

Interplay of Power Relations in Neeharika's *Yogmaya*: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This article aims at exploring how Neelam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* presents the complex web of power relations that comprise domination, submission, and resistance. It mainly draws on Michel Foucault's idea that power is pervasive, not just oppressive but productive as well. Viewed from the Foucauldian notion of power as a theoretical framework, the study reveals the interplay of dominant and counter discourses in propagating knowledge and truth that are constructed and reconstructed. The novel is treated as a site of struggle where the state power along with the discourses of religion, patriarchy, and gender roles prominently operate so as to suppress the voice of the dissent. *Yogmaya*, a rural woman of the humble background, continuously resists both verbally and physically against various forms of power in the face of threats. She exercises her power in the same way as those who traditionally believe they possess it. In this connection, the focus lies on the protagonist's persistent attempts of resistance through the bold interrogation of the hegemonizing discourses and regimes of truth. As the text under study is written in Nepali, I use transliteration and free translation in order to cite the lines for analysis.

Keywords: discourse theory, hegemony, polyphonic voices, power relations, resistance

Introduction

Published in 2074 Bikram Sambat (B.S.), *Yogmaya*, a Nepali novel written by Neelam Karki Niharika and honoured with the 'Madan Puraskar, presents a fictional world and its inhabitants in diverse forms of power relations against the backdrop of the state power of the Rana regime in Nepal. *Yogmaya* is the protagonist of the novel she since her childhood makes a rebellion and revolt against the oppressive power so as to shake the status quo and make her voice audible. Right from the beginning, she undergoes a series of sufferings that originate from such unequal power relations as age, sex, and class that directly inflict her. Hidden in the womb of oblivion for hundreds of years, Niharika makes an archeological excavation of history and digs out a strong and fearless female figure that has combated lifelong against the power structure of several forms. The novel presents the mobility of power through diverse forms of knowledge and truth that are produced and disseminated from the dominant discourses of

religion, patriarchy, caste, class, and several other social institutions. However, there also exist counter discourses that stand in opposition and sometimes parallel to the dominant ones.

Yogmaya, the title character, stands in the front line and advocates revolutionary ideas and opinions that do not conform to those of the mainstream society. Even before she appears in the novel, she significantly holds the curiosity of the reader who comes to know about her from the dialogues of various characters. She is mainly reported as a widow who fails to accommodate herself in her husband's house. She is even accused of making amorous advances with a man of the village during her stay in her parents' house before she flees to Assam. In fact, she has left for Assam as she cannot stand the stigma about her character, ethics and integrity in the contemporary conservative and patriarchal society. It was not common for a woman of the time in Nepali context to make such a bold decision to leave all the relatives behind and go into exile with a man in a foreign land. Later, Yogmaya seems to be more powerless due to her widowhood, social rank, lack of fortune and also, being a female. However, she does not endure silently the unjust acts inflicted on her. She strongly resists. Sometimes, she verbally opposes the dominant discourses and articulates her defiant voice fearlessly at the cost of her own safety and security. Michel Foucault's view seems very relevant here. Power does not reside in one central source; it exists in a variety of micro settings . . . power and the resistance to power are everywhere (as cited in Ritzer, 2011, p. 601). He contested the traditional notion about the powerlessness of the individual as compared to institutions and the state. In the same way, Yogmaya's subservient position does not limit her power of rebellion even before the tyrannical power of the Ranas' oligarchy and the preponderance of Hindu culture and tradition that had been unquestionably ingrained in the fabric of the Nepali society.

Problem, Objective and Research Questions

Yogmaya is persistently engaged in resistance to power since her childhood. Resisting prevailing cultural discourses of time, she defies the power of the state, too. The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship of the characters in the novel. The role of discourse and power is very important in shaping this relationship. The article emphasizes Yogmaya's part in the complex web of power relation she is enmeshed in. Within this overall objective, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How do the characters in the novel interact with each other in the network of power relations?
- How is power exercised and resisted?
- What is the role of discourse in relation to power in the text?

