

Women as Subaltern. The Liberation from Patriarchy: A Study On “Parched” And “Hellaro”

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the situation of patriarchy in Indian society and their liberation in Leena Yadav's “*parched*” and Abhishek Shah's “*Hellaro*”. It also explains the sexual oppression of women in an Indian society. Here the liberation of women from that patriarchal society means a lot. Both movies used different ways to show their emancipation. The theory of Subaltern by Antonio Gramsci is applied to analyse the suppression of women and their liberation from that all unwanted norms. In addition, it is worth studied as the female necessities and their sexual needs.

However, this study focuses on two major Indian films both revolves around women characters. “*parched*” explains mainly four female characters in other hand, “*Hellaro*” discussing a group of women. Qualitative research is taken as the approach of the study. Data collection is mostly obtained by watching the movies while the data analysis is done by applying the theory to analyse the movies. The result of the study confirms that, female sexuality and their all needs are equal to the male. The both films are male dominant and discuss a huge gender-based gap which deprive women in their employment and sexual needs. It also affirms that woman can bring positive change in society, but they are always in subordinated position.

Keywords: - Subaltern, Liberation, Oppression, Society

1. Introduction

The suppression of female sexuality is regarded as one of the most important issues in our history. The suppression of women is based in the historical status of women as private property and their unequal relationship to men in the society. They have many boundaries on their sexuality and body. In another words, according to our social situation, women had a lesser sexual importance. They have felt that, they are not permitted by society to express their sexual feeling or to enjoy sex in many contexts. A woman in

the society, due to her subordinate position, she had suffered fears of discrimination, exploitation and suppression. She became the victim of several social evils, especially the sexual oppression. The paper mainly following two major Indian film and the theory of subaltern by Antonio Gramsci is applied to analyse the patriarchal life of women in an Indian society. In postcolonial studies and in critical theory, the term subaltern designates and identifies the colonial populations. They are socially, politically, and geographically excluded from the hierarchy of power of an imperial colony and from the metropolitan homeland of an empire.

The concept is related to issues of domination and power. "Subaltern" meaning of inferior rank is term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those working-Class people in Soviet Union, who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Gramsci claimed that the history of the subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant classes, although the history of the latter is that which is accepted as the "official" history. For him, the history of the subaltern social groups necessarily fragmented and episodic, since they are always subject to activity of the ruling groups, even when they rebel. Women oppression is the most widespread and the deepest form of oppression in society. This paper brings out the evidence from the film *parched* by Leena Yadav and *Hellaro* by Abhishek Shah. We can understand the origins of the suppression of female sexuality from this multiple Source and in what ways the women break the hell of dominance and suppressive patriarchy. "*Parched*" movie is a drama film written and directed by Leena Yadav and produced by Ajay Devan. In India, the film was released on 23 September 2016. It is her first international feature film. It is a powerful movie that unfolds in rural Rajasthan, India, where four women following a patriarchal tradition, suffering from social norms, and personal struggles. Rani, a resilient widow, who supporting her family and arranging her son's marriage to a child bride, Janki. Lajjo, her friend, suffers in an abusive marriage. Bijli, a bar dancer, fights to survive in a world that physically exploits her. And Janki, the young bride, represents the face of oppression that these women seek to break. As their lives intertwine, they find pleasing moments of solidarity, laughter, and courage

The film is an exploration of female empowerment, survival, and the struggle for self-discovery in a society where patriarchy dominates and silences women's voices. These 4 major characters are pure example for rigid life style of a women. All of them wants to escape from the village they live, but some circumstances put them under the social barriers. But at the end of the movie shows the way they liberate their life from that barrier. By cutting their lengthy hair they showed their strength and resilience. In other hand, *Hellaro* is entirely different in the case of female liberation from patriarchy. *Hellaro* is another movie which released on 2019. It is an Indian Gujarati drama film directed by Abhishek Shah. Abhishek Shah is the writer, director, and producer of this movie *Hellaro* the first ever Gujarati film, which has won the National award for "Best Feature film" in history of cinema. The movie powerfully exploring themes of patriarchy, oppression, and female empowerment.

The story revolves around a group of women especially Manjari, a young bride who married to a remote village and trapped in a strict patriarchal norm. According to the village women are only means to domestic works and suppressed. In the village, women find happiness in collecting water from a distant lake. That is their only moment of freedom and happiness. Manjari also finds happiness in the way others did. Their lives change when an unconscious drummer, Mujli, who teaches them to play garba, which became as a spark of rebellion.

