

Alienation of Female Body in the Selected Stories of Parijat

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the much neglected aspects of alienation of female body with particular reference to the selected stories, Tiuriko Phul, Pairiyako Gandha, and Salgiko Balatkrit Anshu by prominent Nepali writer, Parijat dealing with the female body alienation. The article focuses on how female bodies have been alienated from their selves; how these female characters, Lati and Salgi do not have the sense of being distanced from their own selves. It uses qualitative methodology and takes feminism as a theoretical tool to interpret and analyze the primary texts. Instead of focusing on the analysis of the theme of the text, the article focuses on analysis of the text in concern with female body as portrayed in the stories. The female characters in the mentioned stories are physically assaulted, raped, and coerced time and again. Their bodies become the site where men enact violence. This study argues that these female characters become the victim of violence just because they are women. It also makes an attempt to bring the readers home as to how women suffer from gender-based violence in patriarchy.

Keywords: Alienation, female body, self-identity, objects, possession

Introduction

This study explores the multiple dimensions of alienation and the alienating factors, particularly the female alienation from their body. Woman as a class, as a separate entity, as a category, has not been recognized for centuries as a person in her own rights. Even getting a firm and identical body that every individual possesses, the leading female characters, *Lati and Salgi's* bodies are alienated from themselves. They neither have the sense of possession in it nor can be pleased as their wish. It is because hetero-normative tendency of social value tends to assume ownership over female bodies and alienates them from their own self.

Alienation is a state wherein a person fails to maintain a sense of identity, leading to a disintegration of his/her psychophysical system. A state of alienation exists when a person is unable to identify himself/herself either with his/her self or with the society.

When a person lacks an identity, s/he feels alienated. But alienation is not simply having tension, doubt, apprehension, anguish and boredom but it also means to be unable to perform things systematically and satisfactorily due to these factors.

Feminist writers often use the concept of alienation “to describe female existence in a male-dominated society and culture. Women's body images are exposed, exploited and used as commodities to enrich a society built on advertisements and entertainment” (Young, 2005, p. 55). One may ask how are women's images exposed, exploited and used as commodities. Certain body parts such as the lips, eyes, stomach, butt, or breasts are shown on advertisements, movies, and magazines to convey unrealistic and degrading messages about women. As radical feminists point out, the family has been a “mechanism to support women oppression and regulation of women’s bodies and sexuality by regulating the form of unpaid role of housewife”. All women are “subjected to this role within patriarchal capitalism” (Price and Shildrick, 1999, p. 05). The gendered alienation relies on exploitation, including the sexual exploitation of women’s bodies. Such thought is weighty enough when we look at the roles of Lati and Salgi in the stories.

Since everyone is supposed to be the master of self, the adverse circumstances of life, sometimes, make an individual fail to grab the real possession on that self. When one's body is of value to other more than the self, the question of possession and alienation comes up. It is what we find in the female character *Lati* in the story *Tiuriko Phul*, *Pairiyako Gandha*, and *Salgi* in the story *Salgiko Balatkrit Anshu* have been deliberately used and robbed off their own selves. Their existence is valued merely on account of how long they can please males undermining their own desires and sacrificing for others where their body is centralized rather than their identity. Thus, the proposed study aims to explore feminist interpretation of alienation in terms of body.

The materialist feminists argue that in (hetero) sexual alienation one form of women’s special alienation is to be given explicit recognition. Alison Jaggar explains “economic survival requires most women to present themselves in a way that is sexually pleasing to men” (Jaggar, 1989, p. 308). Women are then expected to display themselves to satisfy men. Women are expected to view their bodies as products and physically displayed images by highlighting and enhancing particular body parts to attract men. As a result, “women’s sexuality is developed for man’s enjoyment rather than for women’s” (Jaggar, 1989, p. 309), and is taken as a means to please others more than the self.