The study solely builds on a form of the qualitative methodology, which is to say that textual data- rather than numerical ones- are analyzed descriptively rather than statistically. The

data have been analyzed with Foucault's concept of power as a theoretical basis. Textual analysis was followed for data collection as a procedure. This is to say that I read the novel critically applying the theory of power and discourse as a perspective, thus collecting the secondary, textual data by reading and re-reading the novel meticulously.

Review of Literature

In this section, Yogmaya's rebellion as a historical event has been brought into light, followed thereafter by the theoretical framework on which the study is based. *Yogmaya* has attracted enormous readership from home and abroad since its publication. The novel has been interpreted from different angles of vision many of which include Yogmaya's social and political rebellion against the oppressive power of the Rana regime despite her limitations as a widow of low socio-economic status.

Timalsina (2074 B.S.) stated that the novel with its full might has established *Yogmaya* as a campaigner of social reformation. It also sidelined numerous scandals imposed on her for years and years, attributing all of them to false social beliefs and perspectives (para. 5). He appreciated Niharika's untiring and in-depth research and rigorous efforts of making an archaeological study of such historical figures that have been long forgotten and even suppressed under the prevailing discourses of untouchability, traditional gender roles, preaching and the Puranas, and many other conservative and oppressive practices of the time (para. 2-4). Such a reading closely connects a text and its context, paving the path for further research on the novel's connection to social conditions and the place of power relations in it.

Mishra (2019) discussed *Yogamaya's* struggle for justice and equity in the society. She mainly focused on "the factors contributing to *Yogamaya's* emergence as a rebel . . . her transformation from a helpless despised rural girl to a rebel feared by the rulers of the nation" (p. 50). Mishra basically attributed her revolt to phallocentrism, gender based violence associated with patriarchy and some other social and cultural institutions of the Hindu religion. Her major contention is that *Yogmaya's* rebellion took place largely because of the oppressive power that comes from the state apparatus and social, cultural and economic privileges. Her study is thus centred on the dichotomy of powerful-powerless relation, and the subversion and revolt made by the powerless and marginalized against the power structure.

Reading *Yogmaya* from the perspective of New Historicism, Paudyal (2018) discussed how the novel subverts the conventional fact-fiction dichotomy by blurring their boundary. This takes place through the historicization of fiction and fictionalization of history in the changed rubric of power dynamics. He also discussed how ideology, discourse and truth have been constructed in various forms to suit the interest of the rulers and suppress the voice of the ruled. Poudyal added:

Scriptures are bunches of ideological fabrications, hegemonizing documents, constructed discourses and lies that benefit the rulers and hypnotize the ruled. On discovering the dark face of fabricated truths camouflaged in religious scriptures, Yogmaya turns a permanent rebel, and plunges into social and spiritual reforms” (para. 6).

Thus, the novel is studied as interplay of conflicting discourses which are reinforced and resisted from different positions of power.

Dhakal (2018) portrayed the revolutionary campaign launched by Yogmaya and a wider participation of the rural folk as unparalleled in the history of the world. She observed:

This work of Neelam Karki Niharika has shown the real history of how a laywoman can help in change and educate the society for their rights and recognize themselves. It clearly depicts how history is constructed, omitted, deformed, and portrays the role of literature to depict the real history (para.15).

Dhakal appreciated Yogmaya’s incomparable contribution to change the face of the society. She regarded her as an aggregate of contemporary social conditions that lead her to become a spiritual leader and a rebel. Her *Hajurbanis*, i.e., the religious verses she composed to correct the evils of the scriptures, are regarded as an outlet of her yearning for liberation. She opined that history had deliberately suppressed Yogmaya’s persistent voice against tyranny.

