

Representation of the Subaltern in Elias's Novels

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for Master of Arts in English Language and
Literature**

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To My Parents

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this dissertation did not publish any where.

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Supervisor's signature

Abstract

This study engages with the idea of the representation of the subaltern in Akhtaruzzaman Elias's two novels, *Chilekothar Sepai* and *Khoabnama*. The idea of the subaltern is a complex one and both Gramsci and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak have foregrounded and adequated the theory of the subaltern. However, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak asks if a proper representation of the subaltern is possible because the mainstream representation of the subaltern often eclipses the voice of the subaltern. She also argues that dominant history has failed to narrativize the resistance of the subaltern. For Spivak, it is rather narrative itself which succeeds in representing the dynamics of the subaltern life. Using Spivak's idea of the subaltern, I argue in this work that among Bangladeshi novelists Akhtaruzzaman Elias has successfully captured the dynamics of life as well as the resistance of the subaltern. In his novel *Chilekothar Sepai* Elias illustrates how Khijir and Chengtu have contributed to *Unosotturer Gonoovuuthan* or the mass insurgency of 1969 and what their lives are about. Besides representing the Khijir and Chengtu, the novelist also has taken into account the lives of ticket blacker Bazlu, a house maid Jummoner Maa, Khijir's mother etc who are the urban proletariat or the subaltern. Elias in his the last novel *Khoabnama* portrays a life of an *adhiar*, Tamij who is involved in peasant uprising or *Tevaaga* movement in 1940s. But Khijir, Chengtu and Tamij do not fight in these insurgencies with a clear idea about their own political aim; rather, they do it out of material necessity and commonsensical idea about the equality and freedom. This is what Elias tries to bring to our notice in through his novels *Chilekothar Sepai* and *Khoabnama*.

The objective of the research is to show how Elias's novels *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai* deal with subalterns' life. Moreover, this project makes an attempt to show how the historical shift from feudalism to capitalism in Bangladesh may offer a historical account but does not account for the lives and struggles of other disempowered groups, including peasants, women and indigenous groups.

Through his novels, Elias raises some of the key questions. Perhaps the most significant of these are: What are the positions of the subaltern in historical insurgency? How does Elias re-present the lives of the subalterns in his novels? What is Elias's position on subalterns' contribution in historical moments? And, finally, what is the role of women in the patriarchal society as subaltern?

Representation of the Subaltern in Elias's Novels

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Introduction

The insertion of India into colonialism is generally defined as a change from semi-feudalism into capitalist subjection. Such a definition theorizes the change within the great narrative of the modes of production and, by uneasy implication, within the narrative of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the “subaltern.” “Subaltern” is a political signifier within the social text. (Spivak 197)

Who are the subalterns? Are the subalterns just a group of people who are connected through experience? Or does the label subaltern has any other political dimension? How are they represented in texts? The representation of the subaltern is always problematic; always complicated by their position in politics and history. Indian feminist deconstructive critic Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak suggests in her book *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1988) that the phased development of the subaltern is complicated by the imperialist project. At the same time, she attempts to formulate a critical vocabulary that is appropriate to describe the experiences and histories of particular individuals and social groups who are historically repressed and exploited by the European colonialism (Morton 47). For Spivak, words like ‘the colonised’, ‘woman’, and ‘the worker’ may seem to provide a coherent political identity for disempowered individuals and groups to unite against the oppressors. These master signifiers do not do any justice to the lives and histories of those people who were frequently ignored and

subsequently forgotten by anti-colonial national independence movements. Against such master signifiers, Spivak proposes to use the word subaltern to conceptualize a range of different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses (Morton 45). As Spivak claims in an interview published in *Polygraph*:

I like the word 'subaltern' for one reason. It is truly situational. Subaltern began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word subaltern used under censorship of Gramsci: he called Marxism 'monism,' and was obliged to call the proletariat 'subaltern.' That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that because it has no theoretical rigor.

(Spivak 141)

If we look at Spivak's formulation carefully we become able to understand that she believes that people or the groups who are marginalized, who can not raise their voice collectively and have no political consciousness, are 'subalterns'. The task of understanding who they are, therefore, is crucial for understanding the politics of subaltern representation.

The term subaltern came into political discourse through Antonio Gramsci. Historically, subaltern refers to junior ranking officers in the British army (OED 1189). Notable early 20th century Italian Marxist theorist and politician Antonio Gramsci used the term to refer in particular to the unorganized groups of rural peasants based in Southern Italy, who had no social or political consciousness as a group, and were therefore susceptible to the domination of the ruling ideas, culture and leadership of the state (Hawthorn 248). In literary and cultural theory subaltern thus refers to the members of those marginalized groups in society who are subjected to the hegemony of the ruling

classes (Ashcroft, Tiffin et al. 218). In Gramsci's work, the subaltern serves as a coded way of referring to classes such as the peasantry. It is important to note that Gramsci uses the term in the plural form and uses it to refer to a class. For Gramsci, the subaltern classes are those who by definition are not unified and can not unite until they are become a state (Hawthorn 235). Further, he directs attention towards both the way in which these groups are called into being by developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production and their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formation. His tentative conclusion is that subaltern groups "are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up; only permanent victory breaks up their subordination, and that not immediately" (Hawthorn 344). For Gramsci, the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic, since they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel. Clearly they have less access to the means by which they may control their own representation, and less access to cultural and social institutions (Ashcroft, Tiffin et al. 216). What is more, Gramsci emphasized that the oppression of the rural peasantry in Southern Italy could be subverted through the development of class consciousness among the peasants. To this extent, Gramsci's account of the subaltern resembled Karl Marx's earlier proclamation in the nineteenth century that the industrial working class in Europe carried the future potential for collective social and political change (ibid). Unlike Marx's model of social and political change, however, Gramsci stressed that the social and political practices of the rural peasantry were not systematic or coherent in their opposition to the state. It is this lack of coherence that distinguishes Gramsci's notion of the subaltern from the traditional Marxist perception of the industrial working class is

unified and coherent. Furthermore, this lack of a coherent political identity in Gramsci's description of the subaltern is also crucial to Spivak's discussion of subaltern.

It is, however, imperative to note that in postcolonial theory, the concept of subaltern is an overused term, randomly used to refer to anyone who is politically/economically marginalized. Such academic co-options of the term have led Spivak to criticize academic opportunism that seeks to gain a privileged space in the name of subaltern representation. In her seminal essay on the issue "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak claims that the historical and structural condition of political representation does not guarantee that the interests of the particular subaltern groups will be recognized or that their voice will be heard. She further mentions that the general difference between aesthetic and political structures of representation is that aesthetic representation tends to foreground its status as a re-presentation of the real, whereas political representation denies this structure of representation. "A subaltern is a person without lines of social mobility" (Morton 54).

Furthermore, Spivak claims that the narrativizations of history are structured or textured like what is called literature (244). The production of historical accounts is the discursive narrativization of events. When historiography is self-consciously "non-theoretical" it sees its task, with respect to rival historical accounts of the same period, as bringing forth "what really happened" in a value neutral prose. That history deals with real events and literature with imagined ones may now be seen as a difference in degree rather than a kind. The difference between cases of historical and literary events will always be there as a differential moment in terms of what is called "the effect of the real" (ibid). In fact the ways in which the difference is articulated

between history and literature also has a hidden agenda. The historians' resistance to fiction relates the fact that the writing of history and of literature has social connotation even when these activities do not resemble what we understand by them today; and that historiography and literary pedagogy are disciplines.

Since official history discourses tends to privilege men and the ruling class as main actors of revolutionary politics, Spivak suggests that literature can provide a different space to articulate subaltern women, peasant, urban laborer's insurgency and resistance in the social text in postcolonial literature. So, Spivak suggests that literary texts can provide an alternative rhetorical site for articulating the histories of the subaltern. In this regard Elias's own relationship to historical discourse seems clear. He has always been gripped by the individual in history. *Chilekothar Sepai* (1986) and *Khoabnama* (1996) bend into full-fledged "historical fiction," history imagined into fiction where he depicts history with actors who seek to change it. Indeed, his repeated claim to legitimacy is that he researches thoroughly everything he represents in fiction. The plausibility of a Khijir and Jummoner Maa (*Chilekothar Sepai*), a Tamij, Fuljan and Kulsum (*Khoabnama*) is that they could have existed as subalterns in a specific historical moment imagined and tested by orthodox assumptions. A subalternist historian writer imagines a historical moment in order to narrate that event and creates some characters putting them at that insurgency (Spivak 244). By the mechanics of representation, a writer also can represent the subaltern within a historical moment and Elias also has tried to represent the lives of the subalterns with the dialectic of history through his novels. Elias's *Chilekothar Sepai* and *Khoabnama* emerge as a counter narrative that challenges official histories. He shows Khijir's involvement in the 1969 mass insurgency and

Tamij's dream of *Tevaaga* movement and indicates how these subalterns' dream and revolution has effaced gradually from the history. In *Khoabnama*, the book *Khoabnama* transfers from Tamijer *Baap* to Sharafat's son. This transfer is also symbolic from the historical point of view as well, because for Elias, history is collective. Hasan Al Zayed points out in his essay "Late Style as Politics" that Elias's novel traverses the long path of history but remains un nostalgic about the past and anchored in the struggles of the masses" (32).

