

**MARGINALISATION AND OTHERNESS IN GEETA SHREE'S 'LITTI
CHOKHA AUR ANYA KAHANIYA'**

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Abstract

Understanding inclusivity through the lived experiences of exclusion portrays a portrait of resilience in the selected short stories of Geeta Shree's *Litti Chokha Aur Anya Kahaniya*. The objective of this study, through the collection of short stories and the stories in focus, is to enrich our understanding of the social, cultural, political and economic framework that challenges inclusion and promotes exclusion. The stories focused on a particular state, Bihar highlights group identity and shared understanding of belonging and recognition. The social system in place carefully explores ideas of diversity, social inequality, the need for intersectionality and integration through Inclusion Studies. The intergroup relationships, therefore, influence inclusion as well as exclusion for Neelanti in *Swadheen Vallabha*. The author, in preserving the cultural knowledge of the rituals and traditions of Biharis, examines individual worth and emphasises the need for dignity, equity and participation. The regional undertones have universal appeal in addressing the global challenges we face today, including health issues, climate imbalance, digital illiteracy, and a lack of social justice. The personal loss of Uma Kumari in the short story *Kab le Biti Amavas ki Ratiya* weaves a narrative of systemic change in not only one but generations to come. The marginalised voices are denied full participation, and the government's policies can't be divorced from lived realities.

In engaging debates to promote holistic development, the interdisciplinary study of Inclusion Studies and Literature examines ‘otherness’ and ‘marginalisation’ as social ills. ‘Otherness’ excludes opposites to remain in the comfort of a subjective understanding of human experiences, negating diversity. In applying a qualitative approach to our study, we intend to understand how humans are separated from each other because of one’s own perception. How did this cultural ‘otherness’ come into place, leading to marginalisation? The collection of short stories set in Bihar is an interesting and insightful study of subordination within one’s own community.

Keywords: Inclusivity, otherness, marginalisation, diversity, inequality

Introduction

This paper investigates Shree’s illuminating narratives. It specifically analyses themes having profound socio-political ramifications. The themes bring into focus the entrenched structures that engender ‘marginalization’ and ‘otherness’. The study dissects the mechanisms, their intricate workings to understand not only the creation but perpetuation of these divisions as well. These divisions ultimately shape our understanding of lived experiences of exclusion thereby appeal for inclusion. The selected short stories in Geeta Shree’s *Litti Chokha Aur Anya Kahaniya* have articulated the lived experiences by turning Bihar into a literary landscape. An ethnographic investigation enquires the working of social dynamics. This study of marginalization is brought about by various intersecting factors like caste, class and gender etc. These factors perpetuate exclusion thus reinforcing the marginalized status. At the cusp of adversity, the feminist lens portrays stories of resilience within the patriarchal society. The research also seeks to uncover the urgency for women’s agency. The interplay of oppressive factors like caste and gender have not only defined their lived experiences but their double oppression as well at the face of patriarchal structure. The narratives shed a light on the indigenous tradition of Bihar. The hegemonic societal structures and norms remain unchallenged but these narratives challenge these dominant practices. Subversion of these norms in a few stories speak of gender rivalries and caste practices that have deep-rooted perspectives seeking an alternative in the portrayal of unconventional characters. Such portrayals of struggle are not

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nuanced but hit the core of the readers directly. Seeking agency, the oppressed sections demand broader dialogue on inclusion, justice at societal level, equity and identity. Young (2000) has divided oppression into exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. This division widens our understanding of marginalization engendered out of oppression. The five categories are a whole in understanding the dynamics and its interaction with the social mechanisms like caste, class or gender in place.

