

Exploring Feminism on *Ghātu* Cultural Site

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Ghātu cultural site from a feminist approach. Ghātu cultural site has been studied mostly from the anthropological point of view but it has not been studied from this approach. The study explores feminism on this site to make the readers aware of female identity and gender equality by teaching feminism in EFL classes because society is not free from the grip of male domination. The pedagogical implications are to make the students or the new generation aware of gender discrimination. Most females think that their misfortune victimizes them but this paper attempts to prove that it is not. This paper suggests that misfortune should be changed into good fortune. According to the theory of feminism, the female voice should be addressed. Ghātu cite is a burning example of extreme male domination. The sati system, immolation, compels queen Yemphawati, to jump into the burning pyre of her husband. The findings of the study show that society has been knowingly or unknowingly dominating and using females yet. This essay protests the conservative thought of a patriarchal society. Still, some males are guided by such a poor mentality and they want to dominate females. The study is about maintaining the balance between male-female so that a win-win game will be there. The trend of

othering never results positively. And this paper forwards these questions. Why do males treat females as commodities in Ghātu? What are the main reasons of the over-domination of females? Are females weaker than males?

Keywords: Commodities, Feminism, Ghātu, Sati system, and Culture

Introduction

This study analyzes *the Ghātu* site from a feminist approach that advocates female identity and gender equality. Analyzing any literary texts from different theoretical tools like, feminism, colonialism, structuralism, post-colonialism, psychoanalysis and so on in the humanities department of English is common but this is not in practice in the English education departments. Similarly, teaching pedagogies are no more in practice in humanities. So, teaching feminism in the EFL classes can be a new taste to the

education background teachers and students. The pedagogical implications of teaching feminism have a wider range of expanding the horizon of human knowledge as the world is fully guided by several isms. Although gender discrimination is the political agenda, academicians must know this. *Ghātu* cultural site is a burning example of male chauvinism. This text tells the history of how male-dominated females in Nepal about five hundred years ago. There are a lot of dos and don'ts in this small piece of cultural activity. The dos aspect has not been interpreted but the don'ts aspect like sati system is criticized. There was a *sati* system, the immolation system, and it was strictly applied by the Khasa-Brahman community until the time of Rana Prime Minister, Chandra Samsher. The purpose of this paper is to make school and college students, especially girls students, aware of gender discrimination. Those who experience discrimination in present-day society may think that it is extreme. But when they read the history of gender discrimination in *Ghātu*, they will realize how painful the situation their great-grandmothers had faced was. Now they feel that the present discrimination is not a big deal. And they should think that there is not a hundred per cent equality between males and females and they have to struggle. When they feel that it is not unsolvable, they can adjust easily. Or they might misjudge if they do not know the background history of male domination. Then they think that present discrimination is solvable.

Ghātu is the site in which the female character, queen Yemphawati, has been treated as an inferior creature, sympathetic character and second-class citizen. In one sense, *Ghātu* is an exemplifying cultural activity in which there is how badly the female has been dominated. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests (Odhiambo & Mutuku, 2022, p. 1). This shows that advocating gender equality is a sociopolitical issue for protecting and guaranteeing women's rights and interests. The issues of gender difference are from the time of Eve and Adam, as the serpent convinced Eve to eat the forbidden apple or since the evolution of human civilization. The main purpose of such campaigns is that no women would suffer like queen Yemphawati and sati Bhuwan Laxmi Malla. Bhuwan Laxmi is the wife of *Kaji*, minister, Bhim Malla. She had immolated when her husband was killed. Bhim Malla would not have immolated like his wife if she had died earlier. Queen Yemphawati is a legendry character, whereas Bhuwan Laxmi Malla is a real character in the history of Nepal and an example of male domination. And this is the historical knowledge for the students in EFL classes.

Ghātu is a folk drama about a tragic story of a young woman, queen Yemphawati. Her self-immolation, the *sati* system, is a kind of suicide. The male-dominated society compelled her to immolate. The female's sacrifice is a great tribute for the sake of the male. She was forcefully proved to be a weak character and instigated to go *sati*. This is a poor mentality of the feudal society. We find this in *Ghātu* which reflects the feudal mentality. This is a great exploitation of females which is still going on in our society directly or indirectly. Society constructed the immolation system, as a culture, to prove the female inferior and the male superior, like the caste system of Nepal. Still, the feudal society is undergoing in many Asian countries. To consider females as commodities and second-class citizens is the male's over judgment and undervaluation. It is not possible to observe the *Ghātu* performance in the villages without females but it is possible without males. *Ghātu* can be considered an example of high respect for husbands, whereas it is analyzed as an example of male domination. There is not any research paper on *Ghātu* that has been analyzed from a female perspective.

