
Unheard Voice of Subaltern in Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds*

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Abstract

Subaltern refers to the group that is marginalized from society's established structures. It refers to any person or group of inferior rank or subordinate because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. The Kolhati in Maharashtra was migrated from Rajasthan. The tribe used to earn their livelihood by performing jugglery and acrobatic acts, Women from these communities earn their livelihood by dancing in the stage shows and men enjoy their earning lavishly for that Kolhati community roamed from one place to another. The present paper is an attempt to study unheard voice of subaltern women of Kolhati tribe in Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds* translated by Sandhya Pandey. Kishore Kale's mother was a Tamasha dancer and had to go through several problems at various levels. Through his autobiography Kishore has drawn the picture of the Kolhati community, the sufferings of the women in the hands of their father and society as well. The girls from kolhati are initiated in the progression at a young age. The initiation is conducted by tying of the ghungroo, after this they are not allowed to get married. They are expected to be under the patronage of a woman whom they called Malak. The writer has narrated all the sorrows and sufferings of the Kolhati tribal women that was wondering in the darkness of suppression, exploitation and deprivation. The writer heard the unheard voice of subaltern women of Kolhati tribal women.

Keywords: Subaltern, Marginalization, Kolhati, tribe, Tamasha, double identity, Marxism, newly born women,

Introduction:

The rise of Subaltern consciousness emerged in 19th century .After that it was come out with peasants and tribal challenging the exploitative British regime and movements for socio-religious reforms. The rise of consciousness and clarity about the Subaltern, self-identity occurred vis-à-vis the development of modern socio-cultural, economic and political relations in the society. Subsequently, there was a documentation and crystallization of social categories and sub-categories based on class, caste, religion, gender, language and region. In 1991 economic reforms policy was also a turning point in the identity politics of the Subalterns. During the history of modern India, most of the oppressed and exploited social groups were identified against the background of the means of new socio-economic, as well as, political structures, nation-making and spread of modernistic principles. Subaltern consciousness is also reflected in literary forms. In the academic context, Subaltern Studies made an attempt to foreground social categories that were at the receiving end of a range of power structures at different locations of the Indian subcontinent. Based on Antonio Gramsci's views and opinions, Subaltern Studies offered many interdisciplinary methods to investigate and analyse the consciousness and voices of disagreement of 'Subaltern social categories'. The most visible research on this subject date backs to 1982 with the work of Ranajit Guha and his associates, who were inspired by Gramsci's use of the term 'Subaltern'. Subaltern Studies has been pioneered by historians such as Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee,

Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyanendra Pandey, Gyan Prakash, Susie Tharu, David Hardima, Gautam Bhadra and Sumit Sarkar (who later left the group), to name a few. They have produced a rich and complex body of work that continues to be thought-provoking. Ranajit Guha used the concept of 'Subaltern' for oppressed, excluded and marginalized groups, using newer methods to narrate their 'Subaltern Movements in India: Issues and Challenges'. The Subaltern Studies group adopted E. P. Thompson's framework of 'history from below' and Antonio Gramsci's philosophy to create new philosophical understandings, conceptual tools and methodological systems for documenting the socio-economic exploitation of Subaltern group.

"Subaltern refers to the group that is marginalized from society's established structures. It refers to any person or group of inferior rank or subordinate because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. Some thinkers used it in general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes 'person rendered' a person rendered without agency by his or her social status." (Young 2003)

The term adopted by Marxist philosopher and theorist, Antonio Gramsci to refer to these groups in society who are under the hegemony of ruling elite class. Gramsci used the term subaltern to underline an inferior or subordinate place in terms of class, caste, gender and culture. Some scholars are of the opinion that Gramsci used the term synonym for proletariat possibly as a code word in order to get his writings past prison censors while others believe 'his usage to be more nuanced and less clear out Morton, 'The subaltern Genealogy of a concept.' The term Subaltern is being used as a reference to colonized people in the South Asian subcontinent and it now encompasses an area in the study of Culture, History, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology and Literature. All those who were denied access to hegemonic power such as peasants, laborers, workers and such other groups were considered as Subaltern classes.