However, the formation of a class is artificial and the economic agency or interest is impersonal because it is systematic and heterogeneous. To Spivak, the concept of subaltern is different from the concept of class. According to Spivak, Marx is not working to create an undivided subject where desire and interest coincide (1999:29). Class consciousness does not operate toward that goal. Similarly, Elias has gone far beyond rather than only dealing with the class struggle and economic problems of the poor people in his novles *Chilekothar Sepai* and *Khoabnama*. To him, class is not always constant and there is class conflict within the class (we find peasants' conflict with the fishermen in *Khoabnama* and Khijir's quarrel with Bazlu and his wife in *Chilekothar Sepai* who belong to same social and economic class). Elias understands the micro politics and the dialectic of class. So, he represents the subaltern as they are and does not reduce them into stereotypes. In other words, Elias does not deprive his characters of complexities and contradictions and disinherit them from their claim to history. Such attitude to representation leads Elias to conclude that reality cannot be adequately explained through a formulaic method or philosophy.

Elias says:

Avwg wbw`©ó †Kvb phillosophy gv_vq †i‡L reality †`wL bv|
 reality- †K Avwg †fZi †_‡K †`L‡Z PvB | wKšZz Avwg †Zv journalist
 bv| reality gv‡b Avwg hv †`L‡Z cvw”Q †Kej ZvB bq| Gi †fZiKvi
 ^cœ, mva, msKí, ms`vi,Kzms`vi meB reality-i †fZiKvi
 reality|...GZKvj Avgv‡i Kgy”wb÷ writer -iv GB wishful thinking -B K‡
 i G‡m‡Q| Zviv k^awgK‡K gnr gvbyl wn‡m‡e †`wL‡q‡Q| Zvi gv‡b
 †m Avmj k^awgK‡K disown Kij, refuse Kij| gbMov GKRB k^awgK ^Zwi
 Kij...GUv n‡”Q reality -‡K betray Kiv |(Mazumder, 168)

Nevertheless, to Elias, the whole life of the subaltern is important. Like Spivak he does not only figure out the aesthetic heroism in the life of the subaltern. That is why he delineates the subtle intricacies of common people, farmers, peasants, and urban laborers daily life by his novels. Elias says in this regard, “Many writers are there who do not want to show the sexual lives of a farmer, they want to show them only as a great struggler. Why? Can’t be there any kind of deception and hypocrisy in that farmer? He himself answers, these are kind of canny” (Kamran 111). To him, the life of human being is basically positive (Elias 24). Elias further mentions that there is no meaning of making the life of the subalterns positive separately while people are living amidst of thousand of pains. Therefore, Elias portrays Tamij, he creates the character Khijir who stands against his oppressors in spite of having his own deceitfulness. These characters are not superhuman beings. That is why, Tamij seduces Fuljan in an open field in *Khoabnama* and he is also attracted to his own stepmother Kulsum. On the other hand, Khijir kicks and abuses his wife so often. Moreover, Elias has started his novel *Chilekothar Sepai* by depicting the masturbation of Osman. To Elias, these all are not apart from life. He says in this concern, “I see the class and the society behind the sex” (Kamran 117). On the

other hand, the novelist Elias does not take any position for the characters of his novels *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai*. His position is nonaligned. He does not take any side and he does not speak for his characters rather he re-presents them as they are. That is why Elias not only re-presents the subaltern as an oppressed class but also deals with their culture, pain, happiness and language. Elias (2004) says in *Rachana Samagra*:

GB `vwi`a w`†qB wbgweË k^agRxex†K m^aú~Y© †Pbv hvq bv| Zvi
 Rxebhvc†b gvbweK g~j`†evamg~††ni weKvk Av†Q Ges nvRvi
 nvRvi eQ†ii †kvIY Zuvi myKzgvı „ewË†K Dc†o †dj†Z cv†iwb | ZvB
 Zuvi h_v_© cwiPq jv†fi Rb` Zuvi ms` ‹...wZ†K Rvbv G†Kev†i
 cÖ_g | cÖavb kZ © |(24)

Through the novels of Elias, some of the key questions for this project are raised. Perhaps the most significant of these would be: What are the positions of the subaltern in historical insurgency? How does Elias capture the lives of the subalterns and re-present them in his novels? What is Elias's position in re-presenting the subalterns' contribution in two historical moments like *Tevaaga* and 1969 mass revolution? What is the role of women as subaltern in the patriarchy? In both *Chilekothar Sepai* and *Khoabnama*, there are revolutionary moments or insurgencies. Elias's handling of these issues are nuanced and thought-provoking, and do not undermine the role of these people such as Khijir, Tamij, Fuljan in those historical moments. He does, however, downplay the complexities of Khijir's role in 1969 insurgency and Tamij in *Tevaaga* movement. For Elias, the characters Fuljan, Tamij, Kulsum, and Keramat Ali- all fight against the oppressors from their own position but can not uprising collectively against the oppressors. Elias further exposes the contribution of these people in historical events through his novels *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai* as a counter narrativization of the official history. He

has written both of his novels within the context of two historical moments; one is *Tevaaga* insurgency of early 1940's and the other is mass uprising of 1969. In both movements the subaltern had a great role but they could not unite collectively due to lack of political consciousness. None of Elias's novels show the collective consciousness of the subalterns. Khijir in *Chilekothar Sepai* desires the down fall of *Mahajan*, yet he does not know how to proceed on with his revolution as an unconscious proletariat or urban rootless subaltern. He dies. Like him, Chengtu does not know what to do further regarding his own agitation against Khaibar Gazi. He waits for Anwar or Ali Box for further step. At the same time, Tamij in *Khoabnama* looks for a dream alone to be an *Adhiar*. Afterwards, these people are effaced from the official history of Bangladesh and all dreams of these subalterns could not be united as an entity to make a further revolution locally. These are actually examples of how Elias has provided an alternative rhetorical site for articulating the histories of the subalterns. In *Chilekothar Sepai*, Elias engages readers view and conscience by the dialectic of the life hood. How a manual laborer/ subaltern can be big and become a symbol of power, hope and inspiration has been shown in *Chilekothar Sepai* through *Haddi Khijir*. *Haddi Khijir* may lost, yet his agony and passion can not be taken away rather it enables others to take a vow with strong arms towards the open sky. On the other hand *Khoabnama* evolves with the dream of Tamij and Fuljan for a less oppressive society with an urge of equal rights by denying the 'hegemonic power'. Yet they also can not emerge as sovereign political subject in control of their own destiny.

On a final note, unlike other writers Elias has not dealt with middle class life and language rather he dealt with different historical issues where he has included fishermen, peasants, urban workers, their lives, pains, sorrows as well as their positive and negative aspects of their personalities to capture the dynamics of their life and resistance. As a very conscious writer, Elias knew that it would be difficult to represent these people yet remain detached from them. His two novels are examples of this effort as he tried to re-present the subaltern by not being a representer of the subalterns in Spivakian sense of 'speaking for'. Moreover, Elias does not evaluate political history rather he has shown how politics has shaped the life of ordinary people, the life of rural peasants, fishermen and urban destitute. Elias also expands his reality beyond the conventional outlook and intellect and shows all the evidences of subalterns' history by identifying that national bourgeoisie used their epistemological power along with politics and religion to subjugate the subalterns. His representation of peasants, fishermen, urban destitute on the one hand and gendered subalterns like Kulsum, Fuljan and *Jummoner Maa* on the other presents before the readers a counter narrative that contests against official history which obliterated the role subaltern played in history. In my work, I will demonstrate how Elias has re-presented the active life of the subaltern by re-narrating colonial and post-colonial history.

Chilekothar Sepai: Haddi Khijir and his revolution

A functional change in a sign system is a violent event. Even when it is perceived as “gradual” or “failed,” or yet “reversing itself,” the change itself can be operated by the force of a crisis. What Paul de Man writes of criticism can here be extended to a subalternity that is turning things “upside down”. “In periods that are not periods of crisis or in individuals bent upon avoiding crisis at all cost, there can be all kinds of approaches to the social. But there can be no insurgency.” Yet, if the space for a change had not been there in the prior function of the sign-system, the crisis could not have made to be change to happen. The change in signification-function supplements the previous function (Spivak , 198).

