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**Can the Subaltern Speak? Voice of the Voiceless approach in
Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God**



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Abstract

The present study aims to explore the struggle of subalterns to speak for the representation of their voices and equal rights in Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God*. The study focuses on the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory by focusing specifically on Subaltern Studies. The main aim of this study is to investigate the systematic oppression and marginalization of the subalterns and their meaningless struggle against this oppression and marginalization. The researcher has used Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God* as a source of primary data. A detailed and extensive study of textual evidences from the novel has enabled the researcher to interpret the text in the light of Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* The selected novel highlights the role of dominant discourses in oppression of the weak and marginalized strata of society, especially women. The characters of Erdrich are not presented as victims but as courageous and brave who have the ability to stand against powerful manipulative authorities. The characters of the novel try their best to be heard and represented equally by the dominant discourses. But the dominant discourses never hear their voices and all their efforts are discouraged. The present study is in fact an attempt to analyze the theoretical perspective of Gayatri Spivak and Erdrich's effort to liberate the victims of social, political and economic biasness. The research finds that the identity and individuality of the subalterns is rendered by the dominant discourses and they are always treated as others and unacceptable. The results show that *Future Home of the Living God* is imbued with the instances in which the subalterns try to speak but their voices remain unheard in front of powerful structures. The parameters of qualitative research are used textual evidences from the selected text are analyzed and interpreted in voice of the voiceless approach.

Keywords: Discourse, Post colonialism, Subaltern, Marginalization, Oppression, Identity

Introduction

This research undertakes to explore Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God* under the light of postcolonial theory. Subaltern study is the main focus of this research. The researcher has intended to investigate Louise Erdrich's perspective about marginalization and oppression due to social and political institutions in America. The present research undertakes to uncover the oppressive practices and institutionalized marginalization of the oppressed class of society. The present study is based on the theoretical framework of the concept of subaltern by Gayatri Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* The struggle of subalterns to live an independent life with basic rights and the courage to speak and stand against the institutionalized oppression and marginalization have been studied in the light of *Can the Subaltern speak?*

Subalterns are the weak strata of the society who are subjugated by the dominant discourses. Guha (1998) argues that Subaltern study is the historic, political, economic and social study of subalternity. (Guha, p. 39). The concept of subaltern is usually applied in South Asian societies. The subaltern studies present the struggles

faced by the oppressed and subjugated people and the ways to overcome this oppression. Guha (1998) argues that subaltern study deals with “the promotion of a systematic and information containing discussion of the themes related to subaltern in the South Asian writings, and hence it helps to eliminate the biased features of literary works in these specific areas.” (Guha, p. 42). Post-colonialism is a field of study that focuses on emancipation of the colonized (oppressed) and it presents those who have been the victims of social discriminations on the basis of race, gender, color and religion. It also highlights the practice of othering by the colonizers. Another important focus of postcolonial study is to analyze the experiences of the oppressed class, based on the migration experiences and the interaction with other cultures. These experiences are the result of oppression and marginalization of the colonized. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) argue that the main focus of postcolonial study is to analyze the link between placement and displacement. Its main concern is to pay attention towards the postcolonial crises which are caused by the experiences of displacement. The postcolonial studies undertake to study the development of an implicit relationship between the place of migration and self. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, p. 8-9)

Mostly, the contemporary South Asian writers are known to deal with the issues which are resulted due to post-colonialism and oppressive policies of the government but, there are some English writers (specifically female writers) who focus on these issues. In this study the researcher has discussed the marginalization of the subaltern, the common practice of othering by the powerful institutes and the struggle of subaltern to get equality. Louise Erdrich questions the social and political systems of America and raises voice against oppressive forces. Gayatri Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* argues that “the subaltern has no ability to speak. There is no way in global list by which the women can be considered as pious.” (Spivak, p. 308) Louise Erdrich is the most prominent figure of second wave of the Native American Renaissance. She discusses many social issues in her writings and oppression of women is one of these issues. She advocates every downtrodden and oppressed irrespective of any discrimination on the basis of color, religion, sex, creed and race. In *Future Home of the Living God* she raises the voice for rights of women, the systematic oppression due to government policies and the marginalization of women due to social systems. She is a true advocate of injustice, marginalization and oppression of women. *Future Home of the Living God* is the story of a young American Girl Cedar Hawk Songmaker who is pregnant. The character of Cedar represents the marginalized and oppressed women whose bodies are colonized by the powerful institutes and whose choices of living and reproduction are not their own. In this novel the character of Cedar presents a subaltern, who is oppressed and marginalized firstly for being non-white and secondly for being a pregnant woman in a society where pregnant women are not considered a part of society. Cedar is a courageous and brave person. She has the ability to fight back with the powerful institutes and she has the ability to speak for herself and her unborn baby, but her voice remains unheard. Through the character of Cedar, Erdrich has presented how the oppressed and marginalized strata of the society have the ability to raise the voices and how these voices remain unheard. Not only the character of Cedar is presented with the ability to resist the oppression but all the other characters also present some encouragement to raise voices for themselves and their loved ones. In this way the researcher has undertaken to explore the unheard voice of subaltern in *Future Home*

of the Living God.