In a similar line of thought, Adhikari (2075) also discussed *Yogmaya* essentially as a work replete with historical events and contents with the contemporary political, religious, cultural, and educational aspects. She argued that the novel also incorporated a lively depiction of rural life, psyche of the characters, philosophy of life, feminine sense, social reformation and positive world views, revolt to social evils and abuses, sense of rebellion, humanism and reinterpretation of the Hindu religion. (para. 3) She stressed that Yogmaya’s *Hajurbani* as a counter discourse to the conventional reading of the Hindu scriptures was a major strength of the novel. Adhikari found the work with a potential of multiple interpretations from diverse angles of vision (para.12). This further encourages the reading of this novel.

In view of these analyses, *Yogmaya* invites a fresh perspective that can add to a new dimension to the critical eye of the reader. The above interpretations have basically dealt with the oppression of power and the protagonist’s resistance to it. They do not, however, focus on how power can be productive, positive and invisible as well. There is only a little description about hegemonizing discourse and counter discourse in the domination-subversion paradigm. This research article attempts to fulfill this gap and read the text as a site of power struggle in relation to the social conditions of that time.

Methodology

In this study, the qualitative method has been used to analyze Nihariks's *Yogmaya* as a primary text. The data have been analyzed with Foucault's concept of power as a theoretical basis. The textual analysis was followed for data collection as a procedure. This is to say that I read the novel critically applying the theory of power and discourse, thus collecting the secondary, textual data by reading and re-reading the novel meticulously.

Foucault provides a strong theoretical basis for the text to unravel how power emerges, pervades, operates and produces truth and reality. Linking power and knowledge, he stresses (as cited in Wolfreys, 2001):

Power implies knowledge, and vice versa. However, power is causal; it is constitutive of knowledge, even while knowledge is, concomitantly, constitutive of power: knowledge gives one power, but one has the power in given circumstances to constitute bodies of knowledge, discourses and so on as valid or invalid, truthful or untruthful. (p. 306)

Foucault maintained a close connection between knowledge and power and their role in producing and affecting the validity and truth of a discourse. He holds that power is productive and positive which can generate new ideas, knowledge, subjectivity, reality and truth. Highlighting the volatile and unstable nature of power, he further asserted "Power is never established for all time, because resistance is always possible" (as cited in Adams & Sydnie, 2001, p. 588). He rejected the tendency of considering power as a perpetual source of repressive prohibitions and a tool of oppression of the powerless by the powerful. As power functions as a strategy, both the dominated and the dominating co-exist in which one group or individual never feels that they are just victims. *Yogmaya*, who is generally deemed to be oppressed in a number of ways, displays an incredible strength to combat the imposition and coercion on her. She enters into the complexities and contradictions of power paradigms by proposing her knowledge as a new discourse so as to challenge the pre-existing discourses. In this reference Foucault's concept of power, discourse and knowledge seem very relevant to the reading of this text.

Discussion

Based on the revolutionary ideas of Foucault, this study concentrated on the complicated web of power relations rather than viewing power as a possession of the privileged. The novelist does not treat any of her characters as a passive recipient of oppression. Instead, each of them demonstrates some degree of strength to think for themselves even if doing so signifies going beyond what is expected. This leads to the emergence of a variety of conflicting ideological positions and a diversity of voices that interact and even rebel. Applying the Foucauldian notion of power as a theoretical lens, the analysis resulted in a set of themes.

Niharika's *Yogmaya* has been discussed thematically which has been presented under four broad headings, namely, 'destabilizing power and discourse', 'polyphonic voices', 'interplay of hegemonic and counter discourses', and 'rupturing the hierarchy of power'. Each of these themes is elaborated separately below.

