

VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: PRATIBHA RAY'S LITERARY ENGAGEMENT WITH SUBALTERNITY

Jayashree B K¹, Dr. C Channappa²

¹Assistant Professor of English, GFGC Rajajinagar, Bangalore

²Research Supervisor, Department of P.G Studies and Research in English,
Kuvempu University, Shankaraghatta, Shimoga

ABSTRACT

This study examines the literary oeuvre of Pratibha Ray, a renowned Indian author, from the perspective of subalternity. Ray's literary works delve into the narratives and perspectives of marginalised individuals and communities, thereby illuminating their unique experiences and challenges. This study analyses the contribution of Ray's narratives on the discourse on subalternity, drawing upon postcolonial and subaltern studies. It explores how Ray's work gives voice to those silenced and oppressed. This analysis examines novels, short tales, and essays to shed light on the intricate methods employed to portray and interact with marginalised identities, concerns, and aspirations. Moreover, this examines the broader socio-political framework within which Ray's literary works are situated and analyses their importance within the Indian literary milieu.

KEYWORDS: *subaltern, marginalised, Pratibha Ray, Indian Literature, caste*

INTRODUCTION

Indian author Pratibha Ray, born in the city of Cuttack in Odisha in 1943, is well regarded for her many contributions to the Literature of that language. She is also well known for the essential creative works she has produced that successfully highlight the voices of underrepresented groups. A major figure in Indian Literature, Ray's writings have received widespread critical acclaim and been translated into various languages. Not much has been done in Indian Literature to explore the subject of subalternity, thus Ray's study of it is awe-inspiring. Her writings are moving because they show people on the outside of society and their fight for dignity and acceptance. Through this study the idea is to shed light on Ray's writings as the voices from the margins. In this regard, the paper delves into a critical analysis of Ray's methods of examining subalternity in her literary works. Isolated from mainstream culture, subalterns are persecuted while their voices and experiences are mostly disregarded. Ray's writings like *Yajnaseni* (1984) "...my birth was not from my father's seed but from the sacrificial altar built for fulfilling a vow. Even before birth, I was destined to avenge my father's insult! I would be a weapon for preserving Dharma on this earth and destroying the wicked. It was for this reason that I was born. Should only women be forced to be the medium for preserving Dharma and annihilating evil throughout the ages? Is it the woman who is the cause of creation and destruction?" (Ray, p. 8)

- The primary purpose of this critical analysis is to assess the capacity of Ray's works to empower marginalised individuals and challenge dominant narratives.
- Secondly, Pratibha Ray's works in the socio-political context were written in order to understand historical and impact her portrayal of subalternity.

RAY'S LITERARY APPROACH

Subaltern studies, a prominent theoretical framework within the realm of postcolonial studies, offers a complete understanding of the viewpoints, lived experiences, and agency of historically oppressed and marginalised groups. Distinguished scholars, like Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, have made significant scholarly contributions to the subject matter now being examined. The discipline of subaltern studies lays considerable importance on creating a space for subaltern voices and critically examining dominant narratives. Pratibha Ray utilises a refined literary approach that involves a comprehensive portrayal of subaltern identities and their associated experiences. The author employs several narrative techniques and character portrayals to successfully explore the notion of subalternity, so facilitating readers in acquiring a more profound comprehension of the day-to-day realities faced by marginalised individuals in India.

SUBALTERN VOICES

Pratibha Ray's body of literary work explores the complex dynamics between marginalised voices and subalternity, shedding light on the actual experiences of persons who have endured suppression and marginalisation. The concept of subalternity, originating from critical theory, provides a theoretical lens through which one may understand the power dynamics and hierarchical structures encountered by marginalised groups in society (Masiero, 2022). The scholarly paper, "Postcolonial feminist research: challenges and complexities" (Ozkazanc-Pan, 573-591), delves into the many problems encountered by researchers that use postcolonial feminist frameworks in their investigative work. The author explores theoretical concepts like representation, subalternity, and reflexivity, highlighting challenges in implementing them in fieldwork. It emphasises the implications for feminist praxis in international management theory, scholarly inquiry, and academic output, suggesting a relational perspective on subalternity for assessing individuals in commercial activities.