Spivak’s approach to the history of the subaltern insurgency as a functional change in the sign system is an approach that expands and deepens the Marxist approach of the subaltern historians to include women, as well as rural peasants and the urban proletariats in literature. However, the novel *Chilekothar Sepai* explores a violent historical event of the Mass uprising of 1969ⁱ where Elias represents urban proletariat Khijir, landless farmhand Chengtu, house maid Jummoner *Maa* and Khijirer *Maa* who are exploited by the ruling bourgeoisie. But state of marginalization does not stop them from taking part in insurrections – local and national- and demand a better life and economical system of the society. Some of these aspects become apparent when we look at *Chilekothar Sepai* itself.

Chilekothar Sepai narrates the condition of Dhaka in 1969. Osman, a 27 years old alienated office clerk, wakes up in the morning after dreaming his father's death. After getting up from sleep he comes to know that his neighbor Abu Taleb was shot dead by military policemen. Osman, dead Abu Taleb's family and Rahmatullah *Mahajan* live in Rahmatullah *Mahajan*'s old three storied building behind which a slum and a ricsshaw garage is located. Haddi Khijir is an inhabitant of the garage where in a small room, he lives with his wife and step son. Khijir is one of the main characters of the novel. He is a tall and anorexic young man of early twenties who was raised up in Rahmatullah's garage and is married to *Jummoner Maa*, an abandoned woman. He does not know his father's name even. People call him *Haddi*ⁱⁱ Khijir because of his visible ribs. Elias introduces Khijir in *Chilekothar Sepai* this way : AvjvDwłłþbi ꜥcQþb XyKj nvwÇ wLwRi| AvjvDwłłþbi KþqKwU wiKkv `ywU ˆzUvþii †Lvþkvbv Kivi fvi wLwRþii Ici| GB †jvKwU Lye j¸^v Zþe Zvi bvþgi AvþM DcvwawU AR©b KþiþQ Zvi Awˆ'me©ˆ ^ †`þni Rb" Zvi nvþZ memgq ˆœz W^vBfvi | c-vqvi _vþK (7). Osman meets Khijir when he goes to the dead Taleb's house. He finds Khijir very active in the procession, in the meeting and everywhere. When university students come to take Taleb's dead body for the procession against Aiyub Khan Governmentⁱⁱⁱ, Khijir takes side of the students and starts giving slogans until *Mahajan* stops him. However, Osman goes to office by ignoring the strike and finds the same enthusiasm among the street children like Khijir against the military government. More interestingly, after reaching office, Osman comes to know that almost all lower ranked employees decided not to come to the

office. Not only fourth class employees but many of the rickshaw pullers, drivers, porters have joined the strike as well. Officers, most of whom have come to the office to save their jobs, find the situation bemusing. Elias illustrates the situation in this way, “GKRb e†j, Lvwj wclb†i K_v ej†Qb †Kb? wiKkvlqvjv, evm KŪ^av±i, W^avBfvi, Kzwj-G†i †ZRUv †L†Qb? Av†i AvBDe Lvb †M†j †Zv†i jvfUv wK? †Zviv wgwbovi nwe? bvwK wd†i G†m GB †Pqv†i emwe?Ó(17). The involvement of the subalterns becomes clearer when Kamal, a colleague of Osman informs: Ó†- úkvj -vg Gwiqv| e˘vUv†i KvR Kvg †bB †Zv, †ivR cÖ†mkb †ei K†i| cywj†ki Mvwo †L†jB wXj †Qv†oÓ(19). Curfew, strikes by the agitators, processions, meetings- all turn Dhaka into a city of insurrection. People’s agitation against the government becomes more violent day by day. Angry mob torches Muslim League^{iv} office in Gulistan. Khijir also takes part on that torching actively. He becomes obsessed with the movement, as if his entire existence is at stake. He violets the curfew and does not care of driving and rickshaw pulling for his earning. Khijir also protests *Mahajan* aggressively and gives slogans against *Mahajan* in the meeting of rickshaw pullers organized by Awami League^v leader Alauddin. Yet Khijir continues his fight against both military government and *Mahajan*. Finally, one day in the middle of that insurgency when Khijir is taking part in the procession by violating the curfew, one bullet takes away Khijir’s life. Khijir’s role in the novel does not end by his death. The dead Khijir emerges as more powerful than the alive, alluring Osman out of his attack and instigating him to join the movement. At the end of the novel Osman breaks free from his shackles, leaving behind his middle class bondage and alienation.

Another story which runs parallel to the one discussed above and lies in the heart of rural Bengal. Elias takes us to the bank of Jamuna River through the visit of a leftist politician named Anwar. Having been instructed by his party, Anwar goes to his ancestral village to see with his own eyes the oppression of the rural people by the landlords. After reaching to the village Anwar comes to know that oxen and cows are often stolen from the village and especially landless peasants' oxen. Anwar does not understand the village politics yet he understands that the micro politics of the village has a far reaching effect in the society. Here he comes close to Chengtu, a local peasant and a resistant of Khaibar Gazi's act. This young Chengtu is inspired by Ali box, a local communist leader who has established a mass tribunal in *Sinduriar Char*. The local people of Chengtu's village also get together for collective resistance against Khaibar Gazi and his pupil under the leadership of Ali Box. *Jotdar* Khaibar Gazi oppresses people for long especially peasants and *Borgachasi*^{vi} in many ways. Now he steals peasants' oxen and sells those to the East of the Jamuna River. If someone can reach to the *Dakatmarar Char* to get back of those stolen cows from the *Khoar*. Some how Ponchar Baap, a local resident has reached to the *Khoar* with the money but he could not return alive from there. His dead body was found by the people. This is a common scenario in that area. That is why the young people have organized for a collective resistance. Chengtu makes his vow against Khaibar Gazi and Hossen Ali while Chengtu's father is very obedient to the *jotdars*. But Chengtu is not as good as his father. He argues with his father: ÒfvZ †Zvgvi N‡i D_‡v‡"Q? nvgvK R‡ev Ki‡j wgqviv †ZvgvK fv‡Mi avb †ewk w` ‡evÓ? (99). Chengtu is not afraid to resist the oppressors as he does not have anything to lose. He says: Ònvgv‡Mvi Avevi wec` wK? nvgv‡Mv‡i Rwg bvB, wRivZ

bvB, Ni bvB, wfUv bvB, avb bvB, gwiP bvB- wec` wem` ^v` n†j nvgv†Mvi †bvKmbv wK?Ó (109). So, one day they attack Hossen Ali in *Dakatmarar Char* and set him on fire. They also set up a mass tribunal to punish Khaibar Gazi but somehow Khaibar Gazi manages to escape when the Awami League leaders come to the village for meeting and appeal for unity. They appeal to the villagers to work under a single leadership and for one single national demand in the name of nationalism by ignoring the local peasants vow and resistance against the local oppressors. In this way, the collective resistance of the local people of Jamuna area is shattered by nationalism. At the same time Chengtu's dead body was found in the rice field who used to agitate local peasants and farmers against their oppressor Khaibar Gazi.

One can notice two different but connected issues arising from *Chilekothar Sepai*- issues that will be discussed in some detail: the idea of Elias's representation of the subaltern and the idea of counter narrativization of history. In *Chilekothar Sepai*, Elias narrates the struggles and compromises of both urban and rural subalterns and show their life and contributions in the mass uprising of 1969 and in local insurgency. But the simple on going life of the subalterns are not kept apart from the narratives by the novelist. We find not only the agitation of Khijir and Osman but their normal everyday lives. Elias's portrayal of Khijir's activities on Eid day is also very important to comprehend the subaltern's life. *Haddi* Khijir and Chengtu fit well into Spivak's typology of "Subaltern" because of their positions in the society economically, socially and politically. In fact, Elias goes beyond the Spivakian definition of the subaltern. Unlike Spivak's subaltern, Elias's subaltern characters are not only revolutionaries but

also members of the common with pain, sorrow, happiness, fault, hypocrisy, disgrace and abomination. Elias's subaltern characters are endowed with ambivalence – limited but gifted with revolutionary potential. For instance, Elias's Khijir is both a revolutionary and a thief. Yet Khijir attracts readers' attention for his brazenness and fearless pursuit of freedom from oppression. Here Elias's attempt is not to portray Khijir as a noble character but to re-present him as he is in the society. However, representation for Elias is not a matter of presenting points of one's character but an out-come of the reality that compromises with other things –the totality. In this regard Elias himself mentions in his biographical article "Atnokothon":

