

**VOICE OF A VOICELESS SUBALTERN: A CASE STUDY IN
TASLIMA NASRIN'S SELECTED WORKS**

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Abstract

From the time immemorial women had been marginalized by the male patriarchal society and symbolized as 'other'. They can't speak and hence regarded as voiceless. But postmodern period ushered a radical change in the male dominated society through the feminism around the globe. Besides, the new trend of subaltern studies added a new dimension in literature. Taslima Nasrin's works emphasizes these voiceless subaltern giving them voices through their revolutionary frame of mind and hence the voiceless subaltern gets voices.

Keywords: *Subaltern, Voiceless, Hadish, Mullahs, Pirs, Blasphemous, Gender discrimination, Psychoanalysis, Eco-Criticism, Patriarchy, Fatwa.*

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"A little black girl, who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. But the society thwarts her attempt cruelly." (The Bluest Eyes- 137).

Toni Morrison, an African-American novelist sketches the traumatic voiceless subordinate position of a black girl in her novel *The Bluest Eyes*. But these words are seemed to the voice of all the subaltern as well as feminist counterpart of the society who is somehow or the other way regarded as marginalized and symbolizes the 'other'. Yes, in the fragmented postmodern period, obviously these voiceless people are getting back their voices challenging the society, state, nation and outraged communities. In this paper, I will try to elaborate the works of a South Asian Women writer who is voiceless in respect of power structure of the society and breaks the stereotypical silent and mute mindset of the society and later on who announces in an interview that- "I will not be silenced. Everywhere I look, I see women being mistreated and their oppressed justified in the name of religion. Is it not my moral responsibility to protest?" (Outlook 1994, 25).

As a South Asian female writer, she was labeled in South Asia especially in Bangladesh and India as "Female Salman Rushdie" and Bangladeshi feminist "Simon De Beauvoir". As a South Asian women writer she is considered as a symbol of women's right and expression, considered to the world as the mother of Bangladeshi feminism. She is a Bangladeshi physician but afterwards tried her hand in literature and turned to a controversial female writer who transcends the national boundary clearly stating the women's oppression and exploitation, violence against women and socially sanctioned silence of the women. Her writings on religion and pirs of Islam, sexual freedom and her

attacking upon the Islamic creed through her blasphemous comment angered the whole Islamic world and issued 'Fatwa' and death threats to her. Yes she is Taslima Nasrin who according to Talpade achieves a niche for women exploring "the race, class, gender and nation, culture and sexuality and not just in terms of static embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that tie us together –that are fundamentally interwoven into our lives (Talpade-191)." On the other hand, Samsul Alam reflecting upon the works of Taslima Nasrin puts the whole Nasrin affair of South Asia in respect of political and historical context and "Explains Nasrin's writing as a possible 'Gendered Subaltern Narrative' within the context of debate between Islamic fundamentalism and modernity (Alam-430)".

The main issues which are the strikingly prominent in the works of Taslima Nasrin is her depiction of violence, gender discrimination, marginalization and the individual identity through the characters of all her texts. The psychoanalysis studies of Nasrin's characters are most important in respect of gender studies. As Freud in her text *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* gives argument that the notion of penis envy concerns the voiceless or silent proposition of the characters. Freud proposes that organ as the emblem of social power and leadership which a woman lacks. This lacking or 'castration' signifies the lacking of social power and advantages. They are hence voiceless, mute or silent. The eminent postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak and her dictum relevant in respect of the characters of all the female protagonists of all her texts "Subaltern Can't Speak"? The female characters of her novels such as Nila, Ranu, and her own mother are the examples of that kind of victim of patriarchal society who cannot represent themselves or cannot raise their voice against the defective norms of the society and its deep-rooted obsolete mannerism. Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis goes on that phallus is not the physical biological object but the cultural construct where in the cultural hierarchy men acquire in the top of the power structure and women are outside the power structure and hence they are continuous threat of domination. This kind of domination leads them to create a home and space in the male chauvinistic society where they became alienated voiceless characters. Nasrin's works are also the creation of that kind of panted up voice and feelings of her

inner beings.

