

Representaion of Subaltern Identities in Urdu Progressive fiction (With a special reference to the selected short stories of Munshi Premchand and Krishan Chander)

Yusra Younus
M. Phil. English (Literature) Candidate
Government College University,
Faisalabad, Pakistan.

&
Lecturer in English
Government Islamia College for Women,
Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Khamsa Qasim
Lecturer in English, Department of English Literature,
Government College University,
Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Author details:

This paper is based upon an M. Phil. Thesis.

1st Author:

Yusra Younus
Lecturer in English,
Government Islamia College for Women,
Eidgah Road, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Corresponding author:

Khamsa Qasim
Lecturer in English, Department of English Literature,
Government College University,
Faisalabad, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

This research intends to probe into the representation of the subaltern identities in the Urdu Progressive fiction. It focuses specifically on the analysis of the selected short stories written by Munshi Premchand and Krishan Chander. This research will try to approach the selected short stories from the Marxist perspective and by landing into the area where it overlaps with the condition of subalternity it will strive to investigate the socio-political conditions in which subalterns were caught up, suppressed and oppressed. It examines the relationship between subalternity and representation by analysing the ways in which that relationship has been played out in the domain of Urdu Progressive Fiction and brings to light the subaltern version of truth and the way they look at the reality of their lives and struggle to get out of the oppression which in turn construct their identities. This research looks forward not only to approach the selected fiction from the postcolonial marxist perspective but to the revival of contemporary interest in Urdu progressive fiction too, which otherwise is considered a dried vein.

KEYWORDS:

Marxism, Urdu progressive fiction, Subaltern identities, Premchand, Suppression, Manipulation, Krishan Chander.

INTRODUCTION

THE present study comprises of a detailed discussion on Marxism focussing specifically on the concepts which are conducive to the establishment of the condition of Subalternity and finally celebrating the similar ideas and concepts that the Progressive writers of Urdu fiction had in common with other two discourses so that a detailed analysis of the representation of the subaltern identities in their work can be done.

i- Marxism

By examining a society closely it becomes evident that it is structured on a series of ongoing conflicts between different social classes. These classes are formed by unequally distributing its goods or even the means to achieve them. In other words, the means of production structures the society, hence introducing, "the concept of dialectical materialism—the means of production controls a society's institutions and beliefs." (p.80) wrote Dobie (2011), and further argues, this divides people into those who own property and thereby control the means of production—the bourgeoisie, and those who are controlled by them—the proletariat, the workers or the labour class.

The various methods of economic production and the social relationships they precipitate form the economic structure of society, called the base. From this base, maintains Marxism, arises the superstructure which according to Bressler (1994) was "a multitude of social and legal institutions, political and educational systems, religious beliefs, values and a body of art and literature that one social class uses to keep the members of the working class in check" (p. 119). Which suggests that norms, values, art and morality of a society is generated by different social, political and ideological institutions and systems and at its root works the base which is essentially economic. Dobie (2011) argued,

because its the dominant classes that control the superstructure, they are able to control the members of the working or the subordinate classes and such an attempt to control inevitably generates conflict between social classes, which are created by the way economic resources are used and who profits from them. (p. 85)

The working class does not always seem to be aware of the situation in which they are caught. The dominating class

using all its power and resources makes not only the prevailing systems appear logical and natural but to be held valid and accepted by the working classes, in a way, it forms the society's consciousness or ideology which is a much debated and crucial term in Marxism. The Marxists maintain that ideology is the conscious stating of a society's philosophy for it is the ruling, upper class who decrees what beliefs, what values and what laws are to be formed and executed in the society to be followed and obeyed by the dominated, subjected and the worker class. It may often refer to the collective or social consciousness of a culture and sometimes it is the personal awareness of the culture of the codes that govern its politics, religion, law, and philosophy. The most important things is the fact that this is the collective conscious and the set standards to which the culture's bourgeoisie and its superstructure subscribes.

Whereas for Dobie, "it appears to be a reasonable, natural worldview because it is in the self interest of those in power to convince people that it is so. Even a flawed system appears to be a success" (p. 86). An ideology, governed by the dominant class, functions to secure its power. And people living in such a conditioned society tend to accept the system which is unfavourable for them without protesting and questioning it hence, developing a false consciousness.

This privilege of the Haves over the Have nots makes them hold the steering in their hands and drive the Have nots to the desired ends where they could make them value and acquire the consciousness of themselves and their relevant status in the society as has already been decided for them by the Haves. This is how the working class, without even being aware of it, becomes trapped in an economic system which is dictated by the bourgeoisie and its hegemony which is interpreted as the predomination of the elites with whom the ultimate power lies—the economic, material power. Cultural hegemony, refers to the domination of a culturally diverse society by the elites or the ruling class who manipulate the beliefs, explanations, perceptions, thoughts, and values of the society and resultantly make their worldview authentic enough to be imposed/accepted as the universally valid dominant ideology. Marxism addresses the socio-political condition of the masses shackled under "the chains of social, economic, and political oppression...presently not free agents but

individuals controlled by an intricate social web dominated by a self-declared, self-empowered, and self-perpetuating social elite" (p. 120), opined Bressler (1994). In this oppressive condition they have to live subservient, powerless lives which is prescribed for them by others.

