

The Subaltern Can Speak in Selim Al Deen's *Chaka* (*The Wheel*)**Shohel Rana**Adjunct Faculty (Senior Lecturer)
North South University, Bangladesh.**Abstract**

Can the peasants, women and the people who live from hand to mouth speak in our Indian context? “Yes, of course they can” could be the immediate answer of such a question. However, if one analyzes the history of the representation of the subaltern throughout the world and specifically the history of our sub-continental national archives, he /she may become confused and frustrated finding misrepresentation or may be, no representation of the heroism and the sacrifices that the subaltern made. This paper attempts to portray Selim Al Deen's depiction of the suppressed subaltern through letting them talk in the text *Chaka* (*Wheel*). Making a dead body live through the passages of the text, Selim Al Deen shows the hypocrisies of the powerful discourses and urges a necessity to subvert the existing notion of representation. He uses native language and culture to give subaltern a voice of their own. Using different theoretical approaches to analyze the text, this paper ultimately concludes by giving a hint that subaltern can speak if they are given a context of their own.

Key Words : Subaltern, Representation, The Wheel (Chaka), Language, Culture.

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Shohel Rana

Adjunct Faculty (Senior Lecturer)
North South University, Bangladesh.

(I)

“Dear listener* Now pity for those who killed him. Who scattered his destiny by wrong address*Pity for those who disfigured his belly. Has hide the reason for killing* who mercilessly hit the bull which has been the companion of human beings’ sufferings for thousands and thousands years and won battles. May the ears and eyes of the people of Noyanpur and Nobinpur be covered with muds and coughs* except that old woman who until this evening thinks that this is her Shonafor” (Selim 40; 3rd Lombok, Second Torongo.)

“The extensions of the sentences themselves carry meaning” (Selim 45). This extract indicates how Selim al Deen represented the subaltern in *The Wheel*. Looking from every side of the history of the representation of the subaltern, the depiction of the subaltern in *The Wheel* can be termed as effective representation. Deep excavation of language, structure, narration, characters and a deconstructive reading would clarify whether this text speaks on behalf of the subaltern or not. But before going to the main discussion, the idea of subaltern and their position in different discourses of history should be scrutinized.

‘Gramsci used the term “subaltern” interchangeably with “subordinate” or sometimes “instrumental” “to denote” non hegemonic groups or classes. He used the term to refer in particular to the unorganized groups of rural peasants based in Southern Italy, who had no social or political consciousness as a group, and were susceptible to the ruling ideas, culture and leadership of the state. Subaltern Studies Collective defines subaltern as “the general attitude of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.” Spivak’s definition includes women’s lives and histories into account.’ (Stephen 48)

“In the historical archives of the British Empire, the lives and political agencies of the rural peasantry in India were subordinated to the larger project of imperial governance and social control; in the elite narratives of bourgeois national independence, the localized resistance movements were subordinated to the larger nationalist project of decolonization. In both cases the complex social and political histories of particular subaltern groups were not recognized or represented.” (Stephen 50) The struggle and contribution of women have always been absent from Marxist approach. Deconstructive reading takes account of

women's struggles. "Can the subaltern speak?" shows how, if the subaltern wants to talk, they have to take help of different discourses. Otherwise, they cannot speak.

While reading the text of *the wheel* it seems that Selim al Deen used participant observation in presenting the life of the subaltern. As if he mixed with them and knew their language, culture, history and struggle unlike those historians who generalize their struggle.

Language plays a more significant role in this text to make the subaltern speak. Selim al Deen takes the basic peasant language. Language carries culture and people like Baher, Shokhurchan are the creator of language. By giving them voice through their tongue, Selim al Deen goes back to native culture and celebrates the power of their everyday conversation. There is no strict maintenance of traditional rules--comma, semicolon etc. ---- in writing this play and the words themselves carry significant meanings. This play highlights oral culture. Shokhurchan sits down and say,

"Hey brother our wheel has got problem

What happened

No, this part is loosed

O" (Selim 9 ; 1st Lombok, 2nd wave)

Peasant culture embodies songs, dances, stories, proverbs. These have many moral tales which relate with the simple lifestyle of the farmers. This play is an oral play. Dhoromraj dances and sing a song of doll's dance

"See see my friends

See with ur eyes passionately

Coming into the river Jomuna your Hori is playing

Such a picture of moon

The sun in the sky" (Selim 20; 2nd Lombok, 1st wave)

Breakdown of rules symbolizes the subaltern's lives which are also broken into many pieces. They are tired of their life.

We find postmodernism with each person having their own stories to tell. The procession of people for searching their beloved ones around the lifeless body gives us explicit description. Rehena waits for tariff who works with a political party which refers to the 1986-87 turmoil in Bangladesh. Shorboti waits for her husband who works at the jute mill. The old woman of 60 waits for her Shonafor. All of these details make us remember that this is a true representation of their life.

