

‘Another Woman’ by Imptiyaz Dharker, and ‘I am Not That Woman’ by Kishwar Naheed: Marginalization, Resistance and Subversion

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to analyse the theme of marginalization, subjugation and resistance in the selected poems, namely, ‘Another Woman’ by Imptiyaz Dharker, and ‘I am Not That Woman’ by Kishwar Naheed and the paper also tries to show how the two poems can be linked as a sequel. While ‘Another Woman’ depicts the mute acceptance of violence by a woman typically from the Indian subcontinent, the speaker in ‘I am not that Woman’ exhibits remarkable resistance to the tendency to stereotype women in the market economy as well as to the oppression in the guise of customs of patriarchal society. Though the overall background of the paper is feminist criticism, the aspects of marginalization, and resistance and subversion as a response are dealt with in detail in this paper.

Keywords- marginalization, resistance, subversion.

I. MARGINALIZATION

According to Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture, the process of marginalization includes ‘socio-cultural segregation of ethnic and racial groups in terms of their representation in socio-political and cultural systems including various professions.’ The term refers to reduction in involvement in society and the considerable loss of opportunities experienced by certain groups or individuals within a specific society, with a consequent breakdown either in terms of social control or in terms of reciprocal solidarity. Such reduction leads to a progressive decline in social participation, an increase in the level of poverty and ongoing exclusion from social agencies like schools, the job market, political communities and so on. (174).

Singharoy describes Marginalisation,

. . . as a process is conceptualised as cumulatively acquired and spatially related phenomena

of social, economic cultural and political denials and deprivations, in- securities and uncertainty, hierarchy and domination which get legitimized and reproduces by the functioning of several normative and societal arrangements to relegate several sections of the population at the social margin despite their protests and resistance.

Marginalization, as a complex process of relegating specific group(s) of people to the lower or the outer edge of the society, operates as function, as cause and also as a social product. It has been delineated in many intellectual and development discourses as a social process that operates and promotes through the practice of discrimination, oppression, subjugation, and domination which is required to be demolished and the causes of such practices to be eradicated.

More commonly used term in the parlance of social sciences is marginality which is defined by Germani as the “lack of participation of individuals and

groups in those spheres in which, according to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate” (Germani,49).

Janet Mancini Billson in an essay “No Owner of Soil: Redefining the Concept of Marginality classifies marginality under three types: cultural marginality, social role marginality and structural marginality.

According to Billson, the most prominent type is structural marginality that refers to the political, social, and economic powerlessness of certain disenfranchised and/or disadvantaged segments within societies. It springs from location in the socioeconomic structure of society, rather than from cultural or social role dilemmas. It has been described as an unavoidable result of capitalist system characterized by poverty, crime and violence. (31)

Imptitaz Dharker was born in Lahore in Pakistan and brought up in Glasglow, Scotland. She is counted among the leading contemporary writers in Indian English today. She is also a painter and an accomplished documentary maker. Her poetry brings together a number of themes and issues of contemporary relevance: exile, home, freedom, geographical and cultural displacements, communal tensions and the politics of gender.

Born in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh, India in 1940, Kishwar Naheed is one of the best-known feminist poets of Pakistan. In a field dominated by traditional male voices, Naheed, writing in Urdu, was a pioneer of a new, distinctively feminine voice and has produced over the span of thirty years a body of work that is innovative, defiant, political, and self-aware. Her poetry dared to go beyond the prescribed accepted ‘feminine’ realms to include hitherto unmined fields of female sexuality.

Another Woman by Imptiyaz Dharker is a poignant depiction of how a housewife living in the Indian Subcontinent mutely suffers all the cruelty and violence meted upon her. She cares for her household but while buying vegetables, cannot even buy radishes that she likes. She can only imagine the taste:

“...imagined the crunch it would make/ between her teeth, the sweet sharp taste, /then put it aside, thinking it/ an extravagance...”

At home, her mother in law abuses her and her parents:

“The usual words came and beat / their wings against her: the money spent, / curses heaped upon her parents, / who had sent her out / to darken other people's doors.”

