

Speak or Speak Not: An Analysis of Two Female Characters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* from Subaltern Perspectives

Abdur Rahim*

Abstract

Ghosh, in his The Glass Palace, portrays the female characters with paradoxical qualities. Though they are subalternised in diverse ways, there are some moments when they challenge the elites' imposition of subalternity on them. They do it by decoding the elites' ideology established and made permanent through their self-made institutions and practices. The trajectory of this decoding eventually widens the way of their dealing with their elite counterparts. Their empowerment is a very intrinsic entity that emerges with their realisation of their self-worth. The major thinkers of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) reveal the issues of subalternity and empowerment in their innumerable discussions. Contrarily, the thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak opine that it is quite impossible for women to speak. If it is, as she opines, possible for them to speak, there will be no one to listen to them. The female characters in Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace namely Dolly and Ma Cho are with the paradoxical qualities of speaking and not speaking. Sometimes they speak which in other times, turns into silence. Thus, they travel between their perceptions of voicing and non-voicing. This article, initially, attempts to examine how Ghosh's female characters namely Dolly and Ma Cho are subalternised and so made voiceless. Furthermore, it explores how they get empowered or get voices or are able to possess voices in their distinctive ways.

Key Words: *Subaltern women, subalternity, voicelessness (speak not), empowerment (speak), paradoxical qualities.*

1. Introduction

Subalternity is a recurrent issue in postcolonial literature. It has been theorised widely with the emergence of poststructuralist ideas. Ranajit Guha and other contributors of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) have contributed greatly to define subalternity and its pluralistic approaches. Spivak considers that women's subalternity is a perpetual reality in the male dominated society.

*Abdur Rahim
Assistant Professor
Department of English Language and Literature (DELL), Premier University, Chattogram
Email: ar.dell.pu@gmail.com

This essay employs both these two schools of thinkers to examine how Ghosh's (2001) female characters such as Dolly and Ma Cho in *The Glass Palace* are subalternised in diverse manners and how they get empowered in their distinctive ways.

The colonial and native elites are historically responsible for subalternising the peripheral people with their long-possessed hegemonic ideology. The imbalance in the relationship between the elites and the subalterns is its eventual aftermath. With the emergence of the postcolonial theories, the elites' one-dimensional outlooks to history and culture of the colonised people or the subalterns are put into question and a new way of locating them is paved by some Indian and English historians. They put their ideas in a series entitled *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ranajit Guha is the pioneering contributor to this series. He is greatly indebted to Antonio Gramsci for his idea of the subalterns. Loomba (1998) argues that SSG's attempt is a "project inspired or coincided with widespread attempts to write 'histories from below' or 'recover' the experiences of those who have been hitherto 'hidden from history'" (p. 232). On the other hand, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000) explore the root of marginality in the "imperial authority" (p. 102) who acted as elites to marginalise the colonised people. Though the idea of subalternity is overgeneralised as a common experience of the non-representing people, it can identically be applicable for exploring women's subalternity.

Women are canonically subalternised and the voiceless women are placed "at the lower end of the hierarchy of women" (Nayar, 2013, p. 150) and thus, discarded from the mainstream historiography paving their subalternity. Stephen Greenblatt's (1988) seminal essay "The Circulation of Social Energy" begins with the statement "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" (p. 495). This statement is relevant to show the relationship between the elites and women who are historically non-speaking dead entities. Women's subalternity begins with the conviction that they are dead (voiceless) and so, religiously taken as "'other', marginalized, and colonized" (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 172). Spivak (2010) also argues, there is "no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" (p. 122) and this condition paves the way for their subalternity. Loomba (1998) furthers Spivak's idea of women's subalternity adding that "self-representation (for women) was not a possibility" (p. 234) because of the elitist interference in women's existence. On the other hand,

Nayar (2013) describes women's conditions as a "position without identity" (p. 61). In addition, Sangari and Vaid (1999) opine that the subaltern women are the "socio-cultural milieu of utter ignorance and impurity" (p. 127-128) which confirms their subaltern position in all the phases of life. Amitav Ghosh's (2001) female characters in his *The Glass Palace*, thus, experience subalternity or the condition of 'not speaking'.

