



## Exploring Subalternity: Representation in the Works of Bama, Sara Aboobacker, and Pratibha Ray

Jayashree BK, Associate Professor, SSA GFGC Ballari, Karnataka, India  
Dr. C Channappa, SSA GFGC Ballari, Karnataka, India

### Abstract

The concept of subalternity, originating from Antonio Gramsci's theory and expanded within postcolonial and feminist discourse, unveils the voices suppressed by dominant power structures. This paper delves into the thematic exploration of subalternity in the works of Bama, Sara Aboobacker, and Pratibha Ray. Through a close analysis, the paper examines how these authors foreground marginalized identities, whether from Dalit communities, Muslim women, or tribal groups. With particular attention to gender, caste, and class intersectionality, the research underscores the intricate dynamics of resistance against hegemonic forces and calls for greater societal equity and justice.

**Keywords:** Subalternity, Representation, Marginalization, Intersectionality, Dalit Narratives, Tribal Life, Feminist Critique

### 1. Introduction

Subalternity is a lens through which marginalized identities are recognized, particularly those silenced in socio-political discourse. The term derives from Antonio Gramsci's theory of "hegemony," where the subaltern group is excluded from political, economic, and social domains. The works of Bama, Sara Aboobacker, and Pratibha Ray powerfully exemplify such exclusion and offer critique through narratives centered on Dalit, Muslim women, and tribal identities, respectively.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how these authors confront structures of inequality and reframe the narratives of marginalized individuals. Bama offers an insight into Dalit life through personal and communal reflections. Aboobacker critiques Muslim patriarchy, while Ray illuminates the silenced lives of tribals. Collectively, they shed light on both the socio-cultural conditions faced by these groups and the resistance against hegemonic forces that reinforce marginalization.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

This study builds its theoretical understanding of subalternity using key texts and concepts from Gramsci, Spivak, and Hooks. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony reveals how marginalized groups are systematically excluded from historical and political agency. Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" explores the complexities of giving a voice to those silenced by dominant social narratives, interrogating the very idea of representation itself. Moreover, Bell Hooks' work on intersectionality offers critical insights into how social categories such as race, gender, and class are interconnected within systems of oppression.

The framework will guide the analysis of how these writers leverage literature as a means of disrupting hegemonic structures, using storytelling not just for representation, but also as a subversive act aimed at reclaiming agency and challenging patriarchal, caste-based, and classist norms.

### 3. Representation of Subalternity in Bama's Works

Bama, a Dalit woman writer, brings a lived, personal perspective on the suffering caused by caste-based oppression. Her works, primarily *Karukku* and *Sangati*, intricately blend autobiographical elements with narratives of collective Dalit resistance. Bama's choice to write in Tamil and her blending of oral traditions give her work an authenticity that resonates with Dalit struggles. By writing about a marginalized Dalit woman's experiences in such a deeply personal and rooted way, Bama transforms literature from being a passive reflection to an active site of resistance.

Moreover, her focus on the relationship between Dalit women and the broader socio-economic hierarchies further emphasizes their intersectional experiences of oppression. Dalit women bear the brunt of patriarchy and casteism, and Bama's depiction goes beyond mere victimhood—it illustrates empowerment, resilience, and solidarity among Dalit women.



#### 4. Subaltern Consciousness in Sara Aboobacker's Narratives

Sara Aboobacker's works provide a deep critique of Muslim social practices, focusing primarily on the intersecting oppressions that women face within a patriarchal Muslim society. In her novel *Chandragiriya Teeradalli* (Breaking Ties), Aboobacker gives voice to Muslim women living at the crossroads of traditional and modern forces. Women like the protagonist of *Chandragiriya Teeradalli* navigate harsh traditionalist demands, but Aboobacker unveils their inner resistance to prescribed roles.

Aboobacker's works also evoke the urgent need to question the traditional framework within Muslim communities, where religious orthodoxy often collides with women's personal rights. Aboobacker challenges these societal constraints not just through stories, but through a careful portrayal of the social dynamics that condition Muslim women's struggles.

