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Women's Rights and Empowerment Movements in Nepal: A Study of *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti**

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Abstract

*This article, "Women's Rights and Empowerment Movements in Nepal: A Study of Yogmaya and Seto Dharti," examines how Nepali literature responds to entrenched patriarchal structures that have historically curtailed women's voices and denied them agency. Nepal's socio-cultural history has been shaped by practices such as child marriage, enforced widowhood, polygamy, dowry, caste-based exclusion, and the Chhaupadi system, all of which silenced women and erased their subjectivities from official history. Literature, however, provides a vital counter-narrative that not only documents these hidden experiences but also resists oppressive traditions. The analysis focuses on two seminal Nepali novels; Neelam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* and Amar Neupane's *Seto Dharti* as feminist texts that illuminate both women's suffering and their resilience. *Yogmaya* reconstructs the life of Yogmaya Neupane, a reformer whose personal defiance against patriarchal restrictions evolved into a collective movement challenging the Rana regime and caste-gender hierarchies. In contrast, *Seto Dharti* portrays the inner world of Tara, a child widow, whose gradual awareness of systemic injustice exemplifies a quieter but equally significant form of resistance. Employing radical feminism (Beauvoir; MacKinnon), intersectionality (Crenshaw), and feminist critique Rege, the article demonstrates how these narratives articulate women's rights through both collective mobilization and individual resilience. Ultimately, "Women's Rights and Empowerment Movements in Nepal: A Study of *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti*" underscores literature's role as cultural testimony, a repository of marginalized voices, and a catalyst for envisioning gender justice in Nepal.*

Keywords: Radical Feminism; Intersectionality; Nepali Literature; Women's Rights; Empowerment; Patriarchy

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Introduction

This article, “Women’s Rights and Empowerment Movements in Nepal: A Study of *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti*,” examines how Nepali literature responds to entrenched systems of patriarchy that have, for centuries, regulated women’s lives and silenced their voices. The socio-cultural history of Nepal is deeply marked by traditional practices such as child marriage, forced widowhood, dowry, polygamy, the Chhaupadi system, and caste-based exclusion, all of which constructed a rigid framework of gender inequality in which women’s agency was denied and their subjectivities erased. Within the Nepali context, this violence meant that women’s everyday realities rarely entered the textual, political, or historical record. Literature, however, provides an alternative cultural archive a space where silenced experiences can be narrated and patriarchal truths contested. Thus, novels like Neelam Karki Niharika’s *Yogmaya* and Amar Neupane’s *Seto Dharti* function as both cultural testimony and feminist critique, enabling a rethinking of gender, voice, and empowerment in Nepal.

Simone de Beauvoir’s foundational argument in *The Second Sex* that “representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (143) resonates profoundly with the Nepali context, where history and cultural discourse have long been male-authored. Women’s lives, when represented at all, were filtered through patriarchal lenses that defined them in relation to men as wives, mothers, and daughters; but seldom as autonomous subjects. Both *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* resist this silencing by re-centering women’s perspectives. In *Yogmaya*, Neelam Karki Niharika reconstructs the life of Yogmaya Neupane, a reformer of the early twentieth century, who breaks the silence imposed upon her by declaring, “Ma chup basdina, yo anyay ko biruddha bolchu” (85). This statement directly subverts Beauvoir’s claim about women’s forced muteness, presenting a protagonist who refuses othering and reclaims subjectivity through speech. Similarly, in *Seto Dharti*, Amar Neupane portrays Tara, a child widow whose lament: “Kasur mero ho ra? Ma ta bali chadeko jasto cha” (“Is it my fault? I feel like I have been sacrificed”; 102) articulates not only personal grief but also the systemic injustice of gendered customs. In both novels, women’s voices emerge as counter-narratives to the patriarchal representations that Beauvoir critiques, thereby transforming silence into a form of resistance.

