

1. Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* and the Issue of Subaltern

The central assumption of this study is female characters in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* are projected as sub-ordinated due to the male-female-power relation of 1960s American society. It uncovers the issue of gender subaltern in the novel. The female protagonist in the novel represents the feminine character whose identity has been manipulated by the masculine society. The female gender has been made subaltern due to the relative domination which proves the notion of gender subaltern. In the text, the main protagonist of the novel, Lilly Owens has no authority and no agency in her own family and society. Her father T. Ray has a great authority in decision making and social, cultural and political aspects. T. Ray teaches Lily to be subordinated in front of the social norms maintained by male. So, the male character shows his oppressive violence and superior nature to female characters. They feel themselves being lost in male dominated society.

Kidd was born in Sylvester, Georgia, and attended local schools. She graduated from Texas Christian University with a B.S. in nursing in 1970. She worked in her twenties as a Registered Nurse and college nursing instructor at the Medical College of Georgia. She was influenced in her 20s by the writings of Thomas Merton to explore her inner life. In her 30s, she took writing courses at Emory University and Anderson College in South Carolina, now Anderson University, as well as studying at Sewanee, Bread Loaf, and other writers' conferences. She got her start in writing when a personal essay she wrote for a writing class was published in *Guideposts* and reprinted in *Reader's Digest*. She went on to become a Contributing Editor at *Guideposts*. Kidd is married to Sanford "Sandy" Kidd. The couple have two children, Bob and Ann. She has lived in Charleston and Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, before Florida, her current residence.

Her first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002), is set during the American civil rights movement of 1964, telling the story of a white girl who runs away from home to live with a woman who now works as an independent bee-keeper and honey-maker with many of her sisters. It has been adapted as a play in New York by The American Place Theater. The novel was also adapted as a movie of the same name by Fox Searchlight, starring Dakota Fanning, Queen Latifah, Jennifer Hudson, Alicia Keys and Sophie Okonedo.

Using bees as a metaphor for humans, Kidd shows how most of the characters are not what they seem on the surface. Thus, people's lives are usually much more complex and complicated than they appear. In *The Secret Life of Bees* Lily must learn about her dead mother in order to understand her own life. In the novel, beehives serves as a symbolic parallel to the community August has created in the pink house. Bees live, work, and produce honey in beehives. As in August's community, female bees dominate the beehive, and the queen bee rules over everything. The queen bee is the mother of every single other bee, just as, according to August, the Virgin Mary is the mother of all the women she is close to, whom she calls the Daughters of Mary.

This novel is set against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement in the particularly tumultuous summer of 1964. The movement for civil rights, though always important, came to a political head during this period in American history. At this time, the rights of minorities were called into question with regard to "equal rights" under the U.S. Constitution. Many whites were angered by the Civil Rights Act and continued to treat African Americans cruelly and racial tensions continued, despite the action and progress addressed in the new laws. Racism still persists as a bold part of American society, despite political movements and social change.

Sue has stated that she drew inspiration from the honeybees that lived in a wall of her house in Georgia while she was growing up. She remembers the humming sound of the bees and the honey that seeped out of the wall. She said that she imagined a young girl lying in bed with bees sifting through the cracks in the wall and the thoughts that may have surrounded her life. That personal experience provided a background for the novel. Though she doesn't believe that any of the characters are drawn specifically from her own life, she did draw from details and recollections of her adolescence for the actions and mannerisms of many of the characters.

The Secret Life of Bees demonstrates the irrationality of racism by not only portraying black and white characters with dignity and humanity but by also demonstrating how Lily struggles with and ultimately overcomes her own racism. Motherless Lily finds at the Boatwright house several surrogate mothers and learns the power of female community. At the beginning of *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily longs for her mother and cherishes the few possessions Deborah left behind. She demonstrates an awareness of her femininity and laments that she has missed out on certain female lessons because her mother is dead. So the theories of subaltern by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, David Ludden, Antonio Gramsci, Dipesh Chakravorty, Ranjit Guha have been accepted to prove the hypothesis of the research.

The origin of the term "subaltern" can be traced back to the medieval age, where this term applied to vassals and peasants. By eighteenth century, it however, came to denote lower ranks in military suggesting peasant origin, from the nineteenth century in India and America, historians and writers began writing about military campaign from the subaltern point of view. When Antonio Gramsci adopted it finally this term got rather an authentic voice to refer to those groups in the society, who are subject to the ruling classes. He used the term subaltern to refer to Italy's rural peasant

classes. He used the term interchangeably with "subordinate" or sometimes instrumental to denote "[n]on hegemonic groups or classes" (214). For him Subalterns are "the unorganized group of ruling peasants who had no social or political consciousness as a group and therefore susceptible to ruling ideas, culture and leadership of the state" (216).

As a Marxist, Gramsci was very much concerned with the proletarians whose voice remains suppressed in the history. When the history of the state revealed in the state, history being the history of ruling groups, he was interested in the historiography of the subaltern classes. His chief concern was with proletariat whose voice remains unheard in the elite historiography. The hitherto history is realized as the history of state and dominant group, he found an urgent need to write historiography of subaltern class who are denied access to hegemonic power. He found history of subaltern group is "necessarily fragmented and episodic" because they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups" (214). They have "less access to the means to control their own representations" and "less access to cultural and social institutions" (214). However, Gramsci did not come into limelight until Raymond Williams promoted his theory in 1997, well after the translations of *The Modern Prince* (1957) and *Prison Notebooks* (1966). Gramsci account of the subaltern has been further developed by a group of historians known as Subaltern Studies collective. Extending the terms of Gramsci's original definition these historians define subaltern as "the general attribution of subordinate in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, gender, caste, age and office or in other way" (216).

