

Resisting Patriarchy: Analyzing Gender Dynamics in Chandrakala Newar's "Agnisnan" and "Hunger"

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Abstract

Nepalese short fictions paint the social reality with a seamless gaze, juxtaposing women's struggle through an apparently meaningless existence. In capitalist society, the nuclear family is the best combination of the parts of the mode of reproduction from the standpoint of capital, and its oppressive qualities have been exhaustively analyzed in feminist literature. This paper explores the capitalist structures, processes, and contradictions that, at the mode of production level, create observed forms of gender inequality that are always historical in the Marxist sense. As a result, social reality should focus not only on the characteristics that it shares with past periods but also on those that are unique to the mode of production in question. Nepali short fictions disclose the domestic violence that Nepalese women are bound to face. In the selected two stories, characters like Junu and Shanti are doomed to face domestic violence because of their economic dependency on their male partners. So, without being economically independent, women in Nepalese society cannot celebrate their total freedom. The qualitative data analysis technique is adopted using feminism and gender studies as a theoretical methodology of this research.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Resist, gender dynamics, social reality, juxtapose, struggle.

Nepali Short Fiction and Its Development

The genre of Nepali fiction has recently completed two hundred years if we consider Shakti Ballav Arjyal's *Mahabharat Biratparba* (1770) as the first fiction in Nepali. It took many years to cross the threshold of hazy and undefined borders of the past and to start drawing the outline of the modern Western model in different genres such as epic, drama, novel, essay, short story, etc. The first samples of these works, especially of the short story in the vernacular, reveal a lack of clear-cut departure from old narratives, tales of morality, parables, fables, etc. Idealistic philosophy and realistic pictures were combined in the writings at the beginning.

Nepali short fiction has crossed different phases. It has incorporated different trends and writing techniques into its history, as well as different philosophies and styles ranging from medievalist features to postmodern trends. Along with B.P.

Koirala's psychological realism, Daulat Bikram Bista established the trend of psychological socialism. In the same manner, Bhimnidhi Tiwari introduced social idealism in Nepali short stories. In fact, a wide range of themes, styles, and techniques can be seen in Nepali short fiction. Indra Bahadur Rai's stories were anti-traditional. Following Rai's trend, Prema Shah, Daulat Bikram Bista, and Shanker Lamichane revolted against the traditional writings to establish new values and to give freshness to Nepali short fiction. All these have claimed the existence and importance of pluralistic thoughts and invented new possibilities where different borders are wiped out and new centers reestablished. Newness in style, technique, characterization, and theme challenges the traditional definition of different literary forms. Modern short stories gradually revealed a wide range of variation and creativity within our own tradition. In this regard, *Beyond the Frontiers: Women's Stories from Nepal* (2006) is the first anthology to appear in English translation, demonstrating that the themes and contents, style, and subject matter are evolving in new directions. Most of the stories collected in it are about male domination, oppression, and violence against women.

Patriarchy and Gender Dynamics: A Theoretical Glance

The patriarchal oppression depicted in Chandrakala Newar's short stories, such as "Agnisnan" and "Hunger," can be analyzed using feminist theories from Simone de Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, and Gerda Lerner. These scholars provide insights into how gendered violence and systemic oppression operate within patriarchal structures, particularly regarding women's subjugation and marginalization.

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women as the "Other," discussed in her seminal work *The Second Sex*, is particularly relevant to the experiences of Junu in "Agnisnan." De Beauvoir argues that women are systematically defined in relation to men, stripped of their agency, and relegated to subordinate roles in society. She writes, "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 26). In the story, Junu's value is reduced to her ability to bear children, and her childlessness leads to emotional and social alienation. Her treatment as an inferior being mirrors de Beauvoir's argument that women are denied autonomy and are instead defined by their reproductive roles within patriarchal structures.

Bell Hooks, in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, emphasizes the role of intersectionality in understanding the oppression of women. She highlights how systems of patriarchy exploit not only gender but also class and race to maintain power hierarchies. Hooks states, "Sexist exploitation of women has always relied on strategies of social division that alienate women from one another, that suggest we have no common cause" (Hooks, 1984, p. 45). This insight is particularly applicable to the dual struggles of Junu and Shanti in the stories. While Junu, as an aristocratic woman, faces psychological victimization from her in-laws, Shanti, a working-class woman, endures economic struggles and domestic abuse from her husband. Despite their different social statuses, both women experience gendered violence, illustrating hooks'

argument that patriarchal oppression cuts across class divisions, perpetuating a system where women remain powerless.