Avwg reality-i †fZiUv †`L†Z PB| Avwg Avgvi †Kvb idea Gi Dci Pvw†q w`†Z PvB bv | †mUv n†e wishful thinking Avi wishful thinking is a thing I am the last person to go with. ... Avwg GKUV B†"&Q †K ev` —eZvi Dci Pvw†q w`†Z cvwi bv| †hgb Avgvi nvwÇ wLwRi, li msMÖvg Av†Q, mijZv Av†Q, †m Pzwil K†l, Af^a Ges iMœ| gvby†li Pig wec†`i gû†Z©, hLb Gi ` †x†K gv` —vbiv Ki†Z wb†q hv†P&Q ZLb| †m passenger Gi Kv†Q fvov PB†Q| Avwg Zv†K fv†jv | Pig Lvivc me wb†qB †`wL Ges Avgvi g†b n†q†Q GBme wgwj†B wLwRi A†bK e†ov |(Kamran 23)

Thus, Elias represents the case of Haddi Khijir and other subalterns without any personal involvement, without claiming to be a representative of their politics. In *Chilekothar Sepai* through the character Khijir, Elias mentions that just because some one is poor/ subaltern, he is not innocent. When Khijir constantly abuses *Jummoner Maa*, we understand his disgraceful manner. When Khijir sighs as he could not cheat Mahajan's 3 taka on Eid day, we observe his greed for money like a normal human being. In many

occasions he steals *Mahajan's* money. He cheats other rickshaw puller on Eid day, Elias depicts this incident in this way: ÒwiKkvlqvjvḑ`i KvQ ḑ_ḑK Av`vq Kiv cqmv GLḑbv Zvi KvḑQ iḑq ḑMḑQ, 1Uv Av` Z UvKvi ḑbvU, 1Uv Avaywj, 1Uv wmwK... mKvj ḑejv wiKkvlqvjvḑ`i KvQ ḑ_ḑK cvlqv cqmv ḑ_ḑK nvZvḑbv wZbḑU UvKvi ḑewki fvMB nvZQvov nḑq hvq wLwRḑii gbUvB Lvivc nḑq ḑMjÓ (41). Khijir also can not tolerate the idea that Jummon will live with them despite his own experience with Faalu *mistri*. At the beginning he has to endure Jummon. Khijir's enthusiasm on Eid day evaporates as soon as Jummoner *Maa* wants to see her son. He utters with anger, ÒgvMxUv Zvi ḑQḑji K_v GKevḑi f~ḑḑZ cvḑi bv| Q`vgiv Gḑm ḑZv Zvi NvḑoB coḑe| IUvḑK mvjvḑe ḑK? ḑQḑji Rb` GZB hLb Uvb ḑZv H Kvgi`wḑḑbi Ni KiḑjB ḑZv cviḑZÓ (49). Like his own step father, Khijir also misbehaves with Jummon and Jummoner *Maa*. Khijir is selfish and unsymptomatic too. When he goes outside in curfew he observes and enjoys people's misery. He recounts an incident humorously to Osman: ÒH jvj evvoi bq vfvovBUv mveḑi GK nvjvq wgwjUvwi Kvb aBiv DV em Kivq| ... nvwmi `gḑK wLwRi Mwoḑq cḑoÓ (234). The fact that Khijir enjoys a middle class 'gentleman's' humiliation is a reminder of his directionless class antagonism. When Osman shows anger and rebukes Khijir for this attitude, Khijir pragmatically explains: ÒAv:! P`vḑZb K`vjvq? Kvidzi gBḑ` Avwg GKjv wgwjUvwii evjUv wQoevi cvi`g?Ó (235). What is fascinating about Khijir is despite all his flaws, he is able to detect the source of his social and economic marginalization and confront it head on. Thus, Khijir emerges as a subaltern who is not represented by someone else but who is able to sties his own canoe.

Now the question as to why Khijir wants the downfall of military government along with those street children? Do they have any political aim or ideology

behind this aspiration? If the Aiyub Khan government falls, what would be the benefit of these street children who actively participate in the strike on the street? Why the slum dwellers join procession against the government and throw blocks of bricks at the police vehicles? And why does Chengtu try to resist Khaibar Gazi and Hossen Ali Fakir's torture? To get the answers of these questions we need not make any sociological and psychoanalytical analysis. We find the clear answer of these questions through Khijir's aspiration for the downfall of Aiyub Khan Government and Chengtu's vow to take revenge against Khaibar Gazi. The life long material and social exploitation of this group of people who are defined as subaltern by Spivak and Gramsci and who are susceptible to ruling class's exploitation, give them the audacity to raise against their oppressors. Khijir's involvement in the mass revolution is symbolic as he believes that the downfall of the military government will bring a far reaching effect for him and for the society. He hopes for a social change and that is why he joins the insurgency. Khijir's insurgency is not only against the military rule but also against the *Mahajan* who exploits him, his mother and tries to exploit his wife. *Mahajan* and Aiyub Khan Government are synonymous to him. Khijir's resentment and the against both these oppressors is not the outcome of sudden rage. Military government has exploited Bengali nation economically and politically for long, while *Mahajan* has been exploiting Khijir and others since independence. Khijir's resentment against *Mahajan* is an effect of the systematic exploitation of Khijir's labor on the one hand and his social relations on the other keeps him in the economic periphery. Not sure about his birth, Khijir grows up in Rahmatullah's house, watching up his mother is abused by the owner of the home. When Khijir turns twenty, Alluddin's garage becomes his shelter. He does not belong to any

particular occupation; sometimes he is a rickshaw puller, sometimes a scooter driver and sometimes just the caretaker of Rahmatullah's garage. Both his mother and wife are victims of *Mahajan's* perversion. Leaving Faalu Mistri, Khijir's step father who tortures and torments his wife, Khijir's mother goes to Rahmatullah's house to work as a house maid. Rahmatullah takes advantage of her destitution and she becomes pregnant. Afterwards she dies due to illegal abortion arranged by *Mahajan*. In a way, *Mahajan* kills Khijir's mother after fulfilling his sexual appetite. *Mahajan's* wife, vaguely aware of this incident, blames her husband for this killing in front of teenage Khijir: Ònvweqv †`vR†Li gB†`l †Zvgvi RvqMv nB†ev bv Avljv†`i evc! wK LvlqvBqv w`wQjv KI †Zv? †Zvgvi Av†LivZ bvB?Ó (43) But *Mahajan* tries to avert his role in her death by blaming Khijir's mother for the incident: ÒLvivc gvBqv gvbyl, Kvi j†M AvKvg DKvg KBiv c`vU evavBqv em†Q, Anb c`vU LmvBevi wMqv GB gwmeZ, Lvovl bv PvKi, evKi, †WivBfvi, DivBfvi e`vKwU†i Avwg ai`gÓ (ibid). *Mahajan* further abuses Khijir as he does not know his fathers name: Ò†cvjvq wK †d†ikZv? gv†qi Kvievi †cvjvq Rv†b bv? G†i wRMvl †Zv, ev†ci bvg KBevi cvi†ev? wRMvl bv! (44). This incident haunts Khijir till his death. He knows his mother was once exploited by Rahmatullah *Mahajan* and now he notices that the same person is trying to exploit his wife. Bazlu's wife teases Khijir by telling: ÒeyBov GKw`b hvi j†M ûB†Q Anb ai†Q Zvi †cvjvi eD†il `yBw`b ev†` GB gvMxi †cvjv†i w`qv MZi wUcv†q jB†ev! K†Zv †`Ljvg Avi K†Zv †`LygÓ (155). Faced with direct exploitation on the one hand and economic marginalization on the other, Khijir grows impatient to uproot both these injustices. That is why Khijir and other likes him join in the mass insurgency of 1969 with the aspiration for new days where there will be no oppression and no Rahmatullah *Mahajan*.

Like Khijir, Chengtu is also involved in an uprising. But this uprising is not a part of the urban movement known as uprising of 1969. It is a peasant movement against the local landlords and *Jotdars* who exploit the landless farmers. Chengtu is well aware of this oppression but his father is not. His father feels proud because Anwar's grandfather once beat him up with his shoes. But when he along with Ali Box has found there is no remedy of this oppression by political leaders, they have started to take action by themselves through a violent local insurgency which is similar to *Naxalite Movement*^{vii}. Chengtu and others can not believe in nationalistic dream, so they do consider their local problem as their own problem and say to the Awami League leaders when they come and pledge to work on a single platform: “Avc†biv wK Aviaç Ki†Qb? nvgv†Mv†i gvbyl wbqv Uv†bb wKmK?Ó (249). But Chengtu does not believe the national leaders' promises. His dream of oppressless society by discarding Khaibar Gazi and Hossen Ali is shattered by the nationalist movement. From this point of view we can say that both Chengtu and Khijir aspire for same dream of an oppressless society where there would not be any material marginalization and class struggle. However, Rahmatullah and Khaibar Gazi remain in the same place in a new guise while Chengtu and Khijir die and have effaced from the history with the course of time.