These lines, translating the typical curses express the taunts this woman faces everyday. She is just another woman as the title suggests, representative of women in the subcontinent. But she is ‘taught’ (emphasis added) not to resist such insults or not to talk back to the power structures. This can be considered an example of a false consciousness embedded by the patriarchal society.

The woman here is also afraid of her husband and dare not speak anything about the treatment she receives by her mother in law. In her husband’s house she is completely relegated to the margin. So much so that she is scared to look up.

“When the man came home / she did not look into his face/ nor raise her head; but bent / her back a little more.”

She is truly voiceless as “Nothing gave her the right to speak”. The poem thus depicts her miserable situation in simple yet stark language. Without having any didactic tone it portrays the agonies faced by many such women who are programmed to suffer without protest. They are told by sociocultural voices:

“This was the house she had been sent to,/ the man she had been bound to, / the future she had been *born*(emphasis added) into”.

The end of the poem shows far cruel side of the level of marginalization and subjugation. The woman is killed mercilessly by her husband and in laws, perhaps for dowry. But as it shocks the readers, the woman has been prepared for this murder as well:

“So when the kerosene was thrown / (just a moment of surprise, / a brilliant spark) / it was the only choice / that she had ever known”.

The parenthesis in the above lines is significant as it shows that when she is being killed, she does not resist at all, it is “just a moment of surprise” for her. This is the power of language of understatement that rattles any sensitive person. But society at large remains insensitive towards such inhuman treatment and violence towards women. The last lines point at this insensitivity and also the acquiescence:

“Another torch, blazing in the dark. / Another woman. / We shield our faces from the heat”.

The short sentences give a blunt and raw effect to the stark reality of the rampant violence towards women making it a commonplace occurrence.

While ‘Another Woman’ depicts a woman’s mute surrender to her tragic fate, ‘I am not that Woman’ by Kishwar Naheed talks about women’s oppression by the patriarchal society from ages. Yet it also offers emancipation through resistance, therefore, is different from the former poem. Evocative imagery strengthens the speaker’s assertive tone who addresses to man, and patriarchal society. The woman speaker here strongly notes her protest in the opening lines: “I am not that woman/ selling you socks and shoes!” These lines indicate how women are used in the advertisements of male products. In such advertisements the woman’s body becomes a commodity. Therefore the speaker insists that she, the representative of women doesn’t want to be used in such a manner. In the same stanza she reminds men: “Remember me, I am the one you hid/ in your walls of stone... not knowing/ that my voice cannot be smothered by stones”. Thus, the very first stanza sets a tone of resistance and emancipation. The stanza also points at the structural marginality that women are

always have been subjected to. The similar strain of protest continues in the next stanzas as well. The speaker also attacks the oppression in the name of customs and traditions: "I am the one you crushed /with the weight of custom and tradition/ not knowing/ that light cannot be hidden in darkness."

The repetitive "not knowing" in every stanza mocks at the futile efforts of the patriarchal society to suppress the female voice. Thus in a way the poem presents an agency that resists and at the same time subverts the marginalising power structures. The poem refers to the institution of marriage as an instrument to exchanging the burden of daughters:

"I am the woman/ you bought and sold/ in the name of my own chastity...I am the one you married off/to get rid of a burden..."

But here she calls her country as "a nation of captive minds/cannot be free.

In the last stanza the attack on patriarchy becomes more scathing and yet honest when the speaker once again asserts that the women have been treated as "the commodity you traded in/ my chastity, my motherhood, my loyalty."

The speaker finally strongly objects the way women are presented in market economy where everything is showcased with impunity. Here, strong feminist traces present elsewhere become more intense:

"The woman on the poster,/ half makes, selling socks and shoes— / No, no I am not that woman !"The circle of strongly resisting the stereotypes gets complete in the end.

As discussed above, both 'Another Woman' by Imptiyaz Dharker and 'I am not that Woman' by Kishwar Naheed present marginalization of women at large. But while the former depicts the woman's mute and helpless surrender to subjugation and violence, the latter poem presents strong resistance and even subversion to the patriarchal power structures. The open defiance of the 'man' made rules gives it a far more feminist aspect.

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