Gerda Lerner's work *The Creation of Patriarchy* provides a historical perspective on the systemic oppression of women, arguing that patriarchy has been institutionalized over centuries to exploit women's reproductive roles. Lerner contends that "Women's sexual subordination was institutionalized in such a way that women came to accept their subordinate position as normal and natural" (Lerner, 1986, p. 8). This idea is vividly illustrated in Junu's treatment as a "childbearing machine" in "Agnisnan." Junu's in-laws plan to have her replaced with another woman due to her inability to conceive, while Bhuwan, her husband, hides his infertility to preserve his masculinity. This reflects Lerner's argument that patriarchal societies exploit women's biological roles to justify their subordination and maintain male dominance.

The ideas of these feminist thinkers shed light on the systemic oppression faced by women in Newar's stories. By examining the characters' experiences through these theoretical lenses, it becomes evident that patriarchal structures perpetuate violence, marginalization, and inequality, leaving women like Junu and Shanti powerless and alienated within their own homes and communities.

Although women are constitutionally considered equal, gender discrimination and violence against women are common in Nepal. It is indeed more severe in Hindu civilization, as well as in other societies, where the dominant religion and culture impact them. Women are constrained to domestic duties, have no access to or control over resources, and have limited mobility in the private sector. Numerous Nepalese ladies are caught up in subordinate orientation jobs. Customs continue to have a significant impact on Nepalese society, and ladies are, in many cases, minimized subsequently. Viciousness against ladies goes to a great extent unnoticed. Viciousness, similar to a spouse beating, is viewed as a characteristic of our general public. Many don't think of it as a type of misuse. In spite of the fact that the oppression of ladies in Nepal shifts among different ethnic and social gatherings, ladies remain a hindered portion in all station ethnic and class classifications of the populace.

Aggressive behavior at home is a maltreatment of force executed fundamentally (however not just) by men against ladies both in a relationship and after partition. It happens when one accomplice endeavors actually or mentally to rule and control the other. Abusive behavior at home takes various structures. The most normally recognized structures are physical and sexual brutality, dangers and terrorizing, close to home, and social maltreatment and monetary hardship. Abusive behavior at home is a nonexclusive term that alludes to oppressive and assaultive ways of behaving between underwear, among individuals from a family, as well as between previous accomplices. Its most prevailing structure is man-to-lady inside an association or previous organization.

The Stories chosen in this study uncover a brilliant world that ladies have lived in, experienced, seen, and anticipated. The characters are people, their relationship,

love, disdain, separation, gathering, disdain, seclusion, yearning for something, and the remainder. They are enamored with the kids they bring forth, their spouses, relatives they live with, or their own selfish independence from the drudgery of life and society that scrutinizes, cares, and controls, and they rebel against the major establishment, which is emblematic and delegate of Nepali ladies' encounters in Nepali short fictions.

Domestic Violence in Chandrakala Newar's "Agnisnan" and "Hunger"

"Agnisnan," basically centers on a traditional family in a modern city. Junu, the main character around whom the story moves, is victimized much by her in-laws only because of her failure to bear a child. She is treated as if she has done something wrong. She discloses her condition as "I am being robbed of my dignity today. The daughter-in-law of the house is being insulted for no fault of hers. My childlessness is taken as a sin or a crime in the house" (Newar, 30). Junu is childless even after many years of marriage. Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame are experienced by June, which is a common phenomenon in Nepali society. More common is the physical abuse of wives by the husband and his family to force the woman to leave to enable the son to remarry. The patriarchal society treats females as childbearing machines. Since machines are brought for production, women in patriarchal society are taken as childbearing machines. A machine that fails to produce goods is repaired first, but Junu, as a child-bearing machine in the patriarchal society, is going to be replaced by another woman. How a woman feels when her bed is going to be shared by or replaced by another: "Her body is burning like a furnace. The pain is intolerable" (Newar, 28). This evokes the pathetic condition of Junu as well as the women in general in patriarchal societies. They suffer difficulties as a result of societal norms such as underage marriage, double marriage, bride price, and dowry.

Junu's in-laws secretly plan to get Bhuban to be married again for the baby because she was thought to be incapable of bearing a child. Junu suffers a lot when she learns about Bhuban's remarriage with Keshari. Her mother-in-law or the whole family treats her as if she lacks something to give birth to a baby. Bhuban also casts his impassive glance at her "she were nothing but a corpse burning on a pyre" (Newar, 28). She has no choice but to sit on the riverbank and wait. She is treated as the 'other' in the household.