Yet, *Chilekothar Sepai* introduces Khijir and Chengtu and series of events to the readers that crisscrosses the disadvantaged people's lives and the mass insurgency. The novel does not carry any central character yet it is the story of Khijir, Chengtu and other poor oppressed people through whom Elias has written about the most important insurgency of Bengali history, 1969 mass revolution. Khijir acts as a liaison between the mass insurgency and the subaltern in the urban area where Chengtu's role exposes how

the peasants were also integrated themselves in that revolution. Anu Mohammad says, “People are keen for a change, they are dreaming for something new. Labor class people of Bangladesh never have dreamt for a change in such an immense manner” (83). It has already been mentioned that *Chilekothar Sepai* is Elias’s first novel published in 1986 and the context of the novel is 1969 mass revolution. Through the narrator’s story telling about Osman, Khijir and Chengtu, the story travels from volatile and hostile metropolitan Dhaka to the socio reality of rural area which has built up on the bank of Jamuna River- both the plots are entangled with a central issue of fighting against the oppressors. The story also crisscrosses with a certain time and context- this is a story of Osman and Khijir in the mass revolution in Dhaka. It also narrates the collective struggle of Chengtu and others against the oppressor Khaibar Gazi in rural Bengal . Elias has written the history of that oppression through his characters like middle class Osman, Leftist Anwar, urban landless laborer Khijir, landless farmhand or *Borgachasi* Chengtu, maid *Jummoner Maa*, Bazlu and so on. Elias shows through his novel *Chilekothar Sepai* that how all classes of people come to a platform against their oppressors but remain isolated for a specific goal as Elias himself states by his character Anwar, “ivR%bwZK wk¶v bvB e¶j Pvlv l w`b-gRyi gvbyl wPb‡Z fyj K‡iÓ (105). The boundaries between the oppressors and the oppressed are somewhat fluid in the novel. Khijir, over the course of the novel becomes the links that connects the various characters of the novel, including Rahmatullah *Mahajan*, Osman, *Jummoner Maa* and secular nationalist Alauddin. Eventually, through Khijir’s life and his involvement in the mass revolution, Elias tries to re-examine his idea of the role of the subalterns in the insurgency of 1969. He also tries to give a counter narrative of history by the novel *Chilekothar Sepai* and through his characters Khijir,

Chengtu and others. Khijir denies and refuses the oppression of Rahmatullah *Mahajan* along with his agitation against the Military Aiyub Khan government. Both Khijir and Chengtu's lives are examples of life long oppression, Khijir by urban Rahmatullah *Mahajan* and Chengtu by Khaibar Gazi and Hossen Ali. Khijir's long anticipation proves his desperateness for *Mahajan's* downfall. He denies *Mahajan's* autocracy and joins in the procession against the military government with a hope of Mahajan's defeat. In fact most of Khijir's revolution is against his class enemy *Mahajan*. He embraces his life as an active participant of the insurgency on the Dhaka Street because this gives him a hope for oppressless society. By the end of the novel, however which culminates in the death of both Chengtu and Khijir in two different situations, Elias demands to the readers to share his understanding of the role of the subalterns in historical events. Chengtu and Khijir's death proves that in each and every historical insurgency the subalterns have great contributions. Without their effort a revolution like mass revolution would not happen. So, this is Elias's way of delineating the involvement of the subalterns in 1969 insurgency to his readers by keeping his focus on Khijir and Chengtu who are the representers of the subalterns.

However, mass uprising of 1969 is a great experience of Bengali nation. People of Bangladesh do have experience of *Tevaaga* movement, *Hajong* Movement, Peasant movement and language movement. But the spontaneous movement like 1969 mass uprising is a rare case in Bengali history (Mohammad 83). Anu Mohammad further says that the mass revolution of Bangladesh is not a simple incident; it was a sudden flow of sweat, blood which was accumulating for long. Elias looks at this mass uprising from in depth and represents this historical moment as a counter narrativization of the history.

Along with the true representation of the subaltern life, he shows and portrays the engagement and contribution of the subalterns in the historical moment of the mass uprising of 1969. Elias shows the involvement of the subalterns in 1969 insurgency by keeping his eye on Khijir and Chengtu. He shows without the involvement of these subalterns, a successful mass revolution might not occur in 1969. The novelist through an unknown character asks, 'Ò gþi Kviv? GB wgwQj Kb, wgwUs Kb, we^awUk Avgj †_†KB †`LwQ| gþi Kviv?... ^K †Kvb wjWvi †Zv KL†bv ,wj†Z gþi bv! gi†Z nq...Ó (8). Finally, 1969 upheaval was not only a student upsurge but a mass uprising. But this is often ignored in the history of Bangladesh revolution. In political history of Bangladesh it is quite often mentioned that mass upheaval is the result of student movement and it is a political success of Bangladesh Awami League. And the unity of the mass movement broke down after the release of Sheikh Mujib (Maniruzzaman 62). But what are the positions of Chengtu, Khijir, Taleb and young children of the Dhaka Street in the history who joined actively in the procession and protested military government? They are effaced gradually from the history. Even after their spontaneous response and involvement in the mass revolution, the subalterns like Khijir, Chengtu's name are lost in some where in the pages of history. On the other hand, still Alauddin and Khaibar Gazi are in their own positions in a new phase. The office boss, who was annoyed with the undisciplined chaos of 1969 insurgency, is now busy with his elite life. Alauddin takes the position of Rahmatullah *Mahajan* and Khaibar Gazi is still in his same position. We can understand the dream of the subaltern through urban rickshaw puller Khijir's dream, and Chengtu's agitation against Khaibar Gazi. The main desire of these people was not the fall of Aiyub Khan, but an oppressionless society. In this regard Elias has tried to give

us a counter narrative of the history where he not only intends to show the revolutionary side of the subalterns but also their lives, falsity, weakness, passion, fraudulent attitude and fakeness. With all these, a subaltern is a true human being and Elias has tried to represent this whole life of the subaltern by this novel *Chilekothar Sepai*, not an isolated heroic feature of subaltern life.

Khoabnama: Tamij and his dream

Khoabnama is the second and the last novel of Akhtaruzzaman Elias. It is set in the British colonial period and narrates incidents that take place in three years before and after Pakistan's independence. Characters and geographies represented in this novel traverse two historical issues *Tevaaga* insurgency^{viii} and Pakistan movement^{ix}. The narrative space of the novel is populated by characters like Tamij, nameless Tamijer *Baap*, Fuljan, Keramat, Shrafat Mandal, Kalam Majhi, and Abdul Qader, Ismael. These characters are important because we can understand the unfolding of history by looking into their lives. Elias places his four main characters Tamijer Baap, Kulsum, Fuljan and Tamij the middle of historical events and narrates the life of the subalterns through them. *Tevaaga* movement and Pakistan movement have a great influence on the plot of the novel. By revolving around these two incidents, different classes of people such as *Jaminder*, Petty land-lords, politicians emerge in the novel. However, how these two movements influence and shape the life of the subalterns is also an important issue of the novel. Elias also narrates the struggles and compromises of the landless farmers whose

labor is exploited by local land owning bourgeoisie. In this sense, Elias's *Khoabnama* demonstrates a mature handling of questions of class, economy and politics.

Khoabnama tells the story of the people of the *Jamuna-Korotoya* region^x. To represent the lives of the people of this area, Elias observes them from a decent distance and it seems that the characters have emerged from the historical condition independently. Tamij is one of those characters of *Khoabnama*. He lives in Girirdanga village in the west bank of *Katlahar Bil*. He is a landless farmhand or *adhiar*,^{xi}. Tamij lives with his father and step-mother Kulsum, a young woman of Tamij's age married to the old, allusive *Tamijer Baap*. Both Tamij and *Tamijer Baap* are hard working laborers. They work on others' land. Despite being an ordinary landless laborer, everybody respects *Tamijer Baap*. Villagers believe that he has a connection with Munsif Baitullah and *Pakur* tree, objects of religious and cultural importance for the villagers. Tamij is more pragmatic than his father. He works and sells his labor in the rice fields of *Khiar* area. From there he comes to know about the *Tevaaga* movement led by peasants and it inspires him to become an *adhiar*. But Abdul Qader, a nationalist who is also the son of a prosperous landed bourgeois named Sharafat Mandal exploits Tamij by wheedling him to work and campaign for Muslim League. Hasan Al Zayed in his essay "Late Style as Politics" (2008) claims that Qader fits well into Franz Fanon's typology of national bourgeois who exploit the surplus labor of the agricultural laborers in the name of national liberation, a false promise never to be fulfilled. He further added that Qader's promise of land reform, that the properties of land lords will be confiscated and then redistributed among their subjects, keeps Tamij on the brink of hope (ibid). He begins to believe that if Pakistan, a separate nation state for Muslims, is established "*Tevaaga* will

be implemented and landless farmers will get two thirds of the crop” (260). When that does not happen and the bill which is supposed to confiscate the properties of the landlords is deferred, Tamij gradually comes to understand that he has no other choice but to go in search of *Tevaaga* to fulfill his dream. Thus, Zayed claims, Tamij’s journey to the *Tevaaga* area constitutes a metaphor which can be interpreted as a journey in search of a real revolution that is to come (2008).