Though the class system in the society was present from the very beginning of the civilization basing upon the birth, caste, creed and profession, the hierarchy of that system in the postmodern period slightly had been changed in respect of the contemporary context. In the Marxist hegemony we can take two classes –capitalist and proletariat- one is exploiter and other is exploited. In the same way family consists of two poles, male and female and the polarity is maintained by 50/50 sharing of power structure between male and female. But the scenario is totally different and hence needs to apply the word Subaltern. The term 'Subaltern' in the contemporary period emerges as an important discipline and not only confined within a single periphery rather broadens its expansion in every field of study whether it is literature, anthropology, sociology or cultural studies. It was first popularized by Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci and was applied by *Subaltern Studies Collective Writing* in 1982 on South Asian history and society from a subaltern perspective. The term subaltern here in the paper is used as a name to refer in South Asian society in terms of Class, Caste, Age and Gender. The prominent postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's 'Can the subaltern Speak?' adds a new dimension in the postcolonial subaltern studies. In the works of Taslima Nasrin, Subalternism can be applied to refer to the woman counterpart of the society. Her writings are controversial and set new dimensions of womanhood in Bangladeshi literature through the exploitation of female body and resistance towards Islamic fundamentalists. All the works of Taslima Nasrin show the position of women especially subaltern women who cannot represent themselves in the society, in the family or in the familial politics of Bangladesh. As a South Asian nation, Bangladesh is the worst example of less developed country and belongs to Orientals. This orientalism suggests that "East becomes the repository or projection of those aspects of themselves which Westerners do not choose to acknowledge (cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness and so on). At the same time, and paradoxically, the East is seen as a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and seductive" (*Beginning Theory*). Taslima Nasrin as a South Asian writer from Bangladesh emphasizes that kind of cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness, exoticism in the works of her novels through

the explosion of her autobiographical as well the nakedness of religious seamy side and dark aspects of its inhabitants or religious extremists.

In her autobiography *My Girlhood: An Autobiography (Amar Meyebela: Akti Atmajibani)* where she displays the anger, helplessness and rebellion of a girl child through the eyes of Nasrin. The novel is the autobiography of Taslina Nasrin herself. The novel shows her father is a physician and her mother is a housewife, a suppressed embodiment of a woman subaltern in respect of male dominated Bangladeshi family structure whose life is centered on her husband. The mistreating of her mother results a frustrated life of her mother. On the other hand the fact which is most intolerable is her father's extra marital relationship with other beautiful women. Nasrin shows the pathetic sorry and sad figure of her mother who cannot revolt because it would create chaos in family. Here her mother is representation of subaltern who cannot speak in Spivak's theory, or cannot raise voice against her husband.

In her another fiction *Lajja (Shame)*, Taslima Nasrin questions the androcentric values and assumptions and showed the dictum of Beauvoir, a French feminist that- "One is not born, rather becomes a woman". *Lajja* depicts the Hindu family in Dhaka during the communal violence prevailed after the destruction of the Babri Mosque. The story opens with a Hindu young man Suranjan whose sister was kidnapped by Muslim fundamentalists during the communal violence and Suranjan takes the revenge of his sister by hiring a Muslim Prostitute for physical intercourse with her. Taslima Nasrin in her novel *Lajja (Shame)* sketches the fundamentalism and communalism and found that Hindus were disgraced and humiliated recklessly by the Muslim fanatics and fundamentalists such Mullahs and Pirs of Islam. Nasrin was shattered by the communal violence, fundamentalistic fanaticism and atrocities of the society of Bangladesh and depicted the critical aesthetics of marginality.

All the heroines of the women novelists around the globe want to make a Space for their own but cannot able to make and free themselves from the shackles of patriarchy. Nasrin's heroines are obsessed with the idea of having their own world to create a Space, have freedom and live their lives on their own way. In the novel *Farashi Premik (French Lover)*, the heroine is a lesbian who

hates men and never allowed any man to come close to her who warns Nila against man by saying "You have seen how life is with a man"...Hasn't it taught you a lesson? Nila concludes "All men are the same. They all exploit women (*French Lover*). In postcolonial eco-criticism, critics showed that Nature has been exploited by the modern man to make civilization more advance, sophisticated and progressive. In the same way male counterpart of the society who exploit the female counterpart of the world as like slave, mute or voiceless passive counterpart of the society. The female persons of the society are puppets of the mechanism of patriarchy.