But according to the village norms, garba only played by men. Women haven't any role in playing garba. As the women secretly learn garba, they begin to stand against the village's patriarchal norms and conditions. The film depicting the suffocating patriarchal system that restricts women's freedom and individuality.

Through dancing garba, the women find a voice and gain strength against oppression. At the end of the movie, A group of women played Garba and realised their power of resilience. Both movies are pure example for the oppression of women but the resilience strategies are different in culture. Women all over the world treated as colonised subjects who merely close to the position of the other. In another point of view, they often called as "Marginalised". Belongs to an inferior position, women are called as "subaltern".

This topic has been widely studied in varying fields as it is very broad in content. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the subaltern women in both films are sexually silence and how they break the great wall of patriarchy and fly to the outer world. It concludes with the description of why female sexuality tends to be suppressed and how to raise their position in the society.

2. Review of Literature

Sisterhood and Solidarity

Bell Hooks emphasize the importance of sisterhood in resisting patriarchal oppression (Hooks). This idea is clearly reflected in *Parched*, where female solidarity becomes a survival strategy.

Ahmad et al. argue that the film constructs an “archetypal representation of sisterhood,” highlighting emotional and social support among women as a form of resistance (Ahmad et al.).

Rural Context and Cultural Representation

Arjun Appadurai’s ideas on cultural modernity help explain the intersection of tradition and change in rural settings (Appadurai). The film portrays the village as a site of both oppression and transformation.

Mondal’s study specifically analyses *Parched* in the context of rural India, arguing that the film presents women as “doubly marginalized” due to gender and location (Mondal). This reinforces the importance of spatial context in understanding the narrative.

Female Gaze and Narrative Technique

Tamilselvi applies feminist film theory to argue that *Parched* employs a female gaze, shifting the focus from objectification to women’s lived experiences (Tamilselvi). This challenges traditional cinematic representations dominated by male perspectives.

Mali Yash Amarshi (2025)

Mali Yash Amarshi examines *Hellaro* as a reinterpretation of folklore and cultural memory. The study connects the film's 1975 Emergency setting with the suppression of women's voices, suggesting that the narrative links local gender oppression with broader political repression

Mayank Jha (2022)

Mayank Jha, in his article "Dancing through Patriarchy: Garba as a Means of Resistance in *Hellaro*," argues that garba functions as a non-verbal mode of resistance against patriarchal oppression. He explains that the film transforms garba from a religious ritual into a symbol of women's freedom and agency, allowing women to express resistance through bodily movement rather than speech

Alaka Sahani (2019)

Alaka Sahani emphasizes the role of folktale adaptation and cultural context in *Hellaro*. She argues that the film uses a traditional Kutchi legend to portray suppressed desires and collective rebellion, showing how long-term oppression leads to resistance and transformation

Research Gap

While existing scholarship has explored feminism, patriarchy, sexuality, and solidarity in *Parched* and *Hellaro* there remains scope for further research. Areas such as ecocriticism, spatial theory, and comparative studies with indigenous or regional literatures remain underexplored.

PARCHED AND HELLARO: A CELLULOID CELEBRATION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

"Yatra naryastu pujoyante, Ramantetatradevta"
• [where women are honoured, divinity blossoms there]

This dialogue from the movie "*Parched*" shows the honest state of the world. The violence, hatred, and toxic negativity of patriarchal power is alive and well in India, where gang rapes and honour killings of women and tribal marriage pacts for young girls are relevant. In this movie we can see women who struggle to be themselves or to embrace their own characters. Set against the backdrop of a rural village ruled by a circle of male chauvinists the drama *Parched* focuses on four spirited women who become friends and activists in their own quest for liberation. In this misogynistic community, women are treated as sexual objects.

There are many scenes which prove that in a patriarchal society women considered as a sexual object. For Example, In the beginning of the movie, Gulab and his friends watching the vulgar images and videos of woman in their phone and they are enjoying themselves. For them a woman is a sexual object.

Gulab and his friends are only 18 years old. In this age they had a false attitude about the women. They get it through their social condition, because their surroundings taught them that a woman is also

under them and a man can use them at any time. This is why Rani, his mother arranges a marriage for him. But he spends most of his time with his restless and violent buddies. In many times Rani saved Gulab from the sex workers, because Gulab have no money to give the ladies after his use.