There has been a wide and pervasive influence on Subaltern Studies historians that come from the theoretical approaches like deconstruction, feminism which write

against the grain. State center historical research came under erasure and the history from the below became flourished. The major contribution to study unheard voices of history is regarded as E.P. Thompson's book *The Making of Working Class* in 1963. As the same time women's history in US became apt subject for research. In 1982 Eric Wolf contributed to this awakening with her seminal book *Europe and the People without History*, which is regarded as the first ever history from the below.

Consequently, from all these influences, intellectuals in India started new school in 1982 with the establishment of Subaltern Studies Group. Sanjay Joshi writes "Subaltern Studies started as a group of historians led by Ranjit Guha, who shared certain dissatisfaction with existing historiography of South Asia" (1273). The group formed by Ranjit Guha and initially including Sahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chaterjee, David Hardiman and Gyan Pandey has produced twelve volumes of Subaltern Studies essays relating to the history, politics, economics and sociology of Subalternity as well as attitudes, ideologies and beliefs system. "In a multivolume of collected essays entitled Subaltern Studies," in Reading Subaltern Studies David Ludden says, "these historians have consistently attempted to recover a history of Subaltern Agency and resistance from the perspective of the people rather than that of the state" (49). In this sense, subaltern study has become a global concern. It has gone as Dipesh Chakrobarty Says "beyond or India or South Asia as an area of Academic specialization" (9).

In the same manner, Subaltern Studies attempted to establish the subaltern as an autonomous realm. At the same time, Post structuralism and Post modernism had great impact on the academic world and Cultural Studies was becoming more influential in all domains. This academic milieu paved a new path for Subaltern Studies. Along with the population of *Subaltern Studies IV* that included the writing

of Gayatri Spivak brought a feministic bend in Subaltern Studies. With her essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" she raises the feminist issues slowly and gradually, Subaltern Studies was moving towards representation, critical theory, cultural studies from subaltern politics.

Spivak, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, says: "The Subaltern Studies Collective generally perceive their task as making as theory of consciousness or culture rather than specially a theory of change" (330). It was the first major shift that emerged in the history of Subaltern Studies. Meanwhile, socialist, communist, and Marxist systems were deteriorating throughout the world. And, the academic world was moving towards post-Marxist studies. In such a context, postcolonial studies remained the only domain which could provide a platform to the third world voices.

In such critical moments, Edward Said, in his foreword to selected Subaltern Studies (1988), writes that Subaltern Studies consisted of the pieces of post-colonial historians. Moreover, he also pointed out the need to include the texts of the writers like Salman Rushdie and Marquez in Subaltern Studies. Spivak repeated her previous claim that Subaltern Studies is a theory of subaltern consciousness or cultural study of the subaltern people rather than a theory of change in her introduction to the same Subaltern Studies. She focused on colonial subject as the major concern of theorization. Now it somehow drifted towards representation from subaltern politics from Gramsci to Derrida and Foucault. "Post-colonial cultural criticism and literary theory", in David Ludden words, "had embraced subaltern studies" (18).

Generally, it is believed that subaltern theory is associated with post colonialism, particularly with Indian historiography. It is obvious too as subaltern theory came into lime light in 1982 when Indian historians established Subaltern Studies group with an aim of writing the historiography of the people ignored by

colonialist as well as bourgeois nationalist historiography. They intervene in those ideological discourses of traditional historiography that attempts to give a hegemonic "normality" to uneven development and the differential often disadvantages histories of races, communities and peoples. They formulate their critics' revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination. In short, they resist the attempts at holistic forms of social explanation. These historians have repeatedly intended to recover subaltern agency and resistance from the point of view of people rather the state.

However, it does not mean subaltern theory is only the property of south Asian historiography. There are marginalized people in every society who are deprived of power and agency, and are always under the domination of elitist whether it is under developed colonized country or highly developed western capitalist countries. For that reason, subaltern theory is applicable to any society to study the unheard voices because it unravels hitherto silenced voices of margins.

Subaltern are the people of inferior rank who are always subject for the domination by elites. Subaltern class may include the peasants, workers, woman, indigenous, marginalized, black, foreigner, and other group who are subject to the hegemony of ruling class.

Different critics have analyzed the novel from the multiple perspectives which preserves the universal nature of novel. Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* has received several critical appraisals since the time of publication. Joanna Trollope says about the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*: "A wonderfully written debut that rather scants its subject of loss and discovery a young girl searching for the truth about her dead mother in favor of a feminist fable celebrating the company of women and the ties between that mothers and daughters." (4)

The novel *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd is her debut novel. It narrates the story of a young girl who searches truth about the death of her mother. It is regarded as a feminist novel. Similarly, Tamara Strauss expresses about the character Lily:

There are moments of real beauty, such as when Lily contemplates life on the banks of a river, following the drowning death of one of the principal characters. As is typical in a coming-of-age story, the initial purpose of Lily's quest, to find the truth about her parents, eventually becomes secondary to her own personal mission of gaining maturity and the ability to live life on her own terms. There is something in Lily's voice, a fierceness in her character and in her willingness to speak the truth, whatever she might perceive it to be, that is refreshing and original. (7)

The main aim of Lily is to find the truth about the death of her mother which becomes secondary as the story progresses. It becomes her secondary purpose. She has an ability to speak truth. Carl Reiner reveals about the role of Rosaleen in the novel:

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily Owens, in the midst of the Deep South's Civil Rights revolt. The memory of her mother's death, which she witnessed, is indelibly printed in her mind. She receives much needed comfort from her warm and protective black nanny, Rosaleen. But, after Rosaleen registers to vote, and sets off to exercise her franchise for the first time, she is waylaid by some of the racist townfolk, and is subsequently imprisoned for assault. Then she busts Rosaleen out of prison. (7)