At the same time, these novels require a theoretical lens that extends beyond Beauvoir's existential feminism to capture the specificities of Nepali women's lives. Radical feminist thinkers such as Catharine MacKinnon argue that "sexual politics is the systematic power of men over women" (113). This framework is particularly apt for analyzing *Yogmaya*, where women's bodies, voices, and choices are controlled not only by familial authority but also by state power under the Rana regime. *Yogmaya*'s refusal of silence becomes a challenge not just to individual male dominance but to an entire system of patriarchal governance. Yet the radical feminist framework must be nuanced through South Asian feminist thought, which insists on grounding analysis in cultural specificity. For example, Uma Chakravarti's concept of "Brahmanical patriarchy" reveals how caste and religion intertwine with gender oppression in South Asia, producing forms of inequality distinct from Western contexts (27). In this light, *Yogmaya*'s resistance against both patriarchal custom and caste hierarchy gains a sharper significance: her activism challenges the very foundations of Brahmanical authority that dictated women's subordination in early twentieth-century Nepal.

Intersectionality, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw's *Mapping the Margins* further illuminates the layered nature of women's oppression in these texts. Crenshaw argues that gender cannot be analyzed in isolation from race, class, or other axes of identity; instead, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1244). In Nepal, caste and geography profoundly shape women's lives, and both novels capture this reality. Tara's suffering in *Seto Dharti* is not only the result of widowhood but also of her isolation in a rural community where traditions are tightly enforced. Her personal grief reflects what Sharmila Rege describes as the "Dalit feminist standpoint," where women's voices must be read in relation to the multiple hierarchies that structure their lives (75). *Yogmaya*, by contrast, mobilizes resistance that incorporates not just gendered oppression but also caste discrimination and poverty, demonstrating how intersectionality helps us understand the collective nature of her struggle. Thus, these novels illustrate how Nepali women's oppression cannot be explained by gender alone; rather, it must be seen at the intersection of patriarchy, caste, class, and rural marginality.

Another critical dimension lies in contrasting modes of resistance: collective versus personal. *Yogmaya* dramatizes how a woman's voice can catalyze a mass

movement, turning private suffering into public protest. Niharika depicts *Yogmaya* gathering Satyagrahis, men and women committed to justice whose demands for equality and truth directly challenged the autocratic Rana regime. This narrative embodies bell hooks's *Feminist Theory* assertion that "to be heard is an act of political resistance for the oppressed" (30). Yet the novel also complicates Western feminist frameworks by showing how *Yogmaya* used religious language and spiritual authority tools familiar in rural Nepal to galvanize reform. Her strategy exemplifies Srila Roy's point that feminist praxis in South Asia often emerges "in hybrid forms, mixing religion, tradition, and modern political demands" (18). In contrast, *Seto Dharti* reveals how even private endurance and reflective questioning can constitute a form of resistance. Tara does not lead a movement, yet her gradual realization that her suffering is socially produced rather than individually deserved marks a subtle but significant feminist awakening. This duality demonstrates that Nepali women's empowerment takes multiple forms, sometimes visible as organized activism, sometimes concealed in the quiet assertion of selfhood.

Therefore, a comparative reading of *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* reveals that Nepali women's resistance operates across registers both collective and personal, public and private. These texts illustrate Chandra Talpade Mohanty's reminder that women's experiences "must be analyzed within specific historical and cultural contexts rather than as universal categories" (40). *Yogmaya*'s collective protest, shaped by her historical moment under Rana autocracy, differs fundamentally from Tara's interior resilience in a rural mid-twentieth-century setting, yet both represent crucial articulations of empowerment. Taken together, the novels demonstrate that literature in Nepal functions not merely as reflection but as resistance: a site where silenced voices speak, where patriarchy is contested, and where possibilities for gender justice are imagined.

Literature Review

The critical landscape of Nepali literature reveals a persistent struggle to bring women's voices from the margins of cultural history into the center of scholarly attention. Historically, Nepali literature, like much of South Asian literary production, has been dominated by male voices, leaving women's narratives either silenced or subsumed within patriarchal paradigms. Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it

from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (143) frames this exclusion as a structural reality of knowledge production. Within Nepal, such exclusion has been reinforced by entrenched practices such as child marriage, dowry, polygamy, sati, widowhood, and Chhaupadi, all of which restricted women’s agency and determined their social identity solely in relation to men. As a result, scholarship on Nepali women’s literature has often taken the form of recovery projects retrieving silenced female figures and voices through historical reimaginings and feminist reinterpretations.