Ray's work highlights the significance of including indigenous perspectives in the discourse on disadvantaged populations. Throughout history, marginalised groups have effectively used knowledge to protect and preserve their cultural legacy and challenge prevailing narratives. According to Masiero (2022), the use mentioned allows communities to assert their unique identities and contest the repressive pressures imposed upon them. Ray's work explores an extra dimension about silenced perspectives, namely *Subarnalata*, *Yajnaseni*, and *Nimai of Nadia*, which depict patriarchal norms limiting women's potential. These systems also result in a lack of legal recourse for women facing discrimination and violence. Ray's analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's chosen short tales depicts women as subalterns, without agency and incapable of articulating their thoughts and feelings. Tagore's literary oeuvre strives to emancipate women and cultivate awareness about the need for education for persons of both genders. Ray's study investigates the representation of women who experience marginalisation and powerlessness within the patriarchal framework of Indian culture. This research highlights how these women are susceptible to manipulation by their husbands and society.

Ray's study aligns with the intentions of subaltern studies, which investigate historical events from a standpoint that prioritises the experiences of marginalised persons and groups. This approach also amplifies the voices that have traditionally been marginalised and suppressed. This practice involves engaging in meaningful dialogue with marginalised people and creating a space inside academic Literature to include their perspectives. Ray's study significantly enhances strategic communication by magnifying the viewpoints of low-income minority women, making a vital scholarly addition. The methodology mentioned above follows subaltern critique, a theoretical framework that aims to interrogate dominant narratives and illuminate the lived realities of marginalised persons (Place & Ciszek, 2021).

Ray's literary works explore marginalised populations and their struggles, focusing on indigenous voices and patriarchy's impact on women's marginalisation. Her work, *Yajnaseni* (1984), offers a unique perspective on the Mahabharata, placing Draupadi, a traditionally marginalised heroine, at the centre. Ray's contributions to understanding power dynamics (Masiero, 2022) and amplifying marginalised perspectives have significantly influenced our understanding of these communities.

The literary works penned by Ray, including *Subarnalata* and *Nimai of Nadia*, explore the lived realities and socio-cultural contexts of women and persons originating from rural areas. These memoirs provide valuable perspectives on the marginalised experiences of women and their struggles in navigating cultural norms and patriarchal systems. The literary works *Yajnaseni* and *Mahamoha*, go into an extensive examination of the notion of subalternity. The novel *Yajnaseni* offers a reinterpretation of the epic Indian text *The Mahabharata* by presenting the narrative from the viewpoint of Draupadi. This literary work sheds light on the intricate nature of Draupadi's circumstances and her struggles in navigating societal norms that are deeply entrenched. The text *Mahamoha* also delves into the challenges encountered by Draupadi. The use of themes and motifs within these literary works contributes to a holistic comprehension of the intricate nature of subalternity. Pratibha Ray's literary works explore the social and cultural origins of subalternity, focusing on the experiences of marginalised individuals. They explore identity, agency, and resistance themes, highlighting their resilience. Ray's works advocate for inclusion and equality, addressing caste-based discrimination, gender inequity, and economic disparities. They serve as platforms for individuals to share their viewpoints.

Ray's portrayal of subalterns is beyond a mere account of these individuals, delving into the complexities and subtleties of their identities. This helps readers comprehensively comprehend the cultural establishments that persistently disadvantage certain demographic groups. Ray's literary compositions serve as a catalyst for readers, inciting them to critically evaluate the prevailing power dynamics within society and actively endeavour to deconstruct these dynamics to establish a society characterised by principles of justice and equality. Through analysing the personal experiences of subaltern characters and questioning established cultural standards, Ray urges readers to engage in introspection and critical evaluation of their preconceived notions and discriminatory attitudes. The examination of Ray's body of work catalyses fostering empathy and facilitating collective endeavours towards constructing a society that supports inclusivity. This analysis primarily focuses on portraying agency and resistance among marginalised groups in the context of repressive regimes throughout Ray's body of work.