Research Questions:

This study deals with the following questions:

What are the particular examples of the suppression of the voice of Subaltern in Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God*?

What is Louise Erdrich's perspective about the subaltern's endeavors to speak and the institutionalized practices for suppressing their voices?

Research Objectives:

The present study aims:

To explore the particular examples of the suppression of subaltern's voice in Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God*.

To analyze Louise Erdrich's perception about the subaltern's endeavor to speak and the institutionalized practices to suppress their voices.

Significance of the study

In the present study the researcher undertakes to present the struggle of those who are oppressed and marginalized and struggling to survive. The researcher also intends to discourage the dominant powerful institutes that are responsible for the suffering of marginalized class.

The present study is significant because it relates postcolonial concept of subaltern to the experiences of human beings in a society that is not postcolonial but people are suffering as colonized. Lois Tyson (2006) in *Critical Theory Today* states that postcolonial theory is not a field that only focuses on the experiences of colonized people but also it deals with the suffering, exploitation, oppression and marginalization of people of every society. (Tyson, p. 194-95). In this way subaltern studies deal with the oppressed and marginalized strata of the society. In fact, the present study intends to study the concept of subaltern under the new dimensions.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The researcher has used qualitative parameter of research for the present study. The primary source of data for this study is Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*. A thorough reading and analysis of the selected text is the base of the present research. The textual evidences have been analyzed in the light of concepts of postcolonial theory, specifically in the light of concept of subaltern. To reach the findings, the related passages from the text have been used to support the researcher's arguments. The literary writings, reviews and commentaries, related to Louise Erdrich's writings have been referred to support the argument of researcher. The interviews of Louise Erdrich helped the researcher to understand the point of view and mind of Erdrich more effectively and hence it helped to draw the conclusions.

As the focus of this study is to investigate and analyze the selected text under the light of subaltern studies, so the work of Gayatri Spivak is given importance. To understand the struggle of subaltern to speak and be heard and get an independent position in front of dominant discourse, the textual evidences from the text have been related to the concept of subaltern by Gayatri Spivak. The most powerful influence on the present study is that of the concept of subaltern by Spivak, because she was the first to introduce and use this concept in postcolonial studies.

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Data Source

Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God* published in 2017 has been selected as the primary source of data for the research. The main concern of this research is to analyze and explore the marginalized and oppressed strata. It also highlights the suppression of their voices in the hands of powerful discourses. The researcher undertakes to analyze Louise Erdrich's perspective about the unheard voices of subaltern and their struggle to be heard. The textual passages have been analyzed through Gayatri Spivak's concept of subaltern that is presented in her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985).

Theoretical Framework:

Post-colonialism is not only about the aftermaths of colonialism but it also deals with the hardships and struggles of colonized nations to get an actual free and independent identity. Post-colonialism is about the journey of colonized to get rid of exploitation of colonizers. Mainly, post-colonialism deals with the circumstances after colonialism so it talks about cultural, historical and individual independence. After the independence the colonized nation moves towards its culture and roots that are being distorted by colonizers. But unfortunately, these roots are lost forever and they are not able to find their true identities. The questions like; to what extents it is important to rediscover the true cultural roots of colonized nations, how can one rediscover his history and culture and how important is it to create a new hybrid culture to deal with the need of the time, are dealt with in post-colonialism.

Can the Subaltern Speak?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is considered a literary giant among the postcolonial critics. She is not only a philosopher but also a literary theorist. She is the first Indian woman who has the honor to serve as a professor at University of Columbia. She has made a wonderful contribution in literary publications and also she is the writer of eleven academic books. After the publication of the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* she has become the voice of postcolonial societies. Besides postcolonial studies her contributions in the theory of Marxism, Feminism and Deconstruction can never be ignored. She has tried to challenge the conventions of colonialism by her theories based on cultures. She has refused to except that the west (colonizers) are superior to the east (colonized). Her studies raise the issue of marginalized, exploited and oppressed subjects of the society. She also talks about the suppression of subaltern women and their empowerment. She tries to give voice to the voiceless subalterns.

Spivak has been considered the voice of postcolonial societies after the publication of her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She has analyzed the postcolonial society and its problems through her concepts of feminism, deconstruction and Marxism. She has tried to defeat the supremacy of colonialism through her theories. She rejects the idea that west has dominance over the Third World. She talks about the empowerment of lower strata of the society. More specifically she talks about the marginalization of postcolonial women. In this essay, she claims that all subalterns are marginalized but women are doubly marginalized; firstly, for being women and secondly for belonging to a postcolonial society.

Literature Review

The researcher has attempted to analyze, evaluate and describe the scholarly researches about post-colonialism and the concept of subaltern. This effort clearly exposes the unexplored aspects of Louise Erdrich's works and some concepts about the theory of subaltern.

