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**ALIKHIT: UNAPPROVED EXISTENCE, UNWRITTEN STORIES AND UNHEARD
MARGINAL VOICES**

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ABSTRACT

Many writers chose subalternity as the theme in their works. These writers purposefully raise the matters that are shadowed from the central line of culture and civilization. Societies are kept at the margin of politics; people are kept at the margin of their rights and freedom, and cultures are kept at the margin making them soundless. Author's role in many of such writings is to probe into these issues, and their writing appears to be the subaltern writing or writing the subaltern. Issues of subalternity, discriminations on the basis economic condition, race, class, religion, gender and cultural superiority/inferiority can become the way to unearth social reality through writing. So, literature is a tool for writers to unmute the voice of subalterns.

Based on this theory of the subaltern study in literature, this research tries to examine on how the novel, *Alikhit* has given the voice to those subalterns who are muted since decades in one aspect to other, how the writer has written the unwritten stories of the subaltern identities, how he has brought the unapproved locality into mentioned condition and how he has made the unheard narratives (of Birahinpur Barewa) heard through this writing.

Keywords: Subaltern, unheard voices, narratives, marginalization, textualization

Introduction

A person lives, no matter how important his life is, but nobody supposes he is existing; a group exists but no other group or and individual feels its existence; an institution survives, but there is no documentation of institution; and a village consists of all the activities as other villages do, but there is no any symptom of the existence of that village, and ultimately the village gets collapsed, the villagers get collapsed; and what is left is always unapproved existence of the village, unwritten stories of the village history and never heard voices of the people. It all happens in a village, real or imaginary, but exactly it happens in the stories or in real. It is the story of the celebrated novel, *Alikhit* composed by Dhruva Chandra Gautam and awarded with the Madan Puraskar (2040 BS).

Quite experimental in the matter and structure beginning in the way a meta-fiction does, Gautam has brought the theme of Terai region strongly with the picture of a village and the life style of the people in this novel. Focused to the issue of marginalized voices, suppressed desires, unsatisfied hungers, and unidentified identities, Gautam has primarily depicted the contemporary society and politics in this novel. This article, with

the subaltern approach, examines on how the writer has raised the issue of marginalized and suppressed people and how he tries to write the unwritten stories of subalterns.

Birhinpur Barewa: Subaltern Geography and Unapproved Village

The narrator, as first person narration, hence the writer and ten other people, especially the archeologists and experts have visited a remote village of Terai with the purpose of archeological investigation, and have spent a complete year in search of old and archeologically valuable matters. This investigation has taken place in two-ways manner- investigation of the old matters archeologically valuable and the investigation of the unapproved and unmapped village and its culture. As identified from the same study, the place has become the center of archeological importance and also it has been noticed that the same center has long been a subaltern geography.

Are subaltern only people? Or is it also the geography or culture? Basically, when Gyatri Spivak spoke, she talked about the culture and people that have long been outside the centerline or linkage. Subaltern, as a postcolonial buzz word, is often associated with the silenced people from colonized cultures, and also with all groups that face discrimination – such as women, workers, minority groups even in non-colonized situations. In both conditions, subaltern refers to the people or the citizens who have been marginalized. The main thrust of the idea has come into popularity with Gyatri Spivak's, essay, "Can the Subaltern speak?" The term has its initial significance of giving a name to those who are out of conventional narrative of civilization. As the development of postcolonial understanding of the position of the people without voice, 'subaltern' basically addresses to people and culture, but the space or the geography as an unavoidable factor, as a subaltern because culture and people are not isolated from the place and economy. It equally applies to everything that has limited or no access to cultural imperialism is – a space of difference, "an identity- in- differential" (Spivak 32). The mechanics of discrimination, identity- in- differential, to people exactly begins from the space or location. Speaking, in Spivak's term, is the mode of representation, "representation as 'speaking for', as in politics and representation as 're-presentation', as in art and philosophy" (28). Hence, speaking is not just for the expression in words or through words, it is what the representation, and representation is also the representation of people, culture and geography separately or in all.

