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### Feminist Narrativization of Patriarchy in *Swosthani Vrata Katha*

Nabraj Pandey

Tikapur Multiple Campus, Far Western University, Nepal

Email: nabrajpandey36@gmail.com

#### Abstract

The paper explores *Thulo Shree Swosthani Vrata Katha* profoundly examining its fasting process and the stories of the protagonists through feminist perception on patriarchy. Goddess Parvati, Shiva, Goma Brahmini, Vrinda and Chandrawati in the book represent all married and unmarried Hindu women living with a rooted brainwashed psychology of patriarchy. The women taking *vrata* envision the same ancient mindset of getting a husband and fortune. The old patriarchal ideology of not allowing daughter(s) get *prasad* of Swosthani has not completely changed yet. Patriarchy refers to the institutionalized system of a society wherein the father rules and controls the mother and other female family members. Moreover, it confines women within the routinized law and order of men. Thus, the paper aims to explore the status of patriarchy in *Swasthani Vrata Katha* from a feminist perspective. The theoretical modality for the study is a descriptive-based qualitative research design primarily applying Sylvia Walby's notion of *Theorizing Patriarchy* (2016). The paper collects data from secondary sources though few are collected via personal communications with Swami Ishwor Chaitanya Ji Maharaj and a social worker Madhuri Joshi. The significance of the study lies in the investigation of the patriarchal instinct of Swosthani *vrata*. Thus, the finding of the study affirms that the radical feminists critique *Varta Katha* as being full of personal and patriarchal.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, feminist perspective, Swosthani *vrata*, major and minor characters

#### Introduction

*Thulo Shree Swosthani Brata Katha* (1973), edited and published by Bombay library, is a holy book that contains thirty-one chapters, telling the stories of Hindu goddesses and gods– Shiva, Parvati, Vishnu, and others. It has been a base for patriarchy resounding on the routinized and biased convention for worshipping goddess Swasthani among Hindu women. The way goddess Parvati commenced

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Swosthani *vrata* (fasting) in *Satya Yuga* (age of truth) for marrying God Shiva has been transmitting the same brainwashed psychology of patriarchy among women even at the present epoch. Again, Goddess Swosthani, the primary power of *Swosthani vrata* and a female, offering women a boon of good luck and husband typifies a defeating mindset of woman. So, the study explores *Swosthani Varat Katha* analyzing its biased fasting process, stories, and other references to patriarchal instinct.

The fasting for Swosthani begins from the month of *Poush Shukla Purnima* (January 16, 2022, the full moon day) to *Magh Shukla Purnima* (February 16, 2022, the full moon day) with the recitation of rituals. Both Married and unmarried Hindu women take the fasting and worship goddess Swosthani for the boon of getting a husband and good luck ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swasthani\\_Brata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swasthani_Brata)). On the final day of the *vrata*, women offer each eight sorts of *prasad* (fruits, food, and water prepared for worship) to a male prioritizing husband the first, son the second, and friend's son the third. If these options get over, they flow the *prasad* into the river (Bajracharya, 2020). But throughout the book, I find no word written for allowing *prasad* to daughters.

Moreover, the text contains a disgusting practice of patriarchy. For example, Satedevi's suicide by jumping into the burning fire of *yagyakunda* (alter); Jalandhar's persuasion of Parvati; the rape episode of Vrinda by Vishnu; Shiva Sharma's marriage to child Goma; Nawaraj marrying Lawanyawati as his second wife. Likewise, Parvati—the rebirth of Satidevi—worships Shiva Lingam for receiving Shiva as her husband the second time. Chandrawati worships for her reunion with Nawaraj—the polygamous male, indicating the defeated mindset of women of a patriarchal society. Thus, all these aforesaid instances echoes on patriarchy.

On the contrary, Chandrawati spitting over the *prasad* of *Swosthani* and chiding her *dole* (bearers) is etymologically wrong. However, so far my perception, it connotatively signals the feminist reactions against humiliating patriarchy. Therefore, the study aims to examine the position of patriarchy in *Swosthani Vrata Katha* using feminist theory.

In my study, patriarchy refers to a system of family or society where men possess power, and they fundamentally deprive women of it. To be more specific, patriarchy, from radical feminist viewpoints, becomes the main hindrance to women's development and progress. Likewise, it focuses on male domination by which men dominate and control females as their subordinate in many cases (Bhasin, 2006). Similarly, patriarchy is mainly concerned with the idea of sex differences that culturally emboldens male dominance. Yet, it blocks women from their rights and makes them dependent on men. Furthermore, a male-dominant society works within a circle of patriarchal stability where men claim to be human and superior (Benett,

2009; Jensen, 2021). As a whole, feminist applies the word patriarchy to explain the power relationship between women and men, issuing a prime concern of seeking the root cause of their subordination and deprivation of their rights.

The working framework for the study is a descriptive-based qualitative research design mainly applying the feminist standpoints on patriarchy. In doing so, I use Silvia Walby's (2016) theory of patriarchy as a principal theory for the study wherein she places a spotlight on the "rule of the father or the 'patriarch' where women are under an utmost control of men" (p. 90). Additionally, other relevant theoretical underpinnings are also adequately applied in the textual analysis under the discussion section. The implication of the theory is to form a foundation for females' disposition towards patriarchy. The study uses secondary sources for the review and analysis, though I have, somewhat, managed personnel communications.

