

Revisioning 'Women' in Contemporary Literature and Cinema
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Abstract

Marginalization refers to deliberate or unconscious political, cultural, social, and economic suppression of a group of people for a long time in the name of the class, caste, age, race, gender, or religion. It results in an unequal distribution of power, wealth, education, duties, and responsibilities. This stops the growth of the marginalized and leads to identity crisis.

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Patriarchy could be better understood by the article “Some Principles of Stratification” by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moorey in 1945 that states the existence of hierarchy in society. The Marxist approach is based on two groups in a society—the ruling class and the subject class. Similarly, the stratification method also derives from the horizontal arrangement of power—higher and lower levels. Men fall under the category of the ruling class because they subjugate the women, who stand the least on stratification principles.

Women have been assigned to do household chores which restrict them to move out and see their capabilities. Women are kept away from productive jobs. Even if some manage to come out to participate, men tend to oppress them by harassing them sexually. According to a report by Human Development Index 1993, “Women are the world’s largest excluded group. Even though they make half of the adult population, and often contribute much more than their share to society, inside and outside the home, they are frequently excluded from positions of power.”

Literature and marginalization have a power relationship with each other. The design of colonized society, culture, feminism, politics, and literature was re-designed post-colonialism but in the same pattern. Contemporary literature enumerates the struggle of subjugates. It would be justified to call the colonial literature, the literature of marginalized.

Society is majorly impacted by movies; no doubt, women are becoming more vocal through films. Filmmakers are now concentrating on women-centric subjects. Nevertheless, women are still objectified in many music albums, advertisements, and movies to attract male audience. Comparing the Hindi movies—*Mother India* (1957), *Mirch Masala* (1987), *No One killed Jessica* (2011), *Earth* (1998), and *Thappad* (2019), the basic concern remains the same throughout the five decades. Even after seven decades of independence, women are still seeking freedom.

Many works have been done on the marginalization of women in contemporary literature and cinema. Poems such as “Milk and Honey” (by Rupi Kaur), “A dream of Common Language” (by Adrienne Rich), “A Collected Poems” (by Sylvia Plath) and many more have been written that describes the helplessness of women to come out of the trap sewed by men. Furthermore, many novelists and short-story writers such as Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto, Kamla Das, Katherine Mansfield, Sylvia Plath, came forth to highlight womens’ angst.

This paper highlights the representation of marginalized women in contemporary literature and cinema. Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* (1982), Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), Alankrita Shrivastva’s movie *Lipstick*

under my Burkha (2011), and Anand Giridhar Das' *Winners Take All* (2018) would be the key works to establish the fact that women have been subjugated by men and society.

***The Other Side of Silence*—by Urvashi Butalia (1998)**

Urvashi Butalia is a well-known feminist writer. Her text *The Other Side of Silence* concentrates on the aftermath of the Partition. Butalia highlighted the concept of double-marginalization. Her book presents the trauma of partition, migration, the struggle of people, politics, nostalgia, and ignorance of communities.

She interviewed Maya Rani, a Dalit woman. Being a Dalit, Rani did not fear the riots of Muslims, Sikhs, or Hindus. Whenever any family fled, Rani used to pick up objects of her interest. To this Rani said that because they were *Harijans*, it made no difference to them.

Post-1947, it was announced that marriages on both sides of the borders would be invalid; it did not matter whether the woman wanted to stay in that marriage or not. Harsher consequences were faced by women who were found pregnant or having a child by a Muslim abductor. An Inter Dominion Treaty was signed to bring back women who were on the other side. However, certain rules were mentioned in the treaty that not all women could be brought back. The life decisions of these women were taken by the state which diminished even the slightest amount of freedom of women. This raised two points—(I) Women had no right to decide what she wanted in her life and the state would make better decisions for women. The point to be noticed here is that young boys were allowed to choose where they wanted to stay after they turned sixteen. (II) The lack of agency that women experienced, which led to seeing forced marriage as a result of abduction within their community.

The tone, language, style of narration of men narrators is completely different from that of women. Men only talked about honor, child loss, suicide, and respect, whereas the narrations of women were concentrated around mental and physical trauma and family loss. Pain cannot be quantified, but concerns differ which enumerates the preferences of an individual; that shows the rationality of her/him in general.

In the midst of it, women were undermining other women. During the dark, shadowed time of Partition, the prime concern of people was to save their honor and tear down the self-esteem of other communities. Their motive was to break the morale of other communities by targeting women. This was the most convenient method to win the battle that has been practiced for ages.