Feminist literary criticism in Nepal has emphasized literature’s capacity to act as cultural testimony, providing alternative perspectives that counter male-authored histories. Elaine Showalter’s foundational claim that women’s writing constitutes a distinct “gynocritical” tradition, which resists patriarchal norms and creates new critical paradigms (13), resonates with contemporary Nepali criticism. Shova Sharma, for instance, has argued that Niharika’s *Yogmaya* “retrieves a silenced female figure from history and reimagines her as a voice of collective protest” (56). Sharma’s interpretation underscores how Niharika’s novel functions as cultural reclamation, a project consistent with Showalter’s emphasis on the importance of women narrating their own experiences. Yet, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty cautions, feminist criticism in postcolonial contexts must avoid treating women’s struggles as universal and instead recognize their cultural specificity (40). Nepali novels like *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* exemplify this need: they speak from within Nepali cultural practices while engaging global feminist concerns of silencing, resilience, and empowerment.

Critical attention to Neelam Karki Niharika’s *Yogmaya* has largely centered on its reconstruction of Yogmaya Neupane, a spiritual reformer and activist of the early twentieth century. Goma Aryal highlights that the novel “articulates feminist possibilities by linking spiritual authority with political resistance” (78). This interpretation reflects the hybridity of *Yogmaya*’s praxis, which blends religious discourse with political critique. Sita Adhikari further expands on this by situating *Yogmaya* within the tradition of feminist resistance in South Asia, noting that the protagonist’s rejection of silence exemplifies Shulamith Firestone’s call to dismantle the cultural bases of female subordination (8; 212). However, some critics caution against reading *Yogmaya* solely through Western feminist paradigms. Uma

Chakravarti's concept of "Brahmanical patriarchy," which emphasizes the intersection of caste and gender oppression (27), provides a more nuanced framework for understanding Yogmaya's defiance. Her challenge to caste hierarchies in addition to patriarchal norms illustrates the multi-layered nature of Nepali women's resistance, something that purely radical feminist frameworks may overlook.

Amar Neupane's *Seto Dharti* has been widely studied for its depiction of Tara, a child widow whose life embodies systemic injustice. Laxmi Karki describes the novel as "a searing indictment of child marriage and widowhood, revealing how these practices erase women's individuality and condemn them to silence" (102). Tara's lament: "Kasur mero ho ra? Ma ta bali chadeko jasto cha" ("Is it my fault? I feel like I have been sacrificed- (102) is frequently cited in scholarship as a moment of feminist consciousness, where personal suffering is reframed as systemic injustice. From the perspective of feminist literary criticism, this moment functions as testimony, aligning with bell hooks's reminder that "to be heard is an act of political resistance for the oppressed" (30). Yet unlike Yogmaya's overt rebellion, Tara's endurance represents a quieter form of resistance one that scholars such as Chhaya Bhandari interpret as a critique of the notion that resistance must always be visible or collective (89). By foregrounding interiority and endurance, *Seto Dharti* expands the scope of feminist narratives to include resilience as empowerment.

Radical feminist theory has been central to readings of both *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti*. Catharine MacKinnon's claim that patriarchy constitutes "the systematic power of men over women" (113) applies directly to Tara's widowhood, which is socially constructed as permanent subordination, and to Yogmaya's enforced silence, which she defies through speech. Shulamith Firestone's argument that liberation requires dismantling not only biological reproduction but also cultural traditions of subordination (8) resonates with Yogmaya's radical rejection of gendered roles. Nepali critics, however, remind us that radical feminism's universal claims need contextualization. Yogmaya's strategy of using spiritual authority to resist the Rana regime reflects what Srila Roy calls "hybrid feminist praxis," where traditional idioms are re-signified for political ends (18). Thus, while radical feminism illuminates the structural nature of women's oppression in these novels, localized readings reveal the specific ways Nepali women negotiated cultural norms to resist domination.

