



Famininity Of Two Subaltern Women Depicted In Two Different Novels : A Comparative Study

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Abstract

*Cast division in Indian social system was mainly based on karma or work in the post Vedic era. But as the time progresses, the place of work slowly took over by the birth or 'janma'. The four type of casts - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Baisyas and Sudras have been classified by their birth. That means if the father was a Brahmin the son was also regarded as a Brahmin and a Sudra's son was called a Sudra. The Brahmins were considered as upper cast, the Sudras considered as lower class. Interestingly the place of women in the society was gradually declined in post Vedic period. They were very much controlled by the men. They were also treated like the slaves in patriarchal society, specially in upper cast societies. In lower class societies, there were some relaxation for women considering their low economic income. In modern times, the same can be visualized in a marginalized society. To establish our view, we took one Assamese novel *Matsyagandha* of Homen Borgohain and one Bengali novel*

Ganga of Samaresh Basu and analyzed the two main from subaltern class namely Menoka and Himi on the basis of their work and struggle for existence.

Key Words: Subaltern, Brahmin, Sudra, Matsyagandha, Ganga.

Introduction: In talking about Shudra, Psychoanalysis says - "Dasayayeva is the creation of Shudra for the enslavement of Brahmanasya Svambhava" ¹ (8/413), that is, Sudra's creation is to enslave the Brahmin.

From all the verses by Psychoanalysis mentioned in association with ancient Indian nation it is clear from that a large number of the masses were neglected in the society by calling them 'Shudras' with the exception of Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. In the conception of modern lower class, the idea is associated with the division of the political-economic class. During the colonial period, the economic or the class at the center of power were taken as the upper class and the others as the lower classes.

"By upper class I mean to say, those who were in power during the English-ruled India..... In colonial India, those who belong to the upper classes by this definition, if excluded them from the entire population, all the others are the lower classes."²

However, it is very clear that the strategy of out casting is been taken at all times, be it the ancient India or modern. For ages although the terminology of that tactic changed, yet lights never fell on that Pilsujs. Especially when it comes to the decentralization of power, another kind of social inequality arises. That is gender discrimination. Here to maintain the male dominance, men are the upper classes, and women are neglected. Writing about the role of history of the lower classes, Partha Chattopadhyay said: "In a male-

dominated society, all women are, in a sense, lower class."³ But nevertheless, there is a history of struggle for self-esteem of the social lower classes.

This history suggests that over the ages this neglected, exploited class has repeatedly tried to establish itself in various ways. Examples of one subject open up in literature of different ages.

If the context of the self-esteem of the lower class women comes, then the first thing that comes to mind is the context of Satyawati of The Mahabharata. The unique Indian history of how the fisherwoman Satyawati became the empress of India is well known. Even in Bengali literature I see that the social injustice that has come down to the lower classes has made its place in the pages of literature. In the oldest patterns of Charyapada of Bangla, Assamese, Oriya literature there is -

“Dumbi your Kuria is in the city outskirts.”⁴

The litterateurs of this era also could not deny the social neglect that has come down through ages. A living image of social division has sharply emerged in the modern fiction novels. Especially if novels are to be told, we see that in the different languages, the image of social inequality and gender inequality has repeatedly emerged. In the Bangla novels 'Hasulibaker Upakatha', 'Ichhamati' Titash Ekti Nadir Naam', 'Ganga', as well as Assamese novels 'Kapilipariya Sadhu', 'Matsyakanya', 'Matsyagandha' etc. the lower class society is prominently discussed. In our research article, we will try to understand the nature of struggling for self-esteem by selecting an Assamese novel 'Matsyagandha' and a Bengali novel 'Ganga'.