Gayatri Spivak in her masterpiece of postcolonial literature, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (2012), has attempted to elaborate the postcolonial theory in different dimensions. Spivak in her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, discusses the literature of the marginalized and oppressed women and elaborates the scope of the literature of subalterns. Spivak undertakes a sensitive issue when she talks about the double exploitation of women in postcolonial literature. Subaltern is basically a military term that she borrowed from the works of Gramsci and she has used this term to refer to the marginalized, oppressed and lower strata of the society, specifically women. The literature that explores these issues is termed as subaltern studies. The works of Spivak appear to be a combination of post-colonialism and feminism. Her concerns for postcolonialism and feminism are summarized by Bertens (2001) in a very effective way. Spivak's concerns for the female writers include the complex approach and the issues of writings. Her efforts are directed to the writings of women which are having a feminist perspective in literature. She has been exposing the sufferings of women in the postcolonial settings so she is also focusing on the postcolonial issues at the same time. (Bertens, p. 211). The terms such as subaltern, strategic essentialism and essentialism are coined by Spivak and they are gaining much popularity in the contemporary times. She has used these terms in the perspectives of both postcolonial theory as well as feministic theory.

Naik and Nagannawar (2018) in *The Subaltern can Speak: A Study of the Protagonists in Booker Prize Winning Novels of Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga* studied the efforts and struggles of the subalterns to raise the voice for their rights and freedom. They analyzed that the discourse related to postcolonial era is mainly concerned with the subalterns and the postcolonial critic present subalterns in different ways. Postcolonial literature is a medium of conveying the expressions of grieve, pain and suffering of the subjugated others. The study of Naik and Nagannawar concludes that the protagonists from the selected texts are the victims of social as well as traditional conventions and their marginalization and suppression is encouraged by the powerful institutes. But they are well aware of their oppression and never remain silent. They are able to speak with the intensity equal to their sufferings and unlike past their presence does not remain unnoticed and their voice does not remain unheard. Though they are not unnoticed anymore but their voices do not affect the authorities.

Young (2012) has undertaken to study the voices of the subalterns when they are given a chance to be heard. She takes the women as the center of her study. She has interviewed some South Asian writers who belong to different backgrounds. All the writers have some reasons and backgrounds to speak. After the interviews, Young concludes that the subaltern's consciousness at individual level is present in all the writers. Though they are unable to raise their voices collectively but still they present the dissatisfaction in different ways. Mostly she focuses on the women writers and argues that 'it does not matter if a writer is poetess, writer or film director their writings focus on the resistance of the institutes and structural of patriarchal systems.' (Young, p. 7). Young (2012) in this study argues that with the help of different forms

of literature like poetry, novel, autobiography and film subalterns can be presented in front of powerful discourses and through this representation they can find their true identity. Spivak is of the view that no doubt the subaltern cannot speak in the dominating discourses of the West but it is possible to design different ways for the representation of their voices and identity.

Saeed (2013) studied the concepts of colonialism in three novels; Robinson Crusoe, Heart of Darkness and Passage to India. She studies the ways of representations and distribution of power in the selected texts. The character of Crusoe in Robinson Crusoe presents a fictional man with many adventures who is the master of an island. Crusoe tries to become a master by bringing the slaves from Africa. This practice is a glimpse of colonialism because the powerful is trying to use the powerless for his benefits. Conrad has represented the people of Africa as impure and corrupted which is actually a colonial propaganda to manipulate the people of third world and make them believe that they are not a part of society. In this way the people of colonized nations are used by the colonizers but they are never treated as equals.

Daniel Roux (2009) comments on the otherness of the characters of Shakespeare, the otherness of Othello arouses a feeling of estrangement because the subject cannot achieve his place in the society due to difference of color and culture. Therefore, he is considered as other. Roux argues that Othello himself is responsible for being the other. He lives in the Venetian society and tries to adapt their ideologies by losing his own identity. He is forced by the colonial powers towards alienation, subjugation and marginalization.

Zaman (1996) has analyzed the literary contributions of Khushwant Singh and Sidwa but his research has some serious unjustified gaps. He has criticized them on the basis of weak expositions. Zaman claims that the ideology of Sidwa about her country and traditions does not portray the stance of partition of sub-continent (Zaman, p. 17). The point of view of Khushwant Singh is entirely against to that of Sidwa. But in reality, no sentimental values about partition are portrayed by both Sidwa and Khushwant Singh. They only talk about partition in the perspectives of destruction and loss. The novels of both the writers present a peaceful and coexisting environment for people of different religions like Sikh, Hindu and Muslim, that is effected by the destruction of partition. Khushwant Singh considers partition as illogical, destructive and undesirable.

Spivak advocates that the lives of marginalized and oppressed communities are controlled by the powerful political, financial, cultural and educational discourses. Bhagwat & Arekar (2018), studied this perspective and they argue that the theme of otherness plays a great role in postcolonial studies.

Future Home of the Living God is a criticism on the dominant discourses that are causing discrimination on the basis of gender, color, religion, and social status. In this novel she criticizes the political and governmental policies to oppress the weak strata of society, specifically women. She has pen downed the fundamental rights of women that are being subjugated and oppressed. Louise Erdrich is not only the writer of a specific community but of all the individuals that suffer the oppression and marginalization in the hands of dominant powerful structures. She questions the political and social structures of America that are marginalizing people for their own benefits.