The present paper examines the autobiography *Against All Odds* by Kishore Shantabai Kale. As Morris said in his book "The subaltern as women cannot be heard or read" (Morris 63)

The objectives of the present paper:

- 1) To study Unheard Voice of Subaltern in *Against All Odds*
- 2) To know the life of Nomads in general and Kolhati tribe in particular through the *Against All Odds*.
- 3) To study power politics in Kolhati tribal community

Hypothesis of the research paper:

The present research paper is hypothesizes that in India Nomadic tribes are subaltern at various levels. Kishore Shantabai Kale is one of the writers who narrate the sad tale of Kolhati women, who was fighting for their rights. *Against All Odds* is about operation, humiliation, depression of Kolhati women. If the readers succeed in understanding the sufferings of the Kolhati women and opposed the system of Kolhati community and educated them, can solved the problem of Kolhati tribe.

Scope and Limitations of research paper:

The aim of present paper is to explore the sufferings of the women in Kolhati community. The present study will inspire to work for the betterment of the tribes .The research has more scope but the study limits itself to analyze the autobiography, *All Against Odds* by Kishore Shantabai Kale.

Kishore Shantabai Kale's autobiography *Against All Odds*:

The present paper attempt to study Kishore Shantabai Kale's autobiography *Against All Odds* focuses on two of the suppressed and deprived communities of India the Nomadic Tribe and the women. *Kolhatyche Por* is written in 1994 by Kishore Shantabai Kale. The book is translated by Sandhya Pandey. Kishore Kale was the illegitimate son of Shantabai who belongs from Kolhati Community. Kolhati is a Nomadic Tribe found in Maharashtra e.g. Dandewale, Kabutari, Khelkar, Dombari, Kolhati, Banseberia etc in Karnataka, They are name by the name Dombari. The Kolhati in Maharashtra was migrated from Rajasthan. The tribe used to earn their livelihood by performing jugglery and acrobatic acts, Women from these communities earn their livelihood by dancing in the stage shows and men enjoy their earning lavishly. Kishore Kale's mother was a Tamasha dancer and had to go through several problems at various levels. Through his autobiography Kishore has drawn the picture of the Kolhati community, the sufferings of the women in the hands of their father and society as well. The girls from Kolhati are initiated in the progression at a young age. The initiation is conducted by tying of the ghungroo, after this they are not allowed to get married. They are expected to be under the percentage of women whom they called Malak (owner)

Against All Odds deals with the contextual framework of male dominated society, politics and women suffering of Kolhati. R. S. Jain observed the attitude of Kolhati community towards women of Kolhati as 'Girls born in Kolhati community were treated as a public property for entertainment and sexual appeasement by the male in society. Their parents looked at them as unfailing source of income (Jain 57). The girls of the community were trained in dance of the community were trained in dance and music and were forced to entertain men to earn money. The male members of Kolhati led a parasitic life'. They made their sisters and daughters dance but their wives were never allowed to do so. The Kolhati community roamed from one place to another. The abducted any young women they liked.

Kishore Kale has depicted the helpless condition of the women in his community. It turns our attention to two major issues considered by Feminism – Virgin Syndrome (the desire of every male to have a virgin wife, though he himself might have lost his virginity) and the motto of French feminists who talk of the newly born women. The writer reveals the harsh realities of Kolhati community. The weaker section of Maharashtra's Kolhati community, despite being the bread winner of the family is still suppressed by male domination and has to pay the price of being born as women. The French feminist writers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixaus talked about 'newly born women' about women celebrating their body about women who have won back their body. In *Against All Odds* the writer presented a section of women who is in awe of their body. Lacan says 'there are one thousand and one pores in female body and from each pore oozes female language.' But the women of Kolhati community are made silent and not permitted to give voice to their sufferings while the men become the male spectator of its women being exploited. Kolhati women have not right on their life. The Kolhati women are like.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shakes be called women. Because she was taken out of man and thus are expected to be submissive to men.' (Genesis 2:23)