Objective: *The objective of the article is to highlight the social establishment of subaltern woman who fights not only for their existence but also their rights.*

Methodology: *The methodology used in this research paper is descriptive and comparative. It is based on primary and secondary sources.*

Research Value: *The research article will focus the struggle of life of subaltern woman in two different societies ie, in Bengali and in Assamese societies. This may added some extra essence in Gender studies of these areas.*

Overview: In the novel 'Matsyagandha' (1984) by Hamen Borgohain, though the Dome Society is talked about, yet the main tone is the rebellion of the Dome woman, Menoka against the upper castes. The way how Menoka take revenge on the oppressive practices that plagued her society since ages - is the discussing topic of this novel. At the end of the story of the novel 'Matsyagandha', it is felt that the character of Menoka occupies the author's complete sympathy and pity. Admittedly, this is the background of the novel, the lower class society, and the upper class - lower class social conflict. But through the revenge against the oppression of women in society by a woman herself, the author expresses his respect for the woman. That women are equal to men, Menoka's revenge against the upper castes proves.

In the novel 'Matsyagandha' the status of lower class women is seen to have represented the entire Assamese lower class life. If excluded men, the image of the upper castes women's social oppression on the Dome women

can also be seen in the novel. After the premature death of Menoka's father, Duryadhan, their family started borrowing money from the so-called social elite Ahom family. Rice collection in exchange for the promise of giving fish in the future. One day when in such a family a housewife was spreading paddy in the sun, the child - Menoka approached the paddy and her shadow fell on it. Immediately, the housewife slapped Menoka. When the the little girl crying mother-mother tried to protest, the woman started to abuse her telling about her caste.

"The woman tried to put her to flight with red-fired eyes, and said, What have you said a Dome caste. You have such courage. Shall I keep silent when a Dome's daughter has thrown her shadow and destroyed a basket full of paddy ?"⁵

Menka could never forget this insult throughout her life and it has always been her cause for hatred for the upper caste.

The most important event in the novel's narrative is the meeting of Ahom young man Maniram of *Mahghuli* river background and *Kaivarta woman* Kamala. The people of *Kaivarta* community in which Kamala, or Menoka are, never abort, because in this society they get married when they have a physical union. But when the pregnant Kamala advances to suicide, Menoka realizes that the offspring of Kamala's womb is not of anyone in their society. Kamala also admitted that Ahom young man Maniram had broken *his* promise to marry him. Then decides to marry the family favourite girl Thorimala and shows Menoka the greed of money to destroy Kamala's womb. It is to be noted that both Kamala and Menoka are lower class women, and both are harassed by upper castes at different times. Menoka remained silent at the injustice to her, but now looking at Kamala, she advanced to take

revenge. Kamala tells Menoka that when Maniram begged her and said that he would marry her, she thought -

"....These are the people who neglect us for our low caste, now if he really marries me then there would occur a great hue and cry in the society. It'll be a great fun. All the insults of us will be avenged."⁶

As a result, it will not be inconsistent with the assumption that the protests for social injustices to the lower classes is portrayed as the women characters of the novel, especially the character of Menoka. In fact, the novel '*Matsyagandha*' focusses on the character of Menoka. Critics say - "The main feature of the novel is the courageous role and protestant voice of an illiterate and poor woman of a village"⁷, the protest which appears in the character of Menoka is personal, though the social injustice is rooted in this protest. In a case where the rebellious voices of a society is heard against the social adultery of another society - it is impossible to deny that this work has been accomplished due to Menoka as a strong woman. Generally, where the protest should have been voiced collectively, we see only a woman's personal voice. Menoka is the only one here who has come out against the upper society and has forced an upper caste man to accept a lower class woman. She tactically married Maniram to Kamala. Menoka sought to get rid of the pain of social disgrace through this marriage. Not only that, she showed the entire *Kaivarta* society the way to get rid of the humiliation. According to critics, though in the novel 'helplessness of the Dalit *class*'⁸ has emerged, yet it must be acknowledged that Menka alone has been involved in the struggle against this helplessness sheltering mental firmness. Therefore, although the social status of the lower class women is relatively low at the beginning of the novel, it has steadily fluctuated with the formula of Menoka with the progress

of the story as well as the progress in the self-esteem of the lower class women has occurred prominently.