Kemball (2022) in the article Bio-colonial Pregnancies: Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God, states that "Erdrich focuses on the healthcare abuses that are

introduced by the America. The discriminating policies introduced by biomedical sciences result in the bio-colonialism, through which the female bodies are exploited and manipulated". (Kemball, p.9). The biochemical theory is related to the subjugation of living beings. Kemball argues that Erdrich has drawn the bio-colonial abuse and the resistance of Native Americans against bio-colonialism. Bio-colonialism means that the bodies of individuals are not their own properties. They are controlled by the powerful structures. The pregnancy of Cedar Songmaker seems to be a global "biological confusion" (Erdrich, p. 5). Due to bio-colonialism fear develops among the humans with reproductive capacities, they are highly afraid of the consequences and the risks of death of mother and child during this process. Kemball quotes the character of Cedar and says that the character of Cedar is used as a personification that presents all women whose bodies and choices are stolen from them. These women are used as a property of the state.

Future Home of the Living God is also studied through the perspective of religion for giving equal rights and representations to women. Mannik (2019) in the article Giving Women's Bodies Back to Women: Representation of Religion and Women's Rights in Louise Erdrich's Novel Future Home of the Living God states that Erdrich has presented a feministic dystopia in this novel. She has also related it with the present political and religious circumstances related to rights of women. Mannik mentions that "this novel refers to the religious and political circumstances that pushed the women inside the houses because it was their biological destiny." (Mannik, p. 17) Mannik calls the setting of this novel as dystopia because he argues that even though there are a lot of advancements but still female bodies are controlled by authorities and they are forced to reproduce. To refer this novel as a feminist dystopia Mannik quotes a line from Cedar's character from the novel; "Whatever is actually occurring, there is constant breaking news about how it will be handled- speculation, really, concerning what comes next" (Erdrich, p. 3). Through this novel Erdrich has tried to give the idea that "all embryos are sacred" (Erdrich, p. 90). But the dystopian world has made them cursed. Through this novel Mannik proves that the women are exploited because they are not given equal rights according to religion.

Estella (2020) in The Climate Changed Being Alive: Reading The Future Home of the Living God through the Lens of the Anthropocene, analyzed this novel from ecocritical point of view. Estella states that Anthropocene can be understood as a cultural idea that considers human beings responsible for the continuous destruction of ecosystems. It presents the period in the world when human beings become decisive. Estella argues that in Erdrich's novel the very prominent instance of Anthropocene is the birth of children with genetic evolution. Erdrich has presented the novel in an unrealistic setting. This setting has led the researchers to study the novel according to the theme of dystopia. Anita Felicelli (2017) presented a study, Louise Erdrich's Dystopian Dreams in Future Home of the Living God, in which she argues that "pregnancies are apocalyptic" (Felicelli, p. 5). It is really mundane to bring another human in world. For some people the birth of a baby is the complete destruction of their own lives and for some people is the start of a new and better life. In this novel the birth of child is also presented as destruction. The birth of child is presented as the destruction of mother's dreams and life. The main focus of Erdrich in the novel Future Home of the Living God is towards equal rights of women. Faliquina (2019), analyzed the novel through the perspective of reproductive rights of women. Faliquina argues that the stereotypical roles of women

are challenged by Erdrich in this novel. Women are not given any kind of reproductive rights. They are unable to decide about the needs of pregnancies. Their pregnancies are decided by the social conventions. To describe this, Erdrich has used future perfect tense throughout the novel which indicates the “proleptic mourning of women that connects them with literary activism of Native Americans” (Faliquina, p. 13). Erdrich has presented unsolved pain of women in this article. Through this article Faliquina gives a feminist analysis of the selected text. The women are not given reproductive rights and their struggle to achieve those rights can be seen in the novel.

Data Analysis

This section deals with the discussion and analysis of the evidences selected from the text. The interpretation and analysis is done in the light of Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern speak?*. The textual evidences that show the struggle of subaltern to speak and the oppression and marginalization of the voice of subaltern have been interpreted. The discussion will enable the reader to comprehend the ways in which the dominant institutes sustain and the oppression of the marginalized strata of the society is practiced. This study enables the reader to understand the roles of dominant ideologies, powerful institutes and government laws to oppress the marginalized strata of the women, especially women. The researcher undertakes to analyze the instances from the text to fulfill the research objectives. It also aims to analyze the disagreement between the subaltern and powerful institutes also it highlights the endless struggle of subaltern to speak and to be heard. The focus is also paid to the marginalizing and oppressing practices of the powerful discourses that are responsible for the silencing and suffering of the subaltern.

Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* is a narrative of the subaltern. Louise Erdrich has assumed her role as a social activist and she has written this novel in the context of subaltern studies which is based on the efforts of subalterns to get an independent representation. She criticizes the powerful discourses that are responsible for the suffering of subaltern. Through this novel, she gives a new image to the concept of subaltern by presenting them in a Western society. Instead of presenting the subalterns in a postcolonial society she has presented them in the native settings of American society. In this way instead of portraying the international policies of suppression and oppression she has discussed the exploitations of subaltern at national level. She highlights that how the powerful institutes marginalize and oppress the outcastes, colored women in the society. Erdrich asserts that the versions of truth that are stated by both privileged and the unprivileged are absolutely different from one and other. In her novel, *Future Home of the Living God*, she has endeavored to cover the truth of the unprivileged. This text provides a platform for the voiceless to develop a voice and speak and it also provides platform for unheard to be heard.

