

Delineation of Slavery in Selected Literature Of Nepal

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Abstract

Slavery stands as the cultural practice, norms and values where one class entice, *persuade and force another class to assist, work and Labor for the benefits of the former. It was a common practice in the world when people were not aware about their rights. Empowerment of people resulted the end of slavery in most of the countries. Slavery was eradicated from Nepal in 1981 B. S. by Rana Prime minister Chandra Shumsher Rana. It was just a legal declaration but it was a great challenge to end it practically. There were different types of slavery in the society. Kamaiya, Kamalari, Haruwa, Charuwa and Haliya traditions were prevalent in different parts of Nepal. This article explores the illustration of slavery in some selected literature of Nepal. This study analyses about how slavery is presented in the literature.*

Key Words: Slavery, Literature, Illustration, Kamaiya, Kamalari, Landowner, Domination.

Introduction

Article one of Slavery convention of United Nations defines Slavery as the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. Convention explains about the slavery in this way;

The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves. (Slavery Convention, 1926, article 1(2))

There are different types of slavery in Nepal. Kamaiya, Kamalari, Haliya, Haruwa, Charuwa are the main practices of slavery. These are the forced Labors. Tej Shrestha (2008) claims that Maoist rebellions also forced people for Labor in armed conflict of Nepal from 2052 to 2062 B.S. "Another bitter side of Nepali experience with 'slavery' that remains unaddressed is the issue of forced Labor under the Maoist Labor camps" (Shrestha, 2008, para. 4).

Shrestha has questioned to the government and rebellions about the use of forced Labor. "While there was armed conflict between government forces and Maoist rebels, they could justify the practice in their base areas under one pretext or the other. But the context and the scenario has changed drastically" (Shrestha, 2008, para. 4).

According to Shrestha (2008), Domestic workers were treated badly. He has explained about all type of domestic workers who are exploited and abused in the working place. He complains that laws can't protect women and children from vulnerability:

With changing social dynamics, keeping domestic workers has become common. Domestic help, especially women and children, are not protected by prevailing Labor laws. Moreover, what they do in other people's homes is hidden from public view. This leaves them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and all sorts of abuses. (Shrestha, 2008, para. 3)

Judie Newman (2023) discusses that topic of slavery is rarely presented in literature. "The topic of slavery in literature is rarely the subject of a discrete work. More commonly it receives coverage in general overviews of African American literature or in discussions of race in literature" (Newman, 2023, General Overviews section).

Nepali literary texts have represented the issue of slavery. Novels *Gantabya*, *Sakhi*, *Faraina*, *Burhan* and a autobiography *Kamalaridekhi Sabhasadsamma* are the selected literature in which we can see delineation of the slavery. So this research article is presenting the issue of slavery illustrated in literature of Nepal. The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- I. To discuss the delineation of slavery in selected literature of Nepal.
- II. To analyze about how slavery is presented in selected literature of Nepal.
- III. To compare and contrast the representation of slavery in selected literature of Nepal.

Methodology

This article has been prepared following the qualitative research method. This study is based on secondary sources. This research paper mainly follows library study. It reviews the secondary sources like books, journal articles, online resources and study reports. Research has followed the comparative study of the texts. I have applied field visit and observation method too for the collection of data and samples.

Theoretical Framework

This article is based on the theory of slavery, cultural hegemony and feudalism. Kamaiya, Kamalari, Haruwa, Charuwa and Haliya practices are the representations of

slavery and feudal system. These are the cultures of dominated community. This culture has been used as hegemony. Rich people exploit the poor in the name of slavery.

Slavery is the consequence of forced Labor practice in Nepal. Kamaiya and Kamalari practice was prevalent in western Terai. Haruwa and Charuwa is still prevalent in Eastern Terai. Haliya tradition was practiced in hilly areas of Karnali and Sudoor Paschim province. These all are the forms of slavery. They were made forced and bonded Laborers. It is the living example of feudal system, cultural hegemony and slavery.