With the ideas of liberation and representation, geographical representation and existence in the central link of the socio-political and cultural civilization is a strong aspect of freedom fighting movements today. On such condition, the society that the writer presents in the novel, *Alikhit*, has no existence at the official documents, "not only in the national map, but also in any of the official and state documents or registrations, the name of the village, 'Birahinpur Barewa has been left, and as a result, there is no any authentic and legal existence of the village yet" (Gautam 106)¹, but still there is a village, there are people, there is life is there, there is a culture; and largely there is poverty, and hence there is the subaltern. Being absent from national and state documents, in Spivak's term, there is no 'representation as in politics', "Barewa cannot select its representative in the election, but just observes the representation from the neighboring village, Dharampur" (106). Being absent in national existence, justice never appears in the village with no complain to any of the injustices over the people, "the burglars from Dharampur would rob the Barewa villagers during the day or during the nights, but no complain would be heard in the court or in the police station; rather they have to be ready for being further robbed" (161) because the whole village has no existence to be noted in official and judicial documents- there is no location, no address, no birth registration, no death registration and no existence of the place and the people. It is the condition, "the robberies, rapes, murders, violence and any other brutalities happen in the village in the way they happen in the nation, but these events are not registered in the nation, and the police is under no obligation to provide justice to the people from the village"(165) because people have no existence as a result of unexistence of the village. At its first level, the whole village has become the subaltern to rest of the national identity.

¹ Citations form *Alikhit*, the novel originally in Nepali, are my translations.

Is the place essential for the position of men/women? Exactly essential, “the senses of place and placeness have been crucial factors in welding together in communal identity” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 117). The idea of the nation, nationality and culture enhance the feeling of the community, closeness and communal ownership on the social values. The people of Birahinipur Barewa have no such feeling of their connectivity to the nation and national identity and for them the national consciousness is “an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty” (Fanon 121) because the life in Barewa is really an empty shell and it is equally fragile, “the life of Barewa was at the level of high imagination because it did not have its reality and had no proof” (Gautam 253). Vishwanath Prasad, the Jimdar has ruled over all the people in the village as the village leader, he has the national existence, he knows everyone from the local level to the government level; he exploits the poverty stricken situation of the people though seemingly he is the source of their life, but the village does not exist.

As a mode of surrealistic pictureless picture, the writer and his friends devoted into the investigation, and have found that the village does not exist any more. It is the village they have spent twelve months taking part with the problems and difficulties of the villagers, but after fifteen days of their transformation to a new place, they have lost the village. It does not mean that it is their weakness or they have left the village, but the whole village has been collapsed nowhere; the villagers have been collapsed nowhere, their poverty has been collapsed, “as the village Birahinipur Barewa was not seen in the map of the district and the country, so was that the village was not seen anywhere in real” (255). Ironically the writer states the condition of the village and villagers, “there was no poverty, no rape, no robbery, no death and murder, and it was the lucky village with out all these misfortunes because there was no village now” (260). This reference gets correlated in the sense that the village was a subaltern village, the village with physical existence but without its legal, authoritative existence at all, and following this trend, ultimately the physical existence of the village has been collapsed and nothing remains more than the memory and the story of the village.

Hence, with the picture of the reality of extreme poverty and marginalization of the people in the unapproved and unregistered village, the novel presents the subaltern position of not an individual or the culture, but the whole village as subaltern geography, and ultimately he has imagined the collapse of the whole village on how legal and official unexistence of the village could be the representative of the real unexistence.

Unwritten Stories of Barewa, Poverty and the Margin

A large tree falls in the wilderness; nobody hears it, does it make a sound or not? It is rhetoric to the physics of sound and the human faculty of imagination. Certainly, the tree makes a sound, but the problem is that we are not able to hear it or the sound is not heard. Similar becomes the condition of written stories and unwritten stories, identified identities and unidentified identities, heard voices and unheard voices.