Ray profoundly influences the conceptualisation and understanding of subalternity, serving as a platform for marginalised individuals whose perspectives have traditionally been suppressed throughout historical narratives. The characters in Ray's works demonstrate acts of resistance, forging alliances with each other and reclaiming agency over their own story. Ray fosters a sense of motivation to champion and amplify marginalised voices traditionally disregarded in historical discourse by questioning established narratives and promoting a critical examination of one's complicity in upholding oppressive systems. Ray's literary works have engendered discourse and heightened consciousness about the challenges and hardships the subaltern encounters, resulting in enhanced comprehension and empathy for the authentically lived realities of this marginalised group. Ray's literary works have incited the academic community to participate in a critical discourse. This discourse centres on the themes of power dynamics and the portrayal of marginalised individuals within Ray's writings. Academics and readers have praised the author's ability to raise the voices of disadvantaged people, also known as subalterns.

SUBALTERN VOICES FROM ODISHA

Ray's creative works are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural variety of Odisha, a region characterised by its unique fusion of tribal, Dalit, and other marginalised social groups. The author's literary works exhibit various subaltern identities in Odisha. The period in which Ray authored her literary works was characterised by significant socio-political movements in India, including advocacy for the rights of Dalits and tribal people. Ray clearly manifested her active engagement with various social movements, showcasing her unwavering support for marginalised populations. Pratibha Ray, an Indian author, has been actively involved in social and cultural activities focusing on social justice and the empowerment of marginalised communities (Smith, 2018). Her literary works, such as *Subarnalata* and *Yajnaseni*, are characterised by themes related to gender equality and the challenge of patriarchal norms. Ray's characters and narratives advocate for women's rights and challenge oppressive societal structures, while her writings often explore the lives and struggles of marginalised communities, including Dalits and tribal populations (Brown, 2021)

Ray's advocacy for social change is evident through her essays and public statements, which emphasise the role of Literature in addressing social issues and bringing about transformation. She has also been a strong advocate for education, particularly for girls and women, with her characters grappling with limited access to education. Pratibha Ray's literary works effectively advocate for social change, focusing on oppressed groups like Dalits and tribals. She promotes women's rights and education, highlighting the role of Literature in addressing societal concerns. Ray's commitment to societal transformation is evident in her articles and public declarations (Roberts, 2017). The process of deconstructing hegemonic narratives involves the examination and evaluation of the stories and discourses that are widely embraced within a particular culture. From a critical standpoint, Ray's works effectively challenge prevailing narratives that have historically marginalised or disregarded the realities of marginalised groups. This study elucidates the methods through which she engages in critical analysis and subverts staying cultural conventions by offering an alternative viewpoint that humanises and liberates those at the periphery of societal structures. The term "socio-political context" refers to the intricate relationship between social and political elements that contribute to the formation and impact of a particular circumstance or occurrence. It incorporates the broader social and political structures. Pratibha Ray's literary contributions extend beyond her fictional works, including a significant corpus of writings that critically analyse societal concerns and delve into the domain of subalterns.

Pratibha Ray's literary examination of the subalterns has had a lasting impact on the Indian literary scene. By critically analysing dominant narratives, Pratibha Ray's works promote social and cultural transformation by highlighting

gender inequity and caste injustice. Her characters are empathetic, making readers feel their problems. Ray's essays challenge patriarchal beliefs and social standards, encouraging community thought and social transformation. Her writings inspire debate and action on critical social issues via resilience and bravery. Ray proposes a more equitable society in her articles and public declarations. Her stories make readers rethink gender, caste, and social justice. Literature can mobilise public opinion and action with her activity. Her legacy inspires authors and readers to utilise writing to improve the world.

CONCLUSION

Pratibha Ray's commitment to social justice and her standing as a storyteller are displayed in her works examining subalternity. Ray's research endeavours to shed light on the lived experiences and obstacles disadvantaged persons and groups face, using theoretical frameworks rooted in postcolonial and subaltern studies. Ray's literary works include a range of genres, including novels, short tales, and essays, whereby she adeptly represents and actively interacts with individuals and communities that are marginalised within society. These works serve as a platform for exploring and addressing the many challenges, concerns, and ambitions these marginalised identities face. The author's literary works are positioned within the socio-political environment of Odisha, whereby she links herself with various groups that advocate for the rights of oppressed populations. Ray's tales serve as a means of contesting prevailing discourses, creating a space for critical conversation, and advocating for social justice and equality principles.

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