
Feminist Voice in Rajan Mukarung's *Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta*

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Abstract

Some of the poems in Rajan Mukarung's latest anthology Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta [The Night before the Market Day] (2019) are written from the feminist perspective. However, the feminist voice raised in these poems is different from the feminist voice of the main stream Nepali feminist literature which raises the issues of urban, middle class, educated upper caste women from the hills (bourgeoisies women), who aspire liberation from the restrictive traditional gender roles. Unlike the main stream Nepali feminist literature, in these poems, he dramatizes the issues of women from the margin. These are poor and illiterate women from Dalit and ethnic communities who bear the brunt of not only gender discrimination, but also suffer from class and caste discriminations. The article aims to analyze three of the poems from the anthology from the Multicultural feminist perspectives. The finding of the article suggests that these poems raise the voice of marginalized women and demand justice to lower caste and ethnic women whose mores are different from the bourgeoisies' women.

Keywords: Feminism, patriarchy, mainstream, ethnic, marginalized bourgeois.

Background

Rajan Mukarung is a celebrated author of Nepali literature. The recipient of Madana Puraskāra (2069 BS) for his novel *Damini Bhir*, Mukarung is one of the founders of the movement known as *Srijanshīla Arājakatā* (Creative Anarchism) in literature. As an advocate of this movement, he rejects bourgeois ideology of Nepali literature that imitates the social reality of Nepali society based on class, caste and gender hierarchies, and approves the culture of those who are at the top of these hierarches. From the beginning of Nepali literature (Treaty of Sugauli in 1816), Nepali literature, based on the tradition of romance, has been limited to the valorization of the winners' history. It has the tendency of worshipping the heroic deeds of the heroes who are from the upper caste hill Brahmin and Kshatriya communities. These literary texts rarely talk about the contribution of the lower caste people. Neither have they talked about the contribution of women.

Mukarung protests the main stream Nepali Literature that promotes the language, culture and tradition of one class of people who have always been in the center of Nepal socio-political system and have been the beneficiaries of the nation ("Kabyāgaudā . . ." *gha*). Krishna Khanal, a political analyst, approves Mukarung allegation of the main stream Nepali literature.

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He agrees that Nepal is a multi-cultural, multi lingual nation. But the main stream Nepali literature rarely reflects the diversity of the nation (7). Mukarung believes that multicultural aspects is the beauty of Nepali society; and its literature should provide space for all of its people irrespective of their culture and tradition. It is therefore, Mukarung portrays the life style of those people who have been sidelined by the main stream Nepali literature; and he writes from their perspectives.

The heroes or the protagonists of his writings are poor, Dalit, women and the ethnic people who have been at the bottom of the social strata and receive no benefits from the nation. Rather they have been exploited in different ways. Though the main aim of his literary creations is to deconstruct the tradition of mainstream Nepali literature and raise the issues of marginalized communities, there lies feminist tilting in some of the poems in *Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta*. But the feminist voice of his poems is different from the ideology of the Second Wave Feminism which has influenced the main stream Nepali feminist literature. In these poems, Mukarung raises the voice of marginalized women. This provides a background for the multicultural feminist study of his poems.

Problem, Objectives, and Methodology

Feminist critics protest the stereotype representations of women in literature and other cultural texts. They assert that patriarchal literature presents two images of women. One as the traditional dedicated housewife and the other as a sex object. By limiting women in these two images, these critics believe, patriarchal literature plays negative role for women's empowerment. So, to repair such imputed images of women in literature, they demand for the feminist literature that portrays independent and empowered female characters. But, the main stream Nepali feminist literature is exclusionary and does not include the issues of marginalized women. Challenging the main stream Nepali feminist literature, some of the poems in *Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta* raise the voice of marginalized women. The way he raises the issues of marginalized women has provoked me to analyze the selected poems from the feminist perspective. In the process of analysis, this article attempts to answer the following questions.

1. What images of women are portrayed in the selected poems?
2. How do the selected poems raise the feminist voice?
3. Why are these women oppressed?

The main objective of this article is to trace the feminist voice in the selected poems. For this, it examines the images of women portrayed in the poems and explain the causes of their oppression.