Destabilizing Power and Discourse

Power and discourse are the major activities of the novel. It explores various dimensions of power that are interwoven with the discourse of class, religion, patriarchy, discipline, and such social institutions as marriage and sexuality. Niharika presents her characters in the network of power relations in which we notice not only oppression, domination and subordination but resistance and negotiation as well. The novel delineates its characters in varied positions that create hierarchies among them. As discourses are embedded in and emerge out of power relations, some are assumed to be more powerful than others. The dominant discourses are regarded as right, truthful, and normal while others are considered as wrong, false and deviant. Although discourses are produced by effects of power within a certain social hierarchy, yet they do not remain uncontested forever. *Yogmaya* pathetically pictures the pain of the widow women who were compelled to die in the pyre of their husbands. She boldly oppugns the evils of the deep rooted slavery system in these lines:

Manchheko yasaree bechbikhan garnu ghor atyachar ho; pap ho. ra yasta atyacharaka tatha papee karmaka virodha garnu hamra kartvya hun. [It is sheer oppression and sin to trade human beings like this. And, it is our duty to oppose such an oppression and sin.] (p. 309)

Yogmaya, thus, cannot stand mute in front of the evil institutions of slavery. The spirit of defiance that she demonstrates throughout the novel is also reflected in her stern denunciation of sati system that had compelled a widow to sacrifice her life by getting herself burnt on the funeral pyre along with the dead body of her husband. She condemns the oppressive practice and accuses the priests and the elites in acerbic terms:

dharma karmaka thekedarharule mahadev ra sati deviko katha sunaudai sati bhai jalnu maha dharma bhane jananako dimag bharee pani die. tyasaile garda kati janana nai a sati hunchhu bhane hatha garera jane pani bhae. [The authoritative people of religion indoctrinated the women with the mythical stories of Lord Mahadev and goddess Sati Devi, and propagated that it was a holy act on their part to get burnt to death at their husbands' death. This even makes them arrogant to choose their own death.] (p.158)

The fierce criticism above from an ordinary woman elucidates the idea that power is never in anybody's hands but goes across the border of wealth, social status and social and

political hierarchy. Yogmaya through her counter discourse becomes a parallel power feared by the rulers and revered by the rural folks at the same time.

The novel is a site of both hegemonic and counter discourses where there is a perpetual struggle of power. It presents a gallery of characters among whom everybody speaks, acts and behaves in connection with the power conferred on them from the structural dividend of the society. In fact, the novel is an extended discourse where prevailing ideas and ideologies are interwoven with the counter discourses in a complex way as a site of interaction, negation and negotiation. Despite the dominant discourses, peripheral discourses also operate both explicitly and implicitly in the text. There is action and reaction, voice and counter voice at the same time. This clearly illustrates the Foucauldian idea that power is pervasive, and it does not come from the above only. Power is not like a stick that one holds and brandishes over the other. Power is a matter not of possession, but of exercise. According to Foucault, “power does not reside in one central source; it exists in a variety of micro settings . . . power and the resistance to power are everywhere” (as cited in Ritzer, 2011, p. 601). Power and resistance exist inseparably. One may exercise power in terms of knowledge, discourse and other social, economic and cultural privileges. But power is not an indisputable and all suppressive force. It also gives rise to dissent, opposition and resistance that inherently exist. Foucault makes a radical departure from the Marxist notion that power exclusively resides in class which is the source of oppression. He suggests that power is multifaceted, nonhierarchical and productive as well. It shapes human behavior and events by producing truth and reality.

Polyphonic Voices

Yogmaya is a narrative of what Mikhail Bakhtin called “polyphonic voices” that are heard from contrary discourses of the novel. Niharika does not let a single dominating voice suppress the voices that come from the margin. Bakhtin also argues that “the multiple voices contained in any narrative work invariably represent diverse and often conflicting attitudes, philosophies and ideologies” (as cited in Murfin & Ray, 1997, p. 86). Right from the beginning, the reader hears an authoritative voice that comes from the hegemonizing discourse. When Agnidgar, Yogmaya’s brother, orders his wife not to let Yogmaya share the same dining place, his wife, Ganga retorts “*aafnai didi ta ho ni*. [she is our own sister]” (p.61). Ganga rejects the patriarchal notion that Yogmaya has fallen off the hierarchy of the caste system through her remarriage. The dominant discourse is bolstered by the autocracy of the state power and the long held beliefs and traditions derived from the Hindu Scriptures that divided the people into touchable and untouchable so as to suppress them. The discourses say what should be done and what should not be done, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. In course of time they are internalized that ultimately “shape human life by naturalizing and normalizing the construction of social identities and norms” (Seidman, 2013, p. 177). They are unquestionably rooted in the particular culture and society, and taken as absolute truths. But the discourse in