The paper divides into major five sections—introductions, literature review, methods and procedures, discussions, and conclusions. The first section provides general information on the title specification and problematic, text overview and findings, objective, theoretical vindication, sources and tools to be applied, and significance of the study. The second section deals with secondary and primary source-based literatures for review purpose. The third section deals with methods and procedures, and the fourth and the fifth sections deal with discussions and concluding remarks, respectively.

However, the critical significance of this study lies in the investigations of the fasting process and the stories of *Swosthani Vrata Katha* that has been the epitome of disparity, fear and exploitation among all Hindu women in the name of getting a good husband and good luck. It is also equally significant for finding out the reality of *Swosthani vrata* nurturing the patriarchal hegemony of Hindu ideology in the psyche of women.

### **Literature review**

The text *Thulo Shree Swosthani Vrata Katha* lacks a proper amount of studies, criticism, and analysis in English. However, some general reviews, newspaper reports, social media posts, and so on are available. In this sense, I call this a new research. However, I use some secondary source-based literature and responses from personal communications as data. A critical review of existing literature in this section intends to identify a gap in the existing literature, the prerequisite for the problematic issue of the study.

Birkenholtz (2013), a researcher of religion and gender from the USA, examines *Swosthani* highlighting her identity to understand the actual form of the goddesses (p. 198). She further argues that *Swosthani* "gradually transforms from an invisible, private, unfixed, indeterminate goddess into a visible, public, fixed,

specific, and local protector of place” (p.198). Birkenholtz compares the traditional belief on goddess *Swosthani* as ‘invisible’ or illusive with the modern belief as ‘visible’ to indirectly disclose the reality behind *Swosthani Vrata Katha*. Birkenholtz, thus indirectly deals with patriarchy. However, Birkenholtz is not firmly and directly issuing patriarchal references to *Swosthani* in her study I want to examine.

The *SOCH* Nepal states different views and ideas about *Swasthani Varta Katha* forwarding a query, whether is it “*kuruti* (superstition) or not?” and gets a blend of opinions. The majority of the participants considered *Swosthani Varta Katha* “as a *kuruti* because the procedures” of *Swosthani Varta Katha* affect women’s “physical health and mental health” (2019, January 30). This study, somehow, expresses the voices of disagreement with the fasting process of the *vrata*, although it becomes rather apparent in terms of females’ views on patriarchy.

Moreover, Bajracharya (February 4, 2020) emphasizes the reactionary tone of modern Nepali women against the *Swosthani vrata*. She authenticates such a base statement asserting that many Nepali feminists have questioned the text’s relevance, arguing it is patriarchal and sexist. Bajracharya’s reference to patriarchy somewhat addresses my stances but does not entirely convince me that the text *Swosthani*, as Bajracharya claims, is the sexiest. Iltis (1983) evaluates the *vrata* in three facets: conceptual, social, and phenomenal. She further affirms and substantiates that *Swosthani* is a very widely observed tradition. In household performances, any caste may partake. There is no “restriction on participation by male or female, young or old” (pp. 8-9). Iltis, hence, analyzes *Swosthani* etymologically. Of course, *Swosthani* doesn’t show any pore of caste discrimination and participatory restriction. However, I found her exploration has not touched upon the reference to patriarchal exploitation and imposition of the *vrata*. Contrary to Iltis, Hutt (1999) writes that *Swosthani Vrata Katha* is an introductory text for someone who “wishes to understand the ideals and constraints” that has traditional control on the lives of women in Nepal (p.126). Hutt, thus, using the phrase ‘traditional control’, to some degree, tries to show the implied reference of *Swosthani* being patriarchal, but his way of balancing it with the world ‘ideals’ keeps a gap for my study.

Likewise, as with the personal communication with Shree 1008 Mahamandaleswor, Swami Ishwor Chaitanya Ji Maharaj (the great sage and the celibate), *Swosthani Vrata* is the best *Vrata ever*. He said, going against *Swasthani Varta* and its fasting process is like going against Hinduism (personal communication, January 10, 2022). Equally, Mrs. Madhuri Joshi, the social worker of Janaki Rural Municipality ward number 2, does not oppose the fasting system. Else, being furious, she responded to my question– “what happens if a daughter instead of a son takes eight sorts of different items out of one hundred eight prepared items of *prasad*?” Her reaction to the question was:

This way, a person from another religion asks because he/she is against Hinduism. You are only observing this part. You are not observing that the power of *Swosthani varta* is on *naari* (woman). *Swosthani Varta* is the *Varta* (fasting) for respecting women rather than humiliating them (personal communication, January 15, 2022).

Both Chaitanya ji Maharaj and Joshi did not strongly agree that *Swosthani Varta* resonates with the patriarchal discrimination. Besides, they urged referring that *Swasthani Vrata Katha* is “a supreme *Vrata Katha* of Hindu which offers women a major power epitomizing the power of Goddess Swosthani, the female” (My translation, *Thulo Shree Swosthani*, p. 118).