Erdrich has faced a lot of criticism for standing against the government and writing for the poor, oppressed and marginalized. In *Future Home of the Living God* she has written to give a chance of speaking to the oppressed strata of the American society, especially women, who are always distressed by the systematic suppression and marginalization. Audre Lorde (1984) in the article *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*, states that “the societies, in which the concept of good is based on the selfish benefits and not on the human interests, are always leading towards the systematic oppression of the weak people. This oppressed group comprises on the colored people, people of third world, working class and elder

people (Lorde, p. 18). These oppressed groups of people are always controlled by the powerful social, political and economic factors. Spivak has discussed the systematic oppression in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and Erdrich in her novel, *Future Home of the Living God* has given a detailed image of this oppression and marginalization of oppressed group in the hands of powerful social, political and economic institutions.

According to Dhakal (2016), “the term subaltern represents any person or group of the subservient rank and position in terms of race, class, gender, caste, sexual orientation and religion. It also refers to the people of lower rank who belong to illiterate strata and non-elite culture. These people are always considered to be uneducated, uncivilized and the subjugated groups, also these groups seem to have some kind of influence of dominant ideologies” (Dhakal, p. 111). The very first type of subaltern that Erdrich describes is the native community of America. This community has been given an inferior rank throughout the history on the basis of mythical narratives, color and religious beliefs. The unfortunate Native American community suffers because they are considered uncivilized and people of color so they are considered unsuitable for the American society. The fundamental ideologies of social system promote the biasness and discrimination towards a particular community of a society. These suppressing underlying ideologies are designed and supported by the dominant powerful discourses. It is only the color of Native Americans that does not allow them to survive in the society like normal human beings. The protagonist of *Future Home of the Living God*, Cedar also suffers from the complexes of otherness from her childhood. She is always treated as other because she is not white and adopted by white parents. The society does not accept her identity. She is confused about her roles and position in the society. Therefore, she says sentences like, “I suffered because I was adopted. Even worse, I had no clan, no culture, no language, no relative. Confusingly, I had no struggles.” (Erdrich, p. 3). She is adopted by a Glen and Serah who are white and of British origin but she is Native American and not white. Therefore, throughout her childhood she was neither accepted by her adopted parent culture nor by her real parent culture. She was always treated as other by both the cultures. This dilemma made her disconnected from the external world. Here the character of Cedar undergoes the same identity crisis like colonized people when they come in contact with the colonizers. The colonizers never accept the identity and individuality of the colonized and always treat them as others. Raina summarizes this identity crisis of oppressed strata as, “they are restricted in the education as well as in social space or perhaps they choose to live a life in solitude due to certain social pressures.” (Raina, p. 29). The people like Cedar are unable to fit in the society.

The social systems of the world are based on discrimination. Even the domains of truth are discriminated and biased. The definition of truth varies for both oppressors and oppressed. According to Spivak (1999) “truth is forged and it is constructed by those who have dominant discourse” (Spivak, p. 210). Louise Erdrich also tries on many occasions to reveal the social injustice that is practiced by the dominant discourses in her novel, *Future Home of the Living God*. Through the character of Cedar, she presents this social injustice. Cedar is confused about her real identity. She is even confused about her surname as her adopted surname is Songmakers and her real surname is Potts. The truth about the real identity of a person is fabricated by the dominant discourses and the person who cannot fall in this fabrication is treated as other. The character of Cedar loves her adopted parents but she cannot adopt their

family name and culture because the powerful discourses do not allow this.

The power of language in the oppression of a person is further made clear when Cedar calls her real family to talk to her real mother Mary Potts Senior. All the hopes of Cedar are destroyed when she receives a cold response from her mother. She has never talked to her real mother before but this first communication between them leads Cedar to consider herself as other and unwanted. Mary Potts Senior is a Native American who is living with her husband Eddy and daughter Marry Potts Junior. When Cedar calls her she does not recognize her and after the recognition when Eddy asks her about the person on phone she replies that she is talking to nobody. In this way her identity and presence is rejected by her own mother. It is not the society that is treating her as other but also her family. "Who is that, Sweetie? Man's (Eddy) voice. Nobody! She (Mary Potts) says. I ignore the awful prickling in my throat, the reaction to the words that she has said nobody (Erdrich, p. 7). Cedar is entirely treated as a subaltern because she is being oppressed and marginalized not only by the powerful discourses but also by her own people. It shows that subalterns are always treated as nobody. The character of Cedar is presented in such a way that it tries to confront and deny the practice of power but she is unable to do so because she is adopted and non-white, hence, she has no right to speak in the society. Though Cedar is living among the Americans but she is always treated as other and unwanted because she is not white. Her brown identity is the instance of her being a subaltern.

