

Representing Atrocity of the Marginalised Class in Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda*

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Abstract

It is highly ignominious that in modern democratic world, marginalisation still prevails in India and around the world. Voices roar for justice and discrimination against marginalised section of society either on streets or with pen. This study is specifically conducted to demonstrate the adverse conditions of women and children in rural as well as urban vicinity of India with special reference to inequality, injustice and exploitation succinctly described by Kiran Nagarkar in his masterpiece novel Jasoda. Researcher uses qualitative method and distant reading of Franco Moretti (1972) as a tool in order to represent the network of dominance. This article aims to sort out the causes of extreme adversity of marginals and implications of immigration. Besides this, researcher also highlights the problem of child trafficking. Researcher, therefore, after evaluating the causes of their suffering recommends certain efforts from the authority as well as society to stigmatize the severe sufferings, humiliating incidents, verbal as well as physical abuse of women and children. This article is significant because it also gives voice to the voiceless specifically women and children of marginalised community.

Keywords: *jasoda, abuse, plight, exploitation, child trafficking, education.*

Introduction

This section focuses on review of literature in order to comprehend the issue of marginalisation. 'Marginalisation is a global problem that impacts negatively upon societies across the world.' (Movat 454). 'To be marginalised is to have a sense that one does not belong and, in so doing, to feel that one is neither a valued member of a community . . . (457)'. 'When we say marginal, we must always ask, marginal to what? But this question is difficult to answer. The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the centre always seems to be somewhere else . . .' (Ferguson 19). Marginalisation is such a blot on Indian society that demeans the lives of humans especially of those who are poor or weak, often gets obliterated by the powerful people who exercise adequately the weapon of patriarchal dominance. In modern times, marginalisation still exists in Indian society on the basis of caste, color, religion, or belief but the situations of poor section of society is incomparable to the suffering of the privileged class. They still face the hostile treatment from various channels viz., males dominance, domestic violence, physical as well as verbal abuse particularly women and children who are excessively subjected to exploitation. Inge Tvedten and Gilson Lázaro concludes in their study that, "In the classic literature on

poverty, rural poverty is often seen as more severe than urban poverty in material terms – but with a stronger safety net in the form of traditional institutions and social networks. . . (4)'. *The Statesman* has published an enlightening article on 'Migration and Marginalisation' where it is stressed that, 'The unheard voice of the migrant population is felt as they are deprived from social, cultural and political identity. . . Girls and women are prey to sexual exploitation and children are not free from the clutches of malnutrition. Again, double discrimination come to the fore when a migrant is a woman, disable and belongs to lower strata of the society'. (Biswal). Dr. Khokan Kumar Bag and Piyal Basu Roy in their study, "Changing Face of Women Exploitation in India", finds that agricultural activities are conducted by majority of rural women and they do not work in service sector like males consequentially make them economically dependent on their husbands and thus victimized them to bear domestic violence (4).

Methodology

This study chooses qualitative method of research in order to have a deep understanding of the sufferings of impoverished woman and children. Furthermore, with the help of distant reading; a method of understanding, evaluating or interpreting a literary text from distance is

incorporated. This method of reading a text (invented by Franco Moretti) aims to interpret or understand vast amount of information by keeping ourselves at a distance, gained popularity with the advent of digital humanities and its scholarship. Keeping in view, the modern times, researcher uses this method to look from a distance to the various ways of marginalisation as different units in order to understand the multiple layers of exploitation of marginalised section. This method 'aspires to generate textual and numerical evidence from texts at large scale' so that excessive information can be visualized as small units to make it more comprehensive (RenaissanceX, 1:02- 1:08).

Discussion

This study demonstrates the lives of rural as well as urban people who are marginalised under patriarchal dominance and male chauvinism. Jasoda; the protagonist of the novel, is an epitome of marginalised class who bears both physical as well as verbal abuse. In her calamity, she went to seek assistance from Bhanwarilalji, the grocer in the village Kantigiri, to feed her children. She requested him to search his shop to know if some kerosene oil is available. He scolds her with abusive language, "Where shall I look Jasoda? In the folds of my dhoti? His hand went to the crotch and scratched his member, 'Want to check it' (13)". Males' chauvinistic attitude towards women is one of the major causes that give vent to the unfavourable gestures often adopted by male to harass women, even in their unpleasant time. Domestic violence is another social evil that works as an exploitative stratagem against Jasoda, Savitri and powerless. For an instance, "She returned home. The back of her husband's hand caught her on the jaw. She staggered and fell back upon Himmat. 'Wasted the whole day and what do you have to show for it? No water, no kerosene.' Sangram Singh kicked her in the small of her back. 'Get up. I'm late. Cook my meal first.'" (13-14). It is also evident in a study that, 'Around 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence, . . . 50% of women surveyed had experienced some form of domestic violence throughout their married life. . . (Nalgirkar). Jasoda's husband Sangram Singh who works at royal palace also gets treated as marginal in the hands of the Prince Parbat Singh who says, 'Take that bloody face of yours and don't show it here or in any part of this world. Ever.' . . . 'Can't you pick up some ghastly disease, syphilis or smallpox or Leprosy, something that will make you die a long death so that I don't have to see your ugly