To achieve the set objectives, the article draws insights from multi-cultural feminism. Multicultural feminist thought recognizes women's diversity and acknowledges that different women act and think differently and their value systems also differ. Rosemary Tong, a feminist

critic defines multi-cultural feminism as a "movement that embraces a variety of marginalized cultures so that they can, at various moments in their development, coalesce to undermine and ultimately overthrow the power of those individuals who have proclaimed themselves to be the center" (214). It challenges the notion of female essentialism, the notion that the idea of 'woman' exists at some sort of platonic form that each flesh and blood woman must somehow embody. In addition, they deny female chauvinism, the tendency of some women, particularly privileged women, to speak on behalf of all women, including women whom they regard as 'Other;' the women who are different from them.

Multi-cultural feminism, thus, is in favor of a feminism which is inclusive. Barbara Smith, a black feminist writer and activist, admits that now it has become a model. Smith adds:

Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement. (49)

The Second Wave feminist failure to recognize diversity within the category of woman gave impetus to multi-cultural feminism. Tong argues that Second Wave feminist thinkers stressed that under patriarchy, qualities such as autonomy, rationality, physical strength, and fairness or justice are associated with "masculinity," whereas qualities such as connectedness to others, emotionality, physical weakness, and caring were associated with "femininity." Thus, these thinkers challenged these traits are biological givens; and believed that women had the same intellectual, physical, and moral capacities as men, and that if women were given the same educational and occupational opportunities men had, women could be men's full equals.

For the Second Wave feminists, the primary enemy of women was sexism—the view that women are unable to do what men do and are appropriately relegated to the domestic sphere. Whereas, marginalized women insists that gender-focused feminism is not a feminism for all women. Tong further explains:

Marginalized women, particularly women of color and lesbians but also poor, uneducated, and immigrant women, complained that the kind of gender-focused feminism that held sway in the academy was not a feminism for all women. Rather, it was a feminism for a certain group of elite women, namely, white, heterosexual, middle-class, well-educated women. These critics of mainstream feminism said that gender is neither the only nor necessarily the main cause of many women's oppression. (202)

These critics of mainstream feminism said that gender is neither the only nor necessarily the main cause of many women's oppression. For example, just because college-educated homemakers may seek release from their domestic duties so they can get jobs in corporate

houses does not mean that poor working women do not yearn to be stay-at-home wives and mothers. More generally, just because some women find that matters related to their sexuality and reproductive capacities and responsibilities play the greatest role in their oppression does not mean that all women find this to be the case. For some women, it is not sexism, but racism, ethnocentrism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, or ageism that may be the major contributor(s) to their low status.

Thus, multi-cultural feminists appreciate women's differences. They regret that second-wave feminist theorists largely ignored women's differences. They blame that "many second-wave feminists wrote as if all women were white, middle-class, heterosexual, and well educated" (Tong 204). Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins are among the first U.S. feminists who have taken the lead in highlighting women's differences. Lorde argues that it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. She asserts, "I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children's culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men" (qtd. in Tong 209). She explains that oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. In addition, Lorde suggests that we should spend our energy in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.

Definition of feminism, then, needs to be broadened to include the factors of race, ethnicity, class, sexual identity and age. Under this theoretical underpinning, this article examines feminist voice as manifested in three of the poems from the anthology. They are: "Māyā Bikako Colo [The Blouse of Maya Bika]" "Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta [The Night before the Market Day]" and "Hata Keka Nāyikāko Kanfesans [Confessions of the Hot Cake Actress"].

Poetics of Mukarung's Poetry: A Review of Literature

Critics identify Mukarung as a writer of identity politics. They suggest that he should be read from the perspective of identity politics as his creations raise the issues of ethnic communities. Through his poetry, Mukarung protests the main stream culture of Nepali society which is exclusionary and denies the existence of multicultural aspects of Nepali society. The main stream Nepali culture focuses on one language, one religion and even one type of dress. Academician Krishna Khanal approves the assertion of ethnic identity that challenges the main stream culture of the nation in his poetry. Because the focus of one language, and one religion as the national culture of Nepali is against the spirit of the concept of federalism sanctioned by the constitution of Nepal. He argues that Nepal is a multicultural nation and creative writers should depict different cultures sincerely (7). Khanal conforms that the ethnic poets like Mukarung and others are doing the same.

Mukarung rejects the state's policy, which he believes, systematically promotes one culture that is the Khas-Aryan (Brahmin) culture at the cost of other cultures practiced within the nation. This state sponsored Brahmin culture, he insists, manifests through the curricula of Tribhuvan University and Nepal Academy that determine the classic of Nepali literature. These institutions disregard ethnic cultures as inferior. Because of this exclusionary method of the nation ethnic people suffer from low self-esteem and identity crisis ("Kurupa . . ." 4). Thus, he claims that it is high time now for demolishing these institutions (metaphorically) and reconstructing them for making them inclusive.