On the other hand, subalternity is not a static condition for the subaltern women. They are distinctively aggressive in their perception of empowerment. Their static condition is deconstructively analysed by the subalternists and it goes against Spivak's (2010) view on women. She occupies a very remarkable position in the postcolonial study to decipher what it means by the subalterns. Her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" conceptualises subalternity and shows the trajectory of the subalterns' perpetual attempt to represent themselves in a world dominated by the elites. She argues that women fail to speak but when they "spoke", women did not, do not, "hear" her" (p. 22). She trivialises the subaltern women's initiatives to empower themselves through their representation in a static manner. On the other hand, Ranajit Guha, and other subalternists, in their *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, popularly known as Subaltern Studies Series, explore diverse subaltern perspectives in the historiography written and popularised by the elites of the society. It becomes apparent in Guha's (1982) words that the subalterns possess an "autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter" ("Some Aspects of Historiography", p. 4). Empowerment of the subalterns lies in possessing this autonomous domain of their own in which they speak very distinctively which is different from their elite counterparts.

2. Dolly's Subalternity/Not Speaking Quality

Subalternity is created in multiple forms and David Arnold (1982) establishes the idea with the argument that it emerges when the regular form of life experiences disorder because of any external or internal elitist interference. He argues that the people of Gudem and Rampa, Andhra Pradesh, are subalterns as their regular life is threatened by the outsiders. He says, "In the first characteristic manifestation of subalternity, the inhabitants of the hill tracts were opposed to outsiders who threatened their territory and their customary life" (p. 80). Dolly's subalternity is parallel to Arnold's observation. Her subalternity begins with the elitist agents' interference in her regular life in her own abode.

Her own territory and customary life is at a stake with her deporting to the royal palace of Mandalay for its service at her early age. The “Queen’s agents” (p. 20) collect them from the places such as Kachin, Wa and Shan which are situated on the Northern frontiers of the country. The orphaned young girls are their targets so that the palace can squeeze their service for the rest of their life. Dolly is also brought at her infancy to the palace from a place called Lashio. The spatial journey from her parental house to the palace leaves her with little memory of her past. It is not possible for her to trace her past, her root, and her place of birth. Hunting Dolly as a maid for the palace confirms her subalternity through her displacement from her own social, cultural, political, religious, and above all, ideological paradigms. The elitist interference of the Queen in Dolly’s regular life clearly subalternises her.

Moreover, the colonial elitism is responsible for Dolly’s subalternity. It begins with the exile of the Royal members of Mandalay to Ratnagiri, India, after the fall of the king King Thebaw in the hands of the British. To scrutinise her position in the family, it can be argued that she spends an unquestionable domesticised life in the palace, but it is tremendously shattered with the invasion of the elitist British soldiers. Her born-subalternity, thus, gets a new dimension with her journey to Ratnagiri in which she experiences more spatial and temporal tightness with the royal members as the hostage of the British ruler. Her subalternity becomes diaphanous while speaking to Uma Dey, the collector’s wife in Ratnagiri. She confesses, “at Outram House we lead very small lives. Every day for the last twenty years we have woken to the same sounds, the same voices, the same sights, the same faces. We have had to be content with what we have, to look for what happiness we can find” (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 2001, p. 119). This is how she leads her subaltern life in her new abode in Ratnagiri along with the royal members.

The creation of subalternity is also linked with the elitist interference in the subalterns’ religiosity. Ghosh (2001) rightly explores the maids’ religious compromise after their journey to the palace. The servants chosen for the service of the royal family of Mandalay hold different religious beliefs, but are compelled to follow monism. Ghosh opines “Some of them were from Christian families, some from Buddhist – once they came to Mandalay it didn’t matter. They were reared under the tutelage of palace retainers, under the Queen’s personal supervision” (p. 20). Subalternity for them begins with the negotiation of their religiosity and it is the process of silencing them. Kamala Visweswaran

(1996) rightly observes in her “Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography” that it is “a necessary kind of silence; a nationalistic refusal to make the issue of women an item of negotiation” (p. 85). Dolly, like other subalterns, also experiences it identically. The royal elitists, from an essentialist perspective, confirmed her subalternity by refusing her root and religion. She is transformed into a maid refusing her religious identity. In her life in Mandalay and Ratnagiri, very little is known about her religiosity which is one of the factors that enhances her subalternity.

