

Unveiling the silenced voices: An Exploration of double marginalization in *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Things Fall Apart***Alphy Maria,**

M.A

Kristu Jayanti College

Autonomous, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

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Dr. D.N.P. Prema Ponmani

Assistant Professor, Department of English

Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

ORCID ID: 0000- 0001-7786-4331

Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of double-marginalisation in two novels: *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Things Fall Apart*. In both the novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Things Fall Apart* the women characters faced double marginalisation. In *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala Markandaya explains the plight of the protagonist Rukmani. She was oppressed both as a woman in a patriarchal society and as a member of a poor, colonized community. She was a victim of the patriarchal society. The patriarchal society limits her autonomy and voice. Apart from the patriarchal society, she also faced hardships because of her poor family background. As a farmer's wife, she struggled because of poverty, hunger and her family lost their land due to industrialisation. The lower classes were trapped in the cycle of poverty because of the exploitation by landlords and colonisers. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe detailed the tradition and culture followed by Africans. Achebe portrayed a male-dominated society, in which women were considered as subordinates and have no power. African women also faced oppression, as a black woman and as a woman in a patriarchal society. The voice of a woman is always neglected and unheard. This study focusses on the marginalisation of women from different perspectives. Through the cross-cultural analysis, this research offers a broader and more global perspective on women's experiences of marginalisation.

Keywords: *Double marginalisation, Industrialisation, Exploitation, Patriarchal society***Introduction**

Double marginalisation is a concept rooted in postcolonial and feminist discourse. It refers to the multiple layers of oppression faced by an individual or groups due to overlapping social identities, such as gender, class and ethnicity. In both the novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Things Fall Apart*, the concept of double marginalisation is evident. "The concept of marginality is generally used to analysis socio-economic, political and cultural spheres, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access to resources and full participation in social life. In other words, marginalised people might be socially, economically, politically and legally ignored, excluded or neglected and therefore vulnerable to live hood change" (Gurung 2003).

In literature double marginalisation describes the ignorance of poor people or lower-class people by the dominant group from the main stream of a society. It can be seen in the life of characters who faced multiple forms of discrimination, such as gender, race, caste, etc. Their experiences of discrimination can be intensified due to overlapping identities. “Marginalisation generally describes the exclusion or removal of a group of people or their relegation to a marginal or powerless position within the society” (Kumar and Soundari 959). Africans faced marginalisation on the basis of colour and due to colonisation and lower caste people faced marginalisation on the basis of caste, poverty and colonisation were the example of double marginalisation. Mainly, double marginalisation was faced by female characters. They struggled a lot because of patriarchal society and also because of their caste, race, class, poverty, etc. Women became victims of a twofold oppression simultaneously.

Double marginalisation draws out the complexity of identity and power dynamics in postcolonial contexts, where colonised individuals often experience oppression on multiple layers, both from external colonisers and internal systems of patriarchy, caste and ethnicity. This concept also reveals how colonialism not only subjugated nations but also worsened the existing inequalities within them. In postcolonial literature, double marginalisation often manifests through characters who occupy intersectional identities. For instance, women in colonised societies were doubly marginalised, as they were oppressed both by colonial powers and by the patriarchal norms of their own cultures. In addition, postcolonial literature often critiques how colonial powers exploited existing social divisions to maintain control, deepening internal inequalities. These acts not only resulted in colonial domination but also left lasting legacies of marginalisation within postcolonial societies. Double marginalisation also reflects the alienation experienced by an individual caught between two worlds, the colonizer’s culture and their own indigenous identity. Moreover, the concept of double marginalisation challenges the homogenized portrayal of postcolonial struggles by emphasising the diversity of experiences within colonized societies. It also highlights how resistance to colonialism is often fragmented as internal inequalities create conflicting interests among marginalised groups. The relevance of double marginalisation in postcolonial literature lies in its ability to illuminate the intricate layers of oppression that shape the lives of marginalised individuals.

Objectives

This study examines the concept of double marginalisation in the novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Things Fall Apart*. The objective of the study is to analyze how double marginalisation, being oppressed on multiple levels such as gender, class or race are portrayed in the novels. To compare and contrast the characters in both the works, focused on their experience and responses. This paper helps to study the role of gender in the double marginalisation and also to examine how economic status and class contribute to the multi-layered marginalisation. It also enables the researcher to investigate the impact of colonialism as a contributing factor to double marginalisation.