face till my dying day?' (23). Marginal section of the society often experiences harsh treatment from high class society in the form of verbal abuse. Parbat Singh abuses Jasoda in conversation with her husband and says, 'Stop peering inside my room. Haven't you seen naked flesh before? Or do you copulate with all her clothes on? (23-24).

Sangram Singh is an absolute symbol of oppression as he often exploits Savitri sexually, the wife of an outcast, and constantly abuses her which is explored in the following lines, ' . . . Sangram Singh crushed the brittle rock slowly over her breast and belly. He bent down and began to lick the sweet powder. Savitri's eyes closed and she began to breathe through her mouth . . . unhurried pleasure crested and broke inside her. . . '. Savitri bears sexual assault led by Sangram on various occasions and he allows ants to crawl on all over her body and jumped when he himself is bitten by ants and say, 'What shall I do, you slut, what shall I do?' (42). Savitri under the influence of Sangram Singh suffers excessively who literally marginalises her and use her as an object of sex, treats her as if she is a prostitute, devoid of respect and gratitude. Her pathetic physical tormentation is revealed as, ' . . . Her eyes were swollen and purple-blue. Her lips were red, ready to burst, the lower lip hanging out pendulously. She did not venture to look at the rest of her body (44)'. The exploitation of Savitri is highly condemnable and very heart wrenching when, ' . . . He pinned her against the wall stretched, her arms behind her head and raced his fingers from the underside of her arms to her armpits, to her breasts . . . ' 'Stop, stop you are hurting me' He paid no attention to her pleas. He was digging into the sides of her flat hard stomach . . . (49). Savitri's exploitation reaches its highest level of disgrace when Sangram Singh sent her outside when she is nude, noticed by Himmat (his son). Dulare, the husband of Savitri, is also exploited by him and falsely charged with an alleged unpardonable in spite against his class. Savitri pleads submissively that, 'Come into your part of the village and break into someone's house? Which Untouchable would dare to do that? Least of all Dulare!' (52).

Drought is not merely a natural calamity causing disastrous famine, shortage of water, infertility of the ground and other challenges related to the livelihood of rural people but also brings forth various hindrances to

rural folk that simply aggravates the suffering of woman more than anyone else in the society. It is explored in the novel that the effect of drought enforces people of Kantigiri towards migration from rural to urban and also prompts them to live like marginal in slums. Jasoda, when loses everything visits her husband in the palace to provide her money to feed children and to take care of his mother from illness. He shows least care, affection or responsibility towards his family which is clearly evident in the following conversation:

'About time you, the children and Maa left.'

'Where would we go?'

'Where everybody from the village has gone. To some city or the other.'

'And you, won't you come with us?'

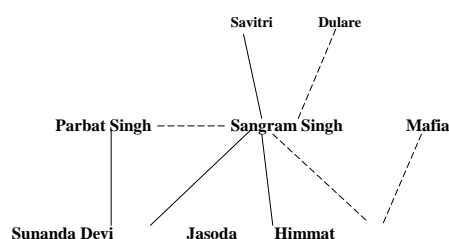
'I've got responsibilities here. Do you expect me to leave His Highness?' (J 91)

Researcher also traces instances where the torture of high class society (untouchability) over the marginalised section is evident in the novel. Dulare faces extreme indignation that prompts him to take shelter in the well to abdicate the cruelty of the upper caste, particularly of Sangram Sings who says, '... Which untouchable would dare to enter our well and pollute it? ... (J 66)' Savitri pleads him for the safety of her husband and shows her willingness to be his servitor as well as a slave but on this score he emphasise that she has already been subjected to this (67). The innocent caricature of Himmat reflects the pathetic condition of the children living in slums of India belonging to the marginalised section. His actions are realistically portrayed that we often see in cinema (like *SlumdogMillonaire*, 2008) or each nook and corner of city/slum. He starts begging during childhood in order to support the livelihood of his family which is so realistic and pathetic. He, in his petulant voice says, 'Pleaje, madam, give phiveruppije'. He followed it up with a tuneless song. 'No fadder, no mudder. No brudder, no shister. Nutting to eet. Give phiveruppijepleaje' (114). His powerful words float like strings on readers mind to stir up pathos.