the novel is not monolithic. The author living in a liberal and democratic time and society feels much free to allow the counter discourse and dissenting voice that makes the novel “another discourse manipulated through and by a culture’s power struggle” (Green & LeBihan, 1996, p. 112). It refutes many of the cultural and religious beliefs of the time and advocates “on the side of liberal ideals of personal freedom and accepting and celebrating all forms of difference and deviance (Barry, 2011, p. 169). Yogmaya here articulates the voice of deviance that she collects out of prayer, meditation, listening to the Puranas and interpreting them from new perspectives. Thus, the so called absolute truth and knowledge get replaced over time as the relations of power change. Yogmaya realizes her own mistake and comes with new truths about the wrong practice of child marriage that victimized her own daughter. She adds:

Balakaima bihe garidine chalana hera. merai gyan buddiko kami bhanum. . . kati kura samajaka chaleka chalan bhandai aakha chimlera anusharana garnu hudai hunna.
[Look at the child marriage. I did not know much myself. We should not follow things simply because they are prevailing customs and traditions.] (p. 242)

Yogmaya castigates all kinds of social discriminations, oppression, violence, and evil practices so that her mission of establishing an egalitarian society becomes a success.

Under her influence, many people including Ganga, a subservient house wife, challenge strongly the prevailing ideologies of knowledge. Mahananda, a Brahmin, who is cast out by the Hindu society in accusation of eating things from the hands of Yogmaya, an outcast herself, insists on getting involved with his brothers at the last rite of their late father. He strongly challenges the religious fanatics in front of him in these words:

Malai mero pitri karyama rok lagauna pani nakhoja. yo maha atyachara ho. Jyadatiko viruddama lagna sikaunu bhako chha thoolee hajurle. ma nyaya khonechhu. kasaile kasiko jat kadna mildaina. [Don't even try to prevent me from taking part in the paternal duty. This is the greatest oppression made ever. Thoolee Hajur has taught us to combat oppression. I will seek justice. Nobody can make others outcast.] (p. 275)

This illustrates that power is no longer exercised by a few institutions and individuals. The people who seemed to be utterly ignorant and even intolerant of any differing creed, belief and opinion turn aggressive against the artificiality and hypocrisy of the society. They begin to think, rethink and act in a novel way that jolts the mindset of the Brahmins, male chauvinists, and the ruling elite.

Yogmaya’s contact with sages has also added a new dimension to her holy life, devoid of personal interest, love and material desires. The contending voice she speaks situates the text in the realm of discursive practices. She makes people realize that so many things about religion and social practices are sham, silly and hollow. She also uncovers many superstitious practices, corruption of the bureaucrats, and the abuse of power and authority by the rulers. The

voice of humanity, justice, freedom, and equality she speaks vibrates the mind of many people that heightens their awareness for the socio-political transformation of the country.

Interplay of Hegemonizing and Counter Discourses

The production of *Yogmaya* can be taken as a text with a cluster of utterances. According to Bakhtin, “Every utterance is potentially the site of struggle: every word that is launched into social space implies dialogue and therefore a contested interpretation” (as cited in Selden, n.d. p.75). The novel invites a dialogic interpretation based on the exchange of utterances. A group of similar utterances form one discourse whereas a group of dissimilar utterances form a counter discourse. *Yogmaya* is basically a reproduction of counter discourses. This is a rewriting of history written from the perspective of a neglected and suppressed historical figure. The dominating role of hegemonizing discourse can be clearly realized when we do not see for a long time any text written by a Nepali writer about a revolution led by a woman. Niharika, a woman writer, lets her protagonist subvert the dominant practices of gender roles, household norms, and the structure of class and caste prevalent in the contemporary society. Among several counter discourses, the novel discusses one that includes widow marriage. It advocates equal position between men and women. *Yogmaya* opposes the oppressive tradition that allows a man to get remarried immediately after his wife dies whereas a woman has to stay single by preserving her chastity, and wishing the best for the departed soul of her husband.