A Marxist literary analysis therefore tries to depict inequities in social classes, imbalance of power among people and manipulation of the proletariat/workers at the hands of the bourgeoisie. It focuses on the formation of different classes within a society and the generation of class struggle among them. Furthermore, it analyzes that how this friction among different social classes of the society gives rise to the construction of different identities of the characters according to the economic and social background they have. The characters are seen grappling with problems and issues having the socio-economic origins and their behaviours, thoughts and gestures are strongly influenced and conditioned by the socio-economic status they are placed in by the elite/bourgeoisie. This most of the times is accepted by them without any resistance. Whereas some cases, caused by severe oppressive control and manipulation, may come up with the fierce eruption of the inner most heart felt emotions and sentiments in the form of strong resistance and negation.

ii- Subalternity

Roy (2004), very aptly remarked that the subalterns were those unfortunate masses who have been deliberately silenced most of the times. If they ever try to express themselves they are preferably unheard by the ones who have power. Dismissed by some as simply another critique of culture and by others as a post marxist stance, subaltern studies began with the work of Ranajit Guha and the South Asian Subaltern collective in the 1980s and was adapted to the postcolonial studies. The group formed by Guha, used the term subaltern " as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (p. vii) as Guha (1982) has put it. They produced many volumes of Subaltern studies that contained discourses on history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity focussing specifically on the culture informing that condition.

The term 'Subaltern' was originally adopted by Antonio Gramsci discussing cultural hegemony to refer to those groups in the society who, in one way or the other were subjected to the hegemony of the ruling class. The hegemony or supremacy of a social group manifests itself in the form of domination which most of the times makes use of all possible ways of subjugating and suppressing the masses who are forced to live under the condition of subalternity. Subalternity refers to a condition of subordination or marginalization, brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistics or cultural dominance. It is a condition – a space of difference- where the masses; the subalterns, have no access to power or any other influential position and they become the ones who are not getting a piece of the pie.

Adding on to the Gramscian concept of subaltern, who primarily restricted the concept of the working class to the industrial labourers alone, in Subaltern studies the word subaltern was used to describe any group that is completely left out of the elite circles, said Bier (2010), in Subaltern studies. Furthermore, Prakash (1994) in Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism, talked about the term 'subaltern' which for him "refers to subordination in terms of class, gender, race, language and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationship in history" (p.1477), which implies the all inclusive nature of subalternity.

Beverly (1999) in Subalternity and Representation posited: a subaltern study is a study of power. Who has it and who does not. Who is accumulating it and who is losing it. Such a struggle for power is intimately related with acquiring specific identities and questions of representation. The society that is fraught with such a struggle becomes a fertile and rich subject of study for insight into socio-political and economic domains. It gives not only the complexity of formation of the subordinated class, but also the diversity of subjects that might be related to it and consequential multi-dimensional identities that are ascribed to the individuals of this class. Baudrillard (1983) very aptly remarked in the Shadow of the Silent Majorities that masses are the subject matter of every discourse, they are the obsession of every social project which deals with the society and its issues (p. 48).

The masses or the marginalized characters like peasants, workers, and people from the lower castes and women who are socially and economically dependent on the male members frequently populate literature that aims to address the social, political and economic issues. This fiction attempts to recover the perspectives of marginalized or subordinated people whether they are women, non whites, non Europeans, the lower classes or the oppressed castes. Although Spivak (1995), in her seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' suggested that It was impossible for us to recover the subaltern voice (p. 24), but for Loomba (1998), while giving a reference to the plight of Hindu widows, these marginalized people may very well articulate themselves in one way or the other and can fight against too absolute a theory of subaltern silence which suggests that it is almost impossible for the subalterns to get their voice registered (p. 237). In addition to it Roy (2004) claimed that it is quite evident that there is really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. Rather we have the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard. This establishes firmly the presence and the formation of the subaltern identities and the way they are generally treated by the dominant of the society. They keep on surfacing in the texts making their presence noticed; even when they remain silent, their silence communicates more than could have ever said by the articulated expressions.

