

**Unparalleled In Marginality: Women In Patriarchy And Colonized Subjects****Dr. S. Franklin Daniel**

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East is east and West is west, and never the twain shall meet.

- Rudyard Kipling.

The Twentieth Century has been acclaimed as the century of colonial demise; the stranglehold of the British Empire over parts of Africa, Asia, Australasia, Canada, and the Caribbean had eased a great deal. Nevertheless, vestiges of colonialism viz. marginalization and repression in its various forms linger – the material and imaginative legacies of colonization and decolonization remain in administration and the Literatures of the World. Marginalization signifies and exclusion from constructive participation from all walks of life. An individual or a nation is entitled to meaningful involvement but, all the same, there is a battle that is raging – a fight against the evils of colonialism and racism. The fundamental shifts in the international political economy and the shifting power balances have vastly changed the perception of the world.

As the first major 20<sup>th</sup> Century work of liberal feminist thought, Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* spearheading the feminist movement is a direct reaction to the marginalization of women in society. Her work on the treatment of women throughout history has been often regarded as a significant work of feminist literature. Highlighting the notions of the divided world with the resonance of its deep and most recurring images of the 'Other,' Edward Said's *Orientalism* published in 1978 has been highly influential in postcolonial studies and other fields. He effectively redefines the term "Orientalism" to mean the false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward the other and their culture with substantial Eurocentric prejudice. These two defining works have left behind an indelible legacy – in feminist and post-colonial studies.

The Eurocentric binaries of the center and the margin, the self and the other, the elite and the subaltern, the West and the East gain significance in such a discourse. Questions such as 'who or what' has been marginalized gains importance. Marginality is an essential and significant issue of the colonial and post colonial society which is reflected by the position and condition of

the peoples of the world. Marginality is a concept used to enlighten the strange and poor political, economic, and social conditions of persons within societies and social classes within a country. In other words, marginalized people might be socially, economically, politically and legally ignored, excluded or neglected, and are hence vulnerable to livelihood change. Marginality could be construed to reflect two major theoretical frameworks, societal and spatial; spatial marginality highlights the geographical or physical marginality in literature. On the other hand, societal marginality has as its focus on religion, culture and politico-economic concerns to an individual or a community. Therefore, an understanding of such an isolation vis-à-vis socio-politico-economic constraint is essential.

The *Second Sex* is one of the best-known works of the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir which prescribes a moral revolution. As an existentialist, Beauvoir believes that existence precedes essence; hence one is not born a woman but becomes one. Her analysis focuses on the Hegelian concept of the Other. It is the (social) construct of Woman as the quintessential Other that Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression. The capitalized 'O' in "other" indicates the wholly other. As a fallout of her pioneering work an entire field of study has sprung up around the feminist movement, a political reform movement, in which women demanded such things as equal pay for equal work, respect for their right to control their bodies, and respect for the idea of womanhood and what that can or should represent.

The 'center' and 'margin' remains one of the most touch issues in post-colonial and feminist discourse. The West gets defined as the center and the rest outside the 'center'/marginalized. The Post-colonial works and feminist works have similar characteristics. Feminist practice is a constitutive part of the field of post-colonialism. When feminists look at literature (or art or culture), they look at its sexual politics. In works written before the twentieth century, they often discover that women are portrayed in social positions that are subordinate to men. Their bodies controlled by men; female characters may use their bodies as a means of getting what they want or need. Feminism impinges itself on post-colonial discourse for two significant reasons. First of all, both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert corresponding forms of domination over those they render inferior.

For this reason the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in several respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance. Secondly, there have been vigorous debates in many colonized societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women's life. Colonialism and patriarchy are seen as power structures that exploit; consequently, the former is seen as a paradigm of the latter in feminist literary criticism.

The feminist and colonized peoples, like other subordinate groups, have used appropriation to subvert and adapt dominant languages and signifying practices. The Second Sex and Orientalism concur on many aspects of the theory of marginality, of difference and the interpellation of the subject by a dominant discourse, as well as offering various strategies of resistance to such controls.

