

**TRANSNATIONAL DISLOCATION AND GENDERED TRIBAL MARGINALITY  
IN JAIWANTI DIMRI'S *TO SURJU, WITH LOVE***

Dr. Maitrayee Misra  
M. A., PGDTE, PhD  
[maitrayeemisra1989@gmail.com](mailto:maitrayeemisra1989@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*Tribal marginality is an issue related to socio-political empowerment in modern India, which becomes doubly complicated if seen from a gendered perspective. Spivak's idea of the 'doubly marginalized' tribal women finds a literary exposure in a recently published Anglophone novella authored by Jaiwanti Dimri. My paper chooses Dimri's transcreated novella *To Surju, With Love* (2017) as a case study in exploring the marginality of a dislocated tribal woman. Born in the Dumka region of Jharkhand, brought up in Mejguri town of Assam and dislocated as a labourer in Bhutan, Dimri's female protagonist Sukurmani reflects the image of water hyacinth, floating aimlessly, in search of a secure and stable life in an unknown land. Through the depiction of Sukurmani's limited world view and limited vocabulary Dimri explores the uncharted regions of her suppressed, marginalized status and her single-handed struggle to bring up her children till her death. Her Memsaab, who is a single working woman, a college teacher on research assignment in Bhutan, becomes the keen observer of her plights as an illegal immigrant woman labourer and a single mother. My paper would attempt to explore how the author makes a comparison between the two different (feminine) world views (Sukurmani as a dislocated tribal subaltern and her employer the Memsaab as the representative of the educated and empowered mainstream Indian) outside the geopolitical border of the Indian nation-state to uphold the issue of gendered tribal marginality in diaspora.*

**Keywords:** Transnational dislocation, Tribal Marginality, Gender, Ethnicity, Identity

The Latin 'marginalis' is the etymological root of the word 'margin' which refers to an edge or border, and therefore, 'marginality' denotes the positionality of the border of any spatial reality. It paves the way for the binary or hierarchical relationship between centre and periphery. This binary gives birth to the notion of the 'marginalized'—"the groups or individuals that experience life on the fringes" and "are denied full access to opportunities and resources that are normally available to dominant groups" (Roberts 191). Often the centre becomes a desired position as the marginalized is always threatened that s/he is "absent, voiceless, or invisible" (Roberts 192). The reason behind their state of being in the margin is "due to their exclusion from political participation" (Perlman 98) in the system of governance

by powerful stakeholders and the majority, as well as their invisibility in the economic system of the society.

In India, along with the people of the main stream culture, can be found people of indigenous culture who are referred to as 'Tribes' in general. They are the earliest inhabitant or *adivasi*, whom the Government had marked as the Scheduled Tribes. After the independence, the Government of India has scheduled the tribal communities "in the constitution" and helped them with "special provisions for their welfare and development." (Survey Report 1). But the lack of awareness of these government aids restricted their welfare. Again certain private and government initiation for industrial establishment robbed off their land ownership. As a result mass migration to other states and sometimes beyond the borders of the country for livelihood, can be witnessed among the tribes. This immigration status of the tribes becomes "one of the most insidious factors of vulnerability for marginalization and exploitation" (Mehretu et.al. 93). Along with it when the term 'gender' is added, the marginalization reaches its extremity.

Focusing on the above mentioned issues of marginality, tribal identity and gender, the present paper has chosen Jaiwanti Dimri's recent novella- *To Surju, With Love* (2017) as case study. The author beautifully reminisces her two years (1997- 1999) stay in the Kanglung region of Eastern Bhutan, working under the Colombo Plan as a professional academician. Set in the beautiful panoramic vista of Bhutan, the novella is actually the heart rendering saga of the "disturbing submerged realities of the lives of the subaltern Indians" (SWL xi). Dimri introduces her protagonist Sukurmani and her tales to depict how class, economy, tribal identity, illegal migrant status and gender fixes the dislocated Indian labourers' identity as a 'subaltern' and "virtually" situates them "on the margins of margins" (SWL xi). Ranajit Guha in the 'Preface' to the *Subaltern Studies Reader*, remarks that the word 'subaltern' "stands for the meaning... 'of inferior rank'" and the "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups" (vii).

We can find an epistolary flavour in the title of the novella, *To Surju, With Love*, but the narrative does not surround the eponymous character of Surju. Rather, it is centred on the life of his mother Sukurmani, who is a dislocated tribal subaltern labourer cum maid servant. We all know that the renowned critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak had once raised the question -"Can the Subaltern Speak?". At this juncture I raise another question- 'Who listens to the Subaltern?' Here Dimri has portrayed a main stream female character of Memsaab who becomes the patient and 'sahridaya' listener of Sukurmani's tale. Through a third person narration, the author is able to focus on Sukurmani's limited worldview, the uncharted regions of her suppressed, marginalized status and her single-handed struggle to bring up her children till her death. She also presents Memsaab's sympathetic acceptance of Sukurmani.

The hierarchical binary of the mainstream and the marginalized that is viewed in the socio-cultural scenario of India is somewhat different outside the geo-political borders. For