Furthermore, subordination can very well be examined thoroughly in a binary relationship with dominance. Dominance, in its all manifestations, can be subjected to a

detailed analysis in order to get a more clearer insight into subalternity and the identities it generates. So, the analysis of subaltern identities in the domain of subaltern studies may focus on the objective formation of different categories of subalterns, social, economic and political factors involved in their formation, and how antagonistic or affiliative they become when used, abused, manipulated and played upon they are by the dominant.

iii- Progressive Writers' Movement

Zaheer (2012), stated that the basic crux of the progressive movement was to fight for liberty for their people and strive to end exploitation of one group by another group of people.

The Progressive Writers' Movement, a progressive literary movement of pre partition India, with an anti imperialistic and leftist approach assayed to propagate equality among masses and attacked injustice, political subjugation and social backwardness in the society.

The Indian Progressive Writers' Movement and Association appeared on the literary scene in 1932 with the publication of 'Angare' - a collection of nine short stories and a play-which was a joint venture of Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmed Ali, Rasheed Jahan and Mehmoud-u-Zafar. These young writers already apprehended the intensity of literary, social, cultural and religious criticism that was expected out of this publication, Mahmud (1996) recorded, attacked at enslavement to social and religious practices which were based on ignorance, at the disgraceful acceptance of the foreign rule, and resisted against the inequalities in Indian society and its economic drawbacks but they perhaps miscalculated the ferocious severity of this attack. Medinah(1933), a renowned newspaper, went on to the extent of saying that there was not anything intellectually modern to be found in it but immorality, evil character and wickedness. This 'bundle of filth' tried to mock at the creator of the world, made fun of religious beliefs and cracked indecent jokes. The book was banned the very year for it jolted the so called established orthodox standards of the society and created ripples through the otherwise stagnant waters of socio-political, religious and moral structures. The stories openly ridiculed religion and highlighted the oppressive nature of different traditional and social institutions, wrote Bose (2005).

A League of Progressive Authors was first announced by Ahmed Ali and Mahmud-u-Zafar that was later expanded to become the Indian Progressive Writers' Association which was set up in London in 1935. Whereas the Progressive Writers' Association was established in 1936 in Kolkata. The same year All India Writers' Association was set up by Syed Sajjad Zaheer and Ahmed ali and joined by many emerging and established writers of the time. This was, says Zaheer (2012), the time of a bulk of new ideas, many revolutionary movements, a whole lot of noble resolutions, and glimmering hope (p. 96).

One of the most important elements of this fiction for Ahmed (1986) is its tendency to be realistic: being literature for life it strives to depict the contemporary life and has a

foresight for future and wants to address in detail the aspects of life which had yet not been talked about in literature (p. 9). He further says that it maintains an objective outlook, tries to portray life, deviates from tradition, intends never to hide anything, and does not follow the notion of selecting some of the details and leaving the other (p. 16).

In western countries, where realism surfaced in the nineteenth century, it stood for a literary activity aiming at the faithful depiction of life of the individual in society as it actually was, not as it ought to be, or as it was imagined to be in romances and allegories. The emphasis on the role of literature as a mirror of society next led the nineteenth-century European writers to turn it into an instrument of social criticism.

Urdu prose writers at the beginning of the twentieth century were perhaps unaware of the changes in literary activity and purpose that were taking place among the European writers. But by the end of the First World War they could be said to have been influenced by these changes. And the depiction of reality with a specific motive of pinpointing the social evils to the end of bringing a reform became the key element of Urdu fiction: These twin characteristics of realism and social criticism defined the nature of Urdu progressive writing at that time records Zeno (2012) in Professor Ahmed Ali and the Progressive Writers' Movement in The Annual of Urdu Studies, and furthers the assertion thus:

And the Urdu writer found himself in the midst of a political storm in his society, a storm whipped up by a set of freshly introduced political ideas. Anti imperialism, national independence, social revolution__ these ideas possessed the consciousness of people everywhere (p. 41).

Malik (1967) suggested, "There was no doubt that the doctrine of socialist realism in literature was propagated in Urdu short story by the Marxist litterateurs who used literature as a political weapon from the arsenal of dialectical materialism" (p. 649). He further opines, "The manifesto of the Progressive writers' movement drafted in 1936 stated clearly that the contemporary literature of the subcontinent must deal with the problems of our existence today...the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection" (p. 651). Such a focus of progressive fiction makes it a rich study material to examine the socio-political manipulation and abuse of masses that were caught up in the 'problems of existence' and had to suffer through the condition of subalternity.

Munshi Premchand (1880-1936) is considered to be the first literary expert hand at the art of Urdu short story writing. Although this particular genre has been introduced to urdu fiction by English literature but it was Premchand who took the art of short story writing to the pinnacle of excellence. Many critics found him to be a realist, a humanist, a reformer and an idealist. His fiction is the most powerful and true to life depictions of people, their lives, their aspirations, desires, victories, injustice, defeats, exploitation, courage and cowardice wrote Singh (1976).