Landlords and rich persons used to provide loan to the farmers but they were unable to pay in time. Loan and landless condition were responsible to make them slaves. They had to work without any satisfactory remuneration. They were exploited physically, financially and sexually. Government declared Slavery free country but different types of practices continued in the society as the seeds of slavery.

This research applies the Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. And more it follows the Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau's theory of hegemony. Hegemonic stories and realities are reflected in the literature of Nepal. So this research is applying the theories of slavery, feudalism and cultural hegemony to represent the literary creations.

Discussion

The history of Slavery in Nepal starts from Licchavi time. Dinesh Raj Pant (n.d.) writes in his article entitled *The Institution of Slavery in Nepal and its Analysis Based on the Dharmasastras* that this is the only clear mention of the institution of slavery during Licchavi times to have come to light.

Bajracharya (2022) has presented seven types of slavery based on Manusmriti. "There are seven kinds of slaves: a man captured in war, a man who makes himself a slave to receive food, a slave born in the house, a purchased slave, a slave given as a gift, a hereditary slave, and a man enslaved for punishment" (p.3).

Bajracharya has explained about the causes of slavery in Nepal;

Several factors could lead a person into slavery in pre-modern Nepal. Original enslavement mainly arose from five causes: the caste system or belonging to an Enslavable caste, being born of slave parents, punishment, impoverishment, and capture in war or rebellion. A growing enforcement of caste hierarchy caused a certain class of people to fall into the lowest strata of society and underprivileged legal positions. (Bajracharya, 2022, p.7).

The Global Slavery Index 2016 Report has estimated that 2,29,000 people are in modern slavery in Nepal. This report has analyzed that the caste system perpetuates discrimination and some traditional forms of slavery in Nepal. "Although the caste

system was officially abolished in 1963, certain populations continue to face discrimination often resulting in a lack of economic opportunities" (The Global Slavery Index, 2016).

This report has described that minorities are the victims of slavery. "The traditional systems of Haruwa, Charuwa, Kamaiya, Haliya and Balighare enslave Nepalese minorities, such as the Dalits (untouchables), through forced Labor and debt bondage practices" (The Global Slavery Index, 2016).

Dr. Fraser Murray et al. (2019) have defined "modern slavery" as an umbrella term for various situations where a person is exploited by others for various forms of gain. Their research report has included Human trafficking, Child trafficking and Labor, Commercial sexual exploitation, Traditional bonded Labor (agriculture), Exploitative Labor and Forced marriage as the modern slavery (p.5-6).

Their research report concludes that Nepal has long been affected by bonded Labor, with the traditional Kamaiya, Haliya and Haruwa-Charuwa bonded Labor systems in place for generations. "Families would be caught in lifelong or serial indebtedness to landlords, paying off this debt predominantly through agricultural but also domestic bonded Labor" (Murray et al., 2019).

This report shows the connection of different forms of slavery.

There are various linkages between the different forms of modern slavery and exploitation, and one form of exploitation can often create space for further and potentially more severe exploitation. It should be recognized that modern slavery in Nepal is increasingly interlinked and layered. (Murray et al., 2019, p.21).

This research report suggests the solution for slavery. "Use the process of federalization as an opportunity to revive, strengthen or introduce the necessary structures to address the different forms of modern slavery" (Murray et al., 2019, p.22).

Bajracharya (2022) concludes that the fate of the slaves was full of humiliations. Sexual abuse and violence against them were common. The accommodation and care provided to them by the masters were of the minimum (p.15). So these problems, sufferings causes, consequences and history of slavery have been in the literature. This research paper focuses to the representation of slavery in different literary texts of Nepal.

Delineation of Slavery in literature

There are many literary texts related to slavery in Nepal. Most of the texts are based on Kamaiya and Kamalari practices. Most of the creations are novels which are mainly focusing the Kamaiya and Kamalari traditions of western Terai. This research article has studied about the literary texts written about kamaiya and kamalari practices.