Spivak (1988) considered to analyze the others as entities whose identity can be understood in relation to dominant discourses because the dominant discourses have the power to divide people into the binary opposition of us and them (Spivak, p.99). She considers the postcolonial literature as an attempt to empower the others and to liberate them to express themselves and settle in powerful discourse that has made them other. (Spivak, p. 829). The other cannot get its voice from outside the powerful discourse. The other has to be empowered to get a representation in dominant discourse. Same is the case with the character of Cedar, her voice is suppressed by the powerful discourses and she has to empower herself to make her voice to be heard. She is suffering as other, when she is pregnant in a society where pregnant women are being considered as outcasts. When Cedar visits her doctor for a regular checkup he advises her to hide her pregnancy. The doctor says "When you get out, do not tell anybody that you are pregnant." (Erdrich, p. 43) From this point the suffering of Cedar for being pregnant starts. It shows that the powerful discourses use the marginalized class for their own benefits. The biasness of dominant discourses towards marginalized class leads them to the silencing of their voices. Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern is considered unable to communicate in the vocabulary and language which can be heard and comprehended by powerful discourses. This is the reason that subaltern is silenced. (Spivak, p. 340)

Spivak has connected herself with Marxism and feminism in the postcolonial discourse. She not only questions the practice of colonialism but also questions the claim of West that they are superior. In her theory of subaltern, she has raised the questions about subalterns. These questions range from the suffering of colonized nation to the marginalization of women in the society. The set pattern of society urges her to think that she is a weak creature and her existence and the existence of her child depends on the decisions of government. In this way she is moving towards marginalization and othering. As she says, "I can be merely the nameless being." (Erdrich, p. 53). She is oppressed to the extent that she herself considers her identity

as meaningless and subjugated. But the powerful discourses are not able to suppress her for a long time, she decides to stand against the powerful discourses and confront them with courage. She decides to confront the policies of government and to protect her child. She decides to stand alone in front of the powerful discourses and tries to raise her voice. According to Spivak (1988) the voices of subalterns are silenced barbarically and they are not allowed to raise their voices against powerful discourses. Then finally, a time comes when the subalterns are fed up of their oppression and marginalization and they decide to stand against the powerful discourses (Spivak, p. 289). In the same way Cedar decides to raise her voice to be heard. She rejects the notion created by powerful discourse that she is weaker creature and decides to confront the powerful discourses.

Vivek Shraya (2014) wrote a novel *She of the Mountain*, in this novel the struggle of subaltern is similar to the struggle of Cedar. The protagonist of *She of a Mountain* is a nameless person and he suffers throughout his life because he is not accepted by the society. Shraya has intentionally kept the protagonist nameless. Her nameless protagonist represents the subaltern who does not have a name or identity. The subalterns do not have any identity because they are controlled by the dominant discourses. They are considered as nameless being who are doomed to suffer in the hands of powerful discourses. It shows that the people who are considered outcasts, inferior, marginalized and other do not have their own identities. Their identities are controlled by the powerful discourses. In *Future Home of the Living God* the pregnant women are also belonging to the same category of people because the powerful institute of government is trying to control their existence. Cedar and all the other pregnant women are condemned to suffer. When the society was going through such a major change Cedar tried to raise her voice but her voice was not heard by the powerful discourses. Therefore, the only person who can listen to her is her unborn child. She decides to note down everything in a diary so that if her child survives he can know what happened with his mother. She is always in continuous fear of being captured. Though she is hiding and she is not causing harms to anyone but she is in a fear like a culprit who can be taken in at any moment. She describes her fear as, “will this be the day that I am discovered and taken away? And what then? What would they do to you (baby)?” (Erdrich, p. 92). Spivak (1988) states that subaltern is never allowed and never given a chance to live a life according to its own wishes and desires (Spivak, p. 176). Its life and existence are controlled by the dominant discourses. The subaltern tries to speak but the noise created by the dominant discourses make it voiceless.

Erdrich has created an unreal situation in the novel in which the female characters are suffering. She exposes the cruel government policies that are the causes of suffering for poor class and those who are not able to follow them are considered downtrodden. The society that is described by Erdrich functions on the policy of us and them. The dominant discourse of government considers itself and the people who follow it as us and those who are against the dominant policies of government are considered and treated as them. The character of Cedar also belongs to the category of them and other. She tried to stand against the powerful forces but it led her to disconnect from the society and to become an outcast. When the subalterns are treated as others they feel isolated and alienated from the society in which they are living. Cedar also feels like she is not a part of her society and this feeling leads her towards isolation and alienation. She considers her entity as meaningless and questions her existence as she

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says, "Maybe God has decided that we are an idea not worth thinking anymore." (Erdrich, p. 10). The feeling of isolation leads the subaltern towards the feeling of nothingness. Therefore, Cedar has also started to consider herself as an entity with no importance.

Subalterns are the people who are rejected by the whole society and also by the people who are close to them. The society considers that the subalterns themselves are responsible for their suffering so they are left alone. The character of Cedar also presents this aspect of subaltern. From knowing about her pregnancy to be considered as dangerous for society to be hiding in a deserted house there is no mentioning of Cedar's husband. He never appears in all these struggles and hardships because he also seems to be following the notion of us and them. It seems that he follows the notion of us and considers Cedar as them and other. Therefore, he has left Cedar alone in the hardest time.