Methodology

The researcher used various qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis of double marginalisation. The study involves literary analysis through close reading and thematic examination to uncover how gender, class and colonial influence intersect to create multi-layered oppression. A comparative analysis will be used to highlight similarities

and differences in the portrayal of marginalised characters within the distinct cultural settings of India and pre-colonial Nigeria.

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, double marginalisation refers to the oppression faced by individuals who were marginalised both by external colonial forces and by internal societal structures. The novel vividly captures the ways in which colonialism and traditional Igbo social norms intersect to create layered forms of subjugation, particularly for women, individuals of lower social status and those unable to conform to the rigid expectations of their community.

The arrival of European missionaries and colonial administrators represents the external force that marginalised the Igbo community. "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe 166). Colonialism disrupted the social, political and religious systems that had sustained the Igbo people for generations. The intrusion of Christianity challenged traditional beliefs, while colonial governance undermined the authority of village elders and the communal decision-making processes. The Igbo people were once the masters of their own destiny. But gradually they were subordinated to an alien system that erased their cultural identity and autonomy. Achebe illustrates this through the gradual but pervasive influence of the colonial presence.

Being occupied by whites creates a conflict between the Black and white cultures. British men enter Umuofia in the name of Christianity. They start institutions and later they form administration there. They see Africans as aliens because of the contrasting features. That's why the author mentions English as Locusts, which are destroying insects. It is an image of English destroying African culture (Ebenazer 7).

For instance, the establishment of the Christian church provided an alternative power structure that attracted those marginalised within Igbo society, such as the osu (outcasts) and those who feel alienated by traditional norms. The church offered these individuals a sense of belonging; simultaneously, it deepened the division within the community. Colonialism, therefore, acted as both a unifying and a divisive force, amplified existing inequalities by introducing new forms of marginalisation.

Internal societal structures also play a significant role in marginalising Igbo people. As depicted in *Things Fall Apart* Igbo, society is hierarchal and patriarchal, with rigid expectations regarding gender roles, social status and behavior. Men like Okonkwo were celebrated for their strength, wealth and adherence to traditional norms, while those who deviated from those ideals, such as his father Unoka, were ostracised and ridiculed. Igbo society is a society which places a high value on strength, achievement and titles which are primarily held by men. Men those who were not able to meet that expectation are considered as weak and "agbala" (Achebe 13). The men in the Igbo society, particularly those who were not traditionally powerful, were marginalised both by their own cultural standards and by the colonisers. Because, the Igbo society gave much importance to the strength and power of men.

"In Africa, black is considered marginalised but particularly when we discuss about women they are suppressed not only as blacks but as woman also" (Kantharia 42). Women in Igbo society were particularly subjected to internal marginalisation. They were relegated to

subordinate roles, valued primarily as wives and mothers and excluded from positions of authority. Okonkwo's attitude towards his wives and daughters reflected this patriarchal hierarchy.

As the mirror of a patriarchal society at that time, the novel shows that beating a woman is very common. A woman has to stay at home all day just to serve the husband and do household work. During the peace week, Okonkwo beats Ojiugo, his youngest wife because she is not in her hut and has gone out without informing him and also without preparing food for her children. Okonkwo gets angry because he thinks that he is free to do everything without informing and consulting his wives. But the wives are expected to seek his permission to do anything (Kantharia 43).

He demanded obedience and punished any perceived insubordination. At the same time, women played a vital role in preserving cultural traditions, such as storytelling and religious rituals, highlighting the paradox of their marginalisation and indispensability. "He beat her very severely. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace. His first two wives ran out in great alarm, pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (Achebe 28). Even though Achebe celebrated the richness and complexity of Igbo society, he used these portrayals to criticize the inequities within traditional Igbo culture.