The above literatures and personal communications show that there have been more discussions on behalf of *Swasthani Vrata Katha*, closing its routinized patriarchal practice and the showy serenity of its biased celebration. Although the studies carried out by the youth of *SOCH* Nepal and Hutt hint at a connotative reaction against *Swosthani vrata*'s convention, they remain silent in evacuating its patriarchal attribute. Thus, the presence of patriarchy delivering females' voices does not surface in the critical discussions above without yielding into a streamlined, critical curve—a gap this study proposes to plug.

### **Methods and Procedure**

The study employs a descriptive-based qualitative research design mainly drawing on Sylvia Walby's (2016) theory of patriarchy, wherein she asserts that patriarchy is the father's rule or the patriarch where women are under the rule of a male-driven society. Patriarchy brainwashes the women making them completely passive and blind. Moreover, she theorizes that it is “a set of structured and institutionalized social relations in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (p. 91). Her theory implies that *Swosthani vrata* narrativizes the rooted chauvinistic dogmas of patriarchy to encourage women to equate their position and responsibility as men deserve. The other related theoretical connectivity for the study aligns with the textual analysis under the discussion section. As this paper is research in the field of literature, it calls for a close examination of the primary data in the light of the theoretical tools. However, I used some personnel communications as auxiliary tools to substantiate my claims in review section. The evidence from the secondary data—the critical works on the primary text, *Thulo Shree Swasthani Vrata Katha*- validates my primary data findings.

### **Discussion and Findings**

*Swosthani Vrata Katha* is supposed to be Hindu's best holy book for centralizing Goddess Swosthani—the metaphor of woman, as the major power in *vrata* (fast). However, the *vrata* is unfair in its purposes and procedures. The

ultimate purpose of the *vrata* is to get good husband, his long life and good luck. But throughout the book, not a single term is written on behalf of equating women to men. Else, female taking fast, male allowing for *prasad* and becoming dominant in decision making have foregrounded. This creates a disparity between male and female. So, the fasting process and the stories relating to major and minor characters confirm that the thematic tone of Swosthani *vrata* outshines patriarchy.

### **Fasting process**

Hindu women have practiced the fasting process of *Swosthani Vrata Katha* since goddess Parvati took it in *Satya Yuga* (the era of truth as per Hinduism) to receive God Shiva as her husband. Both married and unmarried Hindu women take the fasting that begins from *Paush Shukla Purnima* (the full moon day in mid-January) and ends for *Magh Shukla Purnima* (the full-moon day in mid-February). The *vrata* (fasting) underlines patriarchal supremacy, religiously resounding on the fact that the husband becomes the “person primarily accountable to higher ecclesiastical authorities” (Stark, 2016, p.18) of the *vrata*. Additionally, it also entices me with the query– why is even goddess Swosthani supposed to assume males as more important than females and offer the women completed fasting, a boon of the excellent husband than others?

The one month long– mid-January to mid-February–*vrata* begins after the women take a fast, trim the nail of their hands and legs and have a single-time meal of the day. The *vrata* is only for women who aspire to a good husband, destiny, and long life. The primary power of the *vrata* is goddess Swosthani, the female, but she blesses women for their excellent husbands.

Similarly, the quote: “Bath early in the morning, get fresh, worship goddess Swosthani offering flower, fruit, and leaves, worship Shiva Lingam at mid-afternoon and tell one story each night maintaining a proper sequence from chapter one to chapter 31”(My translation, *Thulo Swosthani*, 1973, p. 1) centralizes god Shiva as the metaphor of masculinity. The way Goddess Swasthani inflicts women wish for their good husbands represents her inferior mentality. Regarding patriarchy, Becker (1998) argues that in patriarchy, “women are forced out of their rights and manipulated by their husband” (p.209). The *vrata* has been controlling women deifying men as gods and for women. In this sense, the process of *vrata* haunts me with the question- why husbands do not fast for their wives’ sake?

Moreover, the one-way fasting process of *Swosthani vrata* foregrounds the question: Aren’t females equally important and meaningful as men? It implies that men grip power in all the essential organization of society and rituals that women are deprived of access to such power and become obedient followers of their husbands (Lerner, 1989). Equally, why I am strongly dissatisfied with the *vrata* is because of



its ending process that evokes a grave gender discrimination nullifying the right of a daughter:

*antyama bisarjan garera prasaad jhiknu. tyasbaata roti, akshyataa, pushpa, sutra, paan, supari, sbai aath aath ka drale sagun samet afno patilai , pati nabhae, chhorolai, chhoro pani nabhae mit chhoro lai dinu, tyo pani nabhae mero falno Kaman sidda hos bhanera gangama bagaunu.* (At last, after completing the fasting, separate *prasad* and from them separate *sel roti* (a typical homemade ring-shaped rice bread popular in Nepal), *akshyata* (rice prepared for puja), flower, betel, *supari* (areca nut), etc. in eight pieces and give them to the husband. If there is no husband, give them to a son and give them to a friend's son if there is no son. If there is no friend's son, offer them to the river wishing for the completion of the purpose desired.). (My translation, *Thulo Swosthani*, p. 121)

The excerpt above symbolizes “a specific form of discrimination and a particular aspect of patriarchy– son preference, and discrimination against girl” (Walby, 1990, p. 27). This makes me curious: What if they offer the *prasad* to their daughter rather than offering to the river? Doesn't a daughter belong to parents' as their offspring? Thus, masculine preference for giving the *prasad* only to males vividly exposes patriarchy in the fasting process.