Krishnaraj Sarbahari (2059) has raised the issue of slavery in his novel *Gantabya*. He has presented the story of kamaiya and kamalari in this novel. This novel is the first novel after declaration of Kamaiya freedom. Government of Nepal declared the Kamaiya free country in 2 Shrawan, 2057.

This novel has released the sufferings of Kamaiya and Kamalari. Tharu boys and girls used to go to landlord's house as a slave in their childhood. Novel depicts the sorrowful childhood of Tharu children. "He doesn't have any good memory of childhood. He found himself in Dhimragagara landlord's house as a chhegrahawa (a person who takes care of goats). He used to go to the field with the flock of goats and sheep while he was of 6/7 years" (Sarbahari, 2059, p.19).

Joshi (2075) has presented the issue of Kamaiya and Kamalari in his novel *Sakhi*. It has portrayed the miseries of Kamaiya and Kamalari in western Terai. Tharu community is accepting and continuing this practice as a slavery. (p.100)

Maghi festival is taken as the time of starting slavery and its renew. Novel has illustrated this plight in this way:

Magh returned again. Magh came. Happiness of festival spread over the Village. Kamaiyas started to drink Jaad (alcohol) to get relief from tiredness of a year. Some of the Kamaiyas joined to new landlord leaving the old one. Some of them renewed in the old landlord's house being unable to pay Sauki (loan). The third day of Maghi, Badku, a kamaiya, intoxicated by alcohol said to Kainla Kaka (forth uncle), the land lord, "Lord, I won't go anywhere leaving you. Soar to cow." (Joshi, 2075, p.100)

In this paragraph, novel shows the tradition of Kamaiya and Kamalari and the obligation of continuing slavery. Maghi is celebrated as the new year of Tharu community but this festival becomes the time of starting kamaiya life. Most of the Tharu farmers are being slave because of loan. They can't pay loan and obliged to become kamaiya. Most of the kamaiyas are continuing the old landlord because they are unable to pay loan. Badku is a kamaiya who is ready to continue to the previous landlord. This type of process goes on for years and years.

We can see that how landlords create pressure to stay as a kamaiya for long time:

Kainla Kaka (Fourth uncle) said to Badku with sympathy, "How can you go to elsewhere ? You have to pay 20 thousand loan. How can you pay it ? You won't have such a luxurious life elsewhere." Then we can't guess how many years Badku spent in that house. He stayed there as a permanent kamaiya. (Joshi, 2075, p.100)

Not only farmers, their daughters were also obliged to work as a kamalari in landlord's house. *Sakhi* presents a scene about life of kamalari and her painful routine in this section:

Kismati, a kamalari, started to wash dishes since seven years old in this house while she used to urinate in her body, couldn't clean defecation. Flowers used to flourish looking at her. Gods used to smile looking at her face. She washed dishes from that early age sitting on a filth. Moon used to drip the drops of tears from the sky seeing a flower like girl child rubbing her soft fingers on filth dishes till late night. Those tears of moon used to leak on her as drops of dews. (Joshi, 2075, p.112)

Kismati is a representative character of Kamalari. Most of the Tharu girl children have spent their childhood in landlord's house as a slave. They had to work from early morning to late night. They were treated inhumanly. It was the violation of law and child rights but also it continued for many years in western Terai. This novel illustrates this sorrowful life of kamalari.

Nepal (2075) reviews the novel *Sakhi* and concludes that it can be experienced of complain of kamiya and kamalari behind the curtain along with Tharu songs and culture. There is the illustration of kamaiya movement, Maoist movement and changing society (Nepal, 2075).

Upadhyaya (2076), has completed a thesis on *Sakhi* novel entitled *Sakhi Upanyaasko Saili Baigyanik Adhyaan* for MA degree from Tribhuvan University. Upadhyaya analyzes this novel as the novel of Tharu and their struggle.