Women were marginalised by Igbo patriarchal norms and by the colonial system, which reinforced male-dominated structures of power. The introduction of Christianity, which offered some women a degree of empowerment, often perpetuated the existed gender inequalities. For example, the church hierarchy mirrored the patriarchal order of traditional society, limiting women's roles and influence. Individuals like Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, experienced double marginalisation due to their inability to conform to both Igbo and colonial expectations. His sensitive and questioning nature made him an outlier in a culture that values strength and decisiveness, leading to alienation from his father and community. When he was converted to Christianity, he found solace in the new religion's rejection of traditional norms. But this decision further alienated him from his family and community. Achebe used Nwoye's journey to illustrate the profound psychological toll of double marginalisation.

Achebe used Okonkwo's tragic life to highlight the broader implications of double marginalisation at the societal level. The Igbo people were caught between preserving their traditions and adapting to the colonial presence. This tension led to fragmentation and conflict, as individuals and communities struggle to reconcile competing demands and identities. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe weaved the themes of colonialism and traditional Igbo culture into a complex form that highlights the double marginalisation experienced by individuals and communities. By examining the mixing of colonial forces and societal norms, the novel provides an exploration of power, identity and resistance. Achebe critiques both the injustices of colonialism and the limitations of traditional Igbo culture, offering a balanced perspective on the challenges of cultural transformation. Through the portrayal of double marginalisation, *Things Fall Apart* not only captures the struggles of a society in transition but also to reflect on the broader implications of cultural disruption and resilience. The novel's relevance lies in its ability to illuminate the human costs of marginalisation and the complexities of navigating multiple layers of oppression.

Double marginalisation in *Nectar in a Sieve* stems from two main sources, colonialism and modernisation and the societal structures that perpetuate gender and class-based inequalities. “This novel is a vivid record of the hungry rural peasantry whose life is afflicted by the existing social rituals and institutions such as child marriage, widowhood and negligence of the female child, slavery, landlessness, homelessness, casteism, illiteracy and superstition” (Sarmad 338). Through the perspective of Rukmani, Markandaya portrays how the colonialism and Indian societal structures shaped the lives of individuals, particularly women and their struggles to survive and maintain their dignity in a rapidly changing world. The establishment of tannery in Rukmani’s village symbolizes the modernisation, which is a threat to traditional agrarian lifestyle. This tannery results in numerous economic opportunities and fosters economic development. Also it will lead to the social and environmental upheaval.

“A large building, spruce and white; not only money has built it but men’s hopes and pity as I know who have seen it grow brick by brick and year by year” (Markandaya 7). The villagers lost their lands because of this modernisation. Their livelihood and identity is deeply tied to their land. Thus, this traditional displacement is devastating for them. The tannery represents not only economic exploitation but also the alienation of rural communities from their cultural and social roots. The economic changes caused by industrialisation mirrors the effects of colonialism in India. Traditional systems were dismantled in favor of industries that served the interests of colonizers. The villagers became laborers in a system that exploited them, leaving them impoverished and powerless.

In addition to economic oppression, as a woman Rukmani faced marginalisation in a patriarchal society. “Markandaya represented Rukmani as modern woman. Distinctly Rukmani is different from the Indian women of her time because she is literate and her husband supports her” (Pailanon 324). Rukmani was conditioned to accept her subordinate position from an early age itself. She was married to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer at a young age and was expected to adapt to her new life without complaint. Rukmani’s value lingered on her capacity to procreate, especially with sons. Her initial inability to conceive led to societal ridicule and personal anguish. Her initial infertility exposed the deep-rooted expectations of patriarchal society on women. When they had many children, the burden of raising them in poverty fell on her shoulders. It emphasises the unequal distribution of labor and responsibility between men and women. The novel also highlights the vulnerabilities of women in the face of societal changes. Rukmani’s daughter, Ira was forced to take the profession of prostitution to support her family. It illustrates the extreme measures women were compelled to take in times of crisis. Ira’s plight draws out how the patriarchal structures and economic oppression left women with few choices and rights.

Through this novel Markandaya portrays that women are expected to dedicate their lives for their families. Rukmani, the protagonist sacrificed all her desires for her children. Her life illustrates that how traditional gender roles forced women into selfless servitude. Experience of Ira shows that how the oppression based on gender limits the choices of women. A divorced men can remarry and continue with his life, but for women it’s not possible. They were left with no other choice.