### **Story of major characters**

Sati Devi, Parvati, and Goma Brahmani are the protagonists in *Swosthani*. They obviously disclose the patriarchy and injustice. Though they represent women's power, they are objected to and manipulated by God Shiva, the image of patriarchy. Their story overshadows the collective female predicaments imposed by the practice of male-dominated ideology. Thus, they are narrativized as ideal, sacred, and obedient, eclipsing their fundamental rights and politics.

Sati Devi, the eldest and most beautiful daughter of Dakshya Prajapati and Virani, is the primary form of goddess Parvati. She refers to a woman with chastity, faith, and devotion to her husband, Shiva. The wish of God Shiva to marry Sati Devi accumulates being impressed with her beauty. The beauty of women becomes the metaphor for “fetishizing their body in a patriarchal society” (Asra, 2021). So, the extract, “*Satideviko hat vishnuko hatma sumpane thauma vishnule afno mayale chhopera sanyalsi rupi mahadevko hatma pari die.*” (Vishnu tricks Sati Devi; consequently, her parents compel her to marry God Shiva.) (My translation, *Swosthani* 4, p.56). Such masculine attributes entice women as commodities of beauty.

After getting married, Sati Devi did not oppose and reject Shiva, although he was very old, fearful, and dirty. In a patriarchal system, opposing and rejecting a

husband by his wife means questioning the religion. Sati Devi, rather than being sad and unhappy, convinces her parents of the case of marriage with Mahadev. Culturally women are compelled to perceive “gender inequalities” (Hawkins, 2013, p. 6) as luck because of the rooted mentality of patriarchy. The lines by Sati Devi clue on patriarchal society and culture:

*bahini harule deuta swami payako samjhera manma thulo dukh lage tapani budhiman bhaeki hunale afulai samhalera mero karmama estai rahechha bhanera chitta bujhain. Kastai bhay pani mera pati baba mahatarile diyaka enai hun bhanera ishwar manin.* (Despite her other sister’s marriage with deities of Swarga (heaven), she does not become sad and disappointed with her unmatched husband else, she persuades herself to believe in her own luck. Whatever attributes and conditions he possesses, she thinks that he is her husband whom her parents offered her hand, and accordingly, she accepts him as an incarnation of God) (My translation, *Swosthani*, p.57).

Although the above discussion deifies husbands, they rely on irony and implied voices of opposition against patriarchy. What feminists interpret as patriarchy is the idea that men are oppressors in a cohort in the system (Hawkins, 2013).

Sati Devi walks following her husband after seeing off her parents, keeping various sorts of fear in her, showing the fear of women being raped and kidnapped by any patriarchal male. Married women disobeying husbands and breaking the so-called *patibrata* (a virtuous wife who has made a *vrata* (vow) to her *pati* (husband) of her devotion and protection) dismantle the patriarchal ideology and compel women to adopt it as their religion. As stated in their role in *Swasthani*, men are allowed to check up women’s character, but vice versa are not accepted. The sentences deliver such a message:

*pati bridda chhan ma bharkharki purna youvana chhu, mera swami lai kasile kehi gari haran gari dustamati liera malai haran garera lai halchha ki bhanne shanka upjera vriddha patika najikairahera hiddathin. Mahadevle satideviko charitra herne ikshyale parvatko shikharma euta kharle banaaeko kuti utpatti gare...aafulaai dhairya dina birsera aanka dekhi aashu khassalin...jhatta mero karmale yastai paaryo bhanera*

*Manama dhairya liera...tyaslaai kuchole jhaari safa paarera badharin. swami jaga bhaepachhi ke khaana dine bhanera yata uti sab khojin kahi kehi painan...mahadevaka godaa muni aera basi rahin. char dinaka din mahadev jaga bhae...he paapini isree! malaai baahira chhadera aafu bhitra sutis.* (My husband is old, but I am young and beautiful. Anybody may drag me off my husband and remove my chastity. Thinking so, Sati Devi was



walking being too close to her husband. To check her character, Mahadev created a hut on the peak of Kailash *Parbat*...She lost her patience and shed tears... Soon being aware of her luck...she cleaned the hut, and searched for food for her husband but got nothing...being hopeless, she sat near the feet of Mahadev, her husband. Mahadev awoke after four days...Hey, naughty and dishonest wife! You left me out alone in my sleep) (My Translation, Swosthani, pp. 57-58).

This aforesaid patriarchal menace terrorizes Sati Devi.

In addition to Sati Devi's obedience and *patibarta dharma* (faith and devotion towards her husband), her role tilts against patriarchal convention and its practice when she disobeys Mahadev and ultimately attends her father's worshipping party as an unwanted guest. Mahadev suggested to his wife saying "tyasto hath nagara!" (She should not insist) on attending her father's party. The line "*kailash dekhi Naaradka saath lagi Dakshya Prajapatiko yagya bhairahoko thauma pugin*" (She went to attend the ritual organized by Dakshya Prajapati with the sage Narad from Kailash) (My translation, Swosthani, p, 83) indirectly echoes her revolutionary tone against the patriarchal value system. In this sense, Sati Devi's obstinacy counters patriarchy like a radical feminist who believes patriarchy is "a set of structured and institutionalized social relations in which certain men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (Walby, 1990, p.20). Therefore, I argue that the text *Swosthani Vrata* is patriarchal.