The subalterns are silenced with the beginning of their subalternity. Guha (1982), in his “On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India”, argues that the elites’ oppressive and dominant discourses silence the subalterns whose consents are always considered to be secondary. Their subalternity can be aligned with that of an oriental woman namely Kuchuk Hanem, an Egyptian courtesan whose “emotions, presence, or history” (Said, 1978, p. 6) are recorded by the writer Flaubert for his readers. What is very remarkable in Said’s narrative about Flaubert’s observation is Kuchuk Hanem’s passivity and silence. Said clarifies that Kuchuk Hanem, in Flaubert’s writing, represents the passivity of the Eastern world which the colonisers impose historically and culturally. The maid servants in *The Glass Palace* are also subalternised by the elitist members of the royal family determining their passivity and silence. Dolly, after being the maid in the royal family of Mandalay, loses her ability to speak in terms of her loss of the past, her religiosity, and cultural identity. Thus, her subalternity is confirmed and given a sustainability by the elites of the royal family. The Queen’s policies of collecting the maids and assimilating them with her own ideology are undoubtedly the ways of making them not speaking agents.

2.1 Dolly’s Empowerment

Though Dolly’s subalternity is a recurrent issue in Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, she is able to overcome it. She develops her personality to resist the subordination imposed on her by the elitist people. Tirthankar Roy (2001) argues that the subalterns can alter the elitist historiography and write their own one through confronting diverse fronts such as “domination-submission-resistance” (p. 2223). Guha (1982), on the other hand, opines that the subalterns can do it by decoding many of the elitist assumptions about the subalterns and destroying “many of those familiar signs” (“Aspects of Colonial Historiography”, p. 1) of subalternity. Dolly empowers herself by denouncing her subalternity.

Empowerment for her is a transition to shift her position from a subaltern royal servant which is “other, ... marginalised, and ... colonised” (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 172) to a powerful lady by opposing and fighting off “what is pernicious or threatening to one’s existence” (Chandra, 2005, p. 563). In a nutshell, it can be argued that the signs of her empowerment are manifested in her changed position as a maid, her departure from her fiancé Sawant to create room for the First Princess, her decision of marrying Rajkumar, and finally, her choice of life as a devoted Buddhist.

Dolly’s empowerment is demonstrated in her responsibilities of teaching other maids at the Outram House in Ratnagiri so that the apprentices become fit for serving the royal members. Moreover, she surpasses herself relentlessly in her personal life to get empowered. Moreover, she proves her extreme personality in her decision of breaking relationship with Sawant to save the First Princess from social harassment of giving birth to an unnatural child. In addition, she is able to develop a towering personality as a wife and a mother. Amalgamation of all of these issues proves her distinctive paradigm of empowerment. This kind of critical paradigm is undoubtedly a shift from what Spivak (2010) establishes in her “Can the Subaltern Speak?” with the synthesis that the subalterns cannot speak and if they speak there is rarely anyone to listen to them. Dolly is able to speak through her unparalleled personality and distinctive nature of listening to her mind.

2.1.1 Dolly’s Empowerment as a Servant

Empowerment for the subaltern women lies in the non-canonical activities that may not be found in the canonical power paradigm. Dolly is an insignificant maid in the royal family, but from the very beginning of her service, she is able to speak out through her ability of being liked by the Second Princess. Ghosh (2001) expresses it opining, “It was the youngest of these maids who had had the most success in dealing with the Second Princess. She was a slender ten-year-old, a timid, undemonstrative child, with enormous eyes and a dancer’s pliable body and supple limbs” (p. 20). It can be argued that Dolly is able to attract the attention of the elitist persons like Queen Supayalat through her extraordinary services to the Second Princess. Thus, she is able to speak of her ability which is truly a process of getting empowered in the territorial domain of her subaltern identity. Moreover, the Queen, though an elitist, has to depend on her for looking after the Second Princess. Eventually, Dolly’s identity is not static. It reflects Said’s (1978) description of the orientals, “the

orient is not an inert fact of nature” (p. 4). He argues that the orientals have their own history enabling the occidentals to talk about them. Thus, as he opines, both the East and West “support and to an extent reflect each other” (p. 5). However, Dolly also has the potentials to be evaluated by the Queen Supayalat and it, undoubtedly, creates an empowering space for her in the palace.