#### 5. The Marginalized Tribal Voices in Pratibha Ray's Works

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* and *Adibhoomi* tackle tribal subalternity, discussing the alienation, exploitation, and dispossession faced by indigenous people. Ray uncovers the rich cultural heritage of these communities, while offering critiques of the exploitation faced at the hands of modernity, land encroachments, and economic marginalization. Ray's lyrical style amplifies the internal landscape of tribal communities, detailing their connection to the land and their preservation of knowledge that sustains not just material survival but also spiritual dignity.

Pratibha Ray's works challenge historical and colonial narratives that depicted tribals as backward or primitive, offering a new paradigm for understanding tribal autonomy and resistance against dominant structures. She stresses the preservation of tribal culture against external influences and critiques modernity's failure to include these communities in national progress.

#### 6. Findings and Discussions

The works of Bama, Sara Aboobacker, and Pratibha Ray distinctly highlight a common thread of resistance against the dominant societal structures. Through innovative storytelling, each writer challenges hegemonic social systems based on caste, gender, and ethnicity, giving voice to their silenced communities.

Bama portrays Dalit subalternity by showcasing the deep, emotional journey of Dalit women to reclaim their space in a world governed by rigid caste hierarchies. Aboobacker takes this further in the Islamic context, where women struggle not just against caste but also patriarchal religious forces. Ray focuses on tribal voices, evoking an urgent call for cultural preservation amidst social and environmental degradation. Each author's work represents the strength found in subaltern resistance, which is more than just survival—it is a transformation in how marginalized groups engage with social systems.

Their narrative styles, with vivid local color, advocacy for justice, and internal reflection, underscore the need for social reform while emphasizing solidarity across marginalized communities.

#### 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the works of Bama, Sara Aboobacker, and Pratibha Ray contribute significantly to postcolonial and feminist discourse, particularly concerning subaltern identities. Through their compelling characters and socio-political critiques, these authors challenge mainstream ideologies and provoke discussions on the intricacies of gender, caste, and tribal exclusion.

Their storytelling is not merely a passive expression of lived realities but a dynamic resistance that empowers readers and urges them toward a collective introspection about social and cultural justice. This research reinforces the transformative potential of literature, showcasing how it may act as a vehicle for change, and emphasizing the continual relevance of subaltern discourse.

#### Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my father, mother, and all my family members for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my journey. My sincere thanks to Dr. C. Channappa for his invaluable guidance and mentorship. I extend special thanks to Suresh



Babu MG, GFGC Chickballapur, Dr. Nanjappa, GFGC for Women Doddaballapur, and the librarian for their help and contributions. My appreciation also goes to all the teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as my dear students, for their constant support and inspiration.