Kale has become restless to project socio-economical, cultural and political conditions, their stories and exploitation, harassment and deprivation by their high class masters and their own caste as well. He was surprised to see the parents and the relationships with their daughters. He says what kind of relationship was this. "I wondered? And Why, why did nobody oppose it?"(Kale 64). The women in the text like JiJi, Shanta, Susheela, Rambha and Baby are the most subaltern women.

Shanta is a dominated character narrated in the present work. She is the eldest daughter of Kondiba Kolhati. She was pulled out of school to bringing money. The tale of Shanta is being decided as a Tamasha dancer because of her beauty. Shanta's father laid a plan and instead of Shanta, he managed to marry another daughter of Shalan with the groom who was selected for Shanta by her grandfather Krushna Kolhati. Shanta was beautiful whereas Shalan was dark and plain. Kodiba thought as a dancer, Shalan could never have attracted men and money the way Shanta would. Such type of a selfish purpose of a father in Kolhati community was presented. Finally Shanta, mother of Kishore Kale sent off to Chandrakalabai's Tamasha Party to learn dance. Tamasha is a traditional form of Marathi theatre, often with singing and dancing widely performed by local or travelling a theater groups within the state of Maharashtra.

The writer felt disgraceful and low on the part of male in Kolhati community. He described the pitiable and pathetic conditions of Kolhati female. The autobiography unfolds the darker side of society that has not been known to many. It shows the exploitation and tragic life of subaltern women in Kolhati community. The ceremony 'Chira Utna' makes the reader restless from treatment about the vulnerable condition of women. The men paid Kolhati girl a prefixed price for her virginity to perform the ceremony. Kale writes, "The Kolhati community forces its women to dance to attract male attention. Young teenage virgins are given to men in a ceremony called 'Chira Utna' with all the trappings of a wedding, but none of its sanctity. The man pays a prefixed price for her virginity." (Kale 4-5)

This kind of degeneration where a father whores as his daughter is unbelievable and unacceptable. The children who take birth through such relationship has rejected by the society. If the child is boy; he has to live the life with the stigma of impurity and illegitimacy. On the other hand if the child is a girl; she has the same fate as her mother. *Against All Odds* is about the plight of writer's own life.

Many a times the dancer is persuaded by the chira malik to give up her dancing, only to resume it a couple of years later, having realized the insecurity of being the 'keep' of a landlord. The writer describes on the predicament of Kolhati girls who are coerced, by the male members of their own families, to live as the mistresses of rich, upper caste married men. That is why most Kolhati children bear their mother's name, a fact that proclaims their illegitimacy and which makes them victims of societal mockery. In this community, a 'good' woman is one who selflessly provides for her kinfolk. Kolhati women cannot marry and any 'transgression' of this norm is punishable by the caste panchayat. Kale's mother, Shantabai Kale is 'given' to three affluent men, landlords and moneylenders, in succession. Her first chira malik, a MLA, who abandons her as soon as she becomes pregnant, is the father of the author. As soon as Shanta Kale, the narrator's mother becomes pregnant, Namdeorao Jagtap, abandoned her.

The dominant village people looked her as an object of sexual pleasure. Shanta was harassed by the audience by squeezing her hand and touching her. The subaltern women are frequently molested. Women of Kolhati community faces double exploitation, double inequality and double injustice. There is a double jeopardy. They face degradation and even dehumanization as women and as women of Kolhati community. Gender is at the base of their marginalization and subaltern condition.