His understanding of the characters is unmatched in Urdu literature. When he portrays the proletariat class he depicts their true feelings and emotions while the elite are presented as the true prototypes of their class. His most important plots are those in which he has depicted the grass root realities of the peasants and the masses from the rural lowest classes.

Premchand is not only considered the father of the Urdu short story but also the initiator of realism in Urdu fiction. He is fully aware of 'Life', and its organic dimensions. He understands the social problems and has tried to understand the complications of the social pattern on which the society has been structured and keeps on witnessing the happenings closely.

In his presidential address to the first Progressive writers association's meeting, he came up with following expression which encapsulates his approach towards life and literature:

Literature has been defined many times in many different ways, but in my opinion the best ever definition of literature is its quality of being a critique of life; whether it is in the form of prose, short stories or poetry, it should comment on Life. (Premchand's presidential address, p. 313)

His progressive stance, because of which he continued to take a step forward than the rest of literary minds around him, makes him take sides with the most modern political and social movements of his time. Although initially he was inspired by the Gandhian views and he propagated the same ideas in his fiction as well but later he moved on to a larger and a vast canvas with the representation of that life and environment that he was familiar with. Braylvi (1986) endorsed the point thus:

Premchand's artistic genius is important for the reason that he is known for speaking on the behalf of life and its problems. Along with the representation of the rural life, he has painted the Indian and human life too. With Premchand the predominating theme is Life and its complications. (p. 153)

Another interesting aspect to his artistic mastery is his understanding of the psychological makeup of the characters he works with. He exhibits the expert skills of diving deep down into the emotional and psychological recesses of the minds and hearts of the characters. The best ever psychological portrayals of the human mind populate Premchand's fiction and short stories are loaded with the manifestations of human emotions and feelings.

His short stories immersed in the themes of patriotism and national struggle, no doubt, are also considered the best ever creations on the subject. Bukhari (n.d.) stated that Premchand not only wanted the sub-continent to be free from the British Raj but also want the capitalist system to be ended. He wanted such a system that was based on equality and humanity where the chances for economic prosperity were equally available for everyone. Premchand is the first ever short story writer who has come up with the most sensitively throbbing heart for the masses.

Premchand, like Dickens, usually take a particular social institution or problem as the central theme; the landlord exploitation in Premashram (*The Sanctuary of Love*, 1922); Industrialization in Rangabhumi (*The Arena*, 1924); the dowry system in *Nirmala* (1926); and educational reform and political oppression in *Karmabhumi* (*The Field of Action*, 1931).

Krishan Chander (1914-1977) is one of the most prolific writers producing bulks of short stories, novels and radio plays. His famous short story *AnnaData* (*The Giver of Grain*) reflects upon the Indian poor peasants and their rich feudal lords. He was born and educated in Lahore whereas his childhood was spent in Jammu Kashmir. His two famous novels *Shikast* (*Defeat*) and *Mitti kay Sanam* (*The Clay Idols*) are thematically rooted in the Kashmir's partition and life in Kashmiri villages. He shows a very keen understanding of displaced expatriates and rootless urban men. He was an avowed communist and was against Hindu-Muslim riots and conflicts. His literary masterpieces on Bengal famine and the barbarism at the time of partition of India earned him an everlasting fame. Talking continuously about the abuse of power, poverty and sufferings of the downtrodden, this legendary writer passed away while working on his writing desk.

As far as the artistic genius of Krishan Chander is concerned his works is fully charged with the awareness of the continuously changing socio-political scenario of the sub-continent. Even a cursory glance on the history of the short story will establish the fact that the Urdu short story got its roots deep down in the literary soils of the sub-continent with what Amjad (2014) called 'the social awareness'. Going through different ups and downs of the ages Krishan Chander's fiction has never lost contact with the artistic, philosophical, thematic, political and social concerns and changes of his contemporary times.

Krishan Chander seems to choose peace, socialism, humanism and the struggle for a better life as the subject matter for his fiction. By pondering over and writing about these very issues and subjects he tries to convey the good and bad aspects of these ideas and concepts. But his skilful mastery over the art of short story writing does not let his readers go astray in understanding that what are his personal inclinations towards these issues recorded Akhtar (2013).

One of the most common tendencies among the readers of Urdu fiction is to associate the progressive element only with the writers who claimed themselves to be a part of Urdu Progressive Writers Movement (PWM) of 1930s which was leftist in its ideology and had clear cut Marxist approach towards social and economic hierarchal structure. But it's important to note that the progressive element, that strived to be non traditionalist, leftist, realistic, and was inclined to social and economic criticism, is a legacy to be found in many other writers who were not writing under the banner of the Progressive Writers Movement. Munshi Premchand in his presidential address 1936 to the Progressive Writers Movement Association stated that no

writer can be a writer in true sense if he is not progressive in his approach towards literature. Progressive Writer's Movement was no doubt, anti imperialistic and had leftist tendencies, by advocating equality it took to task social injustice and exploitation. Socialism, for the progressives was an economic system that could end exploitation of the socially deprived, downtrodden and economically manipulated.

