to a high class man, Dr Ramendra. In "The Farce of Brahm", Vrinda, lower caste women suffer from painful condition being untouchable in the society by higher class people. Vrinda nearly loses her mental state to see it. In "The shroud" Budhiya, wife of Madhav dies of labour pain but her dead body does not have even a shroud (Kafan) because of selfish idea of Madhav and Ghisu in Chamar family.

In the story "The Co-wife", female characters, Rajia, Dasi are suppressed by the male character, Ramu in terms of gender inequality, and in "Newly-weds" female characters, Leela and Asha, are exploited by the male character, Lala Dangamal, based on gender role.

In short, the study indicates the situation of subaltern women who are facing multiple problems in life that reflects in the stories through the female characters and their pitiable situation. All the female characters the stories come from a cruel patriarchal and orthodox religious community with poverty-stricken life that force them to choose untimely death in silence. are victimized two fold problem. Sulochana, Asha, Vrinda, Leela, Dasi, Rajia, Bhungi and Budhiya all are representative gender subaltern characters of the story who live to similar fate, live as identity of gender subalterns.

The state-that is centralized power- is always patriarchal in nature, so the weaker, marginal, down-trodden people are always as a rule kept weaker, marginalized and down-

trodden. And these people are gradually excluded from the power scene and even their primary rights to live are negated. In this system the indigenous people of the country, the tribal, the lower castes, the women are kept necessarily outside the boundaries of power. Women by their sheer numbers can be called the largest minority to be thrown aside and oppressed. In the years after independence there has been no vital change in the situation.

For a long period of time the state, the language, the patriarchal elite culture posed as if she was not there- not as a human being. That is, women were always either attractive, sensuous, playthings or hussies or mothers. On the socio-political scene she was a showpiece to be held high or a flesh piece to be violated to bring disgrace to the clan, or group or a nation she belongs to. Thus, a woman was always politically and socially treated as an object and not as an individual. For quite a long time, women, like the dalits or the lower castes, were barred from uttering the alphabet or touching books. But this bar had to be taken off with time.

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