However, *Khoabnama* requires the readers’ attention because it concentrates on the struggle of the subalterns. This novel is not at all a national allegory celebrating the heroism of the postcolonial bourgeoisie. Rather it is an ontologization of collective emancipatory struggle of unity as well as of betrayal. Thus, through this narrative Elias mainly tries to recuperate an insurrectionary moment of history. All humanitarian sides such as the poverty, pain, sex, and hope are integrated in that dream. Nameless Tamijer *Baap* dreams all night and walks in his dream as well. Tamij dreams for land and becomes a fugitive due to charge of lake robbery. Kulsum, after dreaming the whole night, sees her old husband sleeping like a dead man (15). In this way, by keeping the center of *Katlahar bil*, a narrative of dream and reality evolves.

Khoabnama, besides being a rewriting of nationalist history is also a story of subaltern life. The landless farmers, fishermen, craftsmen are the ones who dominates the novel’s chronotopic space. Tamij learns the process of farming by coming into contact with Fuljan and his father Harmatullah. *Katlahar bil* changes by time. New alluvial land awakes and Sharafat occupies it. Tamij thought he would have got that land to cultivate but he does not even get a chance to become an *adhiar* of that land. So, he runs to *Khiar* area where there is a tight fight against the *Jotdars* (petty land lord) with

the *adhians*. “A single *Jotdar* has 5000 *Bigha* land there” (44). As long as the eye sight goes, Tamij can see the rice field. Tamij becomes a manual laborer in *Khiar* area with bearing the hope of *Tevaaga* movement. He says, $\dot{O}cvBKv\ddot{a}iv\text{ }gb\ddot{a}K\text{ }gb\text{ }avb\text{ }wK\ddot{a}b\text{ }av\ddot{a}bi\text{ }(\dot{e}^{-}\dot{I}v)\text{ }wb\ddot{a}q\text{ }\ddot{t}ijMvwo\text{ }K\ddot{a}i\text{ }Zviv\text{ }P\ddot{a}j\text{ }hvq\text{ }\ddot{t}Kv_vq\acute{O}$ (20). Tamij returns home but Sharafat Mandal can not endure Tamij’s dream of becoming an *adhian*. Sharafat Mandal is afraid of the peasants of *Tevaaga* movement as he sees them as threat to his wealth and prosperity. Mondol’s elder son Abdul Ajij, a government employee, knows well about the impact of *Tevaaga* movement. So, he is very reluctant to offer Tamij any land for share cropping. He says, “ $Pvlv\ddot{a}^i\text{ }evovevwo\text{ }mxgv\text{ }Qvwo\ddot{a}q\text{ }\ddot{t}M\ddot{a}Q|\text{ }UvDb\text{ }n\ddot{a}q\text{ }K\ddot{a}iZvqv\text{ }\ddot{a}cwi\ddot{a}q\text{ }GB\text{ }\dot{v}cv\dot{v}wc\text{ }GB\text{ }cye\text{ }GjvKvq\text{ }Avm\ddot{a}Z\text{ }K\ddot{a}iZv\ddot{a}b? wLqvi\text{ }GjvKvi\text{ }Pvlviv\text{ }dm\ddot{a}ji\text{ }fvM\text{ }Pvq\text{ }\dot{y}B\text{ }fvM,\text{ }wb\ddot{a}Riv\text{ }\dot{y}BfvM\text{ }wb\ddot{a}q\text{ }Rwgi\text{ }gvw\ddot{a}Ki\text{ }\ddot{t}Mv\ddot{a}q\text{ }Zz\ddot{a}j\text{ }w\dot{a}q\text{ }Avm\ddot{a}e\text{ }GK\text{ }fvM\acute{O}$ (45). Sharafat Mandal, Kalam *Majhi* and Abdul Ajij buy migrated Hindus’ land and Tamij and others hope to have these lands for sharecropping. With the emergence of Pakistan, they dream of a povertyless society and this dream becomes bigger when the political leaders like Ismael try to integrate *Tevaaga* movement into Pakistan movement. When in Jaipur, peasants unite against *Jaminders* and landlords, Muslim landlords come to Ismael to warn him against the consequences of his action. *Tevaaga* scares these landlords because if *Tevaaga* implemented, the *Jamindari* system will be uprooted and the aristocracy will lose its grip and power. That is why when landlords and politicians get together at Qader’s house, every landlord vilifies against *Tevaaga* to Ismael. Altaf Mondol a landlord who owns 3000 *bigha* of land whines, “ $nvgv\ddot{a}Mvi\text{ }me\text{ }^{\circ}\dot{v}\dot{S}Z\text{ }Ki\dot{v}\text{ }w\dot{a}j|\text{ }Av\ddot{a}i\text{ }nvgvi\text{ }eM\text{ }^{\circ}vPvlv,\text{ }nvgvi\text{ }Rwgi\text{ }avb\text{ }wbqv\text{ }\ddot{t}M\ddot{a}jv\text{ }wb\ddot{a}Ri\text{ }NiZ,\text{ }Avevi\text{ }iwb\text{ }IB\text{ }Pvlv\text{ }e\ddot{a}j\text{ }nvgviB\text{ }cvwU\text{ }^{\circ}i\text{ }gvbyl|\text{ }BMjvb\text{ }wK$

KṭivṭMv?...IB ṭbgK nvivg lqvKṭviivB nvvgi eMṭv`viK D`ṭwb ṭ`q| nvvgi (meṭ`^všZ) Ki`v ṭdjvṭjvÓ (302). Convinced by their reasoning, Ismael changes his mind and employs Keramat to derail the movement. Keramat is a singer of *Tevaaga* who inspires the *adhia*. A homeless folk singer, Keramat works with *Tevaaga* leaders and inflames the peasants of Jaipur, Panchbibi, Akkelpur by his compositions. Ismael uses Keramat and his compositions for nationalist politics. Muslim League leader Ismael also gives hope to the peasants by telling, ÒGKUz meyi Ki, cvwK`Zvb nṭjB ṭRvZ`viṭ`i AvṭUv Kiv nṭe| Gṭmṭ^wjṭZ Rwg`vwi wej Dṭ`Qṭ`i cvkvcwk ṭZfvMvi wej | ṭZv nṭeÓ (143). In this way Muslim League leaders try to get the support of the peasants and they campaign that *Tevaaga* movement is a part of Pakistan movement and try to convince the peasants the demand for the Pakistani state is an outcome of the effort to improve the material condition of the poor. When Muslim League wins the election and a communal riot spreads all over East Bengal, the peasants assemble and demand land reform and end of Zamindar system. Their demand is evident in their slogan: “wn`y gymjgvb fvB fvB, ṭgnbwZ gvbyṭli RvwZṭf` bvB, ṭRvZ`vwi aesm Ki, ṭZfvMv AvBb cvk Kṭiv” (265). And the leaders claim, “Gṭmṭ^wjṭZ ṭUṭbbwY wej gyf Kiv nṭjv, Rwg`vwi Gṭevwjm Avi ṭZfvMv AvBb GKB mṭ½ Kiv nṭeÓ (ibid). By seeing the big victory procession for the independence of Pakistan Tamij thinks that *Tevaaga* will be implemented. He also joins the procession and chants slogan on behalf of Pakistan and *Tevaaga*. Tamij and others also hope that there will not be any *Zamindari* system in Pakistan. After being released from jail, Tamij again goes to the lake/bil for fishing. He is defiant as he thinks that in Pakistan *Jaminders* are redundant. He says, “cvwK`—vṭbZ Avevi Rwg`vi Avi jvṭqṭeK ṭcvṭQ ṭKUViÓ (297). He does not know that Kalam

Majhi, who was a fisherman before, has slipped into the shoes of the *Jaminder*. Again problem occurs when Tamij does not listen to the new owner of the lake and starts fishing there. He does not understand the rationale behind Kalam *Majhi*'s control. That is why he asks Kader, *ÒAvç†b bv KwQ†jb Rwgí Dci eM©v`v†ii nK Kv†qg Kivi AvBb cvk Kiv nwe? dzjRv†bi evc†K Avcbvi evc Rwg _`vKv DVvq K`vsKv KwiÓ* (336). So, could Tamij and others fulfill their dreams? Rather it creates a new myth, a new environment of oppression. When Tamij and others want the outcome of *Tevaaga* movement as an assembly bill, they get answers from the leaders: *“G ai†bi GKUv K_v wQ†jv wKŠ‘ Gevi G†m^w†jZ eM©v`v†ii K_v ev` w`†Q”* (336). That is why he left home in search of *Tevaaga* with a new spirit.