To demolish this exclusionary culture of the nation found in the main stream Nepali literature, he along with Hangyug Agyat and Upendra Subba started a movement called *Srijanshīla Arājakatā* (Creative Anarchism) in 2000. The aim of this movement is to represent the diversity of Nepali culture in literature (Agyat 53). So, Mukarung's poetry depicts cultural diversity and raises consciousness about identity. Logical opinions dominate the tone of his poems. Critics identify parody, threat, anger in his poetry; the conservative critics, according to Mukarung blames them for being anarchic in literature. For the conservative critics, Mukarung argues, such tones mar the aesthetic beauty of poetry. But they accept the charge for positive as their creative writings pose a challenge to the main stream Nepali literature, and they name their movement as 'Creative Anarchism.' Sushant Gurung appreciates Mukarung's poetry for representing marginalized culture, language and religion. He finds the use of ethnic terminologies drawn from the ethnic Kirat languages in his poetry (46). This technique conflates with the aesthetic of main stream Nepali literature, and writing in the main stream language using ethnic symbols, myths and expressions creates anarchism. Nonetheless, they contend that it is creative.

Mukarung is against the rigidity of main stream Nepali literature. Different communities have different cultures, languages and religions. He questions the very notion of treating one culture as superior and others as inferior. He claims that cultural diversity is the beauty of Nepal and Nepali literature should reflect this. But that is not happening. He attacks this fascist nature of the Nation which imposes one culture as superior, and promotes the language and religion of that particular community in the name of notional identity. So, to assert the identity of different communities through the main stream Nepali language, i.e., the state imposed official language of the nation, they have to be anarchists. The main aim of their movement is to acknowledge the cultural diversity of the nation, and to raise and establish the voice of marginalized people in general, and the voice of *Kirat* people in particular. Mukarung, in his article "Pahicānako Dāwimā Kabitā [Poetry in the Claim of Identity]", clarifies that his poetic activity is to assert and justify Janajāti's identity. Along with the political transformation of the nation, from the Parliamentary Democracy to Federalism, he demands for the cultural transformation of the nation (*ga*). Strongly claiming Janajāti's identity, he threatens to shake the bourgeois concept of the main stream Nepali literature at its core.

GK Pokharel approves Mukarung's claim and appreciates the movement as a progressive one. He argues that expression of identity in terms of 'Creative Anarchism' itself is a progressive thought. He points that claim of identity, changing aesthetic beauty, cultural literature, regionalism are the features of postmodernism; and one trace these features in Mukarung's poetry (*ch*). In his article "Sāhityamā Sthāna Ko Sarta [Condition of Place in Literature]", Mukarung conforms Pokharel arguments and claims that the aim of regionalism is to assert the identity of the marginalized and to portray the pain of the deprived. Mukarung further adds that those despised ones have to claim and assert their identity (*np*). Regionalism in literature, as he suggests, is to reflect the social reality. In the context of Nepal, to represent the language, culture, social, geographical diversity of the nation is the aim of regionalism practiced by the followers of Creative Anarchism. In his essay "Patrā Sangai Gāunmā [In the Village along with the Characters]", he shares that to award Madana Puraskāra to his novel Damini Bhir is an acknowledgement of the diverse identity of the nation by the academicians of the nation (*jha*).

Indeed, the initiators of 'Creative Anarchism' demand inclusiveness in Nepali literature. Writing in the main stream Nepali language using images, symbols and terminologies from the *Kirat* language justifies Mukarung's concern for identity politics (Purushottam Subedi 46). The interference of the practitioners of 'Creative Anarchism' in the main stream poetry with ethnic conscience, in Abhi Subedi's view, makes a paradigm shift in Nepali poetry (22).

By and large, critics have interpreted Mukarung's poetry in terms of identity politics in association with the 'Creative Anarchism' movement. These critics have examined his claim for identity and demand for inclusiveness in Nepali literature; and they appreciate that it is attuned with the concept of New Nepal envisioned by the Constitution of Nepal. Nonetheless, they refrain from analyzing feminist voice in Mukarung's *Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta*. Thus, the present study attempts to fill this gap in the coming section.