Yogmaya narrates how she secretly escapes in her childhood from her in law’s house and spends three nights in the jungle in order to avoid the torture and inflictions aimed at her. This sounds unbelievable in view of the women in the contemporary society. Almost no girl or woman could take such a bold step. This act was viewed from the prevailing discourse of sexuality that would monitor a woman’s body at every step of her movement. *Yogmaya* in her dialogue with Ganga, her sister in-law, rejects outright the accusation that she has eloped with a village boy. She shares her dissent in these words: *dekhne jyudai re! haat samaaera hideki thie re oraaloma! usaisanga raat base re*. [They say the witnesses are alive! They say I was walking downhill holding his hands! They say I spent the nights with him]” (96).

The female sexuality is considered to generate power that produces the identity of an individual as Waugh (2006) states “The discourses of sexuality concern the operation of power in human relationships as much as they govern the production of a personal identity” (p. 434). For instance, *Yogmaya* is identified as a fallen woman in terms of the relationship she is reported to have developed with others. Villagers even ask her father to tie her with a rope and keep at home to prevent her from going wild. She becomes abnormal and deviated in the eyes of the society. Though there is no evidence, scandals are circulated in the village about her affairs. “Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex, which means first of all sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (Foucault, 1978, p. 83).

Her sexuality becomes a text and discourse by means of which she is expected to practise self discipline, abstinence and celibacy. This shows how sexuality is shifted from the domain of pure body to discourses and culture. Despite the operations of disciplinary techniques, Yogmaya, already a married woman, defies the regime of sexuality and gets remarried at her will twice more.

Leaving the in-law's house without permission is a significant beginning of Yogmaya's revolting life. We get prepared to know further how she will be committed to overcoming all the restrictions and boundaries set by the ideological constraints of social, political, domestic and cultural beliefs and value systems. However, Yogmaya is beset by the ideological framework according to which she has to survive, think, act and react. Traditional norms and values bend on curbing her freedom but she responds to them differently at different times. As a socially constructed individual, she cannot completely detach herself from the community and the network of power relations. She does not reject everything about the religion. Sometimes she seems to be a bit lenient and sometimes she turns fierce. Nevertheless, her continuous resisting attempts enable her to see herself as well as the world afresh. She makes herself anew by calling the established patterns into questions and breaking them in the face of oppressive power. She raises her voice boldly against the so called division between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and also between their sub divisions. She drinks from the hand of a woman who belongs to the so called untouchable caste. Condemning the age-old evil practice of untouchability, Yogmaya further says: "Manchhe achhut huadain . . . hamro jat bhannu nai manav ho. hameele janneko dharma manawata ho. [Nobody is untouchable . . . we are a human race. The religion we know is humanity]" (p. 149). This broad vision and understanding of the world and life endears many people who were seeking freedom from restrictive social conventions.

Despite being the daughter of a Brahmin, Yogmaya revolts against the caste system, sets a model herself and encourages others to walk on her footprints. This seems completely impossible and even unimaginable for a rural uneducated woman of that time to stand against the conventional structure of the society and seek further possibilities and creativities of life. She questions the rationale of the annual Hindu annual ritual called '*Shraddha*' which includes giving away so many things to the priest in order that the departed soul will rest peacefully in heaven. She stands like Tagore's Malini who questions the knowledge inherent in the worm eaten Scriptures. Yogmaya continues challenging the dominating discourse in the face of threats and risks of her own life. She does not care what is socially accepted and what is not accepted though she knows that her ideas do not match the interest of the elite and the rulers. Yogmaya's ideas and attitudes infuriate her own brother who, like their father, was a strict traditional Brahmin. He was a devoted Hindu, guided by the holy doctrines. He was always

suspicious of her activities and took them as a direct attack on their glorious Hindu tradition. In his dialogue with his wife, Yogmya's brother shows his fury in these words:

sara brahaman chidieka chhan.kati ai puran laune brahamanlai samet gyan dine bhaeki! . . . teree dideelai samjhaera rakbhne thoolaa pureatale malai.sabaika aghiltira puret kasaree jange masanga tanlai ke thaha? [All the Brahmins are enraged. How dare she try to teach the Brahmins who recite the Puranas! The senior priest asked me to persuade her and keep her under control. . . . Do you know how the priest roared?] (p.108)