In this regards, Parijat's stories left plentiful prospects of criticisms from the scholarly eyes. As Janga B. Chauhan mentioned in his writings, through her writings, Parijat has raised her voice “against socio-economic irregularities, and taken up the line of critical realism” (Chauhan, 2008, p. 57). Parijat herself has stood as a social rebel on

the various injustices inherent in Nepalese society where her writings seem to attempt on bringing transformation.

Parijat, a rebellious writer from Nepal, presents herself as a rebel in her writings, and her “opposition to all forms of discrimination, oppression and exploitation particularly of female who are the victims of injustice caused by long rooted male chauvinism” (Gautam, 2011, p. ii). But she has always resented being labeled a feminist. She identified more with being a defender of individual freedom, human rights and had demonstrated a very open attitude to life and humanity.

A good amount of time and energy has been invested in Parijat's stories investigating the socio-political and economic aspects behind her writings. This is why, even after being extensive studies on Parijat and on her different writings, the feminist issues specially the female body and body politics has not induced much attention from the scholars. Hence, it aims to deal with the issue of body projection and exploitation with textual analysis of the stories *Tiuriko Phul*, *Pariyako Gandha* and *Salgiko Balatkrit Anshu* by Parijat.

While dealing with various projections of the bodies of female characters in the stories, some research questions are brought into the discussion. The questions – what are the ways that make the leading female characters alienated from their own body; do they have the sense of being alienated; and what plight do the female characters have to face due to alienation – are kept on sight when the research is undergone. The paper parallelly deals with the concept of alienation that is meant a mode of experience in which an individual is deprived of enjoying the self.

In this stance, the scope of this study aims to strengthen solidarity among women with common struggles where women's struggles for autonomy over their bodies often need to contend with male constructed hetero-normativity. Similarly, it makes an important contribution in analyzing South Asian women writers' representations of female as exiled from the body and community, and resistance through speech and silence.

Methodology

This paper uses qualitative research method for the textual analysis of the selected primary text i.e. two stories of Parijat. It also entertains other resources as research journals, research articles, and reviews on the related topic to serve as the secondary data for the research purpose.

Theoretical Framework

This paper aims to draw the materialist feminists' concept of alienation and apply this in advancing the argument as regards how the selected texts bring the ideas of the alienation of female body to the fore. Alison Jaggar claims that women are alienated in all spectrums in their lives in contemporary society. Moreover, Sandra Lee Bartky witnesses the women body reduced into the status of objects just available for visual inspection and manipulation. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft envisions how women have been "a toy of man" in almost all social spectrums. The study applies the mentioned theorists' ideas to examine, analyze and interpret the selected text.

Textual Analysis

Parijat as a visionary writer envisioned the need for a radical overhaul of the existing political system followed by the urgency of socio-economic transformation to help improve the condition of vulnerable and downtrodden communities. She had always resented being labeled a feminist. She identified more with being a defender of individual freedom, human rights and had demonstrated a very open and approachable attitude to life and humanity. Humanity was certainly a very strong aspect of Parijat's writings. Parijat consistently opposed the traditional infallible value system. While she is patriarchy-resistant, she pleads for the involvement of both men and women in building a new nation. So, some characters in her stories are rebellious whereas some are presented as the victims not merely by an individual male but by the long rooted social construction.

This is why, the characters in both of the stories are those people who are exploited and used in various forms. To her, literature means the voice of the voiceless, expression of what is not expressed and representation of what is not represented. It is to this end that Dr. Simon Gautam states emphatically that "the Parijat persona is an androgynous persona" (Gautam, 2011, p. ii). She presents herself as a rebel in her writings, and her opposition to all forms of discrimination, oppression and exploitation manifest itself in her treatment of characters, particularly female protagonists who are victims of injustice and exploitation. Having a keen observation in her writings Dr. Mahesh Kumar Maskey opines that her literary works were creative expression of her own life experience and understandings (or misunderstandings) emanating from her continuous effort to search for meaning of life and to deal with society's contradictions.