Nathan, Rukmani’s husband a farmer in the novel faced marginalisation because of the exploitative land-owning system. The peasants who worked in their owner’s land had to give the majority of portion to the landlords as their rent. “Among the rural folk there is a clear dichotomy between the upper class, the landlords and the money lenders on the one hand and the poor tenant farmers and the laboring class on the other” (Sarmad 338). This

system led the peasants in ultimate debt and starvation. While industrialisation is a symbol of progress, Markandaya had brought industrialisation as a burden to the people, which led to their marginalisation. The establishment of tannery in the novel represents the industrialisation. The tannery raised land prices, which made the tenant farmers difficult to pay the rent. Men like Nathan, who completely relied on agriculture lost their land and identity. Nathan after losing job shifted to city but he could not get a job. *Nectar in a Sieve* highlights the quiet resilience of the marginalised, showing how the characters like Nathan and Rukmani struggled to survive in a world that offers little justice and security.

The character Nathan depicts the state of double marginalised people. Nathan was marginalised due to industrialisation and the land system prevailing in the society. Nathan exemplifies the exploiting impoverished farmers in colonial India. The poor farmers were re dependent on the landlords, who controlled the rent and tenure. This dependency made the farmers more and more vulnerable and, faced insecurity in their life. Also they were supposed to pay the rent regardless of their harvest's success. That made them to work like slaves. They were considered as the marginalised community who had no progress in their life. Because of this land system in the society, people were segregated into high class and low class. The farmers belonged to the low class because of their poverty and the landlords belonged to the high class because they were the owners of the land and acquired profit from the land. Even though the land system was replaced by industrialisation the farmers faced many issues. There was no change for their vulnerabilities, rather it worsened their situation more.

The arrival of tannery in Nathan's village destroyed the traditional farming life. It increased the land prices and rent making it harder for the farmers to sustain their livelihood. Young people like Nathan's son got employment in tannery but the aging farmers like Nathan found it difficult to adapt to the changes. The introduction of tannery devalued the agricultural system. The aging farmers were not able to cope up with the changing society. The tannery had brought wealth but also it causes pollution, social unrest, moral corruption, etc. The farmers struggle to keep their family stable amidst these changes. "It is observed that silence has been imposed forcefully on the people of the lower strata by the powerful in such a way that it became their weakness. It made them helpless and hopeless. They begin to think that they do not have power to bring out the change and completely retired themselves on the hands of God" (Singh 147). It is evident that in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, the character Nathan was exploited by the higher-class people due to industrialization and also the colonisers. Thus, he was doubly marginalised in his own society itself.

As a woman Rukmani faced oppression regarding the gender. India is a patriarchal society and the women were supposed to follow some stereotypes, which demean their value. The character Rukmani was marginalised in a patriarchal society and after the introduction of industrialisation in the village. In the patriarchal society men had more power and women were considered weak and low. They were supposed to obey the men. As Rukmani belongs to a low class and wife of a low class they were given less respect and no jobs were provided. Low class people in the society were given less value. Thus it is very clear that Rukmani was doubly marginalised, one on the basis of her gender and the other due to colonialism.

Conclusion

The novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Nectar in a Sieve* illustrate how colonialism and patriarchy intersect to doubly marginalise certain groups of the society. *Things Fall Apart* highlights the clash of cultures and the loss of indigenous identity, while *Nectar in a Sieve*

highlight on gender struggles and economic exploitation. In both the novels colonialism and patriarchy were the common elements which made the people doubly marginalised. Through colonisation one is being subjugated in every aspect. The colonised people were given no rights to raise their voice. This mainly affected the poor people of the society. They were marginalised from their own society because of their poverty and dependency. The colonisers considered the colonised people as their slaves and the poor people of the society was classified as the low class. There was no progress in their life and they will be considered as the marginalised groups of the society throughout their life. Likewise in patriarchy, women were oppressed based on gender. Women were considered as the weaker section of the society, who were not capable of taking decision and leadership responsibilities. Women were supposed to act as the subordinates of men regardless of their strength, power and ability. Thus, the women in a patriarchal society were doubly marginalised. Since they had no voice in the society they were like mere dolls in the hands of men.

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