Deconstructive reading can give importance to that women crying for Shonafor or the wife in Baher's story or Rehena, waiting for Tarif. The men's lives are centered on women. Women are life giver. And also the female dog with their journey specifies that women have

always been the companion of men in the struggles. Kazi Nazrul Islam in his "women" said "men never won battles solely by his sword/strong hearted women gave him inspiration and strength"

The blood of Karbala with Hassan and Hossain appear into the narrative which re-ignites the history of the revolution in 1986-87 in our country. The sudden change of the color and figure of the dead body turning into a superhuman signifies the potential revenge of the subaltern. Selim al Deen describes "had there been any expression of hatred and anger in any lifeless body for the merciless deaths in the world, then the figure of the dead body would have been like this" (40; 3rd Lombok, 2nd wave)

There is positive natural description of the villages. "One day in a morning of summer, in a river called Kakeshshori, a village Elongzani in front of the east but situated in the west, shines by sunlight." (Selim 7; 1st Lombok, 2nd wave) It symbolizes their liveliness in life. There pleasures counter-attack the existing notion of the west (occident) who takes orient's life as mystery and of barbarism.

The dead body's finding no place to be buried indicates the obliviousness of the people and government towards the subaltern. It criticizes the historical documents and discourses where these people find no recognition of their struggle.

The constant presence of the wheel makes us remember Ngugi's *petals of blood* where we find the words "La Luta Continua" as the title of part four which means "the struggle continues." The driver of the wheel loudly says "O god. We have no freedom" (Selim 32; 2nd Lombok, 3rd wave)

(II)

In the first torongo of the first lombok, selim al Deen states that the wheel pierces the sleep of the people which indicates the horrible and worth notifying life of the subaltern. "The grave" in the second torongo refers the impending tragedy. The 'red flag' symbolizes blood. The description of the wheel which is like "flower of wood" signifies the colorless and uninteresting life of the subaltern. The weevils which are eating wheel, indicate oppression. These people are not economically rich. The detail of the workers' body refers to their strength and they are actually the manufacturer of our life.

We find more detailed description of the subaltern's life. The lines "My wife is so cute" and "everything has freshness" focus on the liveliness and detailed picture. The picture of the hospital is, however, very ugly and horrible. The narrator says "most of the time silence grasps the hospital" The dog that drinks the blood of the lifeless body symbolizes those who live by the blood of the peasants.

The myth created around the departed body refers to *Orientalism* where the east is presented as repulsive, mysterious and dangerous. The true picture is lost because the real hero's dead body finds no place to be buried and his history of heroism has no recognition. The reference of Hazrat Ali and Islamic grandeur symbolize the protest of the subaltern. The second lombok starts with this line: "after this, hey scene and description loving audience" which refers to the writer's frustration who urges the audience to think over the issue to a

great extent. The old man's story about his seeing many deaths refers to the attachment of their life with these people and it also signifies the courage and endurance capacity of these people. They never leave their native culture for the newly arising capitalism which is referred by "chilmari bondor." The following line is referred "after a wish, one can not leave the dead body and go for the harbor of Chilmari."

The sterile women in some words and story refer to the blocked subaltern's lives and struggle because of the bourgeois class and so-called great historians. The peasants are captured in chains and traps. They question the religion. After one of them utters about the protection of the angels around the dead body, the young boy says in wonder "thousand angels!" The reference of Ezid indicates the betrayal of the ruling class or the powerful people who never counted these subalterns and erased their stories.

The butterflies covering the dead body and its relation with the story of hazrat Musa who was given water after being attacked by the scarcity of food, has its own significance. But why are these stories given? May be, the narrator wants to say that the deprived people get divine governance if not human being's guidance. They are not shelter less but they have got their own shield. "Chondrabora snake" symbolizes the trap of the upper class. The story of this snake and its gradual attack symbolizes the colonization process. Colonization, like the snake, kills the victim in the end. These may refer to discourses or ideologies of colonialism which tries to dominate the colonized or the subaltern.

The brainwashing process is at work also. The people who so far worked so hard and had revolution in mind are now tired and have accepted their fate: "this bearing of the dead body no longer seems to be unusual." "When the main gun of the butterflies is lost, they all die and leave the flowers." This line indicates that when protesting spirit diminishes, nothing good remains among the subaltern.

The total journey refers to the life and struggle of the subaltern. The dead body suffers from identity crisis. Both in Noyanpur and Nobinpur, nobody can recognize him. He finds no place for him. Only Baher and his companion have desperate feelings for him. After passing so many times with this dead person they have become his friend. Baher ultimately feels emotionally hurt. We can remember Shorotchondra Chotropadday's "Mohesh" where we find the following lines: "those who did not allow us to eat the rice of ur field/don't forgive them."

The line "human cannot recognize human's bone" refers to the cruelty and obliviousness of human beings. The outburst of the bulls indicate another protest against the merciless death: "why are these bulls acting like this in such a bad time? / Is this the revenge against the death of that innocent hero?" Questions remain. Their try to catch the bulls refer to the difference between civilization and nature. The subaltern lives in nature and those elite class people torturing these innocent people live in civilization which has carried away their humanity.

III

' After the dead body is buried, all sit down into the shadowed shore/suddenly thinking about what, the "garoan" (driver) runs/ kneels down beside the grave/he catches the

fresh mud passionately/cries saying “aha aha”/why ? He does not know/the misbehavior towards this dead body/unknown pathetic grave or his companion of life leaving forever.’(Selim 41; 3rd Lombok, 2nd torongo) Ultimately, though the ants eat the flesh of the lifeless body, the wheel never becomes irritated in bearing the deceased. The wheel is like god who endures all oppression and carries crops and dead body together. Selim al Deen presents the subaltern from their perspective. He gives acute details of their lives, sufferings, happiness and stories. This representation is more close to life unlike many previous discourses where the subaltern never found their true voices and their heroism was never celebrated.

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