Similarly, between 'writing the body' in Second Sex and 'writing place' in Orientalism, between strategies of 'bisexuality' and 'cultural synchronicity' and similar appeals to nationalism may be detected; between the focus on 'imperialism' and 'existentialism.'

The colonized subject is characterized as 'other' through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the supremacy of the colonizing culture and world view. Similarly, the term 'other' is used extensively in existential philosophy by Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex to define the relation between 'self' and 'other' in creating self-awareness and ideas of identity.

In Literature, post-colonial studies have reacted to this viewpoint and subsequently involving itself with the issue of destruction of culture and questioning to what extent this affects the lives of colonial subjects. In this context, Sarla Palkar's pertinent observation on this issue assumes importance:

The colonial discourse had cast English Literature in the role of a Promethean hero, who had undertaken the mission of spreading light and sweetness to all the dark corners of the earth, carrying thereby the message of (Western) civilization to the people still living in a state of degeneration or ignorance. The post-colonial discourse now regards English literature as a sort of hypocritical villain or as an agent of Western imperialism under the pretext of civilizing the colonized people suppressed and to a great extent, destroyed the native traditions and cultures. (Palkar 160)

Colonization affects individuals, both socially and economically. It is related to Western Capitalism which in turn is driven by its great hurry to build a global economic and cultural order to maintain its hegemony in a New World Order. Given the fact that imperialism projected as male-dominated and euro-centric classifies all Asian women as subalterns. Such awareness has forced critics to delve deep into the machinations of gender roles. Understandably, colonial oppression affects the lives of women, both socially and economically, and that has forced post-

colonial critics to adopt a keener awareness of gender roles while debating imperialist exploitation.

Post-colonial discourse shares many similarities with feminist theory and for that reason, the two fields have long been thought of as complementary. Both discussions are predominantly political and concern themselves with the struggle against oppression and injustice. Moreover, both theories reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system, which is dominated by the hegemonic white male, and vehemently denies the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. Feminists consider oppressive any “patriarchal” culture and revere male symbols and that privileges men over women. The Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called occidental, European or Western.

In the same way, Feminist concepts influenced both feminine and masculine. Thus it is natural for men in power to survey from time to time the world with which they deal. All these show that ‘marginality’ as a notion of the centre, parallels both the post-colonial works and feminist works such as Orientalism and Second Sex.

Imperialism, like patriarchy, is such a supremacist ideology that subjugates and dominates its subjects. The oppressed woman is, in this sense akin to the colonized subject. Feminists look for instances in literature where a woman embodies evil in a text, a misogynous representation. Primarily, exponents of post-colonialism are reacting against colonialism in the political and economic sense while feminist theorists are rejecting colonialism of the sexual nature.

Both ‘women’ and ‘natives’ are minority groups who are unfairly defined by the intrusive ‘male gaze,’ which is characteristic of both patriarchy and colonialism. Both have been reduced to stereotypes (virgin, whore, savage, heather) and denied an identity by the system that entraps them. The most important feature that is noticeable in de Beauvoir’s Second Sex is ‘gender’ and that of Said’s Orientalism in ‘National’ marginalization. Orientalism makes assumptions about gender such as the effeminate oriental male or the sexually promiscuous exotic eastern female. The Atlantic is deemed as failing to live up to received gender codes – Men, by western standards, are meant to be active, courageous, strong, while women are meant to be passive, moral, chaste. This adds to the general sense of oddness and abnormality ascribed to the orient. The orient is feminine; the East is ‘feminized,’ deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious and sexually mysterious and tempting while the West becomes ‘masculine’ considered active, dominant, heroic, rational and self-controlled.

The goal of an equitable society is far from won. The marginalized continue to struggle to overcome the effects of decades of social and economic neglect and discrimination. The ‘center’ and ‘margin’ remains one of the most contentious issues in post-colonial and feminist discourse. The West gets defined as the center and the rest outside the ‘center’ – marginalized. Thus “marginality” is perceived as deviant, foreign, dark, impenetrable, and other – it is this very perception of “otherness” and “deviance” that these writers attempt to shatter with their works.

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