By subjecting them to a critical postcolonial marxist analysis this paper will try to trace if the fiction of these writers qualifies to be placed in the overlapping area of Marxism and Subalternity. And if that be so how do the selected short stories depict the socio-economic conditions of subalternity from a Marxist perspective and how does this in turn shape and reshape the identities of the subaltern subjects.

ANALYSIS

When a society is stratified and classified on the economic basis and creates specific socio-political conditions generated by the economic rift among the masses, it works to the end of creating a marginalized class that takes different forms and emerge with different identities while living outside the power concentrated centres.

Other than being called marginalized these people are usually referred to as subordinates, deprived, wave asides and subalterns. This subaltern class has to struggle for their survival in the conditions that are scripted for them by the haves or the all powerful whereas, power is defined and judged by the amount of money one has. Being subalterns they are deprived of any active participation in the society and have to serve as the fuel to be burnt for keeping the wheel of the leisurely lives of the rich moving. It is almost very rare that they get any appreciation or acknowledgement for this role that they play. They are deprived of their fundamental rights and they are kept entangled in the struggle to earn enough money to provide them with food and keep alive.

The subalterns are the object of a special focus for the writers who have a progressive approach towards literature and life because these people prove to be the excellent subject matter for the power centred studies. These people keep striving under these oppressive conditions to survive and acquire different identities while struggling through the stratified existence.

Premchand's selected fiction presents the real life characters which belong to the working and the lower class of the society that was known to him. These characters are open to change and novelty for they are fully aware of the marginalization they have been pushed to. And with him is found the criticism of life and motivation for practical advancement. He wants the poor to get out of the cruel claws of capitalism and set themselves free. His selected short stories, when scrutinized closely, strive to the end of setting the poor, the marginalized free. The elite have been playing the authoritative roles in the society whereas, his short stories have been written to create a society which

features equality, where the breach between the rich and poor is not that starkly evident, and where the poor, the marginalized, the subordinate, and the subaltern live a life of prosperity. While writing with this aim in his mind, the characters he portrays start taking different forms, different natures and different identities.

In the selected short stories of Krishan Chander, he has delineated the subaltern characters and presented how do they interact against the backdrop of peace, socialism, civilization, humanity, struggle for better life, desire to live, evolution and degradation as a social being, oppression, manipulation, and injustice. All protagonists and major characters belong to the marginalized class and are projected through the progressive spectacle extended by Krishan Chander. Being an avowed communist and a devoted humanist, his delineation of the characters remains true to life and brings to light the true identities that they acquire while treated as the subalterns. The manifold and complex identities of the characters get unfolded and are presented in all possible dimensions and this is done through the interplay of the adulated and the marginalized, the superior and the subaltern, within an economically driven and stratified society.

THE VOICE OF RESISTENCE:

It is interesting to note that the voice of resistance in the selected fiction, most of the times are raised by the people from the lowest classes: At times they are the untouchables, scavengers, and at others they are women and people who are utterly poverty stricken. Perhaps the reason for the resistance coming from the most downtrodden is that they are the ones who have nothing at all to lose. That is why they do not fear trying to get their voice registered. Munki the wife of Halku in *The January Night* shows her utter refusal to accept the exploitation of the moneylender by saying, "Why should he abuse you? Is this his kingdom?" (p. 1).

The people with low profile are contented with what ever meagre amounts they have for sustaining themselves. However, the ones who have power and authority, fear the smoothly running system to be derailed and try to keep the downtrodden continuously trapped in the same situation by devising one or the other method, scheme or law and enforce it on them. The rich persist to favour the breach which is there between them and the poor. Perhaps that is the reason Ghisu and Madhav of *The Shroud* are always provided with the alms by the landlord though indignantly.

SUBJECTION TO FREQUENT HUMILIATION AND DISGRACE:

The poor are so deprived that they are made to have nothing at all and this very fact make them have nothing to lose. That makes them fearless and independent of any social approvals. Unlike the middle class, they do not fear public humiliation. The possible reason for this is that they have continuously been subjected to humiliation and have become immune to such situations. Because of this frequent humiliation and disgrace they have learnt

how to put pride and self respect away and make decisions for their survival. The subjection of the characters to constant disrespect and humiliation is symbolically presented in *The Mahalakshmi Bridge* in the form of saris, "As if all these saris, these lives, keep swinging in the air with same colour, same level, same continuity and monotony" (p. 246).