To fulfill their sexual desire men went to Kolhati's women and with the power of money they exploit and harass kolhati women. Fulfilling their physical needs rich men abandoned Kolhati women. Namdeorao Jagtap was a politician and on the basis of his wealth forced Shanta's father to shower on him Shanta's virginity. He abandoned her after

conception. She gave birth to Kishore – who was called an illegitimate and a hybrid child. Kishore was oppressed, exploited and maltreated and humiliated by the society. After abandoned by Jagtap Shanta forced to join ‘tamasha’. She met Krushnrao Wadkar a money lender from Prabhani leaving Kishore behind his grandfather Kondiba and his aunt Jiji because of Wadkar’s refusal. The writer learned for his mother’s love throughout his life, it also highlights the dilemma, the pain of women who is standing at crosswords to choose between the child and a miserable life and husband or Kaja, Yejman for support.

Shanta’s marriage was worsened because Wadkar was a money lender and has bad habits of going to Tamasha and gambling. He lost all his wealth in it. He usually beats Shanta and harasses her physically and psychologically.

Like Shantabai, the writer’s aunt Jiji, Baby and Susheela have undergone through the exploitation in the so called male dominated society. Jiji was treated very badly, her father, Kondiba. Jiji had 25 acres of land in her name. She worked in farm but her father always snatched all the earnings from the farm without giving a single rupee to Jiji was paralysed and all family members left her alone in the farmhouse to dies. This is very pitiable and regrettable treatment given to women in Kolhati community. Kishore felt very sorry, sad and observing such a heart breaking and pathetic condition of women, he was haunted with questions like, “Has a women no right to her own life? Is the only aim of air lives to provide a livelihood to air fathers and brothers? Is it sin to be born beautiful women in a Kolhati family?” (Kale 1995)

Shanta’s younger sister too coerced by their father into joining a jalsa party at a very young age and the trajectories of their lives are essentially not very different from that of Shanta. Each of them is sexually exploited by different ‘yezman’ for a couple of years in exchange for regular sums of money given to their father and abandoned when she becomes pregnant.

Kolhati women were subjugated and victimized by their parents well as dominated people of the society. These women never thought of their peaceful and settled life with their husbands. Shanta says, “We have our problems too. Dancers like us are not here ant of choice, but from necessity. We would much rather have husbands and air own homes to live in. But this is the only way our father and brothers and their families can survive. Men like you come to us and persuade us with your charming talk and money to give up dancing, but after a while you tired of us and then we are left to get along as best we can. Like a flower that lost its fragrance, we are thrown out. We lose everything our youth, our families and our dreams.” (Kale 30)

The Kolhati community people not allowed women settled down by marriage because the women were source of income for them. The family members were completely dependent on Kolhati women. Shanta argued with her partner in her painful condition.

You artist ensure that a place and an income to live on before you go off to other women. You begged me to leave the Jalsa party and come and live with you here. I did not change you. You love to taste different flesh every day but I am not that kind of person. You settle me properly and they go where you like. You promised to buy me fields when you brought men were but it is twelve years now and you have still not kept your word. I have lived in this horrible tin shed, worm old and torn sun’s. You have wheedled all my gold jewelry from me and gambled it away. You taken everything and now you want me to go? Where do you think I go? How will I look after my children? Give me an income that will support we and a proper roof owner our heads and you can keep as many women as you like.” (Kale 31)

The argument of Shanta with Wadkar brought in our notice the critical condition of a tamasha dancer in Kolhati community. Shanta is one of the representatives of Kolhati women who faced every kind of challenges.

Conclusion:

Writer Kishore Shantabai Kale had embraced Buddhism five years ago and wanted his community to give up blind faith and superstitions. His efforts have, however, not gone waste. Now, the Kolhati community wants to educate their children, men have taken up jobs and the number of girls joining tamasha as dancers has reduced for example Rajashri Jamakhedakar, Vaishali Nagarkar, Vatsalabai Kale Kesharbai Ghadage etc are women from Kolhati community, now working as professor, engineer, lawyer.

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