Moreover, Dolly proves her own wisdom on different occasions through the manifestation of her distinctive consciousness. She surpasses herself again and again with her own wit, intellectuality, and dedication. Arun K. Patnaik (1988) examines the subaltern consciousness in Gramsci’s study and explores how the elites consider the subalterns “as superstitious, naïve, meaningless, irrational, and so on” (p. 2). The subalterns challenge this kind of static assumptions of the elites and to some extent, alter. Dolly’s pragmatic and sensible encounter with Sawant, who is responsible for the First Princess’s pregnancy, can be considered to bring out her consciousness and empowerment. Both she and the First Princess are in love with Sawant. Later, it is discovered that the First Princess gets pregnant. Dolly is in a psychological dilemma whether she will continue relationship with Sawant or not. Later, she wraps up her affair with Swant considering that she must not be the First Princess’s competitor in the field of love. She proves her wisdom realising that the would-be-born child will be the bridge to redefine her. She takes the baby’s birth very subjectively and internalises this incident with her extraordinary personality, “now I wake up I feel that the child is mine, growing inside me ... it was as though it were my own child” (Ghosh, 2001, p. 118). She is able to internalise the child because of her extraordinary humaneness and wisdom. Satya Narayan (2018) rightly observes that Dolly is a true personification “of the spirit of endurance and acceptance” (p. 343). Her decision of leaving Sawant for the First Princess’s honour is undoubtedly a sign of her deep understanding of life that enhances her empowerment.

2.1.2 Dolly’s Empowerment as a Lover

Dolly, from her very tender age, has great quality of attracting others. After the fall of the Mandalay Fort, the royal members, including their maids, are taken to the nearby river to exile them to Ratnagiri. While being taken away, Rajkumar meets Dolly escorted by the British soldiers. The meeting leaves so deep impression on him that he develops a long lasting admiration for her. Her childhood beauty mesmerises her. Ghosh (2001) rightly explores her alluring beauty telling:

She was slender and long-limbed, of a complexion that was exactly the tint of the fine *thanaka* powder she was wearing on her face. She had huge dark eyes and her face was long and perfect in its symmetry. She was by far the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld, of a loveliness beyond imagination. (p. 34)

Rajkumar's obsession for the young lady can be marked in his benevolent behaviour to her such as giving her sweetmeat, handing the jewelled ivory box and calling her name intimately "Dolly. Dolly" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 35) ignoring the presence of the British soldiers. His extreme love for the lady is articulately expressed in the words, "I will see you again" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 36). However, he fails to resist his temptation to talk to the lady for which he dares to go "within a few feet of Dolly" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 46) with the gift packet. Dolly accepts it "in uncomprehending surprise" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 46) which she feels again after long twenty years when Rajkumar manages to meet her at Ratnagiri. Rajkumar's childhood venture with Dolly becomes a life-long affair for him. Her physical beauty is so mesmerising that Rajkumar remains unmarried for twenty long years with the hope of getting her. It is her extraordinary quality that makes Rajkumar remarkably dedicated to her. Her empowerment lies in her capacity of winning Rajkumar's mind through her surpassing qualities.

Dolly also manifests her remarkable sign of empowerment in her decision-making. After the collapse of her husband's business empire and killing of her eldest son Nil in Burma, she comes to Kolkata along with her husband and her only surviving granddaughter. What is haunting for her is her youngest son Dino's staying back in Burma for whom she, very consciously, decides to travel back to the country. It is her final tour to Burma as she never comes back. She dedicates her life to religiosity leaving her husband and her granddaughter in Kolkata forever.

3. Ma Cho's Subalternity

Ghosh (2001) introduces many minor characters among whom Ma Cho occupies a great space in the novel. In spite of her brief presence in the novel, she leaves an unparalleled appeal to the readers with her very energetic and imposing characteristics. Her initial presence in the novel can be marked with her interaction with the protagonist, Rajkumar. She, like Dolly, is socially, culturally, domestically, economically, psychologically, and ideologically subalternised but what is very distinctive about her is that her subalternity fails to doom her for eternal subjugation. She manifests her inner strength to empower herself through multiple phenomena.