On the contrary, Sati Devi jumps into the fire of *yagyakund* (alter) and commits suicide. Dakshya disgraces her husband Mahadev, and this disgrace becomes the cause of the suicide. This connects the *Sati* System—a heinous evil in which "a widow sacrifices herself by sitting atop her deceased husband's funeral pyre" ("*Sati* practice," 2022). As radical feminist, in patriarchy, women are subordinate to their men, and their ultimate goal and worship are to serve and obey their husbands (Walby, 2016). The quote: "When she listens to the disgrace of Mahadev in the presence many distinguished guests, Sati Devi could not tolerate; she utters Shiva several times; she jumped into the fire of *yagya kunda* and died" (My translation, Swosthani, p. 86). When Shiva knows his insult by Dakshya in mass caused the suicide of Sati Devi, he vandalizes Dakshya's *yagya* (worship) and kills him. This proves that a wife, in a patriarchal culture, is the part of the husband, and bearing the husband's insult for a woman becomes like a dead alive. Thus, patriarchy "brainwashes the women making them completely passive and blind" (Silviya Walby, 2016, p.91) for idolizing their husbands.

Parvati, the daughter of Menaka and Himalaya, is the rebirth of Sati Devi. She is the originator of *Swosthani vrata* who, with the help of God Vishnu, commences the fasting process of *Swosthani*, gets a boon from goddess *Swasthani*,

and becomes able to marry God Shiva. The way she played with Shiva *lingam* (a symbol of Lord Shiva) since her childhood and rejects marrying Lord Vishnu evokes the nexus of her previous and present life. Her wish to get Shiva as her husband vividly shows the rooted patriarchal psychology of women among all Hindu married and unmarried women. This mythological impression of patriarchy is still prevalent in our society.

Walby (2016) asserts that “the biological inferiority of women makes them inferior in their capacities, their ability to reason and ability to make decision” (p.11). So, as her, patriarchal ideology convinces women as being object for men. Parvati responding to her friends as, “*ma valyakal dekhi nai shree mahadev swami pau bhani unailai bhaji raheki chhu. Aba aru kasailai die bhane ma hatyaa garera marne chhu*” (I am worshipping god since my childhood for receiving Mahadev as my husband. If I am forced to marry with other, I will commit suicide) (My translation, Swosthani, p. 116). In this sense, getting Shiva as husband indicates the abovementioned mindset of Hindu women who comprehends them as the belongings and right of their husband.

The instruction for the fasting process of goddess Swosthani that Parvati underwent symbolizes biased attitude of males. For instance, the instruction reads: “prepare *selroti, fuul, akshyata, paan, supari, teel*, etc. each in one hundred eight pieces, eat hundred pieces of *prasad* from each variety yourself, and obligatorily provide eight pieces of *prasad* separated from each variety to a male rather than a female prioritizing your husband the first, son the second and the son of a friend the third. If there are no males of preceding sorts, offer the *prasad* to a nearby river.” (Swosthani, p. 121). These instructions are full of biased and patriarchal.

Consequently, the biased attitude of Vishnu toward making Parvati a subordinate of Shiva is similar to the quote as “something else is less important than the other thing” (Cobuild, 2010, p.1559). Thus, denial to offering *prasad* to a daughter and other females indicates that women are subsidiary to men.

Goma, the daughter of Shiva Bhatta and Sati Brahmani and the another protagonist of *Swosthani* is the testimony of rooted patriarchal trauma and exploitation. Her traumatic stories reverberate how a woman, even from her childhood, gets exploited and forced to behave accordingly in a male-dominated society. At seven, the patriarchal ideology compels Goma to marry an old man of seventy years, hinting at the entrenched reality of patriarchy. Hence, I am dissatisfied with *Swosthani Vrata Katha* because none of the single sentences advocate on behalf of major role of women in the family.

Goma’s birth represents a patriarchal sensibility. “*Char din pachhi tasala bhitra hernu tes gobar dekhi kanya utapti bhairahalin, putra bhane timiharulai hune*

*chain kina bhane purva janmama timile raakheko chain*". (Look at the pan, after four days, the cow dung inside the pan will change into a daughter, but you will not have a son because you had not earned that in your past life) (My translation, Swosthani, p. 161). Feminists raise a question about God's discriminatory and chauvinistic language (Walby, 1990, p 24). Here, the word Ganesh represents a metaphor for a male, but not a daughter. Moreover, what I interpret between the nexus of cow-dung and Goma is not only the etymology behind the name Goma but also the male-driven Hindu belief that seeks chastity in females.