Tharu is the very honest, civilized and discent caste inhabited in western Terai which has come to present life after long struggle. They have spent their life as a kamalari and kamaiya and got this life. What type of struggle were faced by them to get freedom. This is the compile of these struggles. This is the story of Kismati, her struggle and success. So this is centred on Tharu. (Upadyaya, 2076, p.17)

Panna (2079) has reviewed the novel *Gantabya* and analyzed about the presentation of slavery in the story. "There is reality of kamaiyas like Bisaram, Jugana, Thagana, Bhebhawa, Englishwa, Padana who are from poor Tharu family. They have experienced the painful, sorrowful, exploited and suppressed life" (Panna, 2079).

He has mentioned the selling and buying of human beings. Landowners make slaves in the name of loan. It is the clear example of slavery. "There are landowners who make the kamaiyas slaves for generations as a animal in the name of loan. There is the story of hellish life of Tharu community of western part of Nepal" (Panna, 2079).

Burhan novel by Dhakal (2079) has presented the historical story of Tharu farmers who were displaced to western Terai from their birth place, Dang. Many Tharu farmers migrated to Burhan (Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts) from Dang because of suppression of landowners.

Dhakal has shown this history in his novel. "Many farmers were migrated to Burhan from Dang. Some of them migrated by landowner's sufferings. Some poor people went to Burhan in a group from the community. Some were following the landowners of Burhan" (Dhakal, 2079, p.52).

Most of the farmers had become slaves due to land which they used to get for farming. Landowners behaved the farmers as a slave. Dhakal has presented the reason of slavery in his novel:

It was fixed to get land. Maaila got one bigha land for farming. Farmers had to pay half of the productions to the landlord. Neighbours of Maaila also got land for paying half of the production. They had to manage irrigation and farming themselves but had to give half production. Land owners assumed them as lords. They used to call the farmers at home and assigned the household works. They supported in worships. It was compulsory to support the landowner after getting land for farming in the village. (Dhakal, 2079, p.175).

Not only Sufferings, Revolt and Freedom too

Literature written about slavery not only depicts the sufferings and pains but also raises the voice of revolt and freedom. The first part of novels describes the sufferings of slaves, middle part shows the struggle and last part shows the movement for freedom. Most of the novels have same trend. All literary texts describe the history of Kamaiya and Kamalari, their painful life, exploitation of landowners and revolt against slavery and unsolved problems after movement.

Sarbahari (2059) has shown the revolt of Kamaiya and Kamalari in his novel *Gantabya*. After a long suppression of landlords, Kamaiyas started to speak against slavery. "Kamaiya and Kamalari started Maghi revolt movement from Magh 1" (Sarbahari, 2059, p.94).

Kamaiya and Kamalari united against slavery. They protested against land lords and performed procession in the bazaar. "A procession of 4 thousand Kamaiya and Kamalaris surrounded the main chowk and reached to CDO office. Some of the demonstrators were injured by the police but demonstration was not dismissed" (Sarbahari, 2059, p.102).

Novel *Gantabya* shows the problems of rehabilitation of freed Kamaiyas. They were declared free but couldn't make their living. It shows the problem of returning back to kamaiya life. Bhebhawa, a freed kamaiya said to Sukhla, another freed kamaiya, "I became kamaiya again. What can I do? I can't get employment; it is difficult to stay in hunger. You can come to my landlord's house. He is searching other kamaiyas" (Sarbahari, 2059, p.116).

There are some autobiographies too about kamaiya and kamalari practices. Some of the freed kamalaris have changed their life after freedom. Shanta Chaudhary from Ghorahi-4, Dang changed her life drastically. She lived a kamalari life for 18 years. She involved in kamaiya and kamalari free movement and became a leader. she became the central leader of political party and legislator too. Her life story has been presented in the literature. Some novels depict her life story through imaginary characters. She has also written an autobiography entitled *Kamalaridekhi Sabhasadsamma*.

She has described that traditional practices of slavery are connected with poverty. She expresses her experience and suggests for solving the problem of slavery:

So, problems can't be solved without solving the problem of class. Small improvement programs can just try to suppress the problems but can't solve the problem for long time. The main problem is that pain is with one person and leadership is with another. It is no doubt that problems can't be solved without providing leadership to victims. Then only it is possible for suitable treatment for specific disease. (Chaudhary, 2070, p.162)

Sakhi novel also describes the revolt against kamaiya, kamalari practice and its success. Upadhyaya (2076) concludes that there is the illustration of struggle for freedom of kamaiya, its success and settlement of food and shelter to the freed kamaiyas (p.49).