Histories are inscribed; stories are written; voices are heard and the identity is recognized. The history is mostly inscribed of the ones who have the glory and the importance of doing something special; stories are written of the ones who can write their stories or who can make someone write their stories; and the voices of one is heard who is audible and whose voice is supposed to be worth heard. It means the histories of only few people is inscribed, the stories of only few are written and the voices of only few are heard, and so Spivak makes the rhetorical inquiry if the subaltern can speak. If someone’s voice is not heard, it does not mean that he/she does not speak; and if someone’s story is not written, it does not mean that he/she has no story. Their stories are not written because they are not supposed to be worth written; hence they are at the marginal level.

Alikhit, as the title suggests, has a jungle of unwritten stories of the margin, some found in oral traditions, and many just in human experiences dying with the poverty, disease, superstitions and injustice. These stories are the layers of the margin. Gautam has picked up the characters with such stories in the representative manner from the unmapped village and unidentified locality to the center of administration, culture and civilization. The problem is on who should write or who can write, “How do we determine minority group members? And, can majority group members speak as minority members? Whites as the people of

colour and men as women... ” (Fee 169). It is also the problem of writing the self or writing the others: others both as not one and the marginal one as “there is no real line between self and other, an imaginary line must be drawn” (Gilman 18). For this Gautam has created allegorical heroes named with the name of the months, not exactly a man/woman as central character/s, and has linked with the relevant seasonal characteristics of the stories along with the characters from the village. Covering all the seasonal features, problems on that particular time period and human movements and activities. Capturing the activities of twelve months, as the rest would always be the repetition with no change as such, he has captured the whole events of the marginal ones as their stories along with the references of their myths, especially myths of poverty.

One but a representative story is the story of poverty of Matiya and her mother who sometimes, “ with no cloth to cover her body shame, had to hide her chests with her child on her chest all the time and protect her shame from the people” (Gautam 25). This is the story of hundreds of poor mothers for whom, “poverty is not different from the death” (33). Another unwritten story is with the life of Ramfal Majhi who just can make people well only when “they are beaten by the snakes but not the death” (40) with an irony that Dr. Ravi, being the doctor of the health post, prescribes his patients to the witch doctor, Ramfal Majhi, hence the unwritten story of surrendering of modern medicine in front of the superstition of the witch-curing.

The stories of relations and even the love and pattern of life are always the stories of poverty in Barewa. One member of the writer’s group, Karna Bahadur would take his meal with a Tharu family having three young daughters to whom, “he would give ten rupees note and have a physical relation” (72), but the same story of poverty has not created similar story with Fulawa though he has tried it many times. The story of poverty has made Rajkaliya, Lajkaliya and Jaykaliya opt to accept physical/ sexual exploitation on ten rupees note, but the same technique does not apply to others with the conclusion that the effect of poverty is not the same to all however poverty is the part of their lives everyday, “the poverty would grow like the pregnancy in the village” (87). Similarly, poverty would sometimes take the mode of indifference to life with the stories similar to Shivagulam, who has tried to escape from the lifely burdens becoming a saint or sanyasi.

Poverty does not only create the story of surrender and suppression, also it enhances the condition of courage and revolt no matter the revolt would or would not be recognized. Similar story is created in the life of Inara, who would always revolt against the Jimdar, but ultimately he has been swallowed by his poverty or the courage, “one morning, the corpse of Inara was floating on the Dorahantal Pond” (104), and no inquiry about his death was possible as the whole village was deprived of all sorts of authorities and justice. But the story takes a different mode to Sunara, Inara’s brother, who has been accused of trying to attack over Jimdar and he has been imprisoned resulting the justice-injustice and injustice-justice transformation of the stories of similar kinds of poverty, courage and revolt.

As a part of society and culture, the system of touchable and untouchable is still silently inherent in the societies, but not known what truth is there behind all these cultures. This condition of untouchability has long become an unwritten story, but the novel has exposed the truth on how marginalized as untouchable can automatically become touchable if the person in power makes him/her free. Anup has an unwritten story when he has been discriminated as untouchable just because he has married to a woman from bin caste, supposed to be untouchable, but he has got social purification when “the Jimdar unknowingly got touched while he was drinking tea” (133), and he immediately becomes accepted and touchable. This story represents for thousand cases of untouchability and their marginalization.