In the past, only the females would perform the *Ghātu*. This trend is still going on in Dulegauda of Tanahu and Baikuntha village of Makawanpur. Almost no cultural activities are accomplished without female characters. The females make any cultural performances more interesting and entertaining. The male-dominated society never prioritizes the importance of females' participation in cultural activities. This paper discusses why most eastern societies consider females as weaker by nature. Are they so or only the male construct concept? The present world may not be ready to easily accept the woman's leadership yet in many fields although the Hindu people have the influence of Goddess Durga, Kali, Laxmi and so on. The history of the Hindu kingdom is about the praise of women's powerful deeds. They want to be as powerful as the Goddess Durga but they do not want to empower their sisters, daughters, wives, and mothers. This is because if they are empowered, males have the fear of being dominated. This mentality works a great deal. Similarly, the history of Europe is led by women, for example, Queen Elizabeth. Andalusia (1000 A. D.) presents the following lines spoken by Joan of Arc, the most powerful woman:

My name is Joan of Arc. I am a peasant girl who was born in Eastern France. I led the French army against the English. We won important battles during the Hundred Years' War. I was called by God to lead the French army. I hear God's voice telling me what to do in battles. King Charles sent me as French leader. Now I am a prisoner of the English, and I am going to be burnt at the stake, as a witch. (p.20)

This quote is a short story about an energetic woman called Joan of Arc. Although she was a peasant girl, she led the French army against the English, as French leader, but Therefore, *Ghātu* performing art has the subject of female domination. The contribution of Mother Teresa, Florence Nightingale, CNN hero, Anuradha Koirala from Nepal and Malala from Pakistan cannot be ignored. Is it not necessary to make the students of EFL classes aware of such information?

Ghātu performance is female participated performance. It is impossible without females. And their contribution to fostering cultural activity is worth having. There are few cultural activities which are performed by the male. They are like Balun dance and Lakhe dance, for example. *Ghātu* is the performance that females can alone do without male's participation. This shows that female is capable of doing anything in the world. This concept was no more in the time when *Ghātu* started. In Dulegauda of Tanahu, and Baikuntha village of Makawanpur, there are only female performers. Although in Nalma village of Lamjung, the dance masters are all males, the dancers are all girls. The very female characters play the roles of both the king and the queen. *Maruni* dance is another popular dance among the Gurungs and the boy enacts the girl's role by wearing sari. They do it when girls are not available. This also shows the importance of females. The study is concerned with female participation and their contribution to preserving the *Ghātu* culture or many other cultural activities like *kaura*, *churka*, *lokdohari*, *rodhi* and so on. "*Ghātu* dance is very popular among the Gurungs [. . .] about the historical subject matters of a legendary King Pashramu and his queen Ambawati" (Gurung, 1983, p. 121). *Ghātu* is popular among the Gurungs and other ethnic groups, and it is mostly led by female characters. The whole story centralizes the lamentation and agony of the queen, Ambawati or Yemphawati. The male-dominated society overhears their agony and lamentation. They are lamenting for ages. Thousands of women sacrificed their lives for the happiness of their males. This is the age of

feminism in which females are not to be treated otherwise. Therefore, *Ghãtu* performance is a masterpiece of gender discrimination. Through this site, feminists know the male's intention and it has been easier for them to tackle the issue in days to come. And feminism is the only weapon by which female trouble will be addressed and male-dominated society will be challenged. The change has taken place in the fields of education, politics, and government offices but not as much as expected.

Statements of Problem

Ghãtu performance has been written from a socio-anthropological point of view by many scholars but it has not been critically analyzed from a feminist point of view. The analysis of *Ghãtu* from this angle has not been studied yet. The woman rights activist performs the campaign for their reformation but it is not sufficient yet. Shedding the light on this issue can enlighten the students in EFL classes. The researchers have not focused on the unspeakability of Yemphawati in *Ghãtu* performance. She sacrificed her life for the sake of males. Her sacrifice is not patriotic or so. Her name is no more in the mind of the public after her death. Most writers just narrated what they found about *Ghãtu* and it has not been analyzed from literary aspects or feminist point of view. The Nepali culture itself proves to be defective when the sati system was in practice as Nepal was influenced by India. There was a belief system that the dead soul of Yemphawati would go to heaven and unite there where her husband's soul resided if she immolated. This is just politics. All the language students must know this fact as well. They should be aware of such human tricks by which people are victimized. Students of EFL classes do not study this type of course.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

- To analyze *Ghãtu* from a feminist point of view.
- To identify the female position in *Ghãtu* performance.
- To enhance the significance of women and challenge the woman's status quo.