Nasrin's works attack the religion and showed the women are the agents of oppression and the subordination in terms of class, caste, race, gender and culture in terms of the South Asian historiography. Nasrin breaks down the stereotyped gender relations and the sex roles and attacks the male chauvinism in unconventional ways. In her *Nirbachito Kolam*, she shows by giving the vivid description of woman's physical anatomy as a form of breaking the structured silence. Similarly Nasrin's narrations on the issue of incest, Islamic superstitions and taboo subjects of Islamic aggressions of Bangladesh became anti sentiment of Bangladeshi mullahs and fundamentalists. As a result she has been exiled from Bangladesh as her works are considered as provocative, disorienting and defaming the pervasive secular forces in contemporary Bangladesh. In her *Nirbachita Kolam* she exhibits a strong indictment against social manner for women, lecherous Pirs and the holy men of *Hadish* and depicts the subordinate position of women in the society who is helpless and suppressed counterpart of the male dominated society. So Nasrin takes her pen just to portray the Silence condition of the women of South Asia especially Bangladesh and India to break the silence of the Women subaltern and ushered a new direction towards the Bangladeshi Feminism .Nasrin's major theme of her works which is prominently manifested is the gender biasness and she herself is the victim of the patriarchal society where women are the second sex, cannot express their right to freedom on life, right to equality and expression. Her anger is against the men and religious extremists who marked Taslima Nasrin as the symbol of demonic other. The Muslim fundamentalists call him the apostle, the atheist, the westernized, the agent of the Hindus, transgressor

etc. The anger and bitterness is evident in a translated poem named 'Enjoying a Women'-

"What all you'll get
In this beautiful body,
You will also get in a full time wife
In half a dozen office girls and in chief harlots...
And since I know that before you can spit on my body
I spit twice over into aberrant mind." (Das, 1994, 19).

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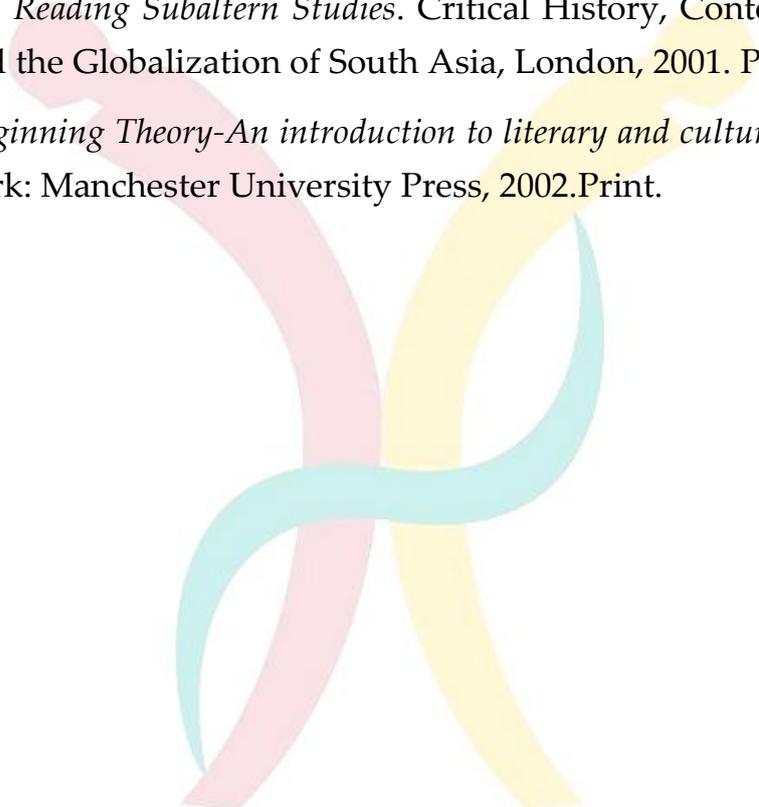
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