Hence, with these as the typical episodes, and with many others, the novel speaks out many unspoken stories of poverty, social discrimination, marginalization and suppression for which neither the authorities have known them nor they have recognized them as the stories of the nation, and they have long been unspoken though seen or experienced with intentional relegation to them.

Dorahantal Pond and Unwritten Narratives

Dorahantal, a pond at the center of the village also known as Dorhantal Pokhara, is a symbol of mystery and reality in the novel. It recurs time and again as the means of memorizing myth, hope of life and prosperity,

death and emancipation one after another. Observing the pond has the sense of pleasure, mystery and anxiety to the study group including the narrator. Dark blue like deep sky colour water with unknown depth and wide pond always remains at the mind of the people of Barewa, especially as a hope to get rid of their poverty. Narrated variously by a village storyteller, Dharichhan, the pond has an unwritten myth linked with the event of Mahabharata. Dharichhan narrates its interesting story as:

Towards the end of Mahabharata war, Duryodhan hid himself into a pond named Dwaipayana Hrad. Pandavas, following his footprints found him within the pond. Duryodhan was going out of the pond when Goddess Laxmi told him not to go out leaving all his property within, but he went out and fought with Bhishm and ultimately he came to his pitiful death. The same pond, then after, is named as Dorahantal. (51-52)

There is no measuring point to identify on whether this myth is really closed to the Mahabharat myth or it is all imagination, neither it has come into any written form, but it has remained in mind and lips of people, especially focused to a typical part of Duryodhan and Laxmi conversation. Suffered from extreme poverty, Barewa people believe, "Duryodhan has left all his gold, diamonds, pearls and property within the pond" (53) and also he is believed to have said to Goddess Laxmi, "keep all this property in the name of one poor from Kali Yuga" (54) and then "Goddess Laxmi blessed the one" (54), but nobody then after has received this hidden wealth. With this belief, many of poorest of poors of the village have ended the story of their lives within the pond as the one to be blessed with the wealth, but ultimately to their mere death. It is an irony towards the understanding of the people who opt death with a thin hope to get the wealth from the depth of the pond. Also the narrator has the childhood experience of nearing to the pond, "it was the center of hope with the imagination of a large balloon to be rich many times when I was a child" (55) and the same to almost all the villagers.

Not only the inhabitants of Barewa, Dorahantal has become the means of emancipation for the members of the study group. Disappeared from their residence, Sharad, one of their friends was found "as the corpse floating on Dorahantal Pond" (273). Attracted with the beauty of the pond, highly philosophic man, Sharad has chosen the pond himself as the means to get complete freedom from the burdens of life though as he used to say, "if there is no satisfying purpose of life, it is useless to wait till the old age for death" (274), however it is not justified yet whether searching for freedom through suicide is an illusion or the best option, neither has Dorahantal Pond answered this question yet. The pond has just become the means of the end of stories of life like Sharad.

The stories of Kathani Budhi, similarly, reflect the irony towards the human condition in the village. Having so many stories of hope and desire to tell to the children of the village, she is the woman with continuous tears throughout her life. She is a storybook for people, and also she is the one who is still survived becoming blind, dumb and mute at a time when the whole village and the villagers have collapsed nowhere. She still has hope and desire of life or liberation when she silently spells, "throw me into Dorahantal Pond" (283), and many of others have similar desire, living or dead.

Similar myth is spoken about the origin of the village, Birahinpur as the cursed by a young lady named Birahini when she was seduced by the villagers. It was the time of Satya Yuga that she "addressed local goddess, Dihivarin and cursed all the villagers to their destruction and bad fortune of the village then after" (256). The seduction, violence, death, murder, poverty, robbery have become the parts of their lives from the very beginning, but all this is the real in the vicinity somewhere but not written yet.