Woman of the marginalised section also encounters hygienic problems so badly that they are unable cope up with. They have issues like earning daily bread, water and shelter but meanwhile they ought to undergo personal battle of menstrual hygiene with least knowledge and

inadequate facilities from the government or other agencies. 'Jasoda had been so preoccupied with getting to know the city, settling down, and eking out enough to feed her family, she hadn't noticed that she had missed her period for a few months –three months to be precise. . . (116)'. She faces all her hurdles of life as well as each intimidation fearlessly in slums from mafia. Slum mafia is also an example of patriarchal dominance and exploitation which is extremely prevalent in these areas. A mafia told Jasoda, "As far as you are concerned I am the Sarkar. I'm not just the government, make no mistake, I'm the Almighty Himself. I can throw you and your children out of the city if I want. I can take you children away and put them to work if you don't pay the rent and you will never see them again". (118)

Following chart demonstrate the hierarchical dominance of man to woman, and man to man:

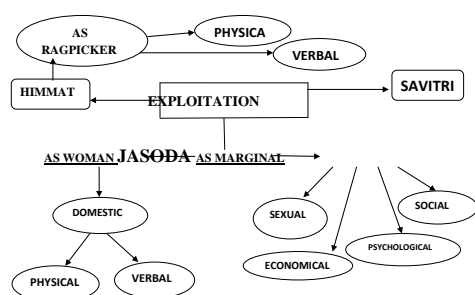


Himmat as a rag picker collect plastic bottles and such other recyclable things for selling purpose. The childhood of Himmat falls under the meanest job to support the livelihood of his family. He becomes the sole breadwinner of the family. Jasoda is an epitome of hard work, struggle and optimism. Each morning seems hectic for her as she has to get up early around 5 O'clock, and then, '... into the park through a tiny gap in the fence and went on to the rocky shoreline where she could brush her teeth, go to the toilet and finish her bucket- bath without anyone watching her (165). She never submits or surrenders before the adverse situation instead she fights back bravely and find ways to live a dignified life in adversity. Her life in slum is extremely troublesome but somehow she finds a job which is tough and hectic for a mother. She is supposed to report at half past five in the morning in the shop and finish her task quickly as a machine, "... Her first task at that early hour was to briskly scrub the mud off twenty kilos of potatoes in a tub of water, refill the tub, light the kerosene stove and put the potatoes

to boil. That done, she set about peeling ten kilos of onions and chopping them, her eyes watering profusely . . .” (Jasoda 133)

Another big hurdle in the lives of marginal in slum is the threat of child trafficking. Jasoda has also faced this problem as her child Saleem is being kidnapped. She complains to the police administration but no one seems interesting to investigate the matter. So the question arises, do the lives of poor section in slums really matter for the governing bodies? Police administration was totally reluctant to understand the pain of a mother for her son. She even knows the kidnapper but just because she doesn't have proof let her voice unheard and suppressed.

The exploitation of Jasoda, Savitri and Himmat as marginal, finds researcher, is of various kinds, shown in the chart below:



Conclusion

Ecological destruction has now become the major reason which germinates other problems of marginalisation like food shortage, water crises, migration etc. This problem hits Women and children of marginalised class the worst with numerous forms of violence which degrades their ways of living. Both woman and children are subjected to males' chauvinism and domestic violence which prevails in *Jasoda*. To overcome these forms of marginalisation, weapon of education should be incorporated to awaken the conscious of the people towards humility and gratitude for fellow citizens irrespective of their gender, age, colour, class, caste or religion. *Jasoda* emerges as character which symbolises the pensive state of woman as marginal in rural or in urban because she suffers double marginalisation on the basis of gender and class. *Jasoda*

is an inspirational as well as iconic woman in the novel who faces all her adversities with optimism and strong bent of mind. She becomes the full custodian of her destiny and with her hard labour contributes to the success of her son Himmat.

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