Even after his marriage he approached the ladies for his need of sex. Through this we can understand, how the boy considered a lady in his teenage. When Rani saw Gulab's cruelty against Janaki, she just remembers her husband who once raped and used her madly. This scene begins as evidence for the sexual suppression of woman in the movie. Another character Lajjo is rani's best friend. She is an outcast in the community, because of her infertility. Her husband manoj an alcoholic regularly beats her. Here Manoj is the representation of imperial power and we can relate it with subaltern. The theory subaltern discussing about power of a group against another less powerful one. Here Manoj appears as a group of dominant power against Lajjo, his wife. He beats her without any mercy. He never considered Lajjo as his wife and a woman. His infertility uses as a weapon against his wife.

According to Manoj women in a society are also under male domination and the power is in their hands. So, a man can do anything against woman. Her longs for a comfortable sex show her worst physical experience from her rigid husband. For experiencing such a moment she approached Shaman, her friend Bijli's lover and she realized sex is something that demands respect. Bijli is a free-spirited dancer and prostitute, who is an other character in the movie. Among these four women, she is the fiery one who is most enraged by the terrible things women are forced to do for men. She longs for a regular life. Despite the facts that she sets the terms of sale of her body, she is unable to stop violence and abuse. Bijli is the major character who is deeply suppressed sexually in the movie. She sells her body to multiple men for making money. Here she considered as a sexual object for men.

Leena Yadav has created an explosive portrait of gender inequality and female empowerment. It is very difficult to watch the many scenes of extreme violence toward the women, but it is important for film lovers to see, what is lovey happening all over the world today. *Parched* like most assured films, doesn't talk directly to the audience, it does so through its characters, struggling to find out who they are, their moments, their quirks, their silences and put-on laughter, their quiet desperation, their throbbing despair.

"I am fulfilling my husbandly duties even when I don't like my wife"

This lines clearly prove that, what is the position of a women in her society and how she treated. The movie shows harsh home truths and dares to delve into areas of rural oppression and gender brutality that are normally not seen to be too relevant to matter. In a sense, *parched* filming the other side of the truth about sexism.

"Jar aha hu gharchorke, dekhta hu kaisechalega ye gharbinamardke"

(I am leaving this house... let's see how you are going to run the household without a man)

There is a lot of abusing throughout the movie, it is all close to the reality of rural India. These women live a parched life of despair and disuse. The men have either abandoned them, or use them as chattels, and instruments of brutal pleasure. The spirit of the film is celebrating fights against an unjust system and society and emerging winners-not because they have well-intentioned men rescuing them, but because they can save themselves.

In a patriarchal society, it is very difficult to overcome the issues. In this movie, the various way of female suppression is explained very clearly. The movie had many situations which prove that suppression of woman. In patriarchal community women have no voice to express their freedom or their rights. They are treated like animals and ruled by the male domination. They never get any kind of equality like men. Even in this movie, the character Janaki, the 15 years young girl who forced to marry in her childhood and she lost all of his freedom.

She abandoned her education in very little age. It is very important that, she had a great wish for to continue her education again. But nobody bother her. at last her mother-in-law Rani who realised that if Janaki continue there, she wants to face many problems like rani. So, Rani sends Janaki to her own village for restart her education.

At the same time the movie is a representation of the survival of woman from a patriarchal society. At the end of the movie Yadav explained the way of their escape from the society. Rani, Lajjo, Bijli and Janaki who, ran away from the village through the way of hair cutting. Yadav used a different style to prove that. Janaki escaped from there through her education and other three woman who cut their hair as a symbol of liberation and say good bye to the village. In each and every scene we can connect the movie with the theory subaltern. Subaltern is a term used for show the imperial power against other. Here the characters like Manoj, Gulab and his friends, the men who approached to Bijli and rani's husband is a symbol of imperial power. They suppressed the women in all sector.

They never give any chance to them for prove their selves. In a patriarchal society men and women live as imperialist and colonials. In our history the colonial power always tends to be suppressed. Another phase of women suppression deals through the movie "*Hellaro*" is all about the patriarchal norms. Some major scenes of the movie explain the evil of the society.