Feminist Voice in *Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta*

In the selected poems, Mukarung portrays women's issues unapologetically. However, he does not replicate the female world of the bourgeois home as the exclusive sphere of women activities as depicted in the main stream Nepali feminist literature. Main stream feminism of Nepal has been influenced by the feminism of the 1970s (Second Wave feminism) which believed that women as a category is oppressed by the fact of their womanhood. This excluded the issues of race, class and ethnicity. Rege rightly points, "Since most of the vocal feminists of the 1970s were white, middle class and university educated – it was their experience which came to be universalized as 'women's experience' (WS-40). The main stream Nepali feminist literature, too, largely raises the issues of middle class women.

In her study of representative women authored Nepali novels, Indira Acharya Mishra has found that all the protagonists of these novels are educated, urban middle class women from upper caste who are oppressed by the fact of their womanhood. Frustrated from the restriction of the family, these women seek liberation from the unproductive feminine activities. Feminist fictions as pointed by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan reveal family as the site of women's oppression. But, images of women in Mukarung's poems are far different from the images of women that one encounters in the main stream feminist literature. They are neither the beautiful damsel in distress, nor the promiscuous bitch that one encounters in patriarchal literature. They are also not only loving and caring mother or devoted wife. They are the women from ethnic, Dalit and marginalized communities whose mores are different from the middle class educated women from the upper caste.

In "Māyā Bikako Colo [The Blouse of Maya Bika]" Mukarung portrays the image of a poor, Dalit woman deprived from her human rights and justice by the state. Maya Bika has been raped and murdered by her social science teacher, a man from the power. Her blouse has been entangled in the bush of *ghangāru* (1.1). It is the evidence of her rape and murder. Nobody has tried to remove it, or protest the incident. It has been thrown over the bush by the teacher who has raped and murdered her. Being helpless, her mother suicide and her father has abandoned the village. Her younger sister, who has witnessed her rape, is terrorized; she keeps on moaning and gets alarmed all the time. The family is traumatized; they have to live in uncertainty and fear, discrimination and humiliation. The poetic persona poignantly describes the treachery that fell on the poor girl:

Didīko māyāle harapala roirahnche sānī bahinī/ harkshṇa tarsinche tarsirahanche / tinai
śhikshaka jo samājika śikshā padhāuchana/ tinle didīko chātī chāmchan/ tunā cu ~ ḍāuna
thālchan/hatāsai colo cyātchana/ ra milkāu ~chan ghanghāruko jhānatira

[The younger sister cries all the time because of the sister's love/ is panicked all the time/ the same social study teacher/ played with her sister's breasts/ loosen her blouse's laces / suddenly he torn off the blouse/ and threw over the bush.] (21)

The description is heart rendering; the poetic persona does not hesitate from describing the atrocities and discordance enacted upon her. Yet, the persona regrets, "We are not affected by the event" (II. 19). No one takes the responsibility of providing justice to her. Nothing happens; neither her body is taken to the hospital for the postmortems report, nor they demonstrate and ask justice for her (III. 23-28). This reveals the seer apathy of the nation and the rights community of the nation.

Justice is denied to Maya Bika because she is from the Dalit community, who are treated as pariah by the nation. Maya's case reveals that gender is not the only cause of her oppression because when the nation's renowned barrister's daughter is raped on her way from

discothèque, the same stake holders and rights community create havoc. There are banners and demonstrations with play cards in the town demanding justice for her.

Maya's case reveals the discriminatory response of the main stream human rights and women rights communities of the nation. They remain indifferent to cases of violation when the victim belongs to the marginalized section of the society in general and the Dalit in particular. Analyzing the prevailing prejudice in Nepali rights community, Praveen Kumar Yadav, a human rights activist asserts that "the human rights movement has remained under the grip of hill-caste males. The privileged have played a role in discouraging those from the marginalized section involved in the rights advocacy" (7). Indeed, Maya's case suggests that issues of class and caste are intertwined and should be addressed along with the issues of gender.

Multi-cultural feminism reasons, "For some women, it is not sexism, but racism, ethnocentrism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, or ageism that may be the major contributor(s) to their low status" (Tong 203). Rege assumes that an analysis of the practices of violence against women by caste would reveal that while the incidence of dowry deaths and violent controls and regulations on the mobility and sexuality by the family are frequent among the dominant upper castes - Dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault and physical violence at the work place and in public (Rege WS-42). Maya Bika's case supports her presumption as Maya's sister has been left in perpetual threats.