The author of the novel 'Ganga', telling about the character of Himi, has revealed shortly -

“The body is not shoreless, it has come to the edge and stopped. When monsoon comes it will float on the shoreless sea.”⁹

From this description, the author's ideas about Himi become evident in an irony that he is seeking to similarities between this woman and a river. Her womanhood is like the river, and so there is a waiting for the rainy season in her. One who fills the water is the key to the dry life. Even in the novel, I see that the love of Bilas has really flowed in the water of rain and come to his life.

Critic Jahar Sen Majumder talking about the love of Bilas and Himi said -

"Only the presence of Himi in the form of ground or river has rescued the character of Bilas from being crippled - he has escaped from the hands of the tragic consequence of being weak." ¹⁰

In his essay, Shri *Majumdar* shows that like the river, in Himi also there is the ebb and the flood - all of which are revealed in the source of her love affair with Bilas.

In this context, we shall again remember that the primary meeting of Himi and Bilas was actually as two representatives of different classes of a society. As a result as Terry Eagleton said, it is natural here that "the social entity determines its consciousness." ¹¹ But the after-taste of the social relationship between the Mahajan (another similar to that of *Fadeni*) and the fisherman dissolves in the water of love which comes as a high tide. That

is funny, but it is not the romantic love that lurks in the middle class, it's form is different. This love affair had been necessary perhaps for the novel's simple linear motion. Samaresh realized that if the story becomes overweighed with the display of Bilas's masculinity and struggled life consciousness, then it would point to the weaker hand of the novelist. Along, that Bilas's masculinity is similar to Himi's diverse and rude nature could also be guessed by the author. So here the author had the necessity of Himi and her passionate romanticism. And perhaps the mutual attraction of man-woman, situated at the two ends of social hierarchy, is so profound and multi-dimensional. Multi-dimensional in the sense that due to one's need they have come closer and loved each other, again moved away once knowing their own limitations. That Himi, who was once hundreds of hands far away from love due to her bitter experience of past life, said -

(a) "The daughter of Radha is back again. Well, I am eating, no problem, a life will be cut. "¹² (P - 257).

(b) I can no longer afford to hunt the pirate. Envy with yourself doesn't feel good anymore. "¹³ (P: 279)

The love of Bilas has been swept away by the tide of Himi's stake. The Himi who refuses every man, at last surrenders to Bilas. She says -

"I lost the courage to live alone. Fashion, you kill fish and eat, I shall sell and eat. But what have you done to me. That I cannot live."¹⁴ In fact, Himi's personality was revealed as a result of her desire to live and move on. And in the move, she made her bold decision without hesitation. The key to Himi's life and death is her pull towards Bilas. The emphasis on this attraction is so great that Himi does not care for wealth or glory. That indication is found in the words of the narrator Panchu:

"Alas, look, look, show, the deed of your ruinous grand daughter. Bring back people of lakhs of money and bind the son of a fisherman."¹⁵

Bilas brings a new love-flood to Himi's life. The love sector of Himi which has dried up due to her dream of having a house fleeing with her lover had broken, is now filled with '*Joan kotal*'. The carrier of that '*kotal*' is Bilas. The deadly heart of Himi is being rejuvenated by Bilas's love. And Himi also forgot everything and fell in love, wanted to own completely through love. But where is the complete own! Because Bilas is not a man lying in the enclosure of his house, he has sea shaft on his eyes. He will go to sea. Himi realizes that she can never be tie Bilas with the family bonding, because his mind is far offshore. Professor Jahar Sen Majumder has arranged the life of Himi in three divisions focussing all these ups and downs.¹⁶

Past		Present	Future	
Separation <i>Chuchura</i>	with	Union with Bilas	Separation Bilas	with

Supporting wholeheartedly the above mentioned commentary, however, I add that the basic nature of the individualism of Himi is hidden in the advent of *mora kotal* in Himi's life that happened due to the separation with Bilas. It would not be possible for a common woman not to bind her lover in love and free him for his work while waiting for him in the corner. In fact, the opposite happens. For this, requires a strong character determination, which is reflected in the final decision of Himi. The side of his firm determination for future decision lies hidden in his coming back from the boat.

This is where Himi is different from the other ordinary women, and within this is her establishment of women's freedom. This establishment has been transformed through love, and class traits are just the boosters.

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