"I had asked you to cut your wings yourself. or it will hurt more when I cut them"

It has taken from the movie and it says everything in a single sentence. The dialog by the main character Arjan who is a member of the patriarchal society, who beats and rape his wife manjary without mercy. Woman go through distressing cruelty and oppression mostly because a patriarchal society, a male dominated society in which older men are in position of power. According to the subaltern theory, there is two kinds of group, one of them is in power and other is under them.

In the beginning of the movie, the man who wearing his cloths for the dance Garba, at the time his daughter asks him, that she wants to dance, suddenly her mother stop her and say don't say anything more. The villagers following a set of rules, which must be followed by women. They are not supposed to dance

Garba their ritual art, they aren't allowed to talk to any widows in the village. Collecting water from a desert pond is the only source of happiness for them. Through the way to the pond, they share all their sufferings and isolations. The movie revolves around a group of women which consist 13 members. All of these 13 women in the group have a tale of woe of male torture.

Hansa suffers a miscarriage of a girl child as her husband beats and kicks her. Kesar becomes a widow in her youth, carries on life with her bed-ridden father-in-law and she is barred from talking to anyone in the village, including women. Gayatri's husband is physically violent towards her. Her peevish husband snaps at and shuts up Sita whenever the little girl dares to ask or laugh. As the vivacious Manjari begins embroidery, A widow snatches the piece from her as any such work is a taboo because a young widow had run away with a man who used to buy her Embroidery. Manjari is caught dancing Garba and her husband slaps her saying,

"Had I not told you whether you have grown wings or horns, remove them yourself, because if I cut them, it will pain you more".

Unafraid of any such shackles the women continued to dissent and breakthrough with dancing and living for the dancing Garba. They found a drummer from the way to the desert pond. Each day they learned and modified their intimacy of dancing Garba in the rhythm of the drummer.

"In this village you can't. Better know your limits."

This conversation deeply explains that, how the woman treats in their village, even in their home. Their husbands are the first one who blocked the woman from all sectors. The each and every woman feared about their husbands when they break the village rules. Because they knew that, if they break the conditions of the village, they hardly beaten by their husbands. For example, when they dance garba, in the night they deeply beaten by their husbands. The drummer is the only one who supported that woman through his Dholi. So, the whole woman's who loved him. They open their minds through the dance garba.

"We feel alive for the few moments that we dance to your rhythm"

when the drummer says that he returns to his village. The words say's that how much they loved the dholi. Because, for them it was the only way to express their feelings, emotions and dreams. Here we can apply the theory subaltern as a representation of female suppression. At the end of the movie, the 13 woman's who break the all condition of the village through the dance garba. For the women in kutch, garba was no rebellion but it is simply an art form to express their individuality. It is one thing to describe the many different aspects of women's oppression in different societies, but quite another to be able to answer questions like: well, what's at the bottom of it? Why are women oppressed? In an attempt to at least partially answer this, it is useful to tease the central question apart. Many of the expectations developed are restrictive and oppressive to women.

3. Conclusion

From the above discussion it is clear that in our country women are victims of subordination (under male domination), exploitation (unequal pay, low wages), oppression (violence). The issues of dowry, violence against women, gender equality, discriminatory personal laws, all of these patriarchal practices exist. In our society, the female sexual suppression is considered as the major issue among people. To understand why female sexuality is suppressed in many cultures, we first need to understand what's so special about female sexuality that it ends up being suppressed almost everywhere and not male sexuality.

Thus, to raise women's position, it is urgent to protect women from patriarchal subordination. It is patriarchal ideology which makes us feminine and masculine, which assigns different roles, rights, and responsibilities to women and men. In the modern world where women go ahead by their merit, patriarchy there creates obstacles for women to go forward in society. Because patriarchal institution and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. After marriage a girl goes to her husband's house. So, our family think that girls are burden for them. Son will earn and look after their parents. So, the oppression of a girl starts from her family.

As a wife comes to her husband's house after marriage, so her husband thinks that she is in a subordination position and he is more powerful than her. So here a girl is also oppressed and discriminated. From this results that patriarchy is the dominant cultural pattern where women are in subordinated position and look at male family members regarding general decisions and even in some very personal choices.

Women exercise their freedom in limited sphere of household activities. The whole idea of this paper revolves around the fact that, female sexuality and their all needs are equal to the male. It is concluded that, the both films are male dominant. There is a huge gender, based gap which beats women in their employment and sexual needs. Although women can bring positive change in society but they are always in subordinated position and having no access to their rights. House hold activities are the only domain in which they dominate male group.

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