The poetic persona is infuriated by the apathy of the society towards the women from Dalit community. Enraged by the state's apathy to redress the injustice heaped upon them, the persona urges that the oppressor themselves should be ready to fight for the justice. His call matches with Lorde who argues that it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. "Women are expected to educate men" (qtd. in Tong 209). She explains that oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. Thus, the oppressor should take the responsibility of making them realize the oppression and alter their behavior. The last stanza of the poem makes this realization. The speaker urges: "dājai,/ aba āranmā ha ṣiyā arjāpnu parne bho/ gha ṣ ghāruko jhānamā aljhirahekai cha māyā bikako colo [brother, now the sickle needs to be sharpened in the hot oven/ for Maya Bika's blouse is still entangled in the *ghangaru's* bush"] (23). It hints that they have to fight for the injustice. Unless and until they punish the culprit, the oppressor will continue exploiting them.

The poet is very clear of where his sympathy lies; he advocates justice for all, irrespective of caste and class. The way he raises the issue of Maya Bika in contrast to the issues of a girl from the elite, upper caste matches with the multi-cultural feminist's perspective. Depicting the plight of Dalit woman, Mukarung raises Dalit women's voice. He contests the main stream feminist narrative that does not address Dalit women's issues.

He provides a counter narrative for the liberation of the marginalized women from class and caste based discrimination.

Similarly, in the title poem "Hātā Jāne Aghillo Rāta [The Night before the Market Day]", Mukarung draws the picture of a typical Kirat woman who is empowered and liberated one. Her portrayal ruptures the feminine identity represented by the main stream Nepali literature. The protagonist of the poem, a Kirat girl from the rural background, unlike her counterpart, a middle class girl from the upper caste, has no restriction of mobility; she has access to the market, a public place for transaction. She is planning to go to the market to sell some indigenous food items like mushroom, pungent chillies, millet and the like. These items comprise her dream, "*ekperungosapanā* [a basket full of dreams]" (l. 2). But as soon as she thinks of the market, she becomes conscious about this modern consumerist culture that provides license to men to treat women as a commodity, and bargain for her. In the market, along with the things, her life would also be bartered. Thus, she protests the culture that treats woman, especially the ethnic woman as a saleable commodity.

In the stream of consciousness technique, the poetic persona provides random details of what will happen to her in the market. She anticipates that she will become an object of male gaze; men will look at her with their lecherous eyes. Men of different castes and age groups will try to exploit her. They are likely to belittle her; harass and try to possess her as an object of their desire. Different males, irrespective of their caste, age and occupation are sure to fix her price to barter her as soon as she will set into the market: "Binod Sāhu," "sasatra ko bhāi," "C.D.O," "L.D.O," sipāhī," "pasale dāi," "Kishor dāi," "Rāi Wkil" and others will try to possess her.

These men will bargain for the different parts of her body: "Binod Sāhukā ākhā mero chātībhari ghurirahekā hunechana [Binod Sahu will be gazing at my breast]" (2.5). The junior army personal will try to purchase her youth with a pair of shoes. The journalist will take her photo to print in the newspaper, as he assures her for she is a typical *kirātini*. The C.D.O and L.D.O. may offer cosmetics in exchange of her life. Even the oldest tailor with poor vision will try to touch her inappropriately in the pretext of measuring her body:

siyomā dhāgo chirāuna nasakirāhekā dalsin bāje/ ekāeka aghi sarnechan mero chātīko
nāpajāca garna [Dalsing grandpa failing to push a thread through the needle/ will
readily come forward to take measure of my breast] (56)

These men take her as if she is a kind of chattel property. Chattel property, in the main, is movable property— cattle, wives, concubines, offspring, slaves, beasts of burden, domesticated animals. Chattel property is reckoned as part of a man's estate. (Dworkin 101-102). The response that she gets in the market shows the remnants of this culture. However, the poetic persona protests this culture that objectifies women. She is convinced that she should fight back the licentious men who will try to touch her inappropriately.

She is also aware of the modern capitalist culture that targets women as its best consumer. She denies wearing bangles for it has no use value, as she evaluates: "phutijāncha tyo nathe kācako [useless breakable glass items]" (21). It shows her progressive outlook. Feminists like Naomi Wolf, Germaine Greer and Paula Black argue that because of the beauty myth created and circulated by the patriarchal capitalism women tend to spend their hard earned money in cosmetic and jewels. They point that women fascination to beauty disempowers them. Paula Black contests that beauty industry as part of multinational industry targets women's consumers. Now, cosmetic consumption and femininity seem part of a seamless fabric (23). To appropriate femininity women need to use these things. The poetic persona's rejection of the bangles denies this thought.