Spivak has a lot of discussions on the rights of women that have heretical effects on the feminist studies. She questions the fundamental suppositions of feminist studies. Spivak (1988) argues that it is considered that the women of different class, creed, color and religion undergo different circumstances if it is the case then it is not possible to have the same movements for different rights of different women (Spivak, p. 156). It is like a utopian idea that is created by powerful social, political and economic discourses. These discourses have agreed to give a universal definition of female gender and female rights but it is not possible to define all the women under the light of one definition and to assign them universal rights. All the women belong to different communities and hence they have different needs and desires. They also have different experiences and they have to face different circumstances. Therefore, the difference within the gender should be respected without considering them as other and inferior. Spivak argues that the feminist writers can achieve the perfection in feminism if they focus on the representation of differences about the women and their problems. The liberty and freedom of women depends on the patriarchal rules. The women are given the equality only to the extent that is acceptable for the patriarchal system. Simon De Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* (1940), in this book she defines the woman through a different angle. The definition of her identity is only possible with mentioning of men. She is not considered as a useful part of society but the opposite of useful. The males are considered as essential and superior and the female are considered as unessential and inferior. The suppression of women by the male figures is also presented by Erdrich. The character of Cedar is left alone like something that is dangerous by the father of her child Phil, when she is pregnant. Phil seems to follow the conventions of powerful discourses as he leaves Cedar alone when she needs him the most. When the things were quite normal and there was nothing like confinement of women, even then she was left alone by her husband. When she visited the doctor for her checkup she felt the loneliness in the crowd. The doctor asked her, "Did not anyone come with you?" she had nothing to reply except, "The baby did." From this point onwards only the baby is her biggest support and she is left alone by the whole society like a subaltern. Erdrich has summarized the feelings of Cedar in a way that not only shows the extent of her social exploitation but also emotional exploitation. "I am on edge because who would not be? And also, I am suddenly self-conscious about being so alone among these strangers. Apparently other women bring friends, maybe even a husband." (Erdrich, p. 40).

In *Future Home of the Living God* Erdrich presents the practice of discrimination,

marginalization and oppression against color and gender based communities. These people are spending their lives as subalterns who have the ability to speak but their voices remain unheard. The character of Cedar is also presented as a courageous person. She has the ability to survive alone in the society that is manipulating and oppressing her. She has the courage to rebel against the powerful discourses for the protection of her unborn child. She is aware of the idea that only she can preserve her identity and her child's identity. She decides to confront the powerful discourses courageously because she believes in herself. As she says, "I am the utterance of my name." (Erdrich, p. 55). She believes that she can raise her voice against the powerful discourses to make them understand about their discriminations. But just like subalterns whose voices are ignored in the noise created by the dominant institutions, Cedar's voice also remains unheard. Her voice cannot attract the dominant discourses to listen to her. This inability of having a voice that is soundless for authorities renders her identity to lose its individuality. She is subjugated by all these circumstances and her courage is converted to the discouragement. The circumstances are created in such a way that she also started believing that she can never get representation of her identity. "I can be merely the nameless being I am." (Erdrich, p. 53) According to Spivak (1988) subalterns are condemned to suffer. During colonial rule they suffer in the hands of colonial rulers and after the colonial period they are ruled by powerful social, political and economic discourses. In this way subalterns neither have freedom in past nor in future. They lose the hope of freedom and independence (Spivak, p. 125). It is the rule of nature that future seems to be more fascinating than past. People ignore the sufferings of past because they think that their struggles will prove to be fruitful in the future. But this is not the case with subalterns, their future is more dark than their past. Erdrich presents this idea through the character of Cedar. She has struggled a lot to get representation in the society but she could not get it in the past and she cannot even get the representation in future. She also belongs to the class which is condemned to suffer. As she says, "I feel that, instead of the past, it is the future that haunts us now". (Erdrich, p. 52) She thinks that the future will be more difficult for those who are suffering because the dominance of the powerful discourses increase with the passage of time and so is the suppression and marginalization of subaltern.

The subalterns of Erdrich are not weak. They are strong women who have the power to speak. The powerful discourses cannot suppress their voices. It is the reason that after the murder of Agnes, Cedar is not terrified. She is motivated and stronger than before. Cedar and Tia decide to get out of the imprisonment because they are well aware of the fact that the controlling authorities would not let them or their babies live freely. They make a rope with the help of threads of blankets. They work day and night to make the rope so that they can get rid of this place as soon as possible. They decide to stand for themselves when no one is there to protect them. As Cedar says, "the two of us against them all." (Erdrich, p. 118). They stand against all the powerful social and political discourses. They decide to raise their voice for their protection at all the costs. Here, they are representing the courage of subalterns who are ready to face all the consequences. They decide to elope from the window even though it is not safe for both of them but still they have to do it in order to get rid of the place where they are being treated mercilessly.