These stories of the pond and the myths behind this pond, the stories of Birahini, stories of Kathani woman have just existed as unwritten stories, "an oral literature, in order to become the subject of analysis, must indeed first become an object. It must, that is, be textualized" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 161), but not textualized yet. Textualization, here, means recognition; it is the recognition of the myth and the recognition of the destiny of all Barewa people for the mere hope and loss behind the mystery. The people in these stories are the "group in turn can be interior to society: women for men, the rich for the poor" (Todorov 3) as the representative people and their importance cannot be ignored just as the aliens because "the importance of

the alien within cannot be overstated" (Goldie 174). These are the properties to be preserved and the issues to be addressed to bring the margin at the center.

Articulating Subaltern and Unheard Voices

The term 'subaltern' is related to the hegemonic power dynamics of the world. Firstly introduced by Antonio Gramsci, "subaltern" refers to a large number of people and group who are marginalized socially, politically, geographically and economically not included or given a position in the hegemonic power structure of colonial set-up however in the recent condition it also includes all types of marginalization even outside defined colonial set up. Its impact has spanned across the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, feminism and women studies with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and her discussion along with Edward Said's Orientalism in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Subaltern, in this point, denotes to all lower classes of the society or we may say a marginalized group who are deprived of the basic facilities of life and whose voices are intentionally unheard.

These subaltern voices are not heard by the power hegemony, but it does not mean that these voices have no life, no culture, and no society; rather it ignores the fact that "cultures are living bodies with organic structures" (Clifford 181). Penetrating within these unheard voices of Birahinapur Barewa, the novel has properly tried to articulate subaltern feelings into identities but still unheard identities, "identity was ideally adapted to talking about the relationship of the individual to society" (Gleason 194). Numerous voices of Jimdars, rulers and the oppressors have been heard, their stories have been written, but the voices of Kathani woman, the voices of Sunara, stories of Matiya Mai, and the experiences of Biharini have not been heard yet, but the novelist has articulated these voices and they have appeared in the form of *Alikhit*.

Alikhit Unearthing the Subaltern and the Margin

What can a literature do for people who are oppressed? What can the novel do for the ones who have been marginalized? Literature cannot change the social, political and economic conditions of the marginal; it cannot bring those subalterns at the central point of civilization, but it can bring the marginal into the central point of writing; and novel can create the narratives of the subaltern. Subaltern people however, are voiceless because they are completely excluded the spheres of hegemonic discourse. With the similar destiny, people of Birahinapur Barewa are unaware of the extent and true cause of their oppression and lack the means to either fully realize or to disseminate their discontent to a wider audience; they are unknowingly oppressed, unidentified and kept far away from the current of civilization. Not only the people, the whole locality is unapproved, unmapped and unacknowledged. They live in isolated area, the area where there is no definition of justice; they are seduced, but it does not become a seduction, they are robbed, but it is not defined as robbery; and they are heavily oppressed by so-called hegemony of traditional power of Jimdari, but they regard this oppression as the kindness in their lives. They use localized speech, but it is not easily understood by outsiders and have little contact with the hegemonic forces yet is still intimately affected by their every action.

Barewa, as a subaltern village, does not exist in any of the official documents; people of Barewa struggle for their lives but their struggle has not been mentioned anywhere yet; they live in extreme poverty, but their poverty has not been identified; they are exploited, but their exploitation is known as their liberation, they have the culture, but their culture is not mentioned anywhere; they have their myths and narratives like Derahantal and Biharini, but they have not been recorded or written yet, and hence they are subaltern and they are marginal group, no matter of their caste and ethnicity. They are unable to reach their oppressors because of various obstacles such as being poor and uneducated.

Alikhit, hence, has become capable of articulating the plight of these subalterns and the need of greater representation of these powerless and marginalized people in society by the social and cultural hegemony. Therefore, in response to Spivaks initial question: no, the subaltern cannot speak, and these subaltern people have not spoken, but they can only be spoken for by the way of writing literature like *Alikhit*.

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