We see them compromising many times on their self respect even for getting a meal once a day and they are not ashamed of it at all. Ghisu, Madhav [*The Shroud*] and Mangal [*The Price of Milk*] are a good example to be cited in this regard. This shamelessness and immunity might be criticized by the elites but this very attitude of the poor point finger at the callous treatment of the lower classes by the rich. It also proves the failure of the system, established by the rich, to give and restore the self respect of the poor.

PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS:

As far as the female characters are concerned, they are financially dependent on the male members of the family. Being part of the gender that is considered socially and economically dependent and weak, they are further pushed out of the centres to the margins. The male members of the lowest castes would treat their women as a commodity and subordinates. Budhya [*The Shroud*] and Bhangam [*The Price of Milk*] are seen providing their families with the day to day provisions at the expense of their bodies and health. They go to the extent of giving up their lives while trying to get both ends meet for their families. Budhya is referred to as "she was a good woman, poor thing. She is dead but she has given us food and drink" (p. 5). Bhangam works day in and day out because she is tempted by the promises of the household utensils, new dresses along with the packs of grains to be received as gifts. Budhya, while alive, has been working hard to provide the men of her family with the meal once a day. The situation becomes extremely lamentable when the male members of the family try to cash and utilize the death of women to the utmost benefit. There are some other female characters that live a life which serves as the fuel for the lives of other members of the family. They keep toiling hard throughout their lives and if they don't, they have to sit and depend on the meagre amounts earned by their husbands. They have to calculate and adjust between the low income and huge expenditures which not only creates frustration and depression but also makes them a soft target for the vent of the exasperation and vexation of their husbands. This results, most of the times, in physical violence and molestation which they have to bear and live with.

One important thing in this regard is the representation these women like Larriya, Jeeona and Shanta Bai [*The Mahalakshmi Bridge*] get at the hands of the writers. In some cases they are portrayed under the typical indigenous cultural influences where a woman worships and obeys her husband as a demigod. Serving the husband becomes almost a ritual for her and this drags her to the extent of doing drudgery for him while at the same time getting

physically thrashed too. Most of the women of the Mahalakshmi Bridge are living the same lives. They are ready to sacrifice themselves and their dreams and aspirations for the sake of the men in their families. And while doing this they do not take it to be an obligation rather the roles assigned to them become very much a part and parcel of their existence.

But this is not always the case. At other instances, the female characters take very aggressive stance and stand against the male members of the family in spite of their economic dependence on them. They refuse to live the lives that are economically deprived and socially marginalized and try to instigate their men to revolt against it. Halku's wife [*The January Night*] instigates him not to pay the interest and switch his profession.

AWARENESS OF THE MARGINALIZED EXISTENCE:

Most of the characters are aware of their marginalized existence and this awareness helps them make preferences out of the little provisions of life. This awareness of marginalization which has socio-economic basis, generates different types of reactions in different characters. At times they accept and resign to the lot they are born with but in many other instances they are seen resisting against this destiny which is scripted for them by the ruling elites and the rich. The form of resistance keeps changing accordingly. Even in these deprived conditions we see them making some very wise and sound decisions for their sustenance which could be morally condemnable but are very practical otherwise. Ghisu and Madhav's decision to buy food and liquor instead of shroud, Jeeona Bai's girl who turns to be a prostitute when her father dies, Hamid [*Eidgah*] purchasing a tong for his grandmother, Kachra baba [*The Dustbin Man*] adopting an illegitimate child who has been thrown on the garbage by his biological parents and the boys of Irani Pulao compromise on being physically molested to get an extra serving of food; all these examples might be morally condemnable and coarse but justify themselves if seen from the practical spectacle.

DELINEATION OF THE EMOTIONAL ASPECT OF THE CHARACTERS:

Apparently these characters might seem to be quiet, insignificant and non entities in the bigger capitalistic scheme of the society but they contain a complete whole world in themselves- a world of feelings, emotions, dreams, disappointments and aspirations.

Ghisu and Madhav fall to the inhuman level of depriving Budhya of a decent burial but at the same time feel the pride of 'giving' by giving alms to the beggar. Halku after having spent and lost what he had still insists on pursuing the occupation of his forefathers. The Bhangam keeps working to support her family till the last moment of her life hoping to get a good sustenance for her son. Her son Mangal has to lead the most disrespectful life and compromises on the contemptuous treatment by finally succumbing to the pangs of hunger. Hamid, though a little

child, thinks about the delicate details of the problems faced in poverty and decides to buy a tong rather while his age fellows bought toys hence sacrificing his innocent aspirations. The six women of the Mahalakshmi Bridge may seem to be the most insignificant women who could easily be ignored in an economically classified society. But they are given such a projection in which they acquire the roles of hard working, brave, molested, prostituted, mean, poor, helpful and working class women. Kachra baba carries the pain of his wife who left him and his dead child and this very pain makes him embrace the illegitimate child picked up from the dustbin. Whereas the boys of Irani Pulao have constructed a secluded world for themselves where they have taken up different names of the heroines of the glamour world and thus camouflaging their miseries under those identities.