Traditionally, market is seen as a public space and unsafe for girls or young women. Thus, generally, young women from upper castes are restricted from going to market alone. But, she is a typical Kirat girl and her father permits her to go to the market for family purpose. She willingly takes the challenge and decides to equip herself to fight against the violence that may occur in the market. The voice she raises, thus, is different from the main stream feminist voice in the sense that she is ready for armed conflict to demolish the system instead of asking for reformation of the system. The Kirat girl's voice is loud and audible:

*becnu cha eka peruṅgo sapanābhari/ garnu cha saudā bholi ta jindagīko/ khikāmāchā
kī chorī / ma hāndimā kirātī / hātā jānai cha sadaramukāmamā / khurpācāhi ~bhirnai
parne bho kamaramā [need to sell a basket full of dreams/ tomorrow needs to barter
my life/ daughter of khikāmāchā/ I am hangdima kirati/ must go to the market in the
head-quarter/ have to carry a sickle in the waist] (58)*

She does not regret for her predicament as a woman; neither has she aspired for men's status. Rather she is confident and capable to defend herself. Her portrayal deconstructs the stereotype of weak women and strong men. She is the representative of ethnic women, a *Kiratini*. Since she has ventured to do marketing alone, devoid of the male relative's company, men might take her as a promiscuous woman and try to exploit her situation. Hence, she takes charge of her life and takes necessary precaution for physical defense. She is ready for armed conflict to fight against the sexual violence on women. This gesture must be read as a symbolic act of liberation. Her confidence ensures her evolution as an empowered woman.

It is, indeed, a poem written with great assurance. Yes, it acknowledges that there lies threats for women in the public space. The 'Hātā' [market] is the common space where the villagers' economic transaction takes place. It is the place where they buy and sell things. But, it is also a place where a woman is taken as an object. She becomes the object of male desire. Men in the market hunt her to satisfy their erotic urges. The protagonist of the poem is conscious that she needs to battle against these leering men. No one will come to her rescue; nor can she avoid going from the market. So, she needs to arm herself with a

sickle to fight against them. It is the need of the time; it is the voice of the marginalized women which hints that they should be able enough to fight against the probable threats.

Mostly, when girls and women are taunt, teased or oppressed, they are taught not to fight in case fighting back invites more violence. So, they tolerate and keep silent. Since they remain silent, they are routinely beaten, raped and killed. Men are often given impunity to violate a woman physically, emotionally and psychologically. Rather people in Nepali society have a culture of questioning the victims. It is the culture of impunity that allows men to harass and abuse women in public space and work places, and get away with it. Women are used to harassments and inured to it. But Mukarung rescues his protagonist from this passive inaction. Her decisions not to submit to the men's desire, not to be misled by the false notion of femininity, equip herself to defend against physical and mental violence are the marks of her independent spirit and feminist consciousness. The particular form of empowerment achieved by her participation in the public space is reflected in her successful negotiation with the male's world. It shows the modest triumph of the ethnic non-conformist girl against patriarchy.

Likewise, in "Hata Keka Nāyikāko Kanfesans [Confessions of the Hot Cake Actress]" Mukarung draws an image of a fearless and liberated woman who is renowned as a hot cake actress. The actress reveals how the modern mercantile companies exploit women in the name of glamour. In her confessions, the actress traces the history of women's exploitation. She is the representative of all women, both real and mythical, who were the victims of gender based violence. She is the "Suparnakha" of the *Ramayana*, "Draupadi" of the *Mahabharata*. Likewise, she stands for the every woman who is raped, tortured, abused and insulted in every nook and corner of the society. She is the living history of men's exploitation of women.

Most of the modern states have guaranteed human rights to women. The constitution of new Nepal also ensures gender equality. But, patriarchy has invented a new methods of domination and control over women in the name of glamor. The modern world of commerce uses renowned and glamorous women to promote the sale of the products. These men of commerce eroticize women and sell them with the products. As the poetic persona confesses, "ma jo chu hordiṇa boardmā unmata hāsirahekī / banāiekī chu dharai kā lāgi dijayara-grla [I am featured in the hording board with enticing smile/ am made a desire-girl for many]" (1.9-10). She has been postured in the hording board as a desire girl for the male viewers. The actress reveals the ideologies of domination and control that guide contemporary world of commerce. She is not born a desire girl, but she has been made one.