In the story, *Tiuriko Phul, Pairiyako Gandha*, the female character *Lati* suffers from the alienated self. She has been distorted from her sexuality, as the narrator does not take her a normal woman. His astonishing statement "how he had a sex with such a by-birth dirty girl" (Maskey, 2019, p. 31) about the tourist guide boy suggests that the

narrator had seen no womanhood in this girl. Her existence has simply been commoditized. The narrator mentions:

What is there in that dumb girl? She just has a figure that identifies women, but she is not a women. Her body smells womanhood, just that. I am chaste and to be saved as sacred. ... I start to see my wife's lips green. I bear hatred to my wife. I hate all other women, too. (p. 31, Trans.)

The underlying meaning of his remark is men can enjoy women's bodies. He reduces women's bodies to objects. It is aptly said, "Reducing women's bodies to the status of objects renders them available for visual inspection, measurement, evaluation and manipulation" (Bartky, 1990, p. 26). For him a woman's worth lies in her body; it is a site where one or more men can play for. It is an object that a man can own, use, or dispose of it at his will.

So, Lati, here, is portrayed as the symbol of impurity which could contaminate the pure male genes and pollute the fairest one. It explains that she has a mere body that has no meaning at all. Her body gets meaning only if it has any use, since she is the hated creature and her body is totally isolated from her existence as a woman.

Similarly, the dumb girl, Lati, in the story has been portrayed in such a way that she is a dummy used to advertise the goods. The dummy may have a sound body but it doesn't explore any human attributes. Unlike such item, Lati sometimes shows a great reaction against her exploitation. Though her mouth could not speak out, her eyes are speaking clearly that she also has value as female creature living in a society. She is not a mere lemon that anyone can take the juice and throw the bark. The tourist guide boy has taken her as a means to quench his sexual thirst. She has been used almost every night by that boy because she has slept in the temple compound that is open to all. The boy has understood her as a common property that anyone can use if they want. Her individual identity or the self has been dishonored since she is forced to accept this open space as her home where she has no security at all. This is why, she wishes:

If I had a home, people wouldn't give me torture. The home has this benefit. If I had a house with four walls and a fenced door, I know how to make those vampires (predators) restless outside fenced door. I would get a sound sleep inside the locked room, but there would also be same as outside; people know what more than that. But not. If I was inside the house, those rascals would give some money or offer a day's meal. ... This is done by all; they offer foods to women at day and exploit at night. (p. 35, Trans.)

Lati knows that male means an exploiter or perpetrator either inside the four walls or outside of it. They own the female body just to quench their sexual thirst. She has seen the relationship between all male and female with a common spectacle that so-called

good care of women at day means to prepare an appropriate prey for their night hunting. Wollstonecraft advises women not to be the "toy of man, his rattle, which must jingle in his ears whenever diminishing the reason, he chooses to be amused" (quoted in Tong, 2009, p. 16). And so happened to Lati when she became rebellious.

Unlike Lati in the story *Tiuriko Phul Pairiyako Gandha*, Salgi, in the story *Salgiko Balatkrit Anshu*, is distorted from herself and is used as the playing tools to males. She has been completely ousted from the happy livings that she could bear at remote village of Nepal. Salgi has become nostalgic and got her parents and the village in her eyes when she has to be a doll of Indian rascals. Her flashback makes her rebellious and she comes out with the rage against those all who made her such plight. Since she is compelled to be a whore in Indian brothel where she has subdued her inner feelings just to satisfy some Indian wantons, and the brothel owner Sardarni has been getting financial outputs making Salgi's body as an opera to Indian male rascals. Now Salgi is just a weathered flower petal that has no fragrance and use at all. The story portrays:

The odor of the males hasn't been faded out from her body. Where has gone that natural and organic fragrance that Salgi had brought with her from Sindhupalchowk. When dusk has fallen, she has to be appeared with heavy make up for flirt; with naughty cheap smoke, with seductive scents, uff! Brothel is this; nothing different here than this. (p. 158, Trans.)