***Top Girl*—by Caryl Churchill (1982)**

Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* is one of the most important plays of the 1980s. Second-Wave Feminism was at its peak when the play was written. The story moves around the female protagonist—Marlene, who successfully bashed the patriarchy and capitalists. The story highlights the social hierarchy of women within them. As mentioned above, a woman is not just marginalized; she is double or maybe triple marginalized. Such women, who subjugate other women, are called patriarchal agents, that is, powerful and privileged women dominate the suppressed women. This was presented by a waitress who serves food to everyone. This shows the system within the system of suppression.

The play underlines the concept of the struggle of women to progress in the chauvinist society. This play is not just limited to the boundaries of England (where it is set) but everywhere else. The Act-One tells the suppression of women in different eras. Act-Two highlights women's struggle in a professional environment, where 'she' is promised to get a reward based on 'her' talent and knowledge. Act-Three follows the conditions women have to go through to follow her passion. The goals of all characters are different; however, their battles are common. The maximum number of female characters makes this play strong. Even though Marlene was presented as a celebrating and independent woman, as the play progresses, we learn that even she is the emotional victim of patriarchy.

Top Girls challenges the unequal distribution of capitalism. It tells the story of women belonging to different periods, social status, and regions. The play highlights the struggle of women and forces its audience to think about the class system, family system, and capitalist system. These types of literary works where successful women do not aid other women are called bourgeois feminists. It refers to a larger number of social powers where women held the highest rank. Churchill successfully illustrates bourgeois feminism in her play. Furthermore, the text represents the authority of marginalized over other the marginalized. Churchill criticizes the class structure in society that makes the situation for the oppressed worse. Churchill displayed the feminist Marxist theory, that is, the equal authority of the marginalized between the class system.

***Lipstick under my Burkha*—by Alankrita Shrivastava (2011)**

As the title suggests—*Lipstick under my Burkha*, 'lipstick' signifies modernity, confidence, desire, and sexuality. On the other hand, 'burkha' is a symbol of tradition, suppression of desire, and concealment of identity. This movie is about the oppression of women on various grounds. Each woman character in the movie is entitled by the label of 'immoral.' All the four female protagonists are living a

secret life because they would never be appreciated to live openly. Rehana Adibi, a college girl, steals cosmetic products, wears jeans, and sings secretly. She seeks to create her own identity. Second is Leela, who runs a small beauty parlor and wishes to travel the world with her secret lover, Arshad, but her family does not allow her to continue her relationship with him and forces her to marry someone else. The third protagonist is Shireen, who catches her husband cheating on her. She is used by her husband only to fulfill his sexual desires without any contraceptive that leads to multiple secret abortions of Shireen. And fourth is Rozy, who is 55-year-old. She falls in love with her telephonic young lover. She is scared of expressing her feelings to him and her family, so she tried her best to keep her love secret on the telephone, however, fails in the end.

Lipstick under my Burkha, reflects the reality of society. It tells how women struggle to gather small happiness for themselves. This movie not just underlines the sexual desires of women, but their desire to live on their terms and conditions. Do women have the freedom to want? This movie is about the lipstick (desire) that has been hidden under a *burkha* (tradition). This movie is a challenge to the patriarchal society to stop 'her' revealing her lipstick.

***Winners Take All*—by Anand Giridhardas (2018)**

Giridhardas touched on society's elite charades and how benefactors are effecting change in his book *Winners Take All*. We want to make a difference in the world without compromising ourselves. Giridhardas raided the freshly gilded winners' inner sanctums, where powerful and wealthy individuals fight and struggle for the less powerful so that their own stratum is not hurt in the future. Why do the unelected members of the upper class handle problems when the elected representatives are nothing more than mannequins in their hands, especially when the state is evading the taxes we pay to the country? When powerful gains a monopoly, those with the least power turn to the state for assistance, a state that relies solely on monopoly approaches.

This system is referred to as 'Neoliberalism' by Giridhardas. Winners have made this system so mechanical that we find ourselves falling into it despite our best efforts to avoid it. I'd like to classify the 'winners' into three categories based on this book: (I) Someone who sincerely wants to see a change in society and is looking for solutions to improve it. (II) Those who are uninterested in bringing about change. Their only concern is to make money. (III) Giridhardas is referring to the winners. These people tend to bring about changes in a way that does not jeopardize their power, riches, or monopoly control.