Subalternity and displacement are inseparably connected and the theme is displayed in *The Glass Palace* repeatedly. Many of the major and minor characters in the novel embrace displacement because of diverse social, cultural, and economic reasons and Ma Cho is one of them. Ashcroft and others (1989) argue that displacement “may be the result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location” (p. 73). They further the idea stating that the colonial conditions always link “place and displacement” (p. 8) in which people are displaced from their original places and eventually, experience “extreme form of physical, social, and individual dislocation” (p. 74). Lorenzo Veracini (2011) also opines that colonisation has “two fundamental and necessary components: an original displacement and unequal relation” (p. 1). This kind of temporal and spatial incoherence caused by displacement eventually generates subaltern condition. Ma Cho’s subalternity is created because of displacement.

The first sign of Ma Cho’s displaced identity is her rootlessness. According to Ghosh (2001), she is “half Indian” (p. 4) and thus, shares two bloodlines. It can be argued that this hybridity leads her to the impossibility of having a sound personal life. Moreover, people with the Indian heritage were not culturally very acceptable in Burma at that time. It was considered as a cultural deviation for the Burmese natives. So, Ma Cho’s birth with the mixed heritage confirms her subalternity. The loss of her past identity deepens her subalternity as she never knows about her early life, her parents, birthplace, reason of her coming to Mandalay, and her single life.

Subalternity for Ma Cho also tends to be a common theme in the novel in terms of her domesticity. There is a breach in her personal life that leads her to suffer from unrequited love. Eventually, she explores an alternative way to quench her sexual pleasure:

But at night, with the day’s work done, a certain languor entered her movements. She would cup her breast and air them, fanning herself with her hands; she would run her fingers slowly through the cleft of her chest, past the pout of her belly, down to her legs and thighs. (Ghosh, 2001, p. 8)

Sexual deprivation constitutes her subalternity. Even her relationship with Saya John fails to materialise her sexual fulfillment as her fiancé takes it as a sin. His disgraceful personality becomes apparent in Ma Cho’s conversation with

Rajkumar, "Everytime he comes to visit me, he has to go to his church next morning to pray and ask forgiveness" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 8). Her subalternity lies in Saya John's reluctance to evaluate her affair with him. This kind of male reluctance is a common phenomenon in the subaltern societies and Dipesh Chakaraborty (2008) describes it as the outcome of "patrilineal" (p. 118) social forms. It is Saya John "small, bespectacled, owl-like man" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 8) who determines her subalternity with his patrilineal position.

Saya John, a "contractor" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 9) for supplying teak wood to the British traders, is a widower and lives with his only son. He develops an illicit relationship with Ma Cho in time of his business tour to Mandalay but is determined that "he'll never marry" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 10) her. His Christian identity motivates him to decide his marital life. Saya John's excessive religiosity eventually creates Ma Cho's subalternity. When questioned by Rajkumar about her marriage with Saya John, she becomes very frustrated and replies mockingly that her beloved suffers from agony after having sex with her and so, he goes to the church to "pray and ask forgiveness" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 10). Thus, Saya John's elitism subalternises Ma Cho.

Ma Cho's social and cultural position is also largely responsible for her subaltern identity. Subalternity, as observed by Peter Brooker (2003), is inseparably linked with "unco-ordinated popular mass" (p. 239) and Ma Cho's depraved behaviour in terms of looting the palace during the British invasion can be analysed from this perspectives. She, like other commoners in Mandalay, does not leave the chance of looting the palace after its fall. She manages to find out a "brass candlestand with a chrysanthemum pedestal" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 33). She is devoid of her rationality that leads her to loot the palace ignoring the Queen's command to give the candlestand back. Contrarily, she "offered her yet another respectful genuflection, but she would not part with her candlestand" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 34). To the Queen, she is none but the depraved subaltern without having any sign of rationality. The paradoxical behaviour is also found in her. When the royal members are taken to the nearby river, the local people surround them but are afraid of the British soldiers. Most of them are weeping including Ma Cho. Rajkumar discovers her crying over the exile of the royal members and is burdened with grief. Ghosh (2001) accumulates the collective agony including that of Rajkumar telling, "He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exists invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their

commonality” (p. 47). It becomes clear that Ma Cho is nobody to the royal members, but inseparably connected with them. Her looting of the candlestand from the palace is the proof of her connectionlessness with the royal members and the latter is proved in her lamentation for their exile. She does not have that standard of mind to determine the right from wrong. Thus, her subalternity is beyond question.