According to Spivak's theory of subaltern, all the social rules and norms are constructed by those who are in power. These rules are forced on the people who are

considered as others. The other always belongs to a different nation, gender, race and class. This theory puts the question that why does the subaltern always remain unrecognized and how can it get the recognition. Then it provides the answer that subaltern cannot be recognized unless it starts to question its oppression and marginalization. The powerful forces want the subaltern to be weak and never ask anything about its individuality and identity. But once it starts to question, it comes to know that it is not voiceless but courageous and brave, having the ability to speak. Mostly, women are considered and treated as subalterns. They are never given the chance to speak so they are made to think that they are voiceless but once they start to question the powerful discourses they recognize their courage and voice. In *Future Home of the Living God*, it is presented through the characters of courageous women like Cedar, Agnes and Tia. Though they remain unheard by the dominant discourses but they know that they have voice and they are strong. "Always know that I care about each and every one of you. Women are powerful. You are empowered to the max. Women are heroes. Superheroes, in fact. (Erdrich, p. 214).

The analysis of selected text in the light of Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, proves that the subaltern has the ability, courage and confidence to speak. Erdrich has given real picture of the marginalized and oppressed strata of American society. She highlights the efforts of subaltern to speak for its freedom, equal rights and representation of voice. Through this novel, she has questioned the ideologies of dominant discourses which oppress and marginalize the people on the basis of gender, color, creed, economy and class. She does not believe in the dominance of powerful discourses. She questions the authority of political power and patriarchy over women. According to her point of view the subaltern can speak but its voice remains unheard because dominant discourses decide whom they want to listen.

Erdrich's view about the voice of subaltern is like a message of courage and hope for the oppressed and marginalized strata. She does not portray a utopian world where the struggle of oppressed strata against the powerful discourses will one day be rewarded. She presents a very realistic world in which the subaltern is condemned to suffer. The novel ends but the sufferings of Cedar get worst which shows that the subaltern has to suffer till its end. Louise Erdrich ends her novel with the idea that the voice of subaltern is not voiceless but it remains unheard by the powerful discourses. Subaltern always hopes to be heard but it is never heard and acknowledged by the dominant discourses.

Conclusion

Erdrich has recorded her protest against powerful discourses and their ideologies through this novel. She gives the idea that these powerful discourses are not concerned about the rights of downtrodden people and especially women. The pregnant women are facing oppression and marginalization because they are pregnant and non-white. The government considers that there is some kind of genetic mutation in the unborn babies so they are confining the pregnant women. But in reality they are using these babies for research purpose. The violent act to suppress the women and its effects on the personality of women and society are mentioned throughout the novel. Erdrich has mentioned many instances in which the voices of subalterns are subjugated. From the women of Asian community to the women of Native American community everyone is the victim of the policies of dominant discourses. The pregnant women have no right to survive in the society and they have no

representation of their voices. They are always treated and considered as others. The only adjectives that are used for these women by the powerful authorities are outcasts, inferiors and others. They neither have equal rights nor equal representation in the society. Louise Erdrich reveals the role of powerful discourses in the oppression of marginalized strata socially and politically. The characters like Cedar, Tia and Agnes are used as objects by these powerful discourses for their own benefits. They are oppressing these women not only physically but also psychologically. Despite of a lot of struggle against these powerful discourses the oppressed remains oppressed and this practice of oppression never stops. The women in *Future Home of the Living God* are the victim to the biased policies of the government. They are not given the basic right to decide their pregnancies and their children are being used for the research works without their consent. Erdrich has portrayed the characters of women in a courageous manner. Her characters do not accept the governmental prejudice and policies and raise voices against them.

Erdrich not only presents her concern about the exploitative policies of government of America but also she proves through her novel that subalterns can speak but they are never heard. In this way she answers Spivak's rhetorical question in a conditional way. According to her yes! The subaltern can speak but its voice remains unheard. Erdrich's all the major characters including Cedar, Tia and Agnes never surrender and keep on struggling against dominant discourses but they always remain exploited and unheard. Agnes is killed by the hospital management, Tia loses her baby and Cedar is imprisoned by the authorities to bear more children for research purposes. All these characters are the victims of powerful discourses. These characters are hopeful and courageous enough to struggle against the powerful structures but they are always overcome by the dominance of these powerful discourses. The characters presented by Erdrich show that she is confident about the ability of subaltern to speak and struggle against the discrimination, oppression and marginalization in the hands of dominant authorities. But the powerful discourses always play a major role in the suppression of their voices and their struggles to raise voice against the powerful discourses are ended in vain.

The prominent feature of the present study is to deal with the problems that are resulted due to powerful discourses. Through this study, the researcher has put the attention of reader towards the biased and discriminated policies of governments. These policies cause violence on social, political and economic levels. The researcher has considered postcolonial theory as a theoretical background which focuses on the ways in which identities are discovered, represented and demolished by social, economic and political factors. The researcher has analyzed and interpreted the textual evidences that present the discovery, representation and destruction of identities. This study is significant not only in the field of literature but also in the field related to the studies of society. The selected text liberates the strata of society that is considered as outcast, inferior and other. Erdrich presents the idea that subalterns are not only the downtrodden of colonial nation but anyone whose existence is controlled by powerful institutes can be the subaltern. The term subaltern is usually associated with people of colonized South-Asian regions but Erdrich gives it a new direction because according to her novel *Future Home of the Living God*, subaltern can be of any region as in the whole world people are suffering due to dominant discourses. The researcher moves to an end by saying that this study is an effort to add some new view points in the field of English literature. Through the present study, the researcher has tried to give a

new direction to the concept of subaltern.

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