The murder of Lily's mother Deborah was printed in Lily's mind. The black woman Rosaleen took her care after her mother's death but Rosaleen was misbehaved when she voted in election and was sent to prison by the whites. Tishani Doshi reveals about the symbolic value of bees in the novel:

Lily has a fascination with bees. In her childhood she would imagine them swarming into her room and filling the place with the whirring of their wings. On the road with Rosaleen, they find another house of bees, or, more accurately, a house of bee-keepers: three black women who are largely shunned by the racist white town, and who live, and worship, in highly unconventional ways. (3)

The readers find the symbol of bees in the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. The female character Lily used to imagine about the bees swarming into her room. She finds a house of beekeepers while passing through the road. The bees serve as Lily's unspoken guides in the novel. They suggest about rebirth, exploration, sexual maturation and personal growth. Nina, Auerbach expresses about the relationship between Lily and Rosaleen:

Kidd's use of black characters, literature, and culture... amount to cultural theft. Lily Owens a 14 year-old girl who is haunted by the memory of her late mother. To escape her lonely life and troubled relationship with her father, Lily flees with Rosaleen, her caregiver and only friend, to a South Carolina town that holds the secret to her mother's past. Taken in by the intelligent and independent Boatwright sisters, Lily finds solace in their mesmerizing world of beekeeping, honey and the Black Madonna. (5)

The nature of prejudice is thoroughly discussed throughout Lily's story. It's important to understand that she grew up in the South, where races were separated by both law and attitudes. The hospital has a separate wing for African Americans, and Christian churches are separated, too. Blacks are not allowed to vote, and are kept from doing so even after a law is passed to specifically allow it. The police routinely allow black citizens, like Rosaleen, to be beaten by their white neighbors. Even Lily understands and believes that African Americans are neither beautiful nor intelligent. Lily has been brought up to believe blacks are second-class citizens, and the world is logically structured this way.

The Secret Life of Bees portrays the life of a young, native protagonist who begins her journey to selfhood in the company of black caregiver. Catherine B, Emanuel writes:

The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd centers on Lily's search for a connection to her mother who died in a tragic accident when she was a toddler. Taking place in South Carolina in the 1960s, *The Secret Life of Bees* explores race, love and the idea of home in turbulent times. It is a lovingly written drama that keeps the pages turning. I highly recommend *The Secret Life of Bees*, especially to women and women's book clubs. (21)

Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the story of a motherless fourteen-year-old, raised by a cruel father, who desperately searches for clues to unlock her mother's past knowledge that she believes will help create her own identity. In this novel Kidd shows the situation of women in patriarchal society. Kidd's fiction mostly portrays the physical and psychological violence in relation between men and

women. This novel portrays the realistic pictures of women and their subordinate experiences and sufferings in patriarchal society.

All the critics praise for his attempt to depict the true picture of racism. Thus, different critics have interpreted the novel from different perspectives as mentioned above but the issue of subaltern has not been explored in the text. Moreover, not a single research has been done in this department on Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*. Thus, the topic is new one and remains unfulfilled by the previous critics and researchers.

The thesis has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter is introduction in nature which deals with the novelist and the issues of gendered subaltern. Similarly, the second chapter deals with theoretical methodology of subaltern and textual analysis. Finally, the third chapter presents a brief conclusion of the whole thesis.

II. Representation of Subaltern Voice in Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*

Lily has grown up believing that she accidentally killed her mother when she was just four years old. At present, she longs for forgiveness and a mother's love. She lives on a peach farm in South Carolina with her harsh father. She has only one friend, Rosaleen, a black servant.

When racial tension explodes one summer afternoon, and Rosaleen is arrested and beaten, Lily is compelled to act. Fugitives from justice, the pair follow a trail left by the woman who died ten years before. Finding sanctuary in the home of three beekeeping sisters, Lily starts a journey as much about her understanding of the world, as about the mystery surrounding her mother.

Etymologically, subaltern means a person in lower rank or subordinate. It was first used to denote a commissioned officer below the rank of captain in British Military. The term subaltern is used in postcolonial theory. The exact meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usage is disputed. Some thinkers use it in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes- a person rendered without agency by his or her social status. Others, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak use it in a more specific sense. Spivak argues:

Subaltern is not just a classy word for oppressed, for other, for somebody who is not getting a piece of the pie. In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism in subaltern- a space of difference. The working class is oppressed. It is not subaltern group in the real sense of the term. Many people want to claim subalternity. They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They are within the hegemonic discourse wanting

a piece of the pie and not being allowed to use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern. (271)

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

At night I would lie in bed and watch the show, how bees squeezed through the cracks of my bedroom wall and flew circles around the room, making that propeller sound, a high-pitched zzzzzzz that hummed along my skin. I watched their wings shining like bits of chrome in the dark and felt the longing build in my chest. The way those bees flew, not even looking for a flower, just flying for the feel of the wind, split my heart down its seam. (1)

Lily even finds the "secret life of bees" similar to her own life. Their industrious care for their mother, their continuous ability to keep going in work, and their ability to survive inspire Lily. Finally, their reliance on an all-female community resembles her own reliance, and the bees' community helps Lily understand the power of the human community. For these reasons, bees are *the* central motif of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

As a Marxist, Gramsci was very much concerned with the proletarians whose voice remains suppressed in the history. When the history of the state revealed in the state, history being the history of ruling groups, he was interested in the historiography of the subaltern classes. His chief concern was with proletariat whose voice remains unheard in the elite historiography. The hitherto history is realized as the history of state and dominant group, he found an urgent need to write

historiography of subaltern class who are denied access to hegemonic power. He found history of subaltern group is "necessarily fragmented and episodic" because they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups" (214). They have "less access to the means to control their own representations" and "less access to cultural and social institutions" (214). Gramsci account of the subaltern has been further developed by a group of historian known as Subaltern Studies collective. Extending the terms of Gramsci's original definition these historians define subaltern as "the general attribution of subordinate in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, gender, caste, age and office or in other way" (216). Lily says about the death of her mother:

My mother died when I was four years old. It was a fact of life, but if I brought it up, people would suddenly get interested in their hangnails and cuticles, or else distant places in the sky, and seem not to hear me. Once in a while, though, some caring soul would say, 'Just put it out of your head, Lily. It was an accident. You didn't mean to do it.'(3)

Lily recalls her very last memory of her mother, Deborah, who died when Lily was a small child. Lily thinks that she played a horrible part in Deborah's death. In a flashback, readers learn that T. Ray told Lily that she accidentally shot Deborah while Deborah and T. Ray were fighting one day. Lily reveals about her mother:

My first and only memory of my mother was the day she died. I tried for a long time to conjure up an image of her before that, just a sliver of something, like her -tucking me into bed, reading the adventures of Uncle Wiggly, or hanging my underclothes near the space heater on ice-cold mornings. Even her picking a switch off the forsythia bush and stinging my legs would have been welcome. (6)

The narrator Lily remembered her mother Deborah who was killed when she was only four years old. Lily's mother, Deborah was shot accidentally by four-year-old Lily. At the time, she had already left Lily and T. Ray and gone to stay with her old housekeeper, August Boatwright, in Tiburon. Deborah was an attractive and lively woman who became depressed living in Sylvan and had trouble acting as a responsible mother. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues:

Subaltern is not just a classy word for oppressed, for other, for somebody who is not getting a piece of the pie. In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern- a space of difference. The working class is oppressed. It is not subaltern group in the real sense of the term. Many people want to claim subalternity. They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. (271)

Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' in a specific way. This term refers to the exploitation and oppression of vulnerable groups of people. But the notion of exploitation differs from the Marxist notion of exploitation. It is simply unheard voice. If a person's voice is not heard, it is subaltern situation. A person without lines of social mobility is subaltern figure. The novel *The Secret Life of Bees* reads about the segregation:

All people ever talked about after church were the Negroes and whether they'd get their civil rights. Who was winning -white people's team or the colored people's team? When that minister from Alabama, Reverend Martin Luther King/got arrested last month in Florida for wanting to eat in a restaurant, the men at church acted like the white people's team had won the pennant race. I knew they would not take this news lying down, not in one million years. (26)

There was the discrimination between the whites and the blacks. The Negroes were suppressed by the whites. People talked about Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. who was assassinated for starting civil rights movement. Lily reveals about prison:

The only image I had for jails was from westerns at the movies, and this one was nothing like that. For one thing, it was painted pink and had flower-print curtains in the window. It turned out we'd come in through the jailer's living quarters. His wife stepped in from the kitchen, greasing a muffin tin. (45)

The protagonist Lily revealed that she had known about the prisons from the western movies but the real prison was different. It had flower print curtains. She went into the prison through the jailer's quarter. The jailer's wife was in kitchen.

"In a multivolume of collected essay entitled *Subaltern Studies*," in *Reading Subaltern Studies*, David Ludden says:

These historians have consistently attempted to recover a history of Subaltern Agency and resistance from the perspective of the people rather than that of the state. In this sense, subaltern study has become a global concern. It has gone as Dipesh Chakrobarty Says "beyond or India or South Asia as an area of Academic specialization. (49)

In the same manner, *Subaltern Studies* attempted to establish the subaltern as an autonomous realm. At the same time, Post structuralism and Post modernism had great impact on the academic world and Cultural Studies was becoming more influential in all domains. Lily tells about Virgin Mary:

'The Virgin Mary,' I said.

And I could tell it was having an effect on her by the way she' kept gazing at it with her mouth parted. I could read her thought: *If Jesus'*

mother is black, how come we only know about the white Mary? This would be like women finding out Jesus had had a twin sister who'd gotten half God's genes but none of the glory.(65)

Mary symbolizes the importance of having faith and believing in something larger than one's self. The black Mary statue also reinforces the importance of storytelling: before meeting August, Lily learned stories from books. But August tells stories, including stories about the origin of the black Mary, to teach Lily important lessons about life. The female character Lily tells about her mother:

She loved her dolls. She would hold little tea parties for them in the garden, and I would make these teeny-tiny sandwiches for their plates.' She paused, like she was remembering. 'What she didn't like was schoolwork. I had to stay after her all the time about it. Chase her around calling out spelling words. One time she climbed a tree, hiding up there so she wouldn't have to memorize a poem by Robert Frost. I found her and climbed up there with the book and wouldn't let her come down till she could say the whole thing by heart.' Closing my eyes, I saw my mother perched beside August on a tree limb going through each line of 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,' which I myself had had to learn for English. I let my head drop, closed my eyes. (294)

Lily longs for her mother and cherishes the few possessions Deborah left behind. She demonstrates an awareness of her femininity and laments that she has missed out on certain female lessons because her mother is dead. Lily struggles to forgive her mother for being a flawed and complicated person. Deborah died when Lily was too

young to have formed many memories of her, and thus the photograph stands as Lily's only access to the woman she will never know.

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

I reached out and traced black Mary's heart with my finger. I stood with the petals on my toes and pressed my palm flat and hard against her heart. I live in a hive of darkness, and you are my mother, I told her. You are the mother of thousands.(204)

Lily remembers Jesus's mother Virgin Mary who gave birth to the messenger of god Jesus. She is regarded as the mother of thousands of people. The black Mary serves several functions in the novel. As the picture, it symbolizes mothers and mother surrogates. Lily carries around a wooden picture of the black Mary, which she found among some objects that once belonged to her mother. This picture literally symbolizes Deborah to Lily, and eventually the picture leads Lily to August, a black woman who will become a surrogate mother. The narrator of the novel remembers her mother Deborah:

I was living here as if I had nothing to hide? I lay on the cot and stared at the glaring square of window, exhausted. It takes so much energy to keep things at bay. *Let me on*, my mother was saying. *Let me on the damn elevator*. I pulled out my bag and examined my mother's picture. I wondered what it had been like to be inside her, just a curl of flesh swimming in her darkness, the quiet things that had passed between us.