Goma represents a victimized woman who probably remains dumbfounded and idle even if she feels injustice and pain. The way the disguised sage Mahadev cursed child Goma for her rejection of giving him the very rice she was shortening for worship resembles how all males impose their impractical whim and obstinacy over women. "*Eh Brahmin valike! taile malai dherai bera parkhais ra antama kelaai raheka aksheta dina inkaar garis. Soon, paapist vaalike, ma tallai ahilei sraap dinchhu*". (Hey! Brahmin daughter! You kept me waiting so long and ultimately denied to give me the very rice you were shortening. Listen, you naughty child, I, hereby, curse upon you) (My translation, Swosthani, p. 165). The connotative sense of the quote above befits quite akin to the reasoning that "a girl", a female, "is treated as subservient to men and of no or little value" (Walby, 1990, p. 29). Hence, like Walby, I believe in the *vrata's* biasedness.

The context of Sage's curse upon the child Goma, its psychology among women, and its unfair and shocking practice prioritize the continuity of the evils of patriarchy. "*Tespachhi Goma chha barsa laagin taba shiva Bhattale afno patni Sati Brahmini sita sllaha garera Gomalai kanyadan din bhani thauthauma yogya bar khojna pathae*". (When Goma became six years old, Shiva Bhatta discussing with his wife Sati Brahmani, sent Brahmins to different places in search of an appropriate man for Goma) (My translation, Swosthani, p .20). This quote unravels the heartless image of male ideology that focuses on "girls' child marriage for virginity" (Monsoor, 1999, p, 167).

Equally, on the one hand, Sati Brahmini opposes Shiva Bhatta's decision of offering Goma's hand to Shiva Sharma, the seventy years old man saying:

*meri chhori testalai kasari diu, dinna...kadachit tyo atma hatyaa garlaaki bhanne tapaaailai chinta hola. ysto paapko bhar ma afno kapaalma thapauli. teslaai ta hajaar brama hatya laage pani ma kanyaadan dine chhaina. prithivima aru koi barman chhainan ki? tapaille khojna nasakeko ho? edi teso ho bhane ma khojchhu.* (How do I offer the hand of my child daughter to him? No, I will not. 'You may have worried about whether he would commit suicide. I will bear the burden of such sin upon my head. Even if I am cursed of thousands of murders of Brahmins, I shall not offer Goma's hand. Aren't

there any other Brahmins in the world? Are you tired of searching? If it is so, I will.) (My translation, *Swosthani*, p. 170).

Again, on the other hand, Shiva Bhatta tries to convince his wife. “Hey stree!...aba tettis koti devata hamro sahae bhaera aae pani sraap tarna sakne chhainan...taba sati brahimini vismaat garna lagi; aho aschrya, budhako ra balkhko vivaha bhaeko dekhnu paryo” (Hey wife!...now we cannot remove the curse even if thirty three *Karor* of deities come to support us. Then Sati Brahmini dismayed and saddened, What a pity! How can I dare to see an old man marrying a child?) (My Translation, *Swosthani*, p, 171). But ultimately, Shiva Bhatta’s decision wins. Being a woman and a mother, Sati knows the pain of child marriage and reacts against such a fearful and shameful decision of her husband. In patriarchal system “men dominate, oppress and exploit women” rejecting “the notion of biological determinism” (Walby, 1990, p.20). What Walby overshadows here jerks me that providing any decisive role to Sati Brahmini for Goma’s marriage is discriminating.

When Sati Brahmini tries to convince Goma to marry the old man, she does not oppose her mother; else accepts that event as the consequence of her luck. Such a belief among females points to “a conception of a system of patriarchy that critically mediates through imposing language, belief, and religion of male” (Walby, 1990, p.101). Goma responds to her mother, “*hey mata timiharuko kehi dos chhaina, mero kramama estai lekheko rahechha*”. (Oh, mother, you do not have any fault for such an event. Such has happened as my luck) (My translation, *Swosthani*, p. 172). This shows the defeating nature of women in patriarchal manipulation.

Moreover, after her marriage, Goma insists on going with her husband Shiva Sharma when he wishes to leave her father’s house. This also confirms the mindset that a married woman cannot cross out the wall of so-called patriarchal belief and religion. “*Ma pani swamisita janchhu, vida dinuhawas’ bhanin. janchhu bhanera nabhan ...timro puruslai jana deu, ... he mata-pita, stri jatiko tritha-brata, dan-dharma pati nai hun*”. (I also go with my husband and bid me a farewell, said Goma. Do not ask for a leave...Let your husband go...Oh, mother and father, for a woman, a husband is everything). This represents patriarchy (My translation, *Swosthani*, p.176).

Goma feels empty in her husband’s absence in her young female body. This feeling indicates emotional trauma when Shiva Sharma leaves her alone in Chandrajyotinagar in her pregnant state. It is patriarchy that encircles women within a boundary of confinement and trying to escape the boundary means disgracing their husband (Stark, 2016). The quote below transmits resonance of this sense:

*he stri! timi grabhini bhaeu, hamro gharma sampatti chhaina, aune pani kehi bato chain, garbhadhannadi karma kele gariddiula, sutkeri bhaema ke*

*kharcha garaula? esartha ma parades gaera kasisit kehi magera lyauchhu. timile afno jiu ra gharko syahar gare, roi karai na rahe bhane...esto patiko kura sune pachhi goma bramanile lacharika sath lau hunchha bhanin.* (Hey, wife! You are pregnant. We do not have any asset. And there is also no source for assets. How can I do the naming ceremony and provide with nutritious food during your delivery period? So, after begging for something from another country, I will come back. Take care of your health and home. Do not cry else, be strong...After listening to such a matter of her husband', Goma agrees difficultly) (My translation, *Swosthani*, p, 180-181).