HUNGER: THE BIGGEST DRIVING FORCE

Hunger becomes the biggest driving force in this fiction because in poverty and deprived living conditions hunger is the biggest problem to deal with. In most of the cases the characters compromise on the so called moral and social values when it comes to having a face to face battle with hunger. Hunger convinces them not to get bothered by their egos and self respect. This makes them prone to moral and ethical deterioration and very much vulnerable to the exploitation by the rich.

The protagonist of *The single penny* only can not think of anything else although he "tried but his brain stopped working. His legs didn't support his torso and he felt as if someone was breaking his bones and had clutched his stomach" (p. 3). Premchand's expression "shameless stomachs" explains much about the psychology of a hungry man who tends to ignore all other moral and social obligations when it comes to filling his stomach.

INACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE MAIN SOCIAL STREAM:

Their marginalization make them accept to stay out of the main social stream and become practically inactive. This is how they are made to believe and accept that they are of no good use for the society. For this very reason they accept the system as it is and keep serving as the insignificant non entities of the society unknowing the benefit which is gained by the ruling elites and the rich on their behalf. This not only makes their lives a constant journey in the dark but also strengthens the rich and supports the existing manipulative socio-economic system. Ghisu, Madhav, Halku, Mangal, Bhangar, Shanta bai, Larriya, Hamid, Jeeona Bai, Madhubala, Nargis, Nimmi and a long list of characters is there who are caught up in the grinding mill of exploitation and manipulative practices of the system.

Most of the characters living outside the active central stream emerge as greedy, cruel and inhuman beings and they become cold to the sufferings of others. The reason is they themselves are subjected to such practices by other people who are slightly better than these downtrodden

masses. Whenever, by luck, they grab a chance they try to make maximum use of it. And for this they do not refrain from using their fellow beings to their utmost benefit and act as opportunists.

The general perception that the hard workers are no better than the idlers and their lives are not having any better sail because they are manipulated and exploited by the elite, gives rise to the behaviour of idleness and a general tendency to shun work. Such a character at least have "the consolation, however, that badly off he was, he didn't have to work as achingly hard as the others and that people could not take undue advantage of his simplicity and helplessness" (*The Shroud*, p. 2). The masses know, no matter how hard they try in the economic system, which serves to strengthen the rich, will never provide them with a chance to improve their living conditions. The young boys of the Irani Pulao have been engaged in the same monotonous routine of polishing the boots and they do the drudgery only to get a single meal by the end of the day. And they are happy with this because the working class whose boots they polish, it is seen working day in and day out to the same end, that is, managing to get a meal by the end of the day.

THE RICH OCCUPYING THE 'CENTRES':

The rich form a separate block. They are the adulated ones occupying the central positions around which the margins are created. They provide the subordinates with food and other necessities of life but on their own conditions. The money they have is given to them by the system and the system works to help them sustain the power they have. This power that they have secured because of money, makes the rich imitable for the poor. Whatever they do and believe in becomes acceptable and exemplary for their subordinates. When the landlord of the *Shroud* gives the alms for Budhya's funeral, the rest of the peasants and farmers start following the charitable act reluctantly. But they think it has become obligatory for them to help Ghisu and Madhav because the landlord has taken the initiative now.

This is the basic human nature that they need to bag one or the other necessity with them and then to struggle for it. But at the same time this very necessity and the struggle to secure it is made a real hard task for the struggling marginalized classes. The chosen text, if approached from the progressive spectacle proves that the writers believe the subaltern masses to be the pulse of the society in the politically and socially changing scenario. It proves that the literature of the new times picks the common man as the protagonist and tries to look at the social hierarchy from below. It seems that the writers want the readers to have a look at the lives of these subaltern characters from the subaltern perspective. The *shroud* of the Mahalakshmi Bridge want the reader along with the elite and the rulers to spare a second and have a look at them so that they can understand the real deprived conditions of their lives.

By subjecting the selected progressive fiction to the postcolonial Marxist analysis, this study has not only put

the characters, created about a century ago, in the very modern light of subaltern studies but has also given a new life to the Urdu short story. This study can safely be concluded on the inference that Urdu progressive fiction generally and Urdu progressive short story specifically has a great potential to be re-studied and evaluated from the post-colonial Marxist perspective and this particular perspective highlights the relevance of this fiction to the present socio-economic and political happenings in present-day Pakistan. This might also be helpful for the researchers interested in economics and sociology. The psychological research focusing the psychological and mental make-up of the deprived classes can also benefit from the present findings.