(212)

Lily was isolated due to the death of her mother. She wanted to forget about the death of her mother but it was very difficult for her to forget that. She saw the photo of her mother and remembered what she had told to her. Photographs symbolize the power of relationships in *The Secret Life of Bees*. Lily only has one photograph of her mother, but when she looks at this photograph she sees her mother's lost potential and her own possible potential, which may or may not be fulfilled over the course of her life. Lily assumes that she will inherit the beauty of her mother. And when she looks at the future, she also sees her beautiful future. The novel describes describes about the suicide of May:

August knelt down in the water and shoved the stone off May's chest. Grabbing May by the shoulders, she pulled her up. Her body made an awful sucking sound as it broke the surface. Her head rolled back, and I saw that her mouth was partially open and her teeth were rimmed with mud. Kiver reeds clung to her hair braids. I looked away. I knew then. *May was dead*. (240)

May is a middle-aged black woman who welcomes Lily into her home. She lives in a pink house in Tiburon, South Carolina. the sister of August and June Boatwright. She had a twin sister, April, who committed suicide when she was 15, and as a result of

April's death she is emotionally sensitive. May eventually commits suicide by drowning in river.

The subaltern is a person or a group of people that have been excluded from society. They do not have a voice, and are lost in the world due to assimilation and colonialism. In other words, "Subaltern" is a term applied to those who exist at the bottom of a hierarchical power system without any means of improving their social condition. In Islamic countries, this often relates to members of the lower economic classes, social castes, and peasantry as these are often the marginal, illiterate, and dispossessed, though social expectations of women allows for the presence of subaltern peasants in all classes. Theorists of subaltern studies have also noted that gendered subalternity is particularly complex, as often, the restraints of gender transcend calls, allowing for subalternity to be free from pure association with socioeconomics. Since this trend in Indian historical and social studies has been so influential, modern Indian literary, dramatic and cinematic texts have reflected a strong interest in the suffering of the subaltern classes. The present novel also strongly raises the voice for the subaltern women to come forward because they are the subaltern of the subaltern.

August went on talking while I leaned back into the familiar story I'd always told myself, the one about my mother loving me beyond reason. I'd lived inside it the way a goldfish lives in its bowl, as if that was the only world there was. Leaving it would be the death of me.

(309)

Everyone, regardless of circumstance or color, needs a mother. As Lily discovers, a person does not need to share a biological connection with a mother figure. Ever since her mother died, she has longed for a maternal touch. The novel narrates about Lily:

I closed the book. I wanted the words to flow off me, but they had stuck. My mother was William Blake's rose. I wanted nothing so much as to tell her how sorry I was for being one of the invisible worms that flew in the night. I placed the book on the bed with the other things, then turned back to August, while she reached down into the box again, causing the tissue paper to whisper. 'One last thing,' she said, and she drew out a small oval picture frame of tarnished silver. (341)

Lily loves to read, and she recognizes the importance of storytelling as a way to escape or transcend one's circumstances. She rightly recognizes that books allow readers to escape into a fantasy world, and she makes up stories about why she and Rosaleen have come to Tiburon. August tells Lily stories to help her learn to love and trust. Through books and stories, Lily sees the possibilities for her own life. She says:

The bee jar sat on the bedside table, empty now. Sometime since this morning the bees had finally gotten around to flying off. I reached over and took the jar in my hands. I heard a voice say, "Lily Melissa Owens, your jar is open." In a matter of second, I knew exactly what I had to do . . . leave. I had to get away from T Ray. (17)

Lily as started disobeying and breaking patriarchal norms and values prevailing in patriarchal society, disobeying her parent Lily leaves him and goes to Tiburon, South Carolina. She goes against the patriarchal norms and values. The narrator says about herself:

I had thought my real chance would come from going to charm school at the Women's Club last spring, Friday afternoons for six weeks, but I got barred because I didn't have a mother, a grandmother, or even a measly aunt to present me with a white rose at the closing ceremony.

Rosaleen doing it was against the rules. I'd cried till I threw up in the sink. (19)

The submissive nature of Lily also shows manipulation of males over her body. Lily is unknown about the politics of domination thus, she wishes male counter to hold and kiss her. The double exploitation of the subaltern is also suggested by Lily's frightened status and politics of exploitation in the name of protection. In this regard, the main characters Lily, August, Rosaleen, and June are the suppressed women in the patriarchal community. They are engaged in the struggle against the patriarchal society for their identity and autonomy. In this novel, Lily is discriminated due to gender difference. This somehow confirms that males should help women. The women are thus, confined as a subaltern who seeks protection from males as well as help in some other form. In the same manner, Lily also submits herself with a man. She seeks protection from the males which also significantly defines Lily as a subaltern object.

According to Ranajit Guha:

The domain of subaltern politics was the long existing parallel of the domain of elite politics. The domain of subaltern politics had a long history which could be traced back to pre-colonial period, and unlike the traditional elite politics, which had been destroyed by the invasion of the colonial rule, the domain of subaltern politics had survived different regimes and the British Raj. (23)

Since Indian nationalism is dominated by colonialist and national bourgeois elitism, post independence historiography puts emphasis on the celebration of independence and the heroism of elite leaders. Partition struggle in nationalist historiography has

been termed as nonsense communal slaughter motivated by riots and encouraged by English rulers. Lily imagines:

I stayed on and stared at the sky and thought about the dream I had. I knew one day I would go back into the parlor when no one was around and touch the Lady's heart. Then I would show August the picture of my mother and see if the moon broke loose and fell out of the sky.