As a piece of a showcase, Salgi has to be seductive and attractive to drag the customers up to that brothel where she had to sacrifice her own womanhood. She just has a use value and is regarded most as per the number of visitors that she satisfied. Here, she hasn't been living and doing anything for her pleasures rather the coercions upon her are to make and define her as an object of male satisfaction.

This is nothing but just the hegemonizing effects of body politics. Body politics, as the critic Susan Bordo asserts, "is a concept that refers to the direct grip that culture has on our bodies, through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life" (Bordo, 2003, p. 16). The patriarchal normativity has compelled the women to impress and satisfy men through their bodies rather than to express what they actually like to excel. The women's bodies have been the sites to control their agencies and aspirations in patriarchy. And women are fated to conform to the parameters of beautiful bodies laid down by patriarchy-unleashed ideology.

Such portrayal degrades woman's life into a depressing, animal-like, existence where they are working just to survive, while producing wealth and pleasure for someone else. Their life and existence is crushed into this abstract, congealed human labor. They are like machines with sole purpose within a society based on commodity production.

Their individuality, abilities, skills and creative development have no value at all. This is why, Salgi realized that women's bodies are never fully in their control; their sexuality is not a choice that they are free to make without interventions by male dominated social construction.

One of the commonalities in these two stories of Parijat is the pathetic portrayal of the helpless girls when she has been chewed up recklessly throughout the night and the day respectively. The landscape of the temple where Lati passes her night and the room where Salgi exposes her body are somehow similar in view judgment. The disorder and apathy is supposed to tease Lati from the temple compound whereas the deep evils have been yawning in the room that has been decorated by the blood of virgin girls like Salgi. As response to this, the sacred-souled girls like Lati possess a mental disorder and arrogance, and Salgi "forces to settle the life with syphilis, ignorance and hateful death" (p. 157). The present circumstances mock Salgi from the very surface of her captivity:

The dim light enters the closet. On a cot at the corner, there lies a young lady's body as deserted dead. Her shameless deserted body looks as if hungry rascals have raped her ten times at that night. The room smells the local wines, and the torn jasmine scattered all over the bed. (p. 154, Trans.)

Salgi is helpless in this condition and is used as per the visitors' will. She was a jasmine flower which now gives no fragrance at all; she is a beauty in itself but it is withered in such a way that no one admires even if she gets released from that inhumane jail. This is why, the Sardarni and the brokers will always be saying "what difference is to you people either in brothel or outside of it" (p. 157).

A brothel is as a place where people of opposite sexes are allowed to resort for illicit intercourse, whether women are common prostitutes or not. It is not essential to show that the premises are in fact used for the purposes of prostitution, where the maximum chances of forceful and unwilling pregnancy does not only cause the ruin of women's body but also harm the treatment on them. And, if that forceful intercourse cause pregnancy, too, the pregnant subject will be de-centered, split, or doubted in several ways. The pregnant woman experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is focused on her trunk in addition to her head. Thus, the dichotomy of subject and object appears anew in the conceptualization of the body itself. The thinkers tend to assume that awareness of their body in its weight, massiveness, and balance is always an alienated objectification of their body, in which their body imprisons them. They also tend to assume that such awareness of their body must cut them off from the enactment of their projects, which Salgi continuously suffers

from this trauma when becomes fail to experience the warm love and respect from Lwage, as her husband, and was chewed up by the rascals every moment.

Similarly, the story does not only portrait the beautiful life scenario and the handsome earning sources of Indian *Sardarni*, but it reflects and analyzes the mind and heart of distorted Salgi. She bears a sense of turmoil where she finds herself in a cuboid of mental trauma. What she excels was just for the benefits of others; where her individual identity is discarded and she is continuously mocked with reference to the so-called remoteness, illiteracy and ignorance due to her upbringing in rural setting. She is understood by this brothel community as an object that can be vulgarized or promoted as a means to exchange something. Neither she gets the physical rest nor her mental condition remains in peace that can be healing tonic to her irritation, fatigue and hatred. She shows the mental outrage against her own fellows who became a ladder of her ruin; against all who think female body just the elastic that one can stretch as far as they wish or can throw lying on the floor if they think it is useless. She loathes to all those males who came to quench their sexual thirst spending handsome money even though they have their wives at home. Here at the point Salgi's mindset has been displayed as:

... Salgi's fatigue and compulsion have been exchanging with Indian currency and getting Sardani's purse filled up. While an Indian man was getting sexual orgasm, she developed the sense of revolt. "They said devils of yard would be useful than the gods of the country, but that Lwage Gharti is more dangerous than those hyenas who paid to exploit me. Lwage is a demon of the village. My devil. (p. 158, Trans.)

Salgi's angst and wrath seems to be a product of Lwage's senseless and inhumane thought on her body as she was just a medium to him to quench his bodily thirst as well as the economic gain that he was longing for.

For Lwage, women are the object of looks, "an instrument to satisfy one or more men's pleasure" (quoted in Tong, 2009, p. 16). So, Salgi develops an anguish that helps her to be bold and makes determined to punish Lwage but the punishment she aspires does not compensate her lost dignity, happiness, identity and self. She knows well that any punishment to that what distorts an individual is not justified, however she became impatient and is about to burst out. This is a clear indication of how an individual reacts when s/he realizes the loss of self.

It shows that Salgi has no possession on her own body; rather she has been distorted and distanced from the value of her own body, that counts on how long and what pleasure she can generate to others. Her physicality has been a mere construct of male rascals' seductive eyes visiting the brothels frequently. Similarly, in the story *Tiuriko Phul, Pairiyako Gandha*, the female protagonist Lati has been socially constructed as

outsider. Her body has frequently been used and tasted by the males but still she has got no entry on social space. She remains empty in this space but she occupies a limited space during her bodily use i.e. in the use value.

She is objectified not because she is supposed to do but because she has a female body. While discussing their theory of objectification, Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts observes, “[T]he potential for objectification fosters habitual body monitoring, leaving women with surpluses of shame and anxiety, a shortage of peak motivational states and scant awareness of internal body states” (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, p. 186). The adverse effect of such practice is that it motivates women to suspend their competence and assimilate the societal norms established by patriarchy regarding how women should look and behave. It discourages women to defy the set structures of a male-ordained society.

This is why, what comes out from the study is that neither Lati nor Salgi is living the life of their own. Their lives are of others and will be meaningful as others aspire. Since they have the body, they are completely alienated from it and living a distorted self in the heteronormative male constructed society.

Conclusion

Although Parijat and her works have occupied enough space in Nepali academia, the scholarly articles looking her stories from this aspect have a great lacking in this sphere. So, this study may accomplish such gap and may open the horizon for further research. It comes to the point that the two stories - *Tiuriko Phul*, *Pairiyako Gandha*, and *Salgiko Balatkrit Anshu* – deal with men's tendency to see and use women body as they wish. Guided by the patriarchal belief system, the male characters of the stories reduce women's bodies to objects for men's pleasure. They use different forms of violence against women to control and dominate them so that they can use and abuse their bodies to satisfy their erotic pleasure. The women characters of the stories – Lati and Salgi – have faced various adversities and anxieties in their life because of their female body. They all have been deliberately used and robbed off their own selves by other for oral and physical satisfaction. But still they don't have the sense of being alienated from their own self. When they come to realize it, they become rebellious against the so called existing norms and values.

Since the protagonists have no possession on their own body, rather they have been distorted and distanced from the value of own body, that counts on how long and what pleasure they can generate to others. Their physicality has been a mere construct of male rascals' seductive eyes on their frequent visit. This is why, neither Lati nor Salgi is living the life of their own. In both the stories the women identity is lost. The woman is

only present with her body active and of use value. She does not have a life if her body is not proper.

Hence, they entirely talk about the female body from the male point of view in regard to be exploited, to be used, to be enjoyed and to be pleased for others (males). The physical existence of those characters is valued merely on account of how long they can please males and how their body is centralized rather than their existential identity.

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