Indeed, women bound within the tapestry of patriarchy are so weak to cross the so-called ethicality and religion. A situation of this kind instigates emotional trauma among women.

Goma lives all alone with the empty body of a widow sacrificing her youth for the sake of her son. She passes her colorless life full of struggles and predicaments.

Her trauma, to some degree, releases when Brahmin names her baby son as Nawaraj. The subsequent extract indicates the value of a son, the agency for patriarchy.

*bramanharule vichaar gari Nawaraj bhanne naam raakhe... Taha uprant tyo baalaklai Goma Brahminile arkako dhago kati, dhiki-jato gari palin... mataa! mera pita ko naam ke ho kaha chhan?... he babu! shiva sarma tera pitako nam ho, ta garbhama chhada bhikshya magna gaeka ...wa chhan wa chhainan... mata! ma kehi bhandachhu sunnu hawas--"putrasy parmo dharmya pitruddarasma nahi".* (Deciding properly, Brahmin named the baby son as Nawaraj...Goma Brahmini then reared the baby by working in someone else's home. Mother! Who is my father, and where is he? Hey son! Shiva Sharma is your father; for begging, he had gone when you were in my womb...whether alive or dead, I do not know...Oh, mother! I tell you something, listen—the prime duty of a son is to serve his father and mother) (My translation, *Swosthani*, p.182-185).

Nawaraj, at his grown-up age, feels very sad and dominated when his peers tease him saying he is a son of no father, and gets victimized by a superiority complex of male hegemony. Then, chanting '*putrasy parmo dharmya pitruddarasma nahi*' (the prime duty of a son is to serve his father and mother) he asks permission to leave home for searching his father, Shiva Sharma. The hymn creates a disparity between a *putree* (daughter) and a *putra* (son), fueling *putra* with "more power and responsibility" (Walby, 2016, p.121) than a *putree*.

Patriarchy compels widows to live with their emptiness, which makes them recount the time they passed when their husbands were alive. This sort of experience

shatters Goma with emotional trauma, as Sieff (2015) claims, “there is nobody to whom we can turn for emotional support” (p. 46). Goma expresses her emotional trauma:

*afulai dukha pareko dekhera... Mahadevle sarapeko samjhera manamanai bhanna lagin--sat barski huda sattari barsaka budha sita vivaha bhayo, ti pani bhikshya magna gaeka firenan*”. (Realizing her severe grief...Goma recounts the curse of Mahadev. She talked to herself when she was seven years of age, she was married to an elderly man of seventy years, and he did not return home yet from the country where he had gone for begging) (My translation, *Swasthani*, p.188).

Thus, Goma’s predicaments show the sordid reality of patriarchy.

### **Story of minor characters**

Vrinda and Chandrawati, the minor characters in *Swosthani*, represent virtuous and resisting characters, respectively. Vrinda’s rape by Vishnu and Chandrawati’s predicament on the shore of Salainadi forms a base for feminist to counter the ramification of patriarchy.

Vrinda, the minor character and the wife of Jalandhar, is such a righteous woman whom God Vishnu rapes to avenge Jalandhar’s ill intention toward Parvati. The succeeding reference discloses the scandalous and rapist nature of patriarchal males:

*he iswor! tapai yata aayepachhi Jalandhar tapaiko rup lieara Parvatilai chhalna gayachha...ma tyo Jalandharki istri Vrindako pativrata dharma nash parera sighra auchhu...Swami aye bahnera Vrindale paau dhoi Bhitra lagi... tyo rat Vishnu tehi baseraafno maayale chhopi Vrindako pativrata dharma nasta paridinu bhayo*” (Oh God! Jalandhar went to disguise Parvati when you came here...I come back soon after committing the rape of Jalandhar’s wife Vrinda...Assuming that Jalandhar came, Vrindah washed his feet and took him into the home...that night Vishnu stayed there and emotionalized her with love, he raped Vrinda) (My translation, *Swosthani*, p.46-151).

Both Jalandhar and Vishnu represent patriarchal males. They remark on the beauty of women for sexual contentment. Jalandhar tries to peruse Parvati and Vishnu rapes Vrinda. I interpret these actions as patriarchal violence and target to control and subjugate women, and such “male violence gets legitimized, and women experience these acts of violence as their destiny” (Sultana, 2010, p.10).

Chandrawati is the daughter of Angniswami and wife of Nawaraj, the son of Goma Brahmini. She represents one of the resisting tones of women. Although the references of not obeying and servicing her mother-in-law in the absence of



her husband Nawaraj, spitting over the *prasad* (food, fruits, and water offered to a deity during worship) of *Swosthani*, and scolding over her *dole* (bearers/carriers) are literally worst, they indirectly expose the females' shared reactionary feeling against humiliating patriarchy of the Hindu society. The vignettes unfold the confined humiliated emotions of Chandrawati:

*apsaraharule shreeswasthani parameswariko vrata gariraheko dekhe. taba doleharu he maharani! hamilai bhok lagyo, tyaha para kehi falkand pae khaera auchhu, tapi ekchhin yahi basnus...he maharani!...kehi bilamb bhayo chhema grnuhaws tapilai pani shree Swosthani parameswariko prasad lyai dieka chhau, linu hawas...he paapist ho! sewakko dharma yahi ho? tyas vratale timiharulai khana dinchha ki? maile ta swosthani bhaneki suneki pani chhaina, tyo kahaki devi ho? ke garna sakchhe?... shree swasthaniko prasad khosi thu thu gari godale kulchin ra aba pani yasai garula ki, chadai laijawo bhanin.*

(When carriers saw angels of heaven worshipping goddess *Swosthani*, they requested Queen Chandrawati to let them go there. They said they were hungry and might eat any *falkand* (fruit) if they got there. So, wait for a while here... Your highness queen!... Forgive us for being delayed in arrival. We have also brought *Prasad* for you. Here it is, please... Hey, you sinner! Is this a way for the responsibility of servants? Does that *Vrata* give you food? I have not even heard who *Swosthani* is. Where is she worshipped as a goddess? What can she do?... Chandrawati pounced upon the *prasad* of *Shree Swosthani*, spit over it, trodded it under her feet, and roared at the *dole*, ordering them to take her fast) (My translation, *Swosthani*, pp. 205- 207).

Referring to conventional patriarchy, Chandrawati seems the worst. However, in the radical feminist perspective, her opposition against *Swasthani vrata* and *dole's* (bearer's) en route delay indicates the "trans-historical oppression of women by men" (Duriesmith & Meger, 2020, p. 7).

Due to his state affairs, King Nawaraj Brahmin forgets his wife Chandrawati, marries Launyawati, the second queen, and takes coronation with the new queen. The quote: "*bidhipurbak nawaraj-lawanyawatilaai Goma Brahmini le rajyabhisek dein*" (Goma managed the coronation ceremony for Nawaraj-Lawanyawati formally) (Chapter 25, p. 202) becomes quintessential for a polygamous ideology of patriarchy. Likewise, Nawaraj is reluctant to search for his wife Chandrawati when she is unconscious on the bank of the Salinadi River. His negligence represents the patriarchal ideology that women are "forced to stay under the control of men (Walby, 1990, p.111). "*Mahakasta paera mudho jhai bhaera shali nadika kinaarma padi rahin*" (Bearing a great sorrow and pain, she is forced to lie unconscious on the bank of Salinadi (Swasthani, p. 208) exposes the instinct of patriarchy.

Further, despite his severe negligence and polygamous nature, Chandrawati's obligation to take a fast of Swosthani for the reunion with Nawaraj reveals the defeated cum inferior (Hornby, 2003, p.1296) conviction of a woman. Yet, I find it more surprising and disgusting when Nawaraj says, "*he stree chandrawati! timro mukh nadekheko aaja pachas barsa bhayo*" (Hey, wife Chandrawati! After fifty years back, I have seen your face today.) (My translation, *Swasthani*, p. 219). He, in my comprehension, utters so to fetishize the young body of Chandrawati—the passionate hunger of a patriarchal male.

Thus, the fasting process and the stories of major and minor characters affirm that the thematic instinct and tone of Swosthani *vrata* excel patriarchy.

### Conclusions

The discussion within the theoretical framework of radical feminism justifies that *Swosthani Vrata Katha* is a story of men's control over women that gets legitimized within the dominating patriarchal ideology. The discriminating fasting process, the blind interpretation of deifying husband among Hindu women, the rapist character of Vishnu, Jalandhar, Mahadev, the polygamous nature of Nawaraj, and the painful stories of Goma Brahmini represent a grave discrimination against women. Moreover, the reference to Vishnu, Mahadev, Jalandhar, Siva Sharma, and Nawaraj, throughout the stories of *Swosthani*, promoting patriarchy, guarantees the biased nature of the *vrata*. However, the real essence of Hindu philosophy is emerged with a fusion of the power of mother and father (Hutt, 2016) and is not patriarchal as written in *Swosthani*.

In line with a radical feminist perspective, the paper has found that in spite of being a central power, Goddess Swosthani cannot allow women for the modification of the *varta*. For reference, the *prasad* of Swasthani puja is not given to a daughter even if the woman taking fast has no son. This type of preceding discussion shows the defeating psychology of females in a patriarchal society. So, the study reveals that the feminist perspective on patriarchy employs the issue of son preference, the use of religion to exploit and suppress women, discrimination between men and women, the dominant role of men, and the losing psycho-socio traits of women.

Although *Swosthani* has been accepted as the best *vrata* for women, my study affirms that it is the *vrata* for continuing the powerful existence of men. The way Parvati longed for God Shiva as her husband is still in our social practice. The tradition of giving each eight types of *prasad* prioritizing husband the first, son the second, friend's son the third and finally offering it to the river if they have no son, is still prevailing in the fasting process. So, the objective of this study has been to disclose the patriarchal veil and inferiority from the mind of women and make them establish their power and role as equal to men.

It is indispensable to discard gender discrimination by modifying the fasting process and the rooted patriarchal instinct to maintain equality and harmony between men and women. Thus, the study's findings could be reference points for future studies on the issues of feminist writings in *Swosthani Vrata Katha* and similar texts for a better understanding of patriarchy, exploitation, male hegemony, and gender discrimination in our social psyche.

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