Home is not a safe environment for women, yet women and children have little choice but to remain at home with the perpetrator. Males hide their impotency and blame women. When Bhuban goes for his semen test the doctor proves that he himself is blame-worthy for not having a baby. The doctor calls him to his chamber. Bhuban pulls a chair and sits down. He tries to read the doctor's face. With a grave face the doctor says, "sorry Bhuban, I hate to say this but your semen analysis report is not good. I have rechecked it. Your semen account is very low. You are as good as impotent" (Newar, 31). Handing the report card over to Bhuban, the doctor excuses himself and leaves the chamber. This clarifies that Bhuban, though he comes to know that he has a weakness, tries to save his masculinity by marrying another woman

because in a male-dominated society if a man can't show his ability to give birth to a baby, he loses his masculinity.

Women remain defenseless and mainly dependent on men, making it extremely difficult for a woman to report violence in her home. Within this joint family system, there is a tight hierarchy, with the bride being responsible for the household, husband, and in-laws' domestic requirements. This hierarchical system, combined with male primacy, exposes women, particularly young brides, to abuse. Junu identified the seemingly small causes of marital abuse by husbands and in-laws as: "No one understands my grief. I am longing to be a mother. My womb yearns for a baby. Who is there to understand me? I haven't had a peaceful sleep for the past four years. My husband is no more the same and neither are my in-laws. I am a loner in this house" (Newar, 30). Junu feels miserable since women have to feel estrangement within their own houses. She has to face all the difficulties by herself.

The Hindu religion has given the superior position to men. They are the only owner of the properties, and they even own female bodies as commodities and exercise their power over them. The only reason behind this is that women own nothing. They even get less pay at work, equal to men. Women are treated as if they are second-class citizens. Junu, in the story, lacks an identity of her own. Even when she tries to rebel and break free from the restrictions, she is derided, as if the cracking of the hen and patriarchy silences her voice. She becomes the 'other'.

Women of all ages and social classes face violence against them. The primary distinction between upper- and lower-class women is that they have been compelled to live in the most vulnerable conditions. The basic difference between high-class women and low-class women is that they have been forced to live in the most vulnerable conditions. Junu, from an aristocratic family, and her maid Shanti, a common working-class woman, have their own problems; besides the difference in their class, they both suffer. Her in-laws psychologically victimize Junu, and Shanti has to suffer physically and economically, as her husband has spent all his property on gambling. Shanti says, "I will need this money for my son's admission to school" (Newar, 29).. Poor Shanti! She worked so hard to fulfill the smallest of her dreams. Her husband didn't seem a bad person. He was always polite. But Shanti said, "he gambled all night. He squandered off all his ancestral property on gambling" (Newar, 29). Shanti always wished that 'Dashain' and 'Tihar' festivals would never come at all as her husband would then spend all the money away. On the one hand, she had to bear the brunt of poverty, and on the other, she had the burden of her children. She has an intimate connection with her children; they are her part, and they grow out of her flesh and in her body.

The husband invests his ancestral property into gambling, while Shanti has to work at others' houses to earn the food, clothing, and school fees of her children. She cannot even keep her earnings with her because of her fear of her husband. Shanti has her own sufferings as a wife of a gambler: She too has her own problems. Probably she has more problems than others have. She uses half of the money buying rice, daal, salt and oil. Rest of the money she deposits in Junu's custody for her use in her emergencies and exigencies. She had taken all her salary. She had said," I have to buy new clothes

for my son. He has nothing to wear for winter. I think I will buy a sweater for him” (Newar, 29).

Poverty can be viewed as both a cause and a result of violence against women. It may seem obvious that domestic abuse causes women to become homeless. It is probably understandable that when asked to address violence against women, most individuals will look at women as a whole. At the individual level, all of these elements may influence the conditions surrounding an individual act rather than violence against the role: "Poor Shanti! She doesn't work at people's houses for pleasure" (Newar, 28). However, there is a need to consider the bigger picture. If the abused woman works outside the family home, she is frequently forced to deposit her earnings. Frequently, the abuser will place all of the family assets in his name. For the abuser, money is an extension of his control. The abused woman is aware that if she quits her boyfriend, she and her children may end up living in poverty.

These socio-cultural practices, along with under-education and a lack of independence, must be considered the primary causes of women's rights breaches. Male psychology, in most cases, portrays them as the most undesirable oppressive agents that have always exercised discrimination against women's power. Alcohol and/or drug abuse, poverty, unemployment, mental illness, stress, poor anger management skills, sexual deviance, and personality problems are all frequently implicated as causes or triggers of male violence against women. The narrator opines, "She even cannot take all her salary home for the fear of her husband" (Newar, 29). Compared to their male counterparts, women receive lower earnings. Women typically perform daily tasks like threshing paddy or wheat, transplanting seedlings, and even building roads and buildings. In addition to being twice as likely to lose their income as a result of an assault, women who are above poverty levels at the time of the assault also seem to be more vulnerable to assault. Due to her life's financial and emotional constraints, women have narrowly and literally embraced the stereotype of women in their culture; they have long engaged in the art of turning themselves into beautiful ornaments.