The aim should be to give women more opportunities in the workplace. To improve this area, measures must be implemented that encourage them to participate in the business sphere. Aids such as maternity leaves, child care tax credits, and so on must be made available to more women. For the Corporations, these amenities are prohibitively expensive. As a result, this is where the issue arises. The management would opt to shut it off in order to save money and enhance profits. They employ solutions such as telling women to face the responsibility of failure, misogyny, and a lack of representation in the house of power in such instances. This results in a counterfeit change in the condition of women.

The privileged sector, that is, men, are more willing to bring about changes via a feminist lens, but in a way that does not diminish their authority. Men participate in feminist workshops and campaigns, but they devise means inside themselves to ensure that women never have a chance to compete. They are undoubtedly aware of women's potential, which is why they have no plans to modify the system. They would create their brand of feminism in such a way that it empowers women in marginalized communities. Elites would publish dissertations on how to uplift women and encourage them to break free from the confines to which they have been confined while maintaining their riches and power in the world.

Said believed that orientalism was not just a political subject, it was based on the regional division based on capitalism. Similarly, women's subjugation is not just a social issue, it is linked with capitalism as well. As the relationship between the occident and the orient is the relationship of domination, power, and wealth, similarly, the pioneer of patriarchy is domination, power, and wealth.

Conclusion

Women have uncountable qualities; however, the chauvinist society does not allow her or provide an opportunity to come out of the trap. This continuous suppression leads to the marginalization of women that snatches various opportunities. This creates us v/s them feeling, where men play the role of ruling class and women as the subject class that connects Marxism with feminism. Marginalization is one of the repercussions of colonialism. As the British were subjugating the Indians, men suppressed women.

1. Literature and cinema are the mirrors of society. Previously, women writers and directors were not allowed to come up in the league due to the fear of exposition and awareness. As time progressed, women writers and directors came up with radical movies that concentrated on women's struggles. The point to note here is that the main concern of cinema and literature—seeking acknowledgment and appreciation is still present; certainly, because it is dominated by men.

Urvashi Butalia's *Other Side of the Silence* is one such powerful text that enumerates the struggle of women Post-Indira Gandhi assassination. It highlights the opposition of men to uplift women. No doubt, abandoned women were given *ashrams* to live, but on terms and conditions. Many women were forced to return when they wished not to. Works were given; however, the major portion of work was still done by men that provided the maximum number of finance to men. Furthermore, the way of expression of men and women was different. Men's concerns were property loss, financial loss, women's honor, et cetera. On the other hand, women talked about child loss, trauma, depression, mental health, friendship, love, et cetera. This shows the preferences and rationality of both genders.

Churchill's *Top Girls* is an epitome of the marginalization of women for eons. This underlines the patriarchal agents, where women are not suppressed by men, but women as well. The play highlights the struggle of women to work against men—domestically, financially, economically, or socially. Marlene, the protagonist of the play, acts as a bourgeois feminist who stands against chauvinism, but does not let any other vulnerable come up to compete. Various characters of different eras and regions show the universality of pain that women go through. This play questions the various systems of society. Very well Marxist's theory of society could be enlightened here where a marginalized overpowers other marginalized to fix their authority on society. This gives them a sense of victory where they feel dominated.

Cinema plays a very important role that controls the niche audience. People admire and follow what cinema presents. Considering feminist cinema of the 1950s, the primary concern of feminist films was similar, that is, getting a deserved place in the male dominating society. Moving further to feminist movies of the 21st century, the demands and representation have changed, however, the root cause remains the same that is, seeking acknowledgment.

Lipstick under my Burkha is the most important movie of the era that reveals the universality of women's fight, regardless of religion, class, or age. If truth be told, they consciously do that to publicize their brand. This is how capitalism and patriarchy are molded together.

Capitalism and patriarchy are the two allies that set their working pattern that subjugates their respective vulnerable. Both play a major role in maintaining gender hierarchy in society. Men participate in the feminist workshops and movements, but within themselves develop ways so that women can never come to compete with them. No doubt, they are aware of the capabilities of women that is why they do not intend to bring the change in the system. They would design their feminism in a way that uplifts women, which makes them more powerful than before.

The change would not take place overnight, but gradually. Continuous efforts are being made to uplift women, however in a capitalist pattern or socialist pattern. It is essential to begin from the domestic level. Filmmakers and writers should work in a way that entertains as well as forces the moviegoers to think about the suppressing condition of the subjugated. One cannot bring the change alone; everyone should work hand-in-hand to make society a better place for all.

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