(142)

Lily wanted to imagine that she wanted to be free like a moon. She longed to go to the parlor. She wanted to show the picture of her mother Deborah to her lover August. The narrator Lily expresses her tension:

Next to Shakespeare I love Thoreau best. Mrs Henry made us read portions of *Walden Pond*, and afterward I'd had fantasies of going to a private garden where T. Ray would never find me. I started appreciating Mother Nature, what she'd done with the world. In my mind she looked like Eleanor Roosevelt. (71)

Lily loves to read, and she recognizes the importance of storytelling as a way to escape or transcend one's circumstances. Lily recalls books that have meant something to her during times of stress. She compares herself to Thoreau's experiences at Walden Pond on her way to Tiburon. She recognizes that books allow readers to escape into a fantasy world, and she makes up stories about why she and Rosaleen have come to Tiburon. The novel *The Secret Life of Bees* describes about the death of Lily's mother Deborah:

Your sorry mother ran off and left you. The day she died, she'd come back to get her things, that's all. God and Jesus, you make him take it back. The memory settled over me. The suitcase on the floor. The way

they'd fought. My shoulders began to shake in a strange, uncontrollable way. I held the jar pressed between my breasts, hoping it would steady me, but I couldn't stop shaking, couldn't stop crying, and it frightened me, as though I'd been struck by a car I hadn't seen coming and was lying on the side of the road, trying to understand what had happened. (50)

The lack of mothers, the search for mothers, and the importance of mothers appear throughout the novel. It demonstrates the significance of mothers to adequate human development. Everyone needs a mother. A person does not need to share a biological connection with a mother figure. Ever since her mother died, she has longed for a maternal touch. When her mother died, Lily must realize that she is loved by this Great Universal Mother.

Subaltern studies come as a social theory to speak against colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. The focus of Subaltern Studies is on the consciousness of the subaltern classes. Gayatri cites about subaltern consciousness and the colonial subject as the basis of theorization. She perceives there as making “a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specially a theory of change” (4). Postcolonial Cultural Criticism and literary theory has embraced subaltern studies endeavor in deconstructing historiography, Spivak writes:

Subaltern consciousness is subject to the elite. It is never fully recoverable that it is always asked from its recovered signifiers. It is disclosed that it is irreducibly discursive. Negative Consciousness is conceived of having historical stage peculiar to subaltern rather than grounding positive view of consciousness. It should not be generalized as the group's methodological presupposition. (339)

Negative consciousness, for instance, sees it as the consciousness not of being subalterns but that of the oppressors. Subaltern provides “the model for a general theory of consciousness. Subaltern consciousness is unavoidably a past phenomenological and not psychological issue”(85). Some elitist objectify the subaltern and are caught in the game of knowledge as power. So, subaltern studies seem to suggest that its own subalternity in claiming a positive subject position for the subaltern might be re-inscribed as a strategy for time. Dipesh Chakravarty, in his seminal essay, “Invitation to a Dialogue” points out about subaltern consciousness as “the peasant consciousness”(72).

Similarly, in this novel, all the female characters such as Lily, August, Rosaleen, June and May are regarded as weaker or second sex. But they resist against male dominated society. At the same time, August resists against patriarchal norms and values. August says:

I decided against marrying altogether. There were enough restrictions in my life without someone. Expecting one to wait on him hand and of foot. Not that I'm against marrying Lily. I'm just against how its set up. Nobody should go through life without falling in love. I just loved my freedom more. (57)

The above lines clear that how August resists against patriarchal norms and values because she is victimized as subaltern. August teaches Lily a great about growing and making choices, and these are lessons she did not learn from T. Ray. August discusses choices and the idea that people's lives dependent on the choices they make. The idea that a women would decide to be her own and not marry is a revelation to Lily. But, as August explains, women had few opportunities.

August is lucky enough to own land and thriving business, so if she marries, she would restrict her freedom to choose. Lily leaves her father and lives with female company. She rebels against patriarchal norms and values to show that she too exists and she too have identity. She too has her own feelings, desires, and longing but her father always restricts her feelings and desires. So she decides to leave him and try to create her own identity and autonomy. She says:

T. Ray had slopped me lots of times. This time he'd hit me full force. He was shouting. "How dare you leave me? You need a lesson, is what you need!" "Get up!" He yelled. "I'm taking you home we're going home," he said. I didn't answer him, but walked over to Our Lady where she lay on the floor and lifted her upright. I touched my cheek. It was swelling where he'd hit me. I'm staying here, I said. I said I'm not leaving." He looked once at me, then let his had drop to his side, Good riddance." he said and moved toward the door. (115)

T. Ray shows up at the Boatwright house, having traced Lily's calls from the lawyer's office. He and Lily have a terrible argument, and T. Ray hits and flicks her. But Lily is able to call him "Daddy" and get him to realize she is not her mother. His pride was wondered when Deborah left and he has taken his anger out on Lily ever since. In this way, Lily resists against traditional norms and values and fought for her own identity and gender equality, she cross the limitation created by the males in the society for her own identity. She longed for her freedom through the great emancipation. She makes a decision to leave T. Ray her father and decided to live Tiburon with calendar sisters.

She was always opposed and victimized physically and mentally by her father where she did not get her identity. She has no agency in her family. So, she decided to leave T. Ray and live with Boatwright sisters for her identity and individuality.

Though her father comes to visit for reconciliation but Lily does not go with him. So, Lily lives a rebellious life against the patriarchal rules. In patriarchal society, a woman is not allowed to leave home but Lily is against the traditional norms and values. In this way, she resists against the traditional norms and values.