As the paper foregrounds the lived experiences of characters that have been systemically identified as the ‘other’- their periphery identity has been explored. The social structure at place perpetuate exclusion. At the receiving end are the marginalized communities that refuse to remain at the periphery or exclusion. Navigating ‘othering’, we focus on cross-cultural interaction that led to cultural misunderstanding thus birthing systemic otherness. The collection of short stories sheds light on how economic hardships, low opportunities, less access to healthcare, no means of education often intersect with caste and gender to exacerbate marginalization making inclusion an uphill task. The psychological ramifications of these factors are detrimental to human living. The Hindu Caste System as portrayed by the author is a complex social-economic buildup. Fueled by political biases, the mechanisms of oppression have become even more entrenched and undisputed with time. The select narratives resist monolithic forms of interpretations but opens roads to discourses that challenges hegemonic practices. Power decides exclusion as well as inclusion. This also dictates one’s identity because exclusionary practices are often power driven and those at the receiving end in the narratives challenge oppression. Not only that, such systemic violence on one’s identity by thwarting attempts at full-participation in the society causes long-term psychological harm. The characters after suffering much at the hands of power ultimately forge path to self-affirmation where discrimination leads to inclusion and violence to liberation. Inclusion Studies, therefore acting as a framework challenge exclusionary practices and ensures equitable representation, participation of all irrespective of caste, class or gender. To ensure inclusive futures, this paper argues for not only an equitable approach but a paradigm shift that makes room for diverse outlook irrespective of background or identity and norms that promote marginalization instead of keeping it on check.

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We have already underscored the interplay of complex factors that shape the lived experiences of individuals at the receiving end. Inclusion Studies, though not only provides a critical framework but the lens through which we can examine the interplay of these complex factors. Social justice is at the core of Inclusion Studies. Such an analysis reveal, for instance, how women who experience layered discrimination and oppression. Caste and gender intersect to create a rather intertwined form of marginalization within literary works. Bihar, the second largest state in India with respect to population is a cultural powerhouse. With a history so promising and enlightening, it has suffered the ravages of time in governance, education and economic prosperity. In the selected short stories, modernity crosses path with tradition in evoking a need for change and advancement.

Discussion

A backdrop that is not only illuminating but compelling, Bihar in Geeta Shree's *Litti Chokha Aur Anya Kahaniya* offers a wider scope of analysis in understanding the need of inclusion. Bihar has seen phases of development where characters from different cross-section of the society find a voice and have a story to tell. The characters not only grapple with social hierarchy, but also complex gender dynamics coupled with a fight for agency among the deprived and disadvantaged communities. It is within this context, 'Swadheen Vallabha' stands out in becoming a narrative of resistance, in navigating traditional power dynamics that are deeply weaved within Bihar's socio-cultural fabric. It continues to influence interactions and exert pressure over individual as well as community. Neelanti is from Sri Lanka, but falls for Arun from Bihar. What sowed the seeds of love wasn't cultural difference but feelings universal in nature. Arun was aware of his socio-economic circumstances and the impediments that Neelanti would face in his native town. He was quite anxious and had requested Athira to be a wise interlocutor to Neelanti and her mother so as to not jeopardize his romantic aspirations. Arun would joke around Neelanti to win his parents hearts by preparing the famous Ceylon tea. Here, the two famous cultural symbol- 'Litti Chokha' from Bihar and Ceylon tea from Sri Lanka interact with Arun and Neelanti. To educate, inform and bridge the cultural gap, Neelanti watches YouTube videos and googles about Bihar. Neelanti's mother is culturally distinct in wearing

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Osrayi. Looking forward to interact with Arun's family, they navigate their way to the country home, walking and often strutting on the kutch-pukka road. They enter into a traditional family setting. To culturally conform and adapt, Neelanti touches Arun's parents' feet to pay her respect and also speaks a line or two in Hindi. Arun's parents are taken by surprise but their happiness knows no bounds. As interaction begins, Neelanti is confronted with an awkwardness - on being laughed at for speaking her full name. The laugh held significance as it alienated her culturally. It also showcased arrogance and prejudice of the culturally dominant, that is, Arun's family. Gargi Bhattacharya (2003) exclaims that racial harassment isn't merely an episode but systemic and structured.