Significance of the study

Ghãtu has been ignored for several reasons that the scholars never consider this cultural activity as the major research area. *Ghãtu* is the burning example of how male dominates the female. There are several symbolic meanings of this cultural activity. The queen symbolizes a general woman who suffers from a male-dominated society. There are hundreds of symbolic meanings in *Ghãtu* which are didactic for the EFL students and the new generation. This cultural festival has not been analyzed from this angle. Society compels the queen for self-immolation because of sati system. Sati system is a bad cultural practice to dominate or exploit females. By reading the pathetic condition of queen Yemphawati, the study encourages to enhance or empower the women in society. Without empowering them, the development of society is beyond imagination. Studying *Ghãtu* from a feminist approach means enhancing the females and enhancing them means enhancing the whole of the human world. But *Ghãtu* has never been studied from this perspective yet. So, this paper focuses on the feminist aspects of *Ghãtu*.

Methodology

This paper has used a qualitative approach to study the *Ghātu* performance from a critical perspective of feminism. The paper has utilized the descriptive analysis of females of five hundred years back history to examine the *Ghātu* performance from a feminine aspect. The insight of femininity or female existence has been questioned. On the *Ghātu* site, the theoretical tool of feminism by Julia Krsteva', has been used to interpret the texts. Some critics argue that her theories open up the possibility of change, e.g., Ainley (1990), Chanter (1990), Jardine (1986), Rose (1986); (Oliver, 1993, p. 95). For gender equality, change is a must for which Kristeva advocates. Besides, the researcher collected the data from *Ghātu* performance informants as the primary source. And other necessary information is taken from different scholarly journals, research articles and books as secondary sources for the analysis of the text. In the study, the performance has been analyzed from a feminist approach or explanatory and analytical approaches have been used. The paper explores that some cultural activities are defective and Yemphawati untimely faced death because of the patriarchal society. The female voice has been badly suppressed in *Ghātu*. So, *Ghātu* is evidence of how patriarchal society enslaved women. And this study protests enslavement. Feminism advocates women's rights that it is a serious issue. Females are not to be treated as the commodities which we find in the *Ghātu* site. Feminism protests gender discrimination. The research shows that no discrimination results positively. Gender discrimination is more sensitive than other discriminations like colour, race and so on. Feminism is one of the oldest movements in global history. There's no single definition, but feminism boils down to ending gender discrimination and bringing about gender equality (Odhiambo & Mutuku, 2022, p.1). Although feminism is the oldest movement in global history, this is still an ongoing issue in several backward conservative societies. This knowledge is a must for the EFL students as it is the lifelike reality that they have to acknowledge.

Analysis of *Ghātu* Performance from a Feminist Approach

The beauty of *Ghātu* is all because of female participation. As women are not only the source of creation, they, as the half domain of the galaxy, are the source of beauty which maintains the harmonious relations of human beings. *Ghātu* is a folk drama performance acted out around a tragic story of [. . .] the queen Yemphawati who immolates in her husband's funeral pyre (Gurung, 2014. P. 1). This shows that female is ready to sacrifice her physical body for the sake of her husband or males. The female is more sacrificial and devoted as well as committed than the males. This is the age of the digital world but society is still in the analogue of the Stone Age. The people have been wearing ultramodern dresses and living in an ultramodern bungalow, in the sky scrapers but their mentality is pre-historic and they still claim that female is an inferior creature. They claim that females are physically weaker, and those who are weaker in the body are weaker in the mind, too. They claim that the male is always superior god sent an agent onto this earth and female cannot challenge males. The argument is very interesting and irritating or laughter-provoking as well.

Nepali culture has been influenced by western culture. For example, cake-cutting culture has become very popular in eastern countries like Nepal. The young generation considers the practice of *Ghātu* culture as out dated stuff. Like "Alaska native people are both influenced and challenged by the Western culture. Unfortunately, that influence has been traumatizing and destructive" (Ricco, 2003, p. 1).