About the subaltern, Ranjit Guha writes “Subaltern” is “a name for the general attribute of subordinate, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any way” (27). Explaining the aim of Subaltern Studies, Guha writes, “The aim of subaltern studies is to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian Studies” (48).

Kerry says about the murder of Deborah:

One hot summer afternoon, Lily’s mother and father begin screaming at each other. Lily’s mother is shot and killed, and Lily is left with a harsh, neglectful father. Her only companion is her caretaker, Rosaleen, a fierce-hearted black woman who cooks, cleans, and acts as a stand-in mother. The story is set during the year of the Civil Rights Act, 1964, in South Carolina. Lily decides she is tired of living with her father, and with Rosaleen, she flees to Tiburon, South Carolina, a small town that holds. (28)

It is the horrible and terrible accident of Lily’s life in which unforgettable and painful events always give psychological torture to her. She is always haunted by this past accident. She wakes up screaming every night and she always dreams same thing. Where, she is in the middle of a lake in a fierce storm and a man and a woman were forcing her head under the icy waters, drowning her. She awakens each time panicky, gasping for breath, soak with perspiration. She has no idea who she is and she has no memory of the past.

Subaltern Studies come as a social theory to speak against colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. The focus of Subaltern Studies is on the consciousness of the subaltern classes. Postcolonial Cultural Criticism and literary theory has embraced subaltern studies endeavor in deconstructing historiography. Subaltern studies seem to suggest that its own subalternity in claiming a positive subject position for the subaltern might be re-inscribed as a strategy for time. Dipesh Chakravarty, in his seminal essay, "Invitation to a Dialogue" points out about subaltern consciousness as "the peasant consciousness" (72). This research is mainly concerned with the subaltern:

She was black as could be, twisted like driftwood from being out in the weather, her face a map of all the storms and journeys she'd been through. Her right arm was raised as if she was pointing the way, except her fingers were closed in a fist. It gave her a serious look, like she could straighten you out if necessary.(98)

Lily describes the black Mary statue. Lily has just spotted it in the Boatwright house. She has yet to learn of its significance, to experience its important role in the lives of the Daughters of Mary, and to understand its place in the family history of the Boatwright sisters. Rather, Lily simply yet viscerally reacts to the statue's material, color, and gesture. Immediately she feels that the statue is able to see deep into her true self. She believes that the statue is aware that she is lying to August and June about where she has come from and why she has come to Tiburon. Although she fears the statue, Lily also connects with Our Lady of Chains and realizes that it has special powers.

Zach and August help Lily understand the power of choice. Zach has decided to become a lawyer, and August chose to become a beekeeper. Both characters

believe in themselves and in their ability to transcend the roles American society has chosen from them. Rather than simply accept their fates, Zach and August decided to work toward achieving their dreams. During their conversation, Lily does not mean to discourage or disparage Zach. She merely expresses the fact that she has never heard of an African American becoming a lawyer, much the same as she had never heard of an African American woman running a honey farm before meeting August. Zach feels empowered by his imagination: the mere act of picturing himself as a lawyer encourages this young man to work to make the image a reality. Lily will eventually discover that, through her writing, she will be able to empower the characters she writes about and engage social dilemmas that she finds restrictive. In her stories, she will depict Zach as a lawyer and Rosaleen triumphantly confronting her racist foes. The novelist says: "I've just never heard of a Negro lawyer, that's all. You've got to hear of these things before you can imagine them. Bullshit. You gotta imagine what's never been" (143).

The conversation, between Lily and Zach encapsulates Lily's limited understanding of how people may transcend social roles. At this stage, Lily has really known about Rosaleen who is black. Lily still sees Rosaleen as a woman who fits into the stereotypical role of a southern and uneducated housekeeper. Lily believes that people have set roles, which they cannot transcend: black women work as housekeepers, black men do not become lawyers, and poor white women like Lily go to beauty school. The novel says about caste:

Becca and I watch for Zach in the lunchroom and sit with him every chance we get. We have reputations as 'nigger lovers,' which is how it is put to us, and when the ignora-muses ball up their notebook paper and throw it at Zach in the hallway, which seems to be a favorite

pastime between classes, Becca and I are just as likely to get popped in the head as he is. Zach says we should walk on the other side of the hall from him. We say, 'Balled-up notebook paper - big deal.' (372)

The novel *The Secret Life of Bees* demonstrates the irrationality of racism. It portrays black and white characters with dignity and humanity. The novel demonstrates how Blacks like Zach and Becca struggle with and ultimately overcomes their own racism. The novelist Kidd moves beyond stereotypes to portray whites and blacks with the multifaceted personalities that is found in real life.

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

Lily is a white girl living with black women, a runaway, and a criminal of sorts, means her life with August must remain a secret just like the secret life of the bees that goes on inside the hive. In this way, the motherhood Lily believes Mary offers her is parallel to the support and love she gets from August and her community of women, a support that is secret to the world but that nourishes her and keeps her alive. The secret life that bees have is similar to the secret life of Lily Owens. Lily learns about the bees' secrets from August, while we learn about Lily's secrets from her first-person narration. Just as the bees produce the sweet honey that August is so

attached to, Lily creates a bittersweet coming-of-age story about a young girl who finds strength, love, and family in unlikely circumstances. The novel reads “Most people don’t have any idea about all the complicated life going on inside a hive. Bees have a secret life we don’t know anything about” (148).

As she explains the nature of spirituality as it relates to beehives, August speaks these words to Lily. August has taught Lily all about the communities bees keep inside their hives. Amongst other things, Lily has learned of the importance of the female power structure in the bee community: how the queen bee is doted on by a whole team of companions, how she lays the eggs that become every single other bee in the hive, and how this queen bee is the mother of thousands. For Lily, who has lost her mother, this sounds incredibly wonderful. She relates it almost immediately to stories from the Bible, and Lily begins to think of the bees as part God and part Mary, whom August also explains as a spiritual essence that is present everywhere, in everything. Taking these two ideas together, Lily decides that the mother Mary is the mother of thousands, and also in many ways her mother as well.