"Hunger" is set in a rented house and about a recently married couple, where the wife tolerates physical violence silently. Hunger is no more than the physical hunger of the husband, who usually beats her wife for his entertainment and to satisfy himself, which can only be put down by violence and injustice. Such a deadly hunger the husband has, a kind of pleasure in pain of other: The wife evokes, "Ouch!...ouch!...I'm going to die...that's enough...enough...leave me alone!!" (Newar, 35). Marital rape occurs in many marriages, but it is one of the most traumatic forms of violence against women. The husband is the one from whom a wife expects love, care, affection, and the highest level of security because of social, traditional, and cultural norms. This articulates the idea that patriarchy has used the institution of marriage to oppress women. Women become victims of their male partners because of marriage. In many cultures where women have little control over their future, arranged marriages are still common. Until recently, marriage vows required women to lose their own names in the contract and to love, respect, and obey their husbands. Women become economically

dependent on men as a result of this process. They put up with the violence because they are dependent on it.

Women have no choice but to submissively follow males because they are economically dependent on men or their families, including their parents' and husbands' homes. Women who live in poverty are forced to accept their subordinate role in the family because they have few other options. The narrator says, "What? A shame...! It's not been three months, and he's already beating his wife...!" (Newar, 35). The wife is bound to face such kind of injustice upon her. She has no access to property or economic resources. She even lacks control over her own body as she is treated as a commodity by the males in the capitalistic patriarchal societies. She is just a doll in the hand of the male as an object to enjoy with. A pathetic condition of a woman where she silently tolerates her husband's misbehaves. No objection to the unlawful act of the males. Because of the thought in Nepalese society that husbands are the gods and 'Patiparneshor' and should be worshiped. Our religion, society, and culture have given a higher position to males, whereas women are submissive and subordinate.

The ancient myths clearly show how women are subjected to and mistreated by men. According to the *Ramayana*, a Hindu religious book, Sita had to jump on the fire to prove her chastity, though she sacrificed all the stately pleasure and prosperity for her husband Ram by following him for fourteen years in the jungle. Draupadi, on the other hand, in another Hindu epic, Mahabharata, is bound to get married to five men. She was even sold as cattle by her husband to his cousin (brother), who did not even inform her. There are enough examples of such women from Medusa to Circe in Western mythologies as well.

The most prevalent type of abuse in the globe, regardless of caste, class, religion, or society, is wife beating or, in more severe situations, wife battering. The wife's disregard for her husband's instructions and her disregard for home chores are both regarded as acceptable reasons for the beating. The narrator states, "They think wives are their own father's property or what? A wife beater! Disgusting! Shame on his manhood"(Newar, 35). A woman is a refreshing item that men desire to own despite her infirmity. She maintains her relationship with her husband because she accepts his love and decency.

According to the narrator, women have a valuable, peaceful, and tolerant attitude and are always non-violent in their desire to end prejudice and violence against them. The narrator remarks, "Surely he'll kill his wife. Why the hell is she forced to bear such injustice in this day and age?" (Newar, 35). The dynamics of domestic abuse include silence. There are many examples throughout history of women's marginalization and the cultural norms that support it. Bride prices and dowries are examples of this in several cultures today.

Children's lives and development are impacted by violence against women, either because they witness violence against their mothers or because of it themselves: "Hunger is also a psychological story, where a woman is ready to tolerate physical violence of her husband instead of deserting him or revolting against him" (Bhattarai,

xiii). From a very young age, children are taught that wives should not argue with their husbands. Additionally, there is a conspiracy of silence and societal taboo regarding domestic abuse in Nepalese society. The conspiracy makes domestic abuse an invisible epidemic of silence.

Conclusion

When examining any facet of social reality, it is important to pay attention to both the characteristics specific to the mode of production in question as well as those that are shared with other eras. Junu's weakness in giving birth to a child and her maid Shanti's poverty is the force that keeps them from leading a happy and prosperous life. Their family members victimized them in Chandrakala Newar's "Agnisnan". Newar's another story, "Hunger," explores the physical hunger of the male character, where the wife tolerates all violence upon her silently.

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