There is no difference between Alaska people and Nepali people in this context. Nepali society has also been badly influenced by the American culture or American lifestyle and Nepali tradition and culture have been ignored. With industrialization and modernization, the significance of cultural activity has been a secondary thing. *Ghātu* is an ignored cultural activity that is an example of how females are dominated. Because of the patriarchal society, queen Yemphawati is compelled to immolate. The story is constructed and male-made. Consequently, anthropologists, extrapolating from their class-based societies, found women everywhere of lower status and then contended that female inferiority was cross-cultural. Leacock (2009) argued that this was false (p. 223). Whether in the east or the west, anthropologists found the lower status of women and females are considered inferior to the male. This essay attempts to fill up this gap. The males knowingly harass the females and harassed mentality of some females cannot progress well in life although all the females are not in the same bucket. This makes their status lower. The males with a feudalistic mentality think that females are to be ruled. Based on physical strength, how justifiable it is, to undervalue the female? So, Leacock (2009) protested that the female inferiority concept was false. Females are never as weak as males thought them to be. This concept enhances all the students in EFL classes.

Unlike Muslim countries, Nepal is characterized by the male dominant society. *Ghātu* is a burning example of the extreme exploitation of unspeakable women. Her unspeakability is never heard of. Sati system is just to exploit the females. Sexual differences are universal—all humans are born female or male—but gender distinctions vary . . . or do they? Are women subordinate in all societies? (Ortner, 2009, p. 312). Yes, males consider women are subordinate in all societies. It is not only queen Yemphawati, who suffers in society. Millions of Yemphawatis are losing their lives untimely and unspeakably. Even if a very strong law has been made, female sufferers do not get justice. And when a person does not find any help in the mundane world, s/he prays for god just for self-satisfaction. Yemphawati has been pressured in such a way that she could not do anything against this mechanism. The female-dominating trend is a thousand-year-old trend in Nepal. Who bells the cat? The male-dominated trend has been well institutionalized. To change this fossilized mechanism, it takes years. This paper encourages the females that it will surely change. There are several indications we find in society. Even god does not do justice for females although Tolstoy claims that god sees the truth but waits. God does not see the truth because god is a male. Ortner (2009) further claims that female/male—is a culturally and politically constructed phenomenon (p. 315). There is politics in discriminating and making the sati system. How selfish the sati system is. The woman has to jump into the burning pyre of her husband but the husband does not do this. Instead of this, he gets married to another woman immediately after his wife's death. Society easily excuses males. It is their obligation. Why did queen Yemphawati commit a kind of suicide? She immolated herself because the widow is considered a social stigma or a kind of damaged good. She could not have tolerated this stigma.

According to Nepali mentality, the widow is taken as a bad omen. When they see the widow at the time of departure, they say that it has been bad luck. What a laughter-provoking silly thing it is! Yemphawati knew that the widow had been living a hateful life. Society passed negative comments over the widows. She knew all this. Therefore, she chose a safe landing of death as she had no alternative way to survive. Her voice was unheard of. Although indigenous women are a bit freer than Aryan women,

most of them have bitter experiences of inherent structural patriarchy and dominated political systems. Social exclusion based on gender has for centuries been an important part of the Nepali milieu. (National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF) (Nepal) (2022). Because of inherent structural patriarchy and dominated political systems, women have been still suffering. Constructed *Ghāṭu* story tells us that the queen's death is the death of her wish but it is not true. One can see the *Jhola movie* (2022) for proof. According to this movie, "sati is an ancient practice of burning a widow on her deceased husband's burning pyre or burying her alive in his grave" (*Jhola movie* (2022), 00:00:05-00:00:07). Similarly, Yemphawati, a young widow woman, is burnt down on her deceased husband's pyre. Is it human justice or wild justice? Yet the woman is not treated as a human being in some Nepali societies by males of feudalistic mentality although the state law guarantees the woman's rights. The scriptwriter, Krishna Dharabasi, has highlighted the sati system as the main subject. Bhuwan Laxmi Malla, the wife of Kaji Bhim Malla, had immolated in her husband's pyre, had cursed very badly, has been contextualized in the *Jhola movie* (2022) and it is assimilated to *Ghāṭu*. Bhuwan Laxmi had cursed like this: Those who sacrificed for the sake of the nation would never have been rewarded but punished/beheaded (Nepali Voiceover, 2022, 00:00:11:30-00:00:11:30). Like Bhuwan Laxmi Malla, Yemphawati jumped into the burning pyre. How pitiless our society was! A lot of correction has taken place now but the change is not as much as required.