The harsher reality of discrimination followed when Arun's mother started keeping her conditions. Neelanti's external identity couldn't have become starker in an alien landscape. Arun's mother's conditions were the established norms and traditional roles expected out of a woman. Any deviation will exacerbate the prejudice against Neelanti as she is the one who is going to be geographically displaced and linguistically pitted against a stratified social order. Neelanti is the 'other' in a Brahmin-Bhumihar family. The tentacles of the caste system are spread thus:

The caste system, one of the most entrenched and oldest social hierarchies in the subcontinent - now influencing diaspora communities globally (Jodhka & Shah 2010) (Soundararajan 2022) - continues to shape the region's intellectual and social structures. Despite legal frameworks through the Indian Constitution and social progress achieved over the years, which guarantees rights and affirmative measures for Dalit's (formerly "untouchables") to counter systemic discrimination, caste-based exclusionary practices remain deeply embedded in both social, civil, formal-informal and here for our inquiry also in the "academic/academia" spheres (Pal 2024). Practices of casteism and caste-based exclusion and differential treatment have been abolished by law but still, shades of it remain in the ingrained attitudes nurtured by the caste system.

(Singh, 2025, p. 38-39)

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In the midst of a spate of conditions laid before Neelanti and her mother, Athira wasn't getting a chance to translate. She understood the cultural and linguistic barrier and was greatly anxious in maintaining her composure as the challenges were growing. Crenshaw (1991) has introduced intersectionality to explain and highlight multiple forms of marginalisation. In the case of Neelanti, if we look from the point of view of intersectionality- cultural, linguistic and gender differences have converged in magnifying her marginalization. Yuval and Davis (2006) have studied the interrelationship of gender, race, class, ethnicity and other social divisions. Such study point to the universality of experience in macrocosm. More than Neelanti, Arun and Athira were aware of the rigid norms that seek to throttle her agency, desire and ambition. These norms would directly come into conflict with Neelanti's identity. On her failure to adhere to such norms, not only the barrier would become insurmountable at the face of familial rejection but this will compound the experience of being the 'other'. Her racial and ethnic identity lock horns with the established norms resonating Foucault's concept of power operating within familial and societal sphere to justify subjugation and subordinate position. The constant and continuous flow of conditions from Arun's mother reinforced gender roles entrenched within the patriarchal system. No avenues of self-expression and more often than not denied of it can lead to low self-worth over time. Athira, who comes forward to form a bridge between Arun and Neelanti's family becomes aware of the conventional marital norms. Fearing Neelanti to be confined in the 'outsider inside' paradox, any deviation from the conditions or the prescribed roles might lead to ostracization. The vegetarian values followed in the household are enforced on Neelanti to pave way for cultural integration. The mechanism of control operates on arbitrary practices that demands adherence over free thinking. The intersection of social hierarchy and patriarchal structure work to degrade as well as dictate their identities.

A social milieu in Bihar despite democratic advancement functions on power structures that thrive on traditional mores. 'Kab le Beeti Amavas Ki Ratiya' talks about such reinforcements. The feudal, casteist and hierarchal structure is at place to exploit, but will Uma get subdued? Forced into marriage, Maalbhog Thakur leaves his new bride, Uma on her wedding night. He returns after 12 years to accept and lead a life with Uma. But something had changed.

What did he miss all these years? When the groom ran away leaving behind Uma, she had turned to sleep for consolation. The new bride turned into a helper in the house and a support for the aggrieved mother. Nobody came from Uma's maternal home to take her back. Her dreams of leading a life together had shattered. Without a husband, she had no identity and no acceptance in the society. Here, Shree weaves a narrative that brings to surface the insidious ways in which patriarchal norms rear its head out. Uma has been marginalized, denied an agency and any means of self-determination. She desires to become a teacher like her mother-in-law, but is denied the opportunity to fulfil Shashikala Devi's selfish ends. She is advised from the relatives to have Uma remarried, but she holds on to her obtuse ideas of honor. Meanwhile Uma was getting impatient to have some money for her own use. Shashikala restricting her the economic means forces her to play subservient roles within the familial setup. The gravity of social exclusion is stated thus:

Being excluded can sometimes be in itself a deprivation and this can be of intrinsic importance on its own. For example, not being able to relate to others and to take part in the life of the community can directly impoverish a person's life. It is a loss on its own, in addition to whatever further deprivation it may indirectly generate. (Sen, 2000, p.13)