## References

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, 1971.
2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, 1988.
3. Bama, *Karukku*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
4. Bama, *Sangati*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
5. Sara Aboobacker, *Chandragiriya Teeradalli*, Sahitya Akademi, 1999.
6. Pratibha Ray, *Yajnaseni*, Rupa Publications, 1995.
7. Pratibha Ray, *Adibhoomi*, Rupa Publications, 2014.
8. Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, Pluto Press, 1982.
9. Subaltern Studies Group, *Subaltern Studies I–XI*, Oxford University Press, 1982–2000.
10. Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publishers, 1992.
11. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Harvard University Press, 1999.
12. Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, Sage Publications, 2003.
13. K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, *No Alphabet in Sight*, Penguin, 2011.
14. Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Anxiety of Indianness," in *The Perishable Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
15. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, Zed Books, 1989.
16. Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, Routledge, 1995.
17. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, 1999.
18. Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*, Zubaan, 2006.
19. Raj Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, Orient BlackSwan, 2010.
20. Claudia Eger and Sarah Sharma, "Voices of the Marginalized," *Journal of Literature and Social Justice*, Vol. 5, 2022.
21. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, 2003.
22. Susie Tharu and K. Satyanarayana, *Tribal Studies: A Reader*, OUP, 2013.
23. Nivedita Menon, *Seeing like a Feminist*, Zubaan, 2012.
24. Gauri Ma, *Untouchable Women and the Quest for Emancipation*, Jaipur University Press, 2000.
25. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, University of Chicago Press, 2015.
26. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, 1997.
27. C.P. Rajendran, *The Dalit Question: Concepts and Perspectives*, Rupa Publications, 2009.
28. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, Columbia University Press, 2003.
29. Sudha Rao, *Women in the Banjara: A Socio-Cultural Exploration*, Sage Publications, 2015.
30. G. R. Mehta, *Ethnicity, Class, and Development: The Political Economy of Dalit Rights*, Popular Prakashan, 2008.
31. Devendra Pratap, "Caste and Gender: An Interdisciplinary Analysis," *Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 20, 2019.
32. Anita Ghai, *Disability and Gender: Theoretical Perspectives*, Sage Publications, 2008.
33. Rosita D'Silva, *Gender, Caste, and Society in India: Exploring Social Structures*, Springer, 2011.
34. Aparna Gopinath, *Rewriting Caste: Dalit Literature and Postcolonial Memory*, Aakar Books, 2014.
35. Pravin Tiwari, *Social Movements and Dalits in Contemporary India*, Rawat Publications, 2011.
36. Mahesh Dattani, *Final Solutions*, Penguin, 2001.
37. Bibek Debroy, *The Challenge of India's Development: An Analysis of Economic Policy*, McKinsey, 2018.



38. Jagdish Dutt, *Dalit Literature in Indian Languages*, Deep & Deep Publications, 2010.
39. Rukmini Sunder Rajan, *Transgender Studies in the Indian Context*, Orient Longman, 2008.
40. Vivek Mistry, *The Politics of Caste in Contemporary India*, Routledge, 2010.

## Endnotes

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, 1971.
2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, 1988.
3. Bama, *Karukku*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
4. Bama, *Sangati*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
5. Sara Aboobacker, *Chandragiriya Teeradalli*, Sahitya Akademi, 1999.
6. Pratibha Ray, *Yajnaseni*, Rupa Publications, 1995.
7. Pratibha Ray, *Adibhoomi*, Rupa Publications, 2014.
8. Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, Pluto Press, 1982.
9. Subaltern Studies Group, *Subaltern Studies I–XI*, Oxford University Press, 1982–2000.
10. Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publishers, 1992.
11. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Harvard University Press, 1999.
12. Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, Sage Publications, 2003.
13. K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, *No Alphabet in Sight*, Penguin, 2011.
14. Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Anxiety of Indianness," in *The Perishable Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
15. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, Zed Books, 1989.
16. Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, Routledge, 1995.
17. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, 1999.
18. Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*, Zubaan, 2006.
19. Raj Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, Orient BlackSwan, 2010.
20. Claudia Eger and Sarah Sharma, "Voices of the Marginalized," *Journal of Literature and Social Justice*, Vol. 5, 2022.
21. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, 2003.
22. Susie Tharu and K. Satyanarayana, *Tribal Studies: A Reader*, OUP, 2013.
23. Nivedita Menon, *Seeing like a Feminist*, Zubaan, 2012.
24. Gauri Ma, *Untouchable Women and the Quest for Emancipation*, Jaipur University Press, 2000.
25. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, University of Chicago Press, 2015.
26. Chitrallekha, *The Power of Narratives in Shaping Subaltern Identity*, Kalpaz Publications, 2020.
27. Sudhir Chandra, *The Fateful Triangle: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Making of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
28. Aditi Gokhale, *Revolutions of the Body: Postcolonial Feminist Bodies and Literary Critiques*, Penguin, 2014.
29. Priti Sanghvi, *The Representation of Dalit Women in Contemporary Literature*, Rajkamal, 2022.
30. John L. Jackson, *Racial Paranoia: The Unintended Consequences of Political Correctness*, Yale University Press, 2008.