Every culture is the product of a social construct for the benefit of a certain group of people, especially males. To dominate the females, they construct the culture and link it to religious beliefs. They don't tell the females that it has been constructed by man but they claim that it is god. In the Middle Age Hindu Society, the perspective towards females was biased [my trans.] (Acharya 221). By this biased perspective, queen Yemphawati had been victimized. She did not protest against this sati system. The suppressed women do not raise their voice against this evil thing. They just follow what they are imposed because they cannot protest it. One Columbian woman followed the widow culture without fail and she died after eleven years. There was an easy chair [. . .] in which she sat down to rest that same night sighing, oh, my poor Olofernos, if you could only see how nice it is to think about you" (Márquez, 2009, p. 58). The so-called easy chair symbolizes the bad culture of widowhood. After her husband died, she lived as a widow for eleven years in a depressed mood. At last, she died sitting in the same chair. Similarly, four other women had died sitting in the same chair, so, this chair was called the murderous chair as the murderous chair was thrown into the sea, far away where it wouldn't bring evil to anyone because it had been used so much over the centuries (Márquez, 2009, p. 58). Sitting in the chair means following the widow culture, and throwing the chair into the sea means stopping following the bad culture. Although cultural activities are a world heritage to some extent, some cultural activities are defective. *Ghāṭu* has also been established with a similar motive of dominating women. *Ghāṭu* culture seems to have started from male perspectives. The masculine mentality is wonderful that femininity is always inferior to males. We think of manhood as eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man (Kimmel, 2022, p. 182). Because of this poor mentality, Yemphawati has been the victim of the situation. Millions of women in South Asia suffered similarly. The females have been knowingly killed by their husbands. Sexual harassment is very negligible in many societies. This paper makes all the literature and language students in EFL classes aware of such defective cultural activities that they are to be changed immediately.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed *Ghātu* performance from a feminist approach and attempted its best for gender equality. The terms like feminism, Marxism, deconstructionism, and psychoanalysis as such are the fields of research. Only the European writers' texts are interpreted and analyzed from the perspectives of feminism or so but not the Nepalese writers' texts. There are several cultural sites or socio-anthropological texts that are to be analyzed from different angles by applying theoretical tools and this trend must be encouraged by the senior scholars and the syllabus. Mostly the literary texts are analyzed rather than the texts of cultural activities. Though a hundred per cent mix-up is not possible, there must be something mixed up between language and literature. Anyway, queen Yemphawati is the protagonist of the performance and she suffered much because of the patriarchal society. She followed the sati system, the immolation system, that is, jumping into the burning pyre of her husband. This is a Hindu culture as it was practised in India then it came to Nepal. It was in a practice until the time of Chandra Shamsher in Nepal. Either in religion or culture, there is a way how to continue the exploitation of the female. According to sati system, the immolation system, the females were forced to immolate that they would go to heaven if they did that right at the time of their husband's death. This interpretation was not scientifically proven but the conservative people blindly followed the rituals that the males had constructed for their ease. Most of the cultural activities are male-made rather than human-made. The findings of the study show that males were very inhumane in the past and they want the same even today. This paper examined the impact of the immolation system and concluded that it was unjust to females. The researcher has just analyzed this cultural activity from a feminist approach but *Ghātu* is the goldmine for the research and future researchers can study this site from a psychoanalysis point of view and so on.

The genderless and colourless cultural activities or hybridized cultural activities are universally accepted and benefitted for all. In Nepal, *Chhaith* can be considered a cultural hybridization, for example. It was only observed by the Tarai people in the past but now it is observed even in Kathmandu. Similarly, for instance, "Louisiana Creole" is a combination of African, French, and English languages. But *Ghātu* cultural activity is biased which promotes only the patriarchal society. Modern people do not accept it because the present world scenario has been changed. The present world principle or concept is about there should be no one above no one. Everyone is to be addressed equally or "treat everyone equally" is what everyone's will is. Most cultural activities are constructed in favour of males. Now, this type of cultural activity is badly criticized. In *Ghātu*, the queen's suffering has not been considered the suffering but the duty. In this regard, *Ghātu* is an example of gender inequality although it is a historical cultural activity. Yemphawati gets shocked when she knew that her husband was slain in the war. The patriarchal society assumes that the wife should die on the spot immediately when she heard of her husband's death. This type of death is considered religiously a very happy death. Can death ever be a happy thing? What an irony! To prove her devotion to her husband, the sati system was constructed by males. Although there is not a sati system in society in practice at present, some females have been experiencing other types modified sati system much bitterly till now. Although they do not have to jump into the burning pyre, their present life is much harder than that. Only living is not everything. It might be much more torturous than death. This death is one-time death but there has been a number of deaths of some modern women. There are hundreds of Yemphawatis in our societies. The concern of the study is, "save Yemphawatis". They have more to do. And ask Yemphawati, she has more to say. The EFL class students must know this.

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