Yogmaya's brother thinks that she has lost her power of judgment and turned wild. As an incorrigible bigot, he does not entertain and endure such an atrocity that makes her interrogate the revered personalities and the holy books. The dominant power structures try their best to maintain their superiority over the marginalized through the production of varying discourses. Thus, the interplay of conflicting discourses continues from varying positions of power. Talking about the role of discourse in propagating power, Tyson (2006) states:

No discourse is permanent. Discourse wields power for those in charge, but they also stimulate opposition to that power . . . human beings are never merely victims of an oppressive society, for they can find various ways to oppose authority in their personal and public lives. (p. 295)

The voice of the margin illustrates that one particular discourse cannot propagate its power continually with the same degree of tenacity. Yogmaya tries her best to keep her individual subjectivity intact through subversion.

To a great surprise of many people, Yogmaya opposes discriminations of every kind. In fact, she fights for '*Dharmarajya*', a state where everyone can have their say and enjoy justice and equality. Niharika's view towards the prevailing socio-economic and political condition is explicitly critical. The text rejects the status quo outright. Yogmaya's ideas and arguments make topsy-turvy the accepted and established ideas about gender roles, marriage and sexuality, and also discourse about racial supremacy. Those revolutionary ideas shake the hard core dogmatism of the conservative Nepalese society. She denounces sati and slavery systems and speaks for the liberation of the Nepalese people who had been oppressed for hundreds of years.

Rupturing the Hierarchy of Power

Yogmaya reverses the traditional understanding of power that it is a source of exploitation which is an object possessed by a privileged class. Instead, the novel inclines the Foucauldian notion that "Power is exercised rather than possessed. Power is not simply or inevitably repressive or coercive but can be productive . . . power does not flow from a centralized source but also flows from the bottom up" (as cited in Adams & Sydie, 2002, p.

578). The novel treats power as a complex network of relations that is widespread in every kind of human relationship, regardless of class, caste and sex privilege. Never heard before in history, characters like Ghartini and Kaili Kamini, women from indigenous and Dalit community respectively, becomes audible in the pages of the novel. The voices of the margin that were suppressed by history for hundreds of years start speaking without any hesitation.

Niharika departs from the conventional notion of delineating individuals as only passive recipients of oppression. She gives agency to them instead of presenting them as objects of knowledge. Foucault's concept of power is very much relevant here. "In his genealogy of power, Foucault is concerned with how people govern themselves and others with the production of knowledge. Among other things, he sees knowledge generating power by constituting people as subjects and governing the subjects with the knowledge" (as cited in Ritzer, 2011, p.595). Yogmaya, a woman of revolting nature from the beginning, rejects to be objectified and begins to show her behavior that is contrary to the norm. The oppressive power cannot dominate her completely. Instead, it makes her more productive. She refuses to tolerate the injustice inflicted to her in the name of patriarchy and phalocracy. Nor does she accept the division of people in terms of caste system as prescribed by religion. She looks at the world through the third eye that she activates by means of meditation, prayer and penance. Finally, she comes with a new perspective to religion which is reflected in her utterances, respectfully called 'hajurbanis'. The 'hajurbanis' are the hymns and guiding principles of her life. They also impress many other people who decide to become her disciple one after the other. Nobody cares for their caste, gender, and class. Pundit Prem Narayan, an educated and enlightened Brahmin, also participates in her campaign. Around her hermitage, her followers make huts and start living to stand by her under all circumstances. Every day they participate in her preaching that mainly focuses on the injustices and oppression on the innocent people. In this way, the imposition of power turns productive in the novel. Yogmaya is addressed as 'Thulihajur', a senior respected member of the society. She is called 'Bhaktini', a devotee of God. Her knowledge and power stand supreme in the vicinity. Her resistance becomes creation. She stands parallel to the Hindu priests in terms of her knowledge and power. In fact, she is revered as a goddess. People visit her and listen to her preaching so that they can alleviate their worldly sufferings. She is an eye-opener for everyone.