The British invasion brought tremendous changes in the lives of the inhabitants of Mandalay. Ma Cho is also affected by this historical change. After the departure of the British soldiers with the royal members, she discovers with awe that her cooking utensils are destroyed or stolen. She has nothing to do with the kitchen as there is no one in the food stall. Rajkumar is the only person to accompany her in her afflicted time, but is never a substantial soothing force for her because of his insignificant existence. She knows that the shop occupies her whole existence which is put into tremendous tremor because of the historical change in the locality. Thus, her history is woven with personal loss and gain. But what becomes more remarkable to her is her existence. For this reason, she bursts into tears and shouts “What am I to do? Where am I to go?” (Ghosh, 2001, p. 56). This kind of thought is surely the result of her displacement which creates her subalternity.

To sum up the note on her subalternity, it can be stated that her rootlessness, her failure to materialise her affair with Saya John, and finally, her self-sex clearly posit her in a subaltern position. Her subalternity can be aligned with what Guha defines in the “Preface” of the first volume of the series entitled *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History*. He states that the term subaltern is used to refer to the “general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way” (p. vii). Moreover, he argues that the term also indicates the “culture informing the condition” (p. vii). Thus, Ma Cho’s subalternity can be considered as a recurrent issue in the novel.

3.1 Ma Cho’s Empowerment

Ghosh’s female characters are mostly subalterns who suffered from almost same level of afflictions because of different elitist interferences. But there are some moments when these women are able to get empowered. Their trajectories of empowerment are peculiar and distinctive in nature. In spite of immense signs of subalternity in Ma Cho’s life, it is possible to explore some

aspects through which she is able to speak. In the Subaltern Studies, the thinkers always attempt to explore the less-discussed paradigms of the subalterns in which they empower themselves in the noncanonical ways. Ghosh's (2001) short-lived character Ma Cho experiences some wonderful moments in which she is able to empower herself in her own ways. It is mentionable here that she does not own any substantial domain apart from her own food-stall, but reels herself in remarkable ways to show her authentic power-paradigms. Ma Cho enjoys her absolute power in her brief appearance in the novel *The Glass Palace*. A chronological analysis of the processes how she gets empowered clearly establishes her tendency of speaking.

Ma Cho is a great entrepreneur. She has a very strong brand of mind who dares to run a food-stall in one of the cosmopolitan cities in Burma. She is a true epitome of what Foucault (1998) observes about power as "the multiplicity of force relations" (p. 92). He furthers his idea stating that power is "everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-producing" (p. 93). Ma Cho's survival in a multicultural city like Mandalay manifests her empowerment. In the city, "there were envoys, and missionaries from Europe; traders and merchants of Greek, Armenian, Chinese, and Indian origin; labourers and boatmen from Bengal, Malaya and the Coromandel coast; white-clothed astrologers from Manipur; businessmen from Gujarat ..." (Ghosh, 2001, p. 16). The city becomes a booming economic zone for the foreigners and Ma Cho is able to secure a place in it ensuring her relation with diverse forces. Moreover, she is a wonderful woman with her managerial quality. She, while selecting Rajkumar as a waiter for her shop, manages to bargain with him authentically. Thus, she manages to hire him settling the matter that she will give him only shelter and food. In addition, she develops pragmatic knowledge to handle her workers. There is always a chance of being cheated and so, she does not believe Rajkumar completely. For this reason, she "didn't trust him with fish or meat" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 6). She goes through the hard work of chopping them and dressing them herself. Thus, she proves her wisdom in selecting workers for her shop and handling them pragmatically, and thus, her empowerment can be proved with what Foucault (1998) argues stating that power can be "exercised from innumerable points". (p. 94)

Ma Cho's empowerment lies in her self-respect. For referring to the subalterns' multidimensionalities in life, Sumit Sarkar (1987) assumes that there are

“different strata coming under the omnibus subaltern category” (p. 278) and this condition of the subalterns is described as an “autonomous domain” (Guha, “On Some Aspects” p. 4). Ma Cho’s life is greatly guided by this autonomy in which there are strata of aspects that act as driving forces to determine her empowerment. It is undoubtedly true that she is severely hurt because of Saya John’s betrayal. She, after the break up, is determined not to reconnect herself with him. , “What’s the use of a man who’s never there when you need him?” (Ghosh, 2001, p. 56). She is able to voice herself through the negation to the person on whom she is mostly dependent. These physical and psychological departures are possible because of her strong personality and that is how, she is empowered.