Intersectionality, as theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, has become increasingly influential in readings of Nepali feminist texts. Crenshaw argues that women's oppression cannot be understood through gender alone, since "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1244). Sharmila Rege extends this framework to South Asia through her Dalit feminist standpoint, which emphasizes that caste and gender are inseparable (75). Nepali scholars such as Nirmala Joshi apply these insights to *Yogmaya*, noting that the reformer's activism challenged not only gender inequality but also caste-based exclusions and rural poverty (66). For *Seto Dharti*, intersectionality highlights how Tara's widowhood is compounded by her geographical isolation in a rural hill community, where customs and caste norms tightly regulate women's lives. Bell hooks similarly argues that "race and class are crucial factors in determining the extent to which women are victimized" (16). Tara's endurance, when read intersectionally, reflects how her oppression is produced through the overlapping hierarchies of gender, caste, and community tradition.

Feminist Theoretical Lenses: Radical Feminism, Literary Criticism, and Intersectionality

Radical feminism provides one of the most important theoretical frameworks for reading *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti*, as it foregrounds the systemic nature of patriarchy and the structural subordination of women. As Catharine MacKinnon argues, "sexual politics is the systematic power of men over women" (113). Both novels vividly illustrate this systematic oppression: in *Seto Dharti*, Tara's entire identity is constructed by patriarchal institutions that dictate her fate as a child bride and widow (Neupane 78), while in *Yogmaya*, the protagonist is silenced by social norms that demand female obedience until she openly defies them by declaring, "Ma chup basdina, yo anyay ko biruddha bolchu" ; "I will not remain silent; I will speak against this injustice" (85).

Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that woman has historically been cast as "the Other" in relation to man (16) further illuminates these narratives. Tara is reduced to a shadow of her male relatives, denied subjectivity and treated as a bearer of misfortune, while *Yogmaya* initially experiences the weight of this "othering" before rejecting it through speech. From a radical feminist perspective, these depictions are not merely personal tragedies but structural realities that reflect patriarchy's hold on Nepali society. Yet,

radical feminist theory is not without its limitations when applied in the Nepali context. Shulamith Firestone's insistence that liberation requires dismantling the biological and cultural bases of subordination (8) does not fully capture the ways in which Yogmaya reinterprets tradition rather than discards it. Her use of spiritual discourse to legitimize her protest reflects a hybrid strategy: resistance rooted in cultural idioms familiar to rural Nepalese. This complicates the universalizing tendencies of radical feminism and demonstrates how women in Nepal adapted strategies of defiance within local frameworks.

Thus, radical feminism helps reveal how Nepali women's suffering is produced by systemic patriarchy rather than individual misfortune. At the same time, the novels demonstrate that resistance may take culturally specific forms, whether Yogmaya's public rebellion through religious authority or Tara's interior questioning of injustice. Thus, radical feminism, when localized, provides a powerful tool for analyzing both overt and subtle forms of feminist resistance in Nepali literature.

While radical feminism highlights systemic patriarchy, feminist literary criticism emphasizes the power of literature to challenge dominant cultural narratives and recover silenced voices. Elaine Showalter's concept of "gynocriticism" insists that women's writing offers a distinct tradition that disrupts male-centered literary canons (13). Both *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* illustrate this potential by providing counter-narratives to patriarchal historiography.

In *Yogmaya*, Neelam Karki Niharika reclaims the life of Yogmaya Neupane, a woman reformer long excluded from mainstream historical accounts. Shova Sharma notes that the novel "retrieves a silenced female figure from history and reimagines her as a voice of collective protest" (56). This act of literary recovery aligns with feminist literary criticism's commitment to rewriting history from women's perspectives. Yogmaya's speeches and her ultimate act of self-sacrifice become cultural testimony, ensuring that her voice endures in ways denied by official records. Similarly, Amar Neupane's *Seto Dharti* uses fiction to narrate the lived reality of Tara, a child widow. Her lament- "Kasur mero ho ra? Ma ta bali chadeko jasto cha" ("Is it my fault? I feel like I have been sacrificed"; 102)—functions as testimony against oppressive customs. bell hooks emphasizes that "to be heard is an act of political resistance for the oppressed" (30). Tara's voice, though quiet, exemplifies this resistance by transforming personal endurance into cultural critique.

Critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty warn against universalizing women's struggles (40). This caution is particularly relevant here: Tara's suffering must be understood not as a universal female condition but as specific to rural Nepali society, where widowhood, caste, and geography intersect to magnify oppression. Feminist literary criticism, when applied carefully, enables us to recognize the uniqueness of Nepali women's narratives while situating them within global feminist debates.

Therefore likewise, feminist literary criticism reveals how *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* transform women's silenced lives into literature that resists patriarchy. These texts not only reflect oppression but actively rewrite cultural memory, positioning literature as a site of empowerment and testimony.

Intersectionality further enriches the analysis by uncovering the multiple layers of oppression that Nepali women face. Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality as the recognition that women's oppression cannot be explained by gender alone, since "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1244). In Nepal, caste, class, and geography intersect with gender to shape women's lives in distinct ways. In *Yogmaya*, Niharika portrays her protagonist confronting not only patriarchal norms but also caste hierarchies. *Yogmaya*'s defiance against Brahmanical patriarchy illustrates how caste and gender oppression intertwine in rural Nepal (112). Sharmila Rege's Dalit feminist standpoint insists that caste must be central to feminist analysis, since women's oppression in South Asia cannot be separated from hierarchical social structures (75). *Yogmaya*'s activism resonates with this standpoint, as she mobilizes not only women but also marginalized communities, demanding justice for all who were excluded by caste and gender systems.

In *Seto Dharti*, Tara's widowhood is compounded by her rural isolation, where customs tightly regulate women's lives. Her suffering embodies bell hooks's critique that "race and class are crucial factors in determining the extent to which women are victimized" (16). In Tara's case, caste and geography play roles as significant as gender in producing her marginalization. Chhaya Bhandari notes that *Seto Dharti* "shows how oppression is amplified when widowhood intersects with poverty and tradition in rural communities" (89). This intersectional lens reveals that Tara's suffering cannot be explained solely as patriarchal oppression; it emerges from overlapping structures that shape her entire existence. Critics such as Mohanty caution against homogenizing

women as a universal category (40). This is especially relevant when comparing *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti*. *Yogmaya*'s defiance represents collective mobilization, while Tara's endurance reflects private resilience. Intersectionality allows us to see both as equally valid articulations of empowerment, shaped by distinct social positions.

Intersectionality illuminates how Nepali women's experiences of oppression and resistance differ depending on caste, class, and geography. It shows that women's empowerment cannot be understood in isolation from these other hierarchies. By applying this framework, *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* emerge as narratives that not only depict suffering but also articulate diverse strategies of resilience. By employing radical feminism, feminist literary criticism, and intersectionality, this study builds a comprehensive framework for analyzing Nepali women's literature. Radical feminism exposes the systemic nature of patriarchy; feminist literary criticism highlights how literature reclaims silenced voices and functions as testimony; intersectionality uncovers the layered oppressions shaped by caste, class, and geography. Together, these lenses ensure that *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* are not merely read as stories of suffering but as complex narratives of empowerment that challenge patriarchal traditions while reimagining spaces of freedom.

