
Voicing subaltern feminine sensitivity and consciousness in Jyoti Lanjewar's *Caves*

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Abstract: Patriarchy continues to derail the society as one of the major root causes of the cultural and social imbalance across the world, India is also the major carrier with a huge blow. Misconception that paternal supremacy can lead to bring development, it actually hampers both male and female and the states at large - which needs to be acknowledged and reviewed duly. The notion of patriarchy itself is principally too fatal to the society as it is based on prejudice and demeaning the other gender to contribute in nation building but rather a servility belittling it only to the binary. Moreover, India further divides the society into varnas no merging within them whatsoever. Beyond these varnas are the subaltern communities, so are also fragmented and discriminated further. The frame dismisses acknowledging the women in the society and beyond the cultural frame and social scuffles are the subaltern women bereft of the mere existential rights, the subaltern men may have. Patriarchy discriminates between men and women and they isolate the subalterns and both isolate the subaltern women. The subaltern literature, different from the mainstream, is the product of persecution, consciousness, identity and rebellion against the patriarchy and culture enslaving the subaltern community and double discrimination of the women. Jyoti Lanjewar is one of the leading poets from the subaltern community who has very aptly revolted against the patriarchal cruelties.

Keywords: patriarchy, culture, society, subalternity, women, discrimination, oppression

Introduction: Indian cultural and social setup set the society apart and pieces as such that birds and animals have a decent life but not the humans. Due credit goes to India's rich culture wherein caste plays the most vital but fatal role in the construction of India as being segregated into five different unmodifiable and unmergeable and obnoxious varnas. The most despicable term dalit in question vis-a-vis the African black here has been beyond the threshold of mainstream society. Be it in normal life; business in urban or agriculture in rural life or even Indian literature, the dalit; a subaltern class continues to be portrayed as a compassionate commodity ever since unlike an upper caste leader. That results in agreeable identity and mental implementation and assumption, the subalternity being lower than upper castes. This typical century-long entrusted belief and lack of education among the subalterns mostly in remote and rural areas further worsen the state of the subaltern woman who strives hard for her survival and identity in the social structure of caste hierarchy and within her own subaltern community. As a daughter, wife or mother, she fails in bringing any change in her life nonetheless; whether with her father and later husband. Rather she is exposed to more as wife abuse albeit innumerable and continuous sacrifices at the cost of her survival and identity for her husband and children that challenges her womanhood and motherhood in many cases. Obviously the casteist reproach and patriarchy, and lack of education are the crucial base for this discrimination. In this regard, eminent scholar Charu Gupta observes her life as -

The devaluation of dalit women increases because they departed from the conception of 'true womanhood' as defined by the cult of high caste women. In these tracts, dalit women were denied the

status of 'women' and classified by their supposedly degrading occupations. Tied to ideologies of domesticity, such portrayals viewed femininity as devoid of labour, denying its economic importance for the household. (Gupta 36)

The plight of the subaltern women against the upper caste counterpart, Charu Gupta highlights as more degradable. The latter assume their prime duties as child bearing, domestic chores and become comfort for their partners while the former as workers unaware of the economic independence and grieving lack of sympathy. The subaltern women poets portray this same pain and sympathy through their writings. Their roar points out the burning flame in their hearts subjected to diverse kinds of persecution and optimization due to their inferior social status. This study is an attempt to examine Jyoti Lanjewar's poem Caves and the subaltern women's anguish and their revolt against the patriarchal order.

Jyoti Lanjewar is one of the leading poets who depicts this vitality. She is a renowned Marathi writer, critic, poet, feminist scholar and social activist and Padmashri awardee. She was born on 25th November 1915 at Nagpur in a family that is dedicated to the social movement of subaltern empowerment. She has published 14 books including her poetry underlying the theme of universality and human voice as woman, womanhood, motherhood, struggle, sacrifice and human rights. Her major works are translated into many Indian and foreign languages; Chinese, Russian, German and English. Her poetry volume includes Disha (Direction), Shubd Nile, ajun wadal uthale nahi, eka zadache akrandan. Disha was translated in English with title Direction in 1982 and ajun wadal uthale nahi as No Storm Still Rises in 1992.

The Caves is her major and most significant poem written in Marathi and translated in English by Shanta Gokhale drawing as the title suggests in an allegorical and metaphorical form in which a hammer carves a cave by its enormous strokes on a rock. Subaltern women's life is also carved from such enormous strokes. The poem depicts the radical conviction of Jyoti Lanjewar that the women face a huge dejection and misery resulting in forming their hands stronger as a rock or cave. Though low caste and discriminated, their consciousness of their rights and identity transform as capable women to tackle any oddities.