Ma Cho’s absolute capacity of self-control deepens her empowerment. In the social complex phenomenon, Ma Cho displays her empowerment in a very authentic way, which is manifested in her unrealistic and unacceptable physical relationship with Rajkumar. In a very fragile psychological condition, she is almost having sex with the under-aged boy Rajkumar, but suddenly comes into her senses. She withdraws herself shouting, “What am I doing with this boy, this child, this half-wit kalaa?” (Ghosh, 2001, p. 57). A deep analysis of the whole incident offers us a tremendous psychological maturity that Ma Cho possesses regarding her self-respect. In her distress time, she loses her sensibility that leads her to be exposed to Rajkumar physically. It does not take place because of her wisdom that makes her leave Rajkumar “for good” (Ghosh, 2001, p. 58). After her departure, she lives only in the stories told by both Rajkumar and Saya John, and the potential of being told confirms her empowerment.

Ma Cho also encounters her own ego to prove her empowerment. It is a counter-war against her own desire. In order to do so, she has to “destroy many of those familiar signs” (Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency”, 1983, p. 1) that is inevitable for a subaltern to get empowered. Her personal life is very ambiguous and there is no clue about her matrimonial relationship. As she does not have any regular partner, she develops relationship with Saya John. He meets Ma Cho whenever he comes to Mandalay. The relationship does not reach any maturity because of Saya John’s religious identity. After spending night with Ma Cho, he considered himself impure for which he visits the church to purify him. Her grief knows no bound when she laments over Saya John’s withdrawn mentality to her. She regretfully discovers that her fiancé is

regretful for his relation with her what he prisms through his visit to the church for forgiveness for his sin of having unnatural physical bond with her. What is more important to notice is that she does not get broken knowing Saya John's disinterestedness in maturing the relationship. She translates the whole venture into her subjective fulfillment of her desire. She decides to materialise her desire for the sake of her physicality. She learns that emotional attachment may provide her nothing more than affliction. For that reason, when Saya John comes to her again with his son, she welcomes him and celebrates the time with utmost pleasure. In this way, she celebrates her empowerment in the superlative manner.

Thus, Ma Cho leads a very complex life cycle which is full of enigmas, afflictions, sorrows, and uncertainties. She is subalternised socially, culturally, religiously, and economically by different elite agents, but able to translate the negativities into the terrain of empowerment. It should be mentioned here that her empowerment is absolutely a new form which is never applauded in the canonical historiography.

4. Conclusion

Though both Dolly and Ma Cho are subaltern characters in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, their subalternity is a created phenomenon. Their elite counterparts have done it following diverse trajectories. Dolly's subalternity begins with her displacement from her original abode and her loss of own territory and customary life in Lashio. Moreover, her journey to Ratnagiri with the royal hostages offers her more spatial and temporal tightness that ostensibly deepens her subalternity. In addition, her forced loss of religiosity and culturality amplifies her subalternity. Contrarily, she proves her empowerment through her distinctive activities. Dolly does it by authenticating her necessity in the palace as a servant, as a governess, and as an instructor to the novice maids. Her empowerment also lies in her rationality that leads her to realise the First Princess's excruciating condition of giving birth to a child before marriage. Finally, Dolly's empowerment is benevolently synchronised in her affirmation of marrying Rajkumar and her possessing of great personality in journeying back to chaotic Burma alone in search of her son Dino. On the other hand, Ma Cho experiences subalternity in her own distinctive ways. Her subalternity begins with her displacement and rootlessness. Her dual bloodline also paves her subalternity by creating cultural stigma on the way to her fulfillment of love affair with Saya John. Her depraved nature is also connected with her subaltern

identity. Apart from this, her empowerment is found in her survival capacity in a cosmopolitan city like Mandalay. The chronicle of her empowerment also includes her benevolent nature of taking care of the orphan Rajkumar. She serves as a life-giving force to him. The scrutiny of her relationship with Saya John reveals her extraordinary understanding of life and reality. Thus, both Dolly and Ma Cho in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* revolve round two conditions- speaking and not speaking. Though they are completely different from each other socially and culturally, they share the distinctive trajectories of subalternity and empowerment.

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