Though working as a teacher, Shashikala thrives on entrenched societal perceptions. The patriarchal codes of conduct laid down by her mother-in-law are emblematic of the humiliation and cruelty she is forced to face. While one woman pulls Uma down, another comes to her aid. As Shashikala leaves for pilgrimage, Uma hatches a plan with Mangru's wife to sell the field produce. The money she got in return was a ticket to her freedom. She started her handicraft business and gave wings to her creativity. Soon the fragrance of her talent spread far and wide. Watching Uma become an active agent rather than a passive object upon her return, Shashikala's dehumanization is answered by Uma reclaiming her dignity. She rose from those very debilitating social structures that reduced her identity and stripped her agency. The cycle of disempowerment that was put into motion by the mother-son duo had normalized her silence and her plight. Her long-standing oppression had come to a halt to certain extent. Her business grew

and she employed five more women to generate surplus. Parallel to her business, she started her studies. In her long resilient fight, twelve years had gone by. In a need of wife, Maalbhog Thakur returns to make a claim on his 'malleable property' - Uma! He is the dominant male order given to phallocentric whims. Uma has worked her way out of social exclusion and doesn't need a male figure to take her own decisions. The traditional roles that thrived on her invisibility have been demolished and with it the arbitrary rules that decided her inclusion or exclusion. A rebellion at such a granular level, in a rural landscape is powerful. Understanding the exchange of dialogue in local color with Bihar as backdrop serves an even powerful tale of resistance. Thus, bringing the idea home that resistance isn't a weapon for the urbanized and educated but is the same of the rural masses as well. It also makes a striking resemblance to Henrik Ibsen's Nora in 'A Doll's House'. The awakening of feminist consciousness is unmissable and applaudable. As long as Uma was powerless, she was an object of pity, the moment she discovered her agency, she became a subject of scorn in the eyes of her mother-in-law and her husband. Maalbhog proclaims that he wouldn't die without an heir thus reinforcing the patriarchal order where Uma is a means to an end.

Conclusion

Geeta Shree's 'Litti Choka aur Anya Kahaniya' has enabled Inclusion Studies in amplifying marginalized voices. A piece of literature in preserving cultural knowledge has laid emphasis on equity, dignity and full participation. This paper has not only explored multifaceted nature of exclusion but also analyzed the factors contributing to the construction of otherness. The prevailing social milieu is a melting pot of various intersecting factors like caste, class and gender. The factors highlight the experiences of an individual relegated to the periphery. We study the systemic nature of inequality born out of time-honored rigid norms that have had profound effect on identity building. India being the hot bed of linguistic and cultural diversity encourages diverse perspectives. With Inclusion Studies, these perspectives uncover subtle ways in which certain voices became unimportant and were silenced with time. The inequalities that were investigated are overlooked fearing social exclusion. The literary technique employed by the author offer readers a critical lens to understand the socioeconomic hiatus fueled by political

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motives. In incorporating the local dialect, the discussion wears a local color emanating a personal touch. The experiences of characters feel authenticated. The vernacular touch gives voice to broader cultural and linguistic debate. The resistance of the subaltern as exemplified in Uma employs the discourses already built around demolishing dominant narratives. Thus, the exploration of these power structures in fictional narratives unaccommodated silence challenging hegemonic dialogues and advocating for discourses on social equity. The feminist consciousness in Indian literature is very much present and Geeta Shree's narratives are imbued with such display. Whether its Neelanti swimming against the tide of expected social norms in choosing Arun or Uma in forsaking her husband, the potential impact of such moments can't be unseen in overturning societal expectations. A literary output of such degree provokes remaking of gender roles. Thus, the Indian cultural and social milieu is challenging stereotypes. The broad sociolinguistic landscape of Bihar proved to be rich in understanding marginalization and identifying the factors that led to it. Engaging with the regional realities and showcasing the local traditions, the author has generated discussion at broader level. The intersection of gender and caste in shaping otherness reveal the unique form discrimination(s) based on one's socio-cultural backdrop. Marginalization here is understood at a local level before taking a shape of national discourse. The lived realities are a work of fiction but are very real in their depiction. The exchange of dialogues is powerful particularly between Uma and Maalbhog Thakur. Such exchange enables deeper understanding of the systemic nature of inequality. Its manifestation at the local level paves way for pan-India discussion. Inclusion doesn't happen at a surface level but it also doesn't have to be shaped as an imposition. It is an organic process whose enhancement must be multifaceted- digital, political, social, cultural and linguistic at a national and on an international level.

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