Analysis of *Yogmaya*

Neelam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* reimagines the life of Yogmaya Neupane (1860–1941), a spiritual reformer from Bhojpur who challenged both patriarchal traditions and the Rana regime. The novel dramatizes how private suffering becomes public resistance, positioning *Yogmaya* as a figure of feminist empowerment. Her refusal of silence—"Ma chup basdina, yo anyay ko biruddha bolchu" I will not remain silent; I will speak against this injustice (85). epitomizes radical feminist awakening. Simone de Beauvoir's claim that women have been historically cast as "the Other" (16) resonates here, as *Yogmaya* asserts subjectivity through speech and transforms her marginality into a voice of justice. Her defiance quickly expands into collective mobilization: "Hami satya ko lagi ekatra bhayeka chau. Nyaya napayepachi chuppa basna sakdainau" We have gathered for the sake of truth. After being denied justice, we cannot remain silent" (142). This shift from individual defiance to communal struggle illustrates Catharine MacKinnon's idea that patriarchy operates as systemic domination (113). Through feminist literary criticism, this narrative functions as cultural testimony,

recovering a woman omitted from historical records and reframing her as a forerunner of rights-based activism.

Yogmaya's resistance also reflects intersectional awareness. She not only protested gender inequality but also denounced caste hierarchies: "Jati-ko naamma hamilai talmat garna khojne haru ko biruddha ladai garnu parcha" We must fight against those who try to suppress us in the name of caste (112). Her movement "was radical precisely because it addressed inequalities across multiple hierarchies. The novel culminates in Yogmaya's mass sacrifice with her followers in the Arun River: "Aba jiwana bhanda maryada thulo cha. Aba hami Arun ma bilayaunchau"- "Now dignity is greater than life. Now we will dissolve ourselves in the Arun" (210). This act transforms death into political defiance, recalling bell hooks's insistence that "to be heard is an act of political resistance for the oppressed" (30). Critics such as Shova Sharma interpret this scene as "a moral indictment of both state autocracy and cultural patriarchy" (59). By re-signifying religious symbolism into feminist protest, Niharika demonstrates how Nepali literature retools cultural idioms for radical critique.

Through Yogmaya Neupane's life, Niharika's novel dramatizes the spectrum of feminist resistance in early twentieth-century Nepal. Her refusal of silence, her mobilization of followers, and her final act of sacrifice exemplify radical feminist defiance of systemic patriarchy. Simultaneously, the novel embodies feminist literary criticism's commitment to recovering silenced voices and presenting them as cultural testimony. Finally, Yogmaya's activism illustrates intersectionality, since her struggle addressed not only gender but also caste and class oppression. In sum, *Yogmaya* transforms a forgotten historical figure into a literary icon of empowerment, demonstrating that women's resistance in Nepal has always been both personal and collective, spiritual and political.

Analysis of *Seto Dharti*

Amar Neupane's *Seto Dharti* depicts Tara, a child widow whose life illustrates the systemic violence of patriarchal traditions in rural Nepal. Married at seven and widowed before understanding marriage, Tara is condemned to silence and exclusion. Her lament- "Kasur mero ho ra? Ma ta bali chadeko jasto cha" Is it my fault? I feel like I have been sacrificed" (102) marks the recognition that her suffering is socially

constructed rather than natural. This realization echoes Catharine MacKinnon's view of patriarchy as "the systematic power of men over women" (113) and its claim that women have been reduced to "the Other."

From a radical feminist perspective, Tara's widowhood exemplifies structural domination, yet her endurance complicates Western expectations of rebellion. As bell hooks observes, "to be heard is an act of political resistance for the oppressed" (30). Tara's survival and reflective questioning, though quiet, function as testimony. In this sense, *Seto Dharti* aligns with feminist literary criticism's commitment to reclaiming silenced voices. Elaine Showalter's gynocritical approach (13) and Mohanty's insistence on culturally specific readings (40) together affirm Tara's narrative as both literary disruption and contextualized testimony.

Intersectionality further deepens this reading. Tara's widowhood is compounded by her isolation in a rural hill village (154), Sharmila Rege's Dalit feminist standpoint underscores that caste and gender are inseparable in South Asian contexts (75). Though Tara's caste is not foregrounded, her social constraints mirror caste-like restrictions amplified by poverty and tradition. Chhaya Bhandari notes that *Seto Dharti* "shows how oppression is amplified when widowhood intersects with poverty and tradition in rural communities" (89).