Yogmaya helps the marginalized people recreate their selves based on new ways of thinking system. The elite try their best to suppress her voice and even petition to the government making complaints against her. Power operates not from the privilege of socio-economic status alone but it operates at such levels as patriarchy, religion, caste, culture and gender and many other institutions. The text's connection with the context of political power of the Rana regime also plays an important role in relation to the exercise of power and the discourse and counter discourse the novel engages in. The history of Nepal illustrates that there

were no civil rights for Nepalese people during Rana regime. People's voice for freedom was deliberately suppressed for a long time. People even lost their lives in pursuit to liberation. Yogmaya herself approaches the government to have her demands fulfilled. When the voice for justice is ignored time and again by the government, she decides to jump into the fire and get burnt alive along with her supporters. She is ready to die rather than succumb before the authority. The government is afraid that it might cause further rebellion that the government will fail to suppress. As a disciplinary and controlling technique, all the rebels are imprisoned and tortured. They are set free on the condition that they will not be involved in those activities again. She is guided by the Rushdian notion that "defiance is an inevitable and essential aspect of what we call freedom" (Rushdie, 2008, p.57). Even when they are released, they continue dissipating their spirit of rebellion. Later, they plan for the mass suicide, this time by jumping into the high current of the river Arun. This time nobody can prevent them. The mass suicide of sixty eight people from a rural area is probably the biggest resistance of this nature against power in the history of Nepal. It was a jolt of dismay that had never been expected.

Niharika thus discusses with a special emphasis on what was deliberately missing from history. The novel is a rewriting of history as no history books included such a glorious revolution led by a woman of a humble background. Many facts about her life were intentionally hidden, suppressed and distorted so as to meet the interest and reinforce the power of the elite. Nor has Nepali literature extensively dealt with such a glorious history by assigning a central role to the marginalized. Niharika, a woman writer, implicitly questions the canonicity of the mainstream Nepali literature. The production of the novel is a resistance in itself that aligns in several ways with the protagonist's interrogation of the social hierarchy.

Conclusion

Niharika has presented its characters in the complex web of power relationship. There is a tussle of power among people in terms of the family hierarchy, gender roles, and the prevailing discourses of religion and patriarchy and social institutions. The novel rejects the notion of a definable structure or system of society but it allows the free play discursive practices. Through counter discourses, Yogmaya, in the face of constrains and restrictions, also exercises power. The novel has deconstructed the traditional notion that power is always oppressive. It has revealed how it can be productive as well. It also shows that where there is power, there is domination, submission and resistance at the same time. Even the tyranny of the Ranas can only constrain actions, but not individuals. The protagonist looks a feeble woman in view of the contemporary society where the dominant discourse is patriarchy that is guided and protected by Hinduism. Despite being a poor widow and socially regarded an outcast, she fears the ruling class. Her *Hajurbanis* instill in the mind of people a sense of revolution that stand contrary to what had been repeatedly asserted over and over again for centuries. In fact, they help to defy the feudal and patriarchal ideologies as well as the discourses of rigid social stratification

associated with the caste system. The novel deconstructs the beliefs and values that are internalized as absolute truth. The novelist has celebrated non-conformity through the interrogation of the regime of truth and knowledge. As this article is confined to the Foucauldian notion of power and discourse alone, it does not include varied perspectives. Further studies on the novel from the vantage point of dialogic criticism and deconstruction are equally feasible.

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