Naomi Wolf succinctly analyzes women's exploitation in the world of glamour: "Women are reared, and often forced, to conform to the specific requirements of ideal beauty, whatever they are at any given time. From foot-binding to waist binding to breast binding, ideal beauty often requires deforming of the natural body" (116). The actress, too, confesses that she

has mutilated and disfigured her body to be attractive. She has dyed her hair in the multiplex parlor, has plucked the eyebrows to make them enchanting, and straightened her nose through surgery. In addition, she has tightened and enlarged her breasts through plastic surgery. She has reframed each and every organ of her to sensitize men because for men "their minds, their thoughts their dreams, their fantasies, are more real to them than women's bodies or lives; in fact, men have used their social power to characterize a \$10-billion-a-year trade in women as fantasy" (Dworkin xxxviii). To meet the demand of those commercials, she has to beautify herself with different artifacts.

Wilson Bryan Key, a media critic also agrees that in advertising the concept of free will has been subverted and appropriated in the interest of an efficient merchandising-consumer oriented economic system. The images are featured to serve the interest of special power structures. He argues, "What is 'real,' therefore, is often the product of consensus rather than of an individual's critical, autonomous perceptual evaluation" (10). He reasons that the media because of the use of subliminal techniques has evolved into a massive behavior modification. The actress has also modified her body to meet the prerequisite of beauty prescribed by the mercantile.

Her confession rings the feminist voice which insists that sexual and reproductive freedom should be of no more or less important to women than economic and political justice (Tong 17). Though she has achieved economic independence, she can cash herself any time she likes as a hot cake, she has no control on her own body. She is used as a commodity, an economic good that is subject to exchange or exploitation in the world of commerce. An object becomes a commodity when it has both exchange value and sign exchange value. And commodity fetishism describes consumers' fascination with objects whose value "lies in their power to signify signs of luxury, social power, and sexual attractiveness" (Tyson 62). Her social value as an individual is replaced by the market value.

Nonetheless, the actress insists that they (commercials) have already done enough harm to her. Now they can harm her no more; she openly challenges them:

khicha photo grāphara,/ yo jābo kasmatika chālālāī / kati nai camkāuna sakchau tyo
nāthe dijital lyābamā?/ kati nai beca sakchau ra aba mlāī? khica [click photographer,/]
this petty cosmetic flesh/ how much you can gleam it in that petty digital lab?/ how
often you can trade me?/ click]. (63)

In her bikini dress the photographer is taking her picture highlighting her sensitive organs as erotic zones for male gaze. They will process her picture in the digital lab to eroticize her body. But, she does not care because her figure that they want to sell is not a natural. To adapt herself with their unnatural demand, she has gone through plastic surgery. It is sarcastic that they sell her disfigured figure as a natural beauty.

The actress is presented as a provocateur to stimulate sexual thoughts in the audience. She is designed and reshaped as if she is an artifact. The poetic persona is disgusted by the way the capitalists exploit women to promote their market. Her feminist consciousness resurfaces with her objection of women's objectification. She does not showcase the feminine values upheld by the people from the main stream. Nor is she ashamed of confessing her fallen status (seen from the patriarchal perspective). She participates in the world of commerce that objectifies her; yet, she subverts the system within it. The ending is a gesture to her evolution as a liberated woman who needs not wear the mask of prudence and pureness to negotiate patriarchy.

Conclusion

In the selected poems, Mukarung portrays different images of women that replicate the diversity of women within the category of woman in Nepal. He purposes alternative femininities experienced by marginalized women which do not match with the femininity envisioned by the mainstream Nepali feminist literature. They are militant, fearless and expressive women, yet, they become victim of gender based violence. They are victimized not only because they are women, but also because they are women from the margin. They are ethnic, Dalit women and women working in the entertainment sector. The men from the main stream molest, rape and murder them because their cultural mores are different from the women from the main stream. They are the victim of gender, class and caste discriminations. Thus, to address their issues, as suggested by multi-cultural feminism, the issues of class, caste and ethnicity should be addressed along with the issues of gender. Detailed study of Mukarung's poems can be made from multi-cultural and Marxist perspectives as well.

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