



AN EXPLORATION OF SUBALTERN VOICES IN ANOSH IRANI'S 'DAHANU ROAD'

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Abstract: Existence of a section of society has always been at severe stake is termed as marginalized group. The upper caste dominant section has successfully controlled the other section by different ways which resulted their suffocation and loss of identity. The term 'subaltern', as Antonio Gramsci coined, refers to those who are outside of the dominant power structures causing them to remain suppressed and treated inferior and low ranked. The term identifies it the cultural hegemony that leads their inability ever since the colonial times. Their voices were muted and unnoticed in terms of social, political, and economic power. The present research attempts to explore 'the subaltern voices' that indicates the voice of suppressed individuals. Here, this term refers to sociological inability due to certain conquering elements rather than biological.

The present research paper incorporates marginalized voices of social and cultural domains in Anosh Irani's *Dahanu Road* (2011). The novel highlights the history of the relation between the landowning Irani and the *Warli* tribe. The landowner Zairos Irani gets shocked when he comes to know that Ganpat, a member of the *Warli* tribe, commits suicide in the chickoo orchard. This offers a portrayal of contemporary India dealing with issues of caste, religion, and socio-economic inequality.

Keywords: **existence, marginalized, dominant, subaltern voices, cultural hegemony, Warli tribe, social inequality**

'According to M. H. Abrams and Walter Scott a novel is a fictional narrative that displays a realistic depiction of the state of a society, while the romance encompasses any fictitious narrative that emphasizes marvelous or uncommon incidents.'¹ Here, Anosh Irani's *Dahanu Road* calls attention on the idea of subaltern voices where the marginalized *Warli* tribe lacks access to mainstream discourse. While revealing the history of relation between the landowning Irani and the *Warli*, author sheds light on subaltern voices of the *Warli* tribe which is often portrayed as silenced, distorted, or ignored in their societal life. Though they are biologically capable to speak up but being low ranked, *Warli* tribe is socially voiceless. In the novel Zairos is a son of Irani landowner living in the town of Dahanu, outside of Bombay. He gets shocked when he comes to know that Ganpat, a member of the local *Warli* tribe, has committed suicide in their chickoo orchard. While

investigating the reason for the Ganpat's suicide, he found some unpleasant facts about his own family's history. The action finds a swift turn with Ganpat's suicide. "A man was hanging from a chickoo tree. His head was bent to the side, his arms dangling, his eyes wide open. He resembled a dark puppet."(12)³ This offers a portrayal of contemporary India dealing with major issues of caste, religion, and social inequality. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her epoch making essay, '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*'⁴ she raises a question whether the subaltern can truly be heard or considered within dominant structure. She claims that the marginalized cannot speak for themselves or they are not easily acknowledged by the dominant powers. "The subaltern cannot speak. This doesn't mean they are mute - it means their voice isn't recognized in the systems of knowledge and power."³

In the novel, the author depicts the social and cultural conflicts between the Zoroastrian and the *Warlis*. Here, this tribe is marginalized, that once owned the land by Zoroastrian. While reviewing the history, the protagonist Zairos shows how the *Warlis*' land was usurped unfairly, and left to live life of penury and degradation. Their struggle for dignity and survival is a voice of voiceless.

Although Ranjit Guha adopts the term subaltern from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci particularly focusing on the colonial India in the context of peasants, tribal, workers, women and other marginalized groups whose existence itself was denied. Anosh Irani's seminal book *Dahanu Road* also depicts peasant oppression and land struggles in Maharashtra. The narrative revolves around Zairos Irani, who is owner of a chickoo orchard. His wealthy Zoroastrian family controls land and labor of the region of the *Warlis*. The tribe represents the subaltern peasants being suppressed by the landowners. Such peasants are denied land ownership, decent wages, and education. Zairos's grandfather, Shapur Irani, is shown creating violence and fear. The novel shows the land grabs, forced labor, and caste-based hierarchy.

Anosh Irani shows the pathetic picture of the labors, peasants, tribes and women outside the hegemonic power structure. The characters like Ganpat, Damu, Lakhu, Rami, Kusum, Pinky are depicted in a state of suffering with the deep scars of historical and ongoing oppression. They are deprived of education resulting in falling prey to the upper caste oppression and remain involved with alcoholism, child marriages, and violence. The *Warlis* leaves in extreme poverty that caused their inability to survive like stray dogs. Though the tribe is acknowledged for their honesty, once Ganpat is caught while stealing money in his childhood but he repents when he is asked to leave. In the course of the time Ganpat becomes trusted worker but his life remains hell while working for his master.

"Ganpat was a *Warli* who had lived and worked on the farm since he was a child, a tribal of the region, he used to be one of Shapur Irani's most trusted workers." (13)³

According to Ranjit Guha, the subalterns are the excluded people from the elite power. Social rights of people like peasants, tribal, workers, and women whose voices were historically ignored or silenced. He mainly discusses the situation of rural peasants in colonial India. In '*The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983)' Guha argues that subalterns were not passive victims of history but an active agent who created their own realities. While focusing on Anosh Irani's novel *Dahanu Road*, it highlights that the existence of *Warli* tribe was historically ignored or silenced due to conquering power structure of elite Irani Family.

“When Ganpat woke up the next morning, he remembered everything. He had never felt younger or more powerful in his life. ‘If it is a money Laxman wants, he shall have it’, he said to Rami. ‘They think we are invisible!’ ‘Who?’ asked Rami. ‘The landlords! The landlord thinks we are invisible!” (240)³

In the present novel, the land is the symbols of both historical memory and contemporary power dynamics. Once, the land belonged to the *Warli* tribe but later that owned by the Zoroastrian. The struggles of the *Warli* while reclaiming their land needs to be taken into account. Their degradation that they suffer is highly notable because the Zoroastrian grow wealth and privilege but on the contrary the *Warlis* face gloomy life while trying to seek revenge. Ganpat’s son Laxman is furious at such oppression, the fury is discernible - “They think they can take our land and we will remain silent. They think they can take our women and we will remain silent. They think they can take our forest and we will remain silent. I will hurt them, I will hurt the landlord. I will hurt him just to remind him that I am alive. I am coming for you, Shapur seth. I am coming for you. He Chanted. Then he stormed out of the hut. (240)³

Conclusion:

Ironi’s *Dahanu Road* evinces social revolution, the impact of colonialism, and the oppression that impacted their lives. Anosh Irani highlights the inequalities within the community. It also focuses on the painful segments of injustice, particularly through the depiction of the suffering of *Warlis*. The novel paints a heart-touching picture of social unequal history of the *Warli* tribe. *Dahanu Road* helps readers acknowledge the survival of the oppressed, their cultural identity, and the painful injustices forced upon the marginalized of the past and the optimism for change in the future.

References:

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- 4) Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 66–111. 14 April 2025 <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Can-the-subaltern-speak-by-Gayatri-Spivak.pdf/>