Finally, I would like to say that *Khoabnama* is not a novel about an individual with time. History for Elias is collective. Elias's characters emerge out of a collective resistance; thrive in explosive junctures of the revolutions. The novel *khoabnama* is not about any individual or society, yet it is a preparation to find out the dream and life of several Tamij. So, Tamij's dream is not an individual dream rather it reflects and represents the collective dream of thousands of people like him. Tamij is the last person in *Khoabnama* who dreams. In his dream, there is no past like his father and Boikuntha; there is no mythical figure like Munsí or Vobani Pathok, no feelings of mystery. He knows his dream has shattered, yet he waits and dreams for an exploitationless society in future. He hates those rural exploiting class who are delighted and rejoiced on the hope of Pakistan. In this way with the hope, dream and life of Tamij, Elias shows the rotation of 40 years of political agenda within the village life, recycling of class relations, and the saturation of party culture in social phenomenon. He also tries to represent the subalterns'

lives and their role in historical event in *Khoabnama* by portraying poverty, oppression, people's belief in myth etc. In this regard, Tamij and his dream play a pivotal role to understand the lives of these subalterns.

Nonetheless, we must admit that *Khoabnama* is not a novel about *Tevaaga* movement. Yet, this particular historical movement gives us the idea how the dream of the subalterns has been betrayed by the national bourgeoisie. Tamij dreams of a classless society by joining the *Tevaaga* movement and witnesses its failure because of the betrayal of people like Ismael, Kalam *Majhi* and Abdul Qader. That is why he again looks for a new path. Though his fate is not clearly shown but we can understand that there is no possibility of his return. His legacy stays alive through the dream of his daughter Sakhina.

Representation of the gendered subaltern: Kulsum, Fuljan and Jummoner Maa

In the classic Marxist theory of labor, there is a sexual division of labour between productive labor and reproductive labor (feminine) which is based on an essential notion of sexual difference. This sexual division of labor is conventionally devalued and ignored the material specificity of women's domestic work, including childbirth and mothering, because these forms of work directly do not produce exchange value of money. In *Chilekothar Sepai*, however the character *Jummoner Maa* signifies how a subaltern woman's reproductive body is employed to produce economic value. *Jummoner Maa's* labor in Mahajan's home to support Khijir effectively reverses this

traditional sexual division of labor between men and women. On the other hand, in the novel *Khoabnama*, Fuljan's hard work in her father's paddy field is also unrecognized as she is an abandoned woman. According to Spivak, (1987:252) woman's employment as professional worker crucially invokes the singularity of gendered subaltern. In this manner, *Jummoner Maa* and Fuljan both problematize the male-centered definition of the working class subject.

In *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai*, Elias articulates the histories and struggles of subaltern women with a political commitment. Both the novels highlight the particular social oppression of the subaltern women in the context of pre/postcolonial nationalism. For instance, in *Khoabnama*, we find two female characters who are subalterns- Kulsum and Fuljan. Kulsum is the grand daughter of Cherag Ali *Fakir* and the second wife of Tamijer *Baap*. She holds the characteristics of *Fakir*, fishermen, peasants and women. There is an illusion in Kulsum's character. But the other woman character of the novel Fuljan is very strong character. She is an abandoned woman who constantly gives her labor to her father's land yet does not get any recognition of her labor. She emerges as a beloved of Tamij and gives him inspiration. The love between Tamij and Fuljan creates cogitation in the society in the distinction of fisherman and peasants. On the other hand *Jummoner Maa* in *Chilekothar Sepai* is also a very important character. She is a house maid in Rahmatullah's house and married to an urban laborer Khijir.

Both *Jummoner Maa* and Fuljan's reproductive body become a matter of economical exploitation. *Jummoner Maa* is exploited by the *Mahajan* while Fuljan's constant labor on his father's land does not get any recognition as she is an abandoned lady. On the other hand, Kulsum remains a silent figure in the novel *Khoabnama* while

we find the articulate subaltern women's agency and resistance through the character Fuljan and *Jummoner Maa*. In fact Elias has shown multiple female characters to illustrate gendered subaltern and their role in patriarchy and society. Yet, along with presenting the life of the farmers and urban laborers, Elias presents the oppressed women in the society. Women have got importance in Elias's novel like any other oppressed class of the society because they are also subjugated by the patriarchal, male dominated society. That is why the economical and physical exploitation of the women have got emphasis in illustrating the life of the gendered subaltern in Elias's writings.

However, Elias's women characters are not showcased as merely beautiful ladies. Rather he portrays them as strong women but often exploited by the ruling bourgeoisie and of patriarchy. Elias's character *Jummoner Maa* in *Chilekothar Sepai* is exploited physically like her mother in law Khijir's mother. But when Tamij in *Khoabnama*, is involved with his step mother in a sexual intercourse, this is not overlooked by the novelist. Neither the subaltern's physical relationship nor their sorrow and pain are over emphasized by Elias in both novels. Somehow, he re-presents them as they are in the society. So, from this point of view Elias's gendered subaltern are not naïve or innocent but they are powerful with their voice and attitude. However, Fuljan in *Khoabnama* is much stronger than Tamij; she works more than Tamij in her father's paddy field. *Jummoner Maa* is also vocal and strong in taking her decision.

None of the women characters of Elias are beautiful. Elias's women characters are not narrated as beautiful show cased lady. Elias does not create them as very beautiful women. Elias describes *Jummoner Maa* as “ Ryᳵᳵbi gv Kᳵl mvevb Nᳵl gyL ayᳵq ᳵmœv-cvDWvi ᳵgᳵLᳵQ| Zvi fv½v Mvᳵj bKkvUvB cvᳵë ᳵMᳵQ, Zvi Kvᳵjv

iþOi Dci cvZjv QvB iþOi Avfv, wKš‘ Ryᄁᄁbi gvþqi Zx² I QyPvþjv KÉ⁻ ^þi GB
 gy»Zv †XþK hvqÓ (47). On the other hand in *Khoabnama* Elias describes Kulsum’s
 physical beauty in this way, “ þQvU †Mvj AvqbvUv Wvb nvþZ wbþq Kzjmyg wbþRi
 gyþLi Wvb w`þK, GKevi ev w`þK wPeyK †þL| `yB Mvþji gþa” †Zgb dvivK bvB,
 kixþii k`vgjv is Mvþj d`vKvþk nþq GþmþQ eþj wbþRi gyLUvþK cÖvq dm©vB
 þVþK| wUþKvþjv bv nþj| bvKUv Zvi DPzB, mvgþbi w`KUv GKUz eþovÓ (17). And
Khoabnama’s Fuljan is physically disabled. Jummoner *Maa* work in Rahmatullah’s
 home with a hope that *Mahajan* will make a good fortune for his son Jummon. Jummoner
Maa and Fuljan both are laborers, one gives her labor as a domestic help to other’s house
 and other gives her labor on her own father’s rice field and home. But both’s labors are
 unrecognized in the society as a means of productive labor, Elias shows this subtly.

Thus, through the characters of Elias’s novel we have found the social
 culture of the subalterns. For instance, unnamed Jummoner *Maa* has been married twice
 which is a frequent phenomenon in the life of the subaltern and often is seen in the
 society. On the other hand teen-age Kulsum is married to old Tamijer *Baap*, and Fuljan is
 involved in extra-marital relationship with Tamij in an open field, which are not
 uncommon matter in the subaltern’s life. These incidents are illustrated by Elias not to
 humiliate these people but to give a true picture of the subaltern’s life and society.

How patriarchy is involved in the lives of the marginalized people we
 understand that in the narration of Kulsum’s life as well. Kulsum is dominated by her old
 husband and his step son. Elias illustrates this patriarchal domination through this lines: “
 Zv ZwgþRi evþci mvbwKi Wvþj GKUzLvwb QjþK coþjv †gþSþZ| bv Avi wKQy cþo
 wb| ZvþZ gvbylUvi ivM Kx! Zovs Kþi jvwdþq DVþjv fvZ †Qþo, Zvici ii“ nj

mvUvmvwU, Ô ZzB nvgvi fv†ZZ cvl w`Q? GB bvcvK fvZ nvwg GLb gy†LvZ Zzwj K`vsKv Ki`v? m†½ m†½ IB Gu†Uv nv†Zi wKj co†Z jvMj Kzjmy†gi wc†VÓ(19). In the way a petty bourgeois like Kalam *Majhi* tries to capture Kulsum is also significant to understand the position of woman in the society. As long as Kulsum's husband was alive, she is secured. Her old husband's death is the starting of her unsecured life. Keramat and Kalam *Majhi* try to take the advantage of the absence of Kulsum's guardian. Kulsum's life is immobile too like any other rural women of the society; Elias did not overlook this as well. All kind of conservativeness keeps women like Kulsum immobile, dark and deaf. This immobility is part of poor landless subaltern women's life. When Tamij tells his story of Khair area, rail station, landlords, and many things Kulsum feels of the outside world for the first time of her life. Through the character Kulsum, Elias gives us a true representation of the gendered subaltern whose voice is not heard. When Kulsum asks about the war, what is the relation of war and *Jotdars*, Tamij remains silent, and he starts another story by neglecting Kulsum's passion to know about *Tevaaga*.