The speaker in the poem warns the society, mainly the culprits, about her becoming strong, due to the longer intolerance, her body becomes habitual to atrocities and dare challenge inclemency in her way. She demonstrates as a torchbearer -

Their inhuman atrocities have carved caves In the rock of my heart. (Lanjewar 160)

The images of caves and rock, she strongly expresses her becoming stronger as the rock and challenges prejudice transforming her a rebel. History evidences women's illiteracy due to which they suffered and were exposed to double atrocities. But they would, no longer now, fall prey to any intolerance and atrocity as they are educationally, socially and economically liberated and strong enough to revert to and challenge any imminent fear. As observed in the lines -

The tables have turned now Protests spark

Now here

Now there. (Lanjewar 160)

Since the subalterns have become conscious of their rights wherever and whenever not only would they raise questions against discrimination and atrocity but fight out too. Consequently Lanjewar remarks that protest sparks nowadays; voiceless become voiced and will not contain to one place but spread everywhere indicating a strong consciousness among the subaltern women.

Accusing the patriarchy for the subaltern women's pathetic state, the poet refuses to call the birthplace as theirs since they were denied their land per contra they were subjected to discriminations and

atrocities ever since their birth, still they have survived their life and are sure to fight back successfully.
She marks it as -

How did we ever reach to this place

This land which was never mother to us? Which never gave us even

The life of cats and dogs? (Lanjewar 160)

Jyoti Lanjewar raises very rational and logical questions since being refused of their own birthplace, her ancestors survived identity-less and conscious-less life. Better are the cats and dogs who not only survived but thrived their life with dignity though animals, which makes the poet refuse to call the land as mother for both being discriminated against and subdued to the inhuman cat and dog life that her ancestors survived. She felt awed at her ancestor's tolerant approach. So is Hira Bansode complementing Jyoti Lanjewar and terming the place as evil step-mother -

But today the schoolbook's lies infuriate me.

We are ashamed to call you mother.

You may be a mother to some, but to us you are an evil step-mother. - TWICE DALIT: The poetry of Hira Bansode

Hira Bansode, in her poem, refuses greatness of the Indian culture, on the contrary, disdains its identity for the state of the subalterns as an evil step-mother that denies its own children the same equality but treats them inferior. With extreme disregard, she rebels against the great culture of India and her birthplace as her motherland like other people. She is infuriated at the thought of calling and singing the schoolbooks' imbibing them being children of the same motherland and be proud of whether it actually honoured them equally or not. She feels ashamed to call the land as her mother when it treats the subaltern children as 'different' and step-children of step-mother. She rejects the lofty culture of the country as being appreciated around the world. In her view, this land fails to confer upon equality as its onus in caring for the subaltern children too. Even water, which is a natural resource with equal rights of all humans and animals, was unfortunately denied in this country, the motherland. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar had to rage a fierce agitation known as Mahadacha satyagrah. Disgracefully, its denial proves that the cats and dogs are better than the subalterns in the society. 12th century Chokhamela; a subaltern born poet questions the god about his birth -

If you had to give me birth Why give me this birth at all

You cast me away to be born: you were cruel

Where were you at the time of my birth? Who did you help then?

Marathi poet Chokhamela, in his abhanga, rejects the birth that consequently leads a castaway and fated to cruelty of the upper castes. He brutally attacks the god for his deliberate absence and negligence at the time of his birth, better he be not given birth as a human were he to meet inhuman cruelty. Such disgrace can only produce a rebel from the subaltern to answer against the upper caste atrocities. The poet suggests not only the physical revolt but educational, intellectual, political and economic levels in order to counterfeit the onslaught and atrocities. It is the subaltern women to revolt for themselves for neither the upper caste women nor the subaltern men would fight for them. Karan Singh observes as -

Dalit women face severe beating from the hands of their husbands, often for no fault of their own this violence in the hands of please stop and do it, means seems to assert their as mill and seek to be little of women. (Singh 135)

Not only upper caste landlords exploit subaltern women but exploitation and victimization in their domestic life by their own men as well. These women face undue violence from their life partners for no valid reason, sometimes brutal beating only to teach them their masculinity. Subaltern women are

always belittled socially and economically so that they rely on their men. Therefore Lanjewar invokes revolt against all such patriarchal, casteist and gender based disorder. They have been silent for years listening to the voice of right and wrong but they are fires now and will undo all the unpardonable sins put to them by the upper caste and patriarchy.

Conclusion: The poem portrays the persistent supremacy and atrocities on subaltern women, Jyoti Lanjewar roars against the patriarchal atrocities by sketching the picture of the inner life of a subaltern woman. As human beings, the subaltern male and female expect the society to treat them equally and as humans but unfortunately, Lanjewar grieves to deny her motherland for disowning from their human rights. She is amazed listening to her ancestors' persistence and questions against not resisting the power. Being conscious of the power of the subaltern women, she advises them to fight against the inhuman behaviour and to regain their rights. The poem Caves challenges Indian culture, caste structure and gender discrimination with a fierce attack on caste-oriented social disorder, oppression and tyrannies. Jyoti Lanjewar exhibits her evident bitterness, irony and sarcastic tone in her poetry.

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