Novel *Gantabya* shows that achievement of kamaiyas didn't become meaningful. "Novel has the perspective of being achievements of Kamaiya movements meaningless because of unsettled life of kamaiyas from barbaric suppression and exploitation of landlords" (Panna, 2079).

Ganesh Nepali (2079) has reviewed the novel *Burhan* and concluded that novel is about the struggle, revolt and desire of improvement in the society. "Subject matter of the story doesn't favour or reject any community. Experience of Kamaiya are same with Tharu or Pahadiya landowners. The views expressed in novel are not new. We have observed closely to the kamaiya movement and armed conflict" (Nepali, 2079).

Novel *Faraina* by Santosh Shrestha (2079) has also shown the revolt, struggle, movement and success of Kamalari. "Victim Tharu community organized a mass conference where decision of movement with procession was finalized. Responsibility of

leadership for demonstration was fixed to Faraina. She joined to movement by heart" (p.144).

Shrestha has illustrated the drastic change in life of kamalaris. Faraina is the protagonist of the novel. She spent very painful life in childhood. She suffered the injustice behavior of landowners for long time. At last, she protested against kamalari practice and involved in the movement. She became a successful leader. People elected her as a legislator, minister, prime minister and president of the country.

This novel has shown the success of kamalari after freedom. Faraina is the model character for the success. It shows that Slaves can become the leader. They have also the capacity to lead the country. Other novels just show the revolt, protest and freedom of kamaiya and kamalari but *Faraina* shows the vast change in the life of slaves.

Selected literary texts have mixed the reality and fancy stories. We see many children in Labor and bonded Labor. Nepal Child Labor Survey 2017/18 has indicated the 29.3 percent child Labor in Nepal. Nepal Child Labor Report 2021 shows that 15.3 percent children of age group 5 to 17 are in Labor.

The study report of a committee formed by Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation in 2078 has shown that 32,509 freed kamaiyas had got the identity card from government. According to this report, there are 9, 490 freed Kamalaris and 16,322 family Haliyas. There is no exact number of Harawa and Charawa.

Freed Kamaiya and Kamalaris have tried to change their life. According to Freed Kamalari Development Forum, 997 freed Kamalaris are studying in secondary level and 277 in campus level. 4,649 Freed Kamalaris have got vocational training and 525 have joined business among them. 88 Freed Kamalaris are in job. These records present that freed kamaiya and Kamalaris are improving their life. Kamaiya and Haliya are still complaining of not getting rehabilitation package. Harawa-Charawa are still working as a slave. Government has declared slavery free country but there are many practices to show slavery.

Conclusion

Slavery is the worldwide problem. It is hidden in the mind of people, culture and practice. Literature is the mirror of society, so literature has incorporated the issue of slavery. Literature of Nepal has also illustrated the issue of slavery. Mainly Kamaiya and Kamalari practices have been presented as the evidence of Slavery.

Literary creations have shown the sufferings, pains and problems of kamaiya and kamalari. Literature presents that kamaiya and kamalari were treated as a slave and they

were misbehaved. Landowners were torturing the slaves. Tharu community suffered for long time because of slavery.

Literary texts have not only illustrated the painful life of slaves but also the struggle, movement and revolt against slavery. Literature has encouraged to the kamaiya and kamalari for protesting against the injustice. Literature shows that government declared the slavery free country but problems are unsolved. Still, many kamaiya and kamalaris are obliged to join the previous life of slaves.

Some of the texts have shown the successful life of kamalari too. They have changed their life and role in the society. They joined in political movement and became the national leader. These are realities of the society too. Some freed kamalaris have become the legislators and central leaders of different political parties. These realities are seen in the literature. So, selected literature if Nepal has clearly shown the picture of slavery, its climax and ending in Nepal.

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