From this point of view we can come into a conclusion that Elias's women characters are those oppressed people who are in the center of social, economical and patriarchal domination. Yet, he represents them not only as an oppressed class but he demonstrates their insecurity and in the society by the character *Jummoner Maa* as she says to his her husband Khijir when he proposes her to leave *Mahajan's* house: "Av†i evev! gi†`i jvnbv K_v KBjv GKlvb! gnvR†b Avgvi †cvjv†i wiKkv KBiv w`†ev| GB,jv QvBov †Zvgvi wmbvi gB†`" wMqv QycvBqv _vKzg, bv? Zvl †Zv Lvuj nvwÇ KqLvb Av†Q| H nvwÇi LvPvi gB†`" Avgv†i ivL†Z cviev? fv`vBg`v gi` GKlvb!Ó (88). *Jummoner Maa* can not believe that Khijir would give her protection, food and

shelter. In same way, we find this insecurity in Kulsum's character. As long as Tamijer *Baap* was alive, Kulsum was fine in her husband's house. When Tamijer *Baap* dies, she is attacked by Kalam *Majhi* and attracted by Keramat. At the same time it is not negligible to take into account that *Jummoner Maa* accepts the physical exploitation of *Mahajan* with the hope that *Mahajan* will ensure her and her son's better future. In a way she is also manipulating *Mahajan* for her purposes by using her body. Kulsum also has engaged in physical relationship with her step son Tamij.

At the end it can be said that Elias's women characters live in the middle of social, economical and patriarchal domination. But he does not represent them as showcased beautiful lady of the society. He does not depict them as totally naïve and innocent. Rather Elias's women characters are those who prevail in the society with the social and patriarchal domination. Their domestic labour is not recognized by the family and society as well as their voice can not be heard. They remain in the social and economical periphery. That is why they are the gendered subaltern (subaltern within the subalterns)

Conclusion:

Hasan Al Zayed perfectly states that Elias shares solidarity with the masses albeit his deep skepticism about systems and socio-cultural determinisms (2008). It is true that Elias had a notion and desire to uproot existing systems of exploitation (ibid). So, he through his writing has tried to re-present the marginalized people and their lives. *Chilekothar Sepai* and *Khoabnama* are great examples of that. This positioning towards the subalterns is not a notion to represent this group of people as noble and victim rather

the true essence of the subaltern life has got importance in Elias's writing. Elias presents those subaltern characters by placing them in a historical moment to show the importance of the urban proletariat or rural peasants in a particular historical event. Though they are effaced from the official history writing, their involvement and contribution can not be overlooked. That is why Elias has taken the responsibility of representing these oppressed people and their life by his novel *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai* with the intention of counter narrativization of the history. He also has chosen to address local inequalities and oppressions of the subalterns through these two novels.

Elias has tried to capture the socio-economical reality of the subalterns through the characters Khijir, Tamij, Jummoner *Maa*, and Fuljan. Though the setting and context of the novel belong to past, does it differ much from the present scenario of Bangladesh? Bangladesh is no more a British colony, not an oppressed part of Pakistan even. 40 years of Independence has been observed. But still does Chengtu, Khijir, Tamij, and Fuljan could stand up against their oppressors? Or do their economical and social positions have changed? These questions are obvious while reading Elias. Still the socio-economical position of the subalterns has not been changed. Both *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai* have shown the pre-liberation phenomenon of the subaltern life, but after 40 years of Independence, the position of the poor oppressed people have not changed. Yet Allauddin, Khaibar Gazi, Rahmatullah, Shrafatullah Mandal are still in their position with more power. The dream what Tamij saw as an *Adhiar* (landless farm hand) is not fulfilled and Khijir's revolution for a oppressionless society is misled by the present capitalist society where the economical distance between poor and rich is more acute. Capitalism and multinational companies have taken the place of Rahmatullah and

Khaibar Gazi or Shrafatullah Mandal. But still we hope that one day Tamij and Khijir's dream will be fulfilled by their descendent Jummon and Shakhina for which Khijir has given his life and Tamij has left his home to an unknown place.

Notes

¹ *Unosoturer Gonoovvuthan* or the Mass insurgency of 1969 in East Pakistan (November 1968- March 1969) is an explosive positive revolt against military dictatorship of Aiyub Khan. The economical and political oppression of the military government on Bengali nation led people to revolt against the military rule. Imprisonment of Sheikh Mujib and 35 other political leaders is often cited as the cause of the uprising (Maniruzzaman 59). But it was not the only reason for the mass revolution; rather it had economical and social orientations.

² *Haddi* is a Bangla word for bone. Here Elias to illustrate the sickly body of Khijir uses the word *Haddi* as his body merely consists of bone. Khijir is weak and poor and his physical structure reflects his social and economical position.

³ Aiyub Khan Government was a military government which came into power in 1958 by a military *coup d'état*. The mass uprising against Aiyub regime that took place between November 1968 to March 1969 necessitated and forced this elite power of Pakistan to quit (Maniruzzaman 11).

⁴ Established in 1906, Muslim League played a pivotal role in securing an independent land for Muslims. After independence, however, League continued as a minor party. It was political party led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This party made an aspiration of a new sovereign country based on religion among the subcontinent people and gave hope of oppressionless society for the common people. Yet Muslim League looks like one "Muslim People" irrespective of class or ethnic difference, according to Kamal (331). In the pre-independence days the Muslim League concentrated all activities and energy on building a separate national identity but it did not develop any serious critique of the colonial state nor did it discuss in any of its forums the nature of the state that was to be (336).

⁵ The Awami League was founded in [Dhaka](#), the former capital of the Pakistani province of [East Bengal](#), in 1949 by Bengali nationalists [Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani](#), [Shamsul Huq](#), and later [Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy](#). The Awami League was established as the Bengali alternative to the domination of the [Muslim League](#) in Pakistan. The party quickly gained massive popular support in [East Bengal](#), later named [East Pakistan](#), and eventually led the forces of [Bengali nationalism](#) in the struggle against [West Pakistan's](#) military and political establishment. The party under the leadership of [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#), the founding father of Bangladesh, would lead the struggle for independence, first through massive populist and civil disobedience movements, such as the [Six Point Movement](#) and mass upheaval of 1969. (Source : www.albd.org)

⁶ *Khoar* is a place or custody for domestic animals. If the domestic animals for instance cows or goats ravage crop field, they are kept in *Khoar* for certain time as a punishment. The peasants or the owners of the animal have to give fine to get return of those.

⁸ Naxalite movement is an Indian revolutionary movement named after the village of Naxalbari in the Himalayan foothills in West Bengal, where it first began. The communist party CPI (M-L) first organized several armed risings of landless agricultural labourers, especially in eastern India in 1967. It subsequently developed into an urban guerrilla movement, especially in Calcutta. Its programme of terror was suppressed with considerable violence.

⁹ *Tevaaga* insurgency is a serious peasant uprising. It is historic *Tevaaga* or share-croppers struggle and movement against landlords, *Jaminder* and *Jotdars*. Most of the areas of erstwhile Eastern Bengal and part of Assam, mainly the Sylhet district were in the grip of peasant movements of variable intensity and nature in the decade preceding political independence. All these movements originated in the pre-independence socio political situation of East Bengal. This movement is popularly known as *Tevaagar Larai* and it was about the reduction of the landlord's demand from half of the production to one third (Kamal 346).

¹⁰ Pakistan movement was a movement against British rule for a sovereign Muslim country. With the birth of Pakistan on the midnight of 14 August 1947, a new state emerged in the world and liberated from British

colonialism, which was a culmination of Pakistan movement. Muslim League activists led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah who worked up for a vision of Pakistan for East Bengal Muslims failed to define the ideology of the new state in any precise terms even while they were engaged in outlining the principles of a new constitution. There was a liberal view of nationhood in Pakistan movement. Nationalist leaders termed the independence of Pakistan as “Pakistan Revolution”. The birth of Pakistan was asserted as “complete sovereignty of the constituent Assembly” by Jinnah (349).

¹¹ Jamuna – Korotoya region is primarily situated in the North Bengal of Bangladesh. Bogra is the district which built up in the bank of Jamuna and Korotoya River. The setting of *Khoabnama* is Jamuna – Korotoya region or rural village of Bogra district.

¹² *Adhiars* are the share croppers or those peasants who cultivate other people’s land. Before the crop used to be equally shared by the owner of the land and peasants who cultivate the land. But the *adhiars* mobilize a peasant movement in the 1940s demanding two thirds of the crop.

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