CONCLUSION

Thus summing up the discussion it is concluded that the characters portrayed by Munshi Premchand and Krishan Chander in the selected short stories take up different identities and exhibit a complex array of behaviours and attitudes. Living the subaltern lives, at times they become the voice of resistance and try their level best to get their voice registered through their actions and

reactions to the system they are the victims of. Most of the times they are subjected to the frequent humiliation at the hands of the ones who would never want them to rise out of the conditions which has been decided and chalked out, sound dumb for them by the elites. Moreover, one of the most organic categories is the female identities acquired by the wives, mothers and daughters of the stories. They are presented as a victim of not only the economic system but are manipulated by their male counterparts too. The religious and social norms and values try to enforce their exploitation. Hunger is one of the biggest factors in making those characters what they appear to be. It makes them forget all moral and social obligations and this dehumanizes these characters. Denial to participate actively in the main social stream and the central positions being occupied by the rich alone becomes conducive to the portrayal of the emotional aspects to their personalities. A vast and organic world thriving with emotions is revealed which makes them all the more real and life-like men and women. It is safe to conclude that the identities acquired by the characters in their subaltern lives which are economically marginalized are presented by the two writers in the best possible way.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahmed, A. (1986). *Progressive Literature*. New Delhi: Karvan e Adab publishers.
- [2] Akhtar, S. (2013). *Urdu adab ki mukhtasir tareen tareekh*. Lahore: Sang-e-meel publications.
- [3] Amjad, R. (2014). *Asr e aagahi aur Urdu afaana*, Armaghan e doctor Saleem Akhtar. Bureau of curriculum, compilation and translation Govt college university, Faisalabad.
- [4] Baudrillard, Jean. (1983) *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, (P Foss, P Patton and J Johnston, Trans.). New York: Semiotext(e).
- [5] Beverly, J. (1999). *Subalternity and representation*. USA: Duke University Press.
- [6] Bier, Jess. (2010). *Subaltern studies*. Encyclopedia of geography. Sage publications. 15th November, 2010
- [7] Bose, H. K. (2005). Sajjad Zaheer: The voice of the common man. *Progressive writers association Pakistan*. Retrieved from: <http://pwa.safonline.org/gpage2.html>
- [8] Braylvi, I. (1986). *Afaana aur Afaanay ki Tanqeed*, Lahore: Idaara e adab o tanqeed.
- [9] Bressler, C.E. (2011). *Literary criticism: An introduction to theory and practice*. New Jersey: Prentice hall PTR Bukhari. (n.d.). Premchand's presidential address to the first progressive writers association meeting, studying Premchand in the light of *zad e rah* and *maydan e amal* Ilmi kutab khana, Lahore: Urdu bazar.
- [10] Chander, K. (1990). *Krishan Chander k behreen afaanay*, Lahore: Urdu bazar
- [11] Dobie, M. (2011). *Theory into practice: Marxist criticism*. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- [12] Guha, R. (1982). (ed.) *Subaltern studies 1: Writings on south Asian history and society*, (7 vol), Delhi: Oxford university press. *The Medinah*, (1933). 13 February. Bijnor: The Urdu press.
- [13] Malik, H. (1967). *The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan*. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol# 26, doi:10.2307/2051241
- [14] Mahmoud, S. (1996). *Angare and the founding of the progressive writers' association*. *Modern Asian studies* 30, 2, pp.447-467, printed in Great Britain
- [15] Prakash, G. (1994). *Subaltern studies as postcolonial criticism*, *American historical review*, December.
- [16] Premchand, M. (1994). *Premchand kay 21 shahkar afaanay*, comp. A. Javed Lahore: Temple road.
- [17] Premchand, M. (2012). *EidGah*, (K. Singh, Trans.). retrieved from: <http://defence.pk/threads/eidgaah-a-heart-touching-story-by-munshi-premchand.202040/>
- [18] Premchand, M. (2012). *The Shroud*, (A. Sattar, Trans.). retrieved from: <http://pratilipi.in/2010/07/the-shroud-premchand/>
- [19] Premchand, M. (2013). *The January night*, (T. Ghai, Trans.). retrieved from: <http://ghai-tc.blogspot.com/2013/05/premchands-story-poos-ki-raat-in.html>
- [20] Roy, A. (2004). *The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize lecture*. Retrieved from <http://realvoice.blogspot.com/2004/11/arundhati-roy-2004-sydney-peace-prize.html>
- [21] Singh, K. P. (1976), *Premchand's Ideology*, Vol. 5, No. 3, published by Social Scientist. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3516526?uid=1>
- [22] Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*. In *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit, G and Spivak G. C. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [23] Zaheer, S. (2012). *The light*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [24] Zeno. (2012). *Professor Ahmed Ali and the Progressive writers' movement*. *The Annual of Urdu Studies*. Retrieved from: <http://www.urduStudies.com/pdf/09/10ZenoProfe>