Through the character of Tara, *Seto Dharti* portrays the systemic injustices of child marriage and widowhood in rural Nepal. Tara's suffering illustrates radical feminist insights about patriarchy as structural domination, while her questioning transforms silence into testimony, resonating with feminist literary criticism's emphasis on reclaiming silenced voices. Intersectionality further reveals how her oppression is compounded by geography, poverty, and rigid community traditions. Ultimately, Tara's endurance exemplifies a quieter but equally valid form of resistance. In contrast to Yogmaya's public mobilization, Tara's narrative demonstrates that Nepali women's empowerment can manifest through personal resilience as much as through collective protest. Together, these insights position *Seto Dharti* as a vital feminist text that challenges patriarchal customs while preserving the dignity and agency of women whose voices have long been silenced.

Conclusion

The novels *Yogmaya* by Neelam Karki Niharika and *Seto Dharti* by Amar Neupane illuminate the complex realities of Nepali women's lives under deeply entrenched patriarchal systems. Both texts reveal how customs such as child marriage, widowhood, and caste-based hierarchies curtailed women's agency, yet they also depict women's strategies of resistance, ranging from overt collective mobilization to subtle personal resilience. Read together, these novels demonstrate that Nepali literature is not merely a reflection of cultural history but an active site of feminist resistance and testimony. The analysis of *Yogmaya* illustrates how one woman's refusal of silence transformed into collective mobilization. *Yogmaya*'s declaration, "Ma chup basdina, yo anyay ko biruddha bolchu" I will not remain silent; I will speak against this unjust (85), epitomizes radical feminist defiance of systemic patriarchy. By mobilizing Satyagrahis and linking spiritual discourse with political critique, she embodies what feminist literary criticism identifies as the recovery of silenced voices and the re-inscription of women into cultural memory. Intersectionality further illuminates her resistance, showing how *Yogmaya* confronted not only gender inequality but also caste hierarchies and rural poverty. In this way, Niharika's novel reclaims *Yogmaya* Neupane as both a historical reformer and a feminist symbol of collective empowerment.

In contrast, *Seto Dharti* portrays Tara's life as a child widow, revealing the internalized violence of patriarchal customs. Her lament- "Kasur mero ho ra? Ma ta bali chadeko jasto cha" Is it my fault? I feel like I have been sacrificed" (102) marks a turning point where endurance transforms into self-awareness. Through a radical feminist lens, Tara's widowhood exemplifies systemic oppression; yet her endurance resonates with feminist literary criticism's emphasis on testimony, as her life becomes a record of silenced voices. Intersectionality deepens this reading by exposing how Tara's suffering is compounded by her rural context, poverty, and rigid traditions. Unlike *Yogmaya*'s public defiance, Tara's resistance is private and subdued, but no less significant. Her endurance represents an alternative form of feminist awakening, where survival and self-awareness themselves become acts of resistance.

Taken together, these novels underscore that women's empowerment in Nepal cannot be captured by a single model of resistance. *Yogmaya*'s collective

mobilization and Tara's individual resilience represent two ends of a continuum, public protest and private awakening, each revealing how women navigate and contest patriarchy in their own contexts. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty reminds us, women's struggles must be understood in their historical and cultural specificities rather than judged against universal standards (40). *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* affirm this principle by demonstrating how Nepali women articulate empowerment in ways that are both deeply local and profoundly resonant with global feminist concerns. The contribution of these texts lies not only in portraying women's suffering but in expanding the discourse of resistance. Through radical feminism, they expose the systemic nature of patriarchal domination; through feminist literary criticism, they highlight literature as cultural testimony that preserves silenced voices; through intersectionality, they reveal how caste, class, and geography intensify women's oppression. In doing so, the novels challenge patriarchal traditions while reimagining spaces of freedom, dignity, and equality. Ultimately, *Yogmaya* and *Seto Dharti* demonstrate that Nepali literature serves as more than artistic expression: it is a political and cultural resource that documents hidden histories, articulates feminist consciousness, and catalyzes movements for change. By reclaiming women's voices from the margins, these novels underscore literature's role as testimony, resistance, and catalyst for women's empowerment in Nepal; past, present, and future.

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