This complicated relationship to love leaves her without a clear idea of whether love can be a positive force in life at all, and she reaches the extreme, negatively charged opinion that the fiery passion of love destroys the world. Later in the novel, when Lily learns that love is not only about rejection and longing, her opinion of love softens a great deal, although she never recants on these poignant, passionate words. Lily expresses about her anger: "I can tell you this much: the world is a great big log thrown on the fires of love" (149).

Lily comes to this conclusion after she has her first semisexual interaction with Zach and has witnessed Neil and June have a fight. In these two very intense moments, she comes face to face with love and learns that it not only brings people

together but also sometimes drives people apart. Just moments before this quotation, Lily was driving with Zach when she realized, definitively, that she loved him. Then, in the field, she licked honey off of his hand. These two experiences, involving emotional outbursts and physical interaction, only serve to confuse her as to the point of love in life. Lily does not have much experience with the positive effects of love. Her father, whom she loves, never shows any affection for her, and she has reason to believe that her mother, whom she so desperately wants to have loved her, abandoned her before Lily accidentally killed her.

There has been a wide and pervasive influence on Subaltern Studies historians that come from the theoretical approaches like deconstruction, feminism which write against the grain. State center historical research came under erasure and the history from the below became flourished. The major contribution to study unheard voices of history is regarded as E.P. Thompson's book *The Making of Working Class* in 1963. As the same time women's history in US became apt subject for research. In 1982 Eric Wolf contributed to this awakening with her seminal book *Europe and the People without History*, which is regarded as the first ever history. The novel describes about the isolation of Lily:

In the photograph by my bed my mother is perpetually smiling on me. I guess I have forgiven us both, although sometimes in the night my dreams will take me back to the sadness, and I have to wake up and forgive us again. I sit in my new room and write everything down. My heart never stops talking. I am the wall keeper now. (373)

Lily only has photograph of her mother. When she looks at the photograph she sees her mother's lost potential and her own possible potential, which may or may not be fulfilled over the course of her life. Lily assumes that she will inherit the beauty of her

mother. And when she looks at the future, she also sees her beautiful future. She handles the photograph carefully. It represents the hope and desire that she might someday find and feel maternal love. The novel tells about the love affair between Lily and Zach:

I looked one last time at the highway. I remember thinking that he probably loved me in his own smallish way. He had forfeited me over, hadn't he? I still tell myself that when he drove away that day he wasn't saying good riddance; he was saying, Oh, Lily, you're better off there in that house of colored women. You never would've flowered with me like you will with them. (370)

Zach is Lily's best friend and romantic interest. Zach forms an attachment to Lily. He gives her gifts. Their love is typically carefree and easy. They have to think about the prejudices of the larger society.

III. Voicing of Voiceless in Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*

The research contends about the exploitation of the women as the consequence of the patriarchy which in turn is used to dismantle the same patriarchal values and norms. The female protagonist in the novel represents the feminine gender whose identity has been manipulated by the masculine society.

It basically focuses on female character Lily Owens who is prevented from creating her own identity. She has a strong desire to a powerful woman as writer but patriarchy always restricted her creativity. Lily's father T. Ray can be seen as the representative of patriarchy as he is portrayed as an oppressive, violent and superior to the women around him. Lily wants August and all the women in the pink house to love her so she can continue to live in this nurturing utopia. The pink house offers Lily an escape from society. With August's help and the support of her surrogate mothers, Lily is strong enough even to face her father in the novel's climatic ending. Fourteen- year-old Lily has matures emotionally and spiritually and is on course toward self-actualization. By the story's end, Lily has become an official member of the daughters of Mary. For a fourteen-year-old high school student who has learned to forgive her imperfect parents, ignore the expectations of her white majority, and embraces the love of a host of incredible black women, Lily Owens is remarkably self-actualized.

Thus, it focuses on the pathetic conditions of subaltern people and their dedicated effort to overcome the obstacles. The stories explore the sufferings and overcoming of subaltern's lives. Though they are physically, mentally and socially challenged and confined within the boundary of domesticity they become successful to subvert their roles through silence revolution.

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The Secret Life of Bees demonstrates the irrationality of racism. It portrays black and white characters with dignity and humanity. Kidd moves beyond stereotypes to portray whites and blacks with the multifaceted personalities that we find in real life. Lily is not a racist in the same way that the group of men that harass Rosaleen are racist. She assumes that all African Americans are like Rosaleen, an uneducated laborer-turned-housekeeper. Lily imagines that all African Americans are likewise coarse and uneducated. But when Lily encounters unique, educated, thoughtful August Boatwright, she must change her assumptions and combat her prejudice. At first, Lily feels shocked that a black person could be as smart, sensitive, and creative as August. Recognizing and combating her shock allows Lily to realize the truth about the arbitrariness and irrationality of racism. As individuals, humans can display a complex array of personality traits and characteristics, regardless of skin color or ethnicity.

Motherless Lily finds at the Boatwright house several surrogate mothers and learns the power of female community. At the beginning of *The Secret Life of*

Bees, Lily longs for her mother and cherishes the few possessions Deborah left behind. She demonstrates an awareness of her femininity and laments that she has missed out on certain female lessons because her mother is dead. But although Lily lacks a mother, she does have female companionship. Rosaleen has raised Lily, and Lily looks to Rosaleen for love and support. Lily sees how strong women support, tend to, comfort, encourage, and love one another by witnessing the bonds between the Daughters of Mary. Through their examples, and by being included in their group, Lily begins to feel empowered as a woman.

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