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Abstract

This research delves into Samrat Upadhyay's short story “During the Festival,” collected in Arresting God in Kathmandu, examines the innate impulses shared by humans and animals within the modern Nepali society. Through a psychoanalytic-feminist theoretical framework, the study critically uncovers the subconscious projections of characters like Ganesh, revealing the complex dynamics of jealousy, sexuality, and familial relationships. Ganesh's jealousy towards his wife's emotional relationship with a young man in the neighbourhood reflects deeper insecurities about sexuality and societal norms and values in Nepal, while the neighbour's displacement of his wife with his mother exposes the unresolved and conflicting issues stemming from the childhood experiences. Drawing on psychoanalytic principles, the analysis explores the themes of infantile fears and psychical metamorphosis, shedding light on the intricate interplay between individual psyche and societal constructs. By dissecting the text's intrinsic characters and unconscious desires, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of human nature and societal complexities in Nepali literature.

Keywords: Androcentric construct, female sexuality, feminist overtones, infantile fears, psychical metamorphosis, unconscious struggle

Introduction

Samrat Upadhyay's “During the Festival,” taken from his collection of short stories in *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, explores the nature of desire and spirituality in the fast-modernizing Nepali society. Besides the usual interpretation, it explores other nuances of the story, which are very insightful readings, using psychoanalytic theory with its feminist overtones. In Upadhyay's fiction, women's sexuality and defense mechanisms appropriate characters in their relationship in the neighbourhood. What emerges from an adult woman's relationship with the neighbour? What makes the woman replicate the wife in his unconscious mind? In this paper, psychoanalytic and feminist theories subvert

the essentialist new critical reading in the repository of the male–female relationships in Upadhyay's narrative. The use of these critical strategies to negotiate the textual meaning reveals various layers which the paper uncovers in the psychoanalytic–feminist theoretical frame. The paper begins with a psychoanalytical reading of the text and then proceeds to a reading with feminist overtones.

To explore female sexuality, this paper applies some of the interpretive strategies and concepts based on the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud who remarks "Dream–formation is based on a process of condensation and displacement" (250), and he asserts that the displacement serves the purposes of the condensation, considering the construction of collective and composite persons one of the principal methods of dream–condensation" (259). In the Freudian analysis of the dream–content, an individual displaces one object or action for another. A difficult task in his or her unconscious appears as a terrible animal, such as a lion or tiger. Similarly, several events that have already taken place in ten years, for instance, are condensed into a dream –work of an hour or so. When an individual has conflicts with his or her spouse at home, differences with his or her chief at the office, and confrontation with opponents in the public space, all sorts of things can be condensed into a terrible tiger in the dream. Precisely, these events and experiences suppressed into the unconscious come into a dream in the subconscious in the Freudian psychic dynamics. In the case of the wife and mother in Upadhyay's "During the Festival", the Freudian defence mechanism of condensation and displacement works. For instance, the mother displaces the wife, and the woman's pursuit of an intimate relationship with her neighbour reworks the inner workings of the subconscious mind.

Literature Review

Female sexuality, as depicted in literature, has been a subject of minute exploration, often blended with feminist overtones and psychoanalytic theories. Upadhyay's "During the Festival" delves into the complexities of women's desires and social expectations regarding them. Scholars, like Ronny Noor, have analyzed these narratives through psychoanalytic lenses, uncovering layers of unconscious struggle and defense mechanisms employed by characters. Noor in *World Literature Today* further writes, "During the Festival is a tale of arranged marriage. Ganesh, whose mother arranged his marriage, suspects his wife of being unfaithful to him. He has no proof, but he is plagued by his suspicion" (139-40). This is how Ganesh grapples with unresolved conflicts. Besides, infantile fears rooted in early experiences, shape the characters' perceptions and relationships which is evidenced in the depiction of Ganesh's struggle with their mother's image.

Feminist overtones in literature challenge traditional representations of gender roles and power dynamics. Through feminist critique, scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir examine how female characters navigate social constraints and assert their agency. Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* writes:

The proposition "sexuality is coextensive with existence" can be understood in two different ways; it could mean that every avatar of the existent has a sexual

signification, or that every sexual phenomenon has an existential meaning: these two affirmations can be reconciled; but often one tends to slip from one to another. Besides, as soon as "sexual" and genital are distinguished, the notion of sexuality becomes blurred. (74)

In the narrative "During the Festival", female characters confront societal expectations while asserting their desires and autonomy. Psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freudian concepts of unconscious desires and defense mechanisms provide a framework and conflicts. Analysis of text like Upadhyay's story reveals how characters' psyches are shaped by unconscious struggles and symbolic representation. The intersection of these keywords offers a rich terrain for literary analysis, shedding light on the intricate interplay of gender, psychology, and language in narratives of desire and identity.

Contaminated Mother in "During the Festival"

Upadhyay, in his short fiction "During the Festival," addresses the unstable relationship between Ganesh and his wife because the protagonist experiences pangs of sexual jealousy only to be later reconciled after a spiritual experience on his way to the Durga temple. The story is analyzed using psychoanalytic theory; however, enacts the psychical struggle of a son to reconcile with the image of his mother. Seen in this light, it is a story of the development of Ganesh's subjectivity in the light of the changing image of Nepal in the global context.

Ganesh, the protagonist of the story, conceives a dyadic image of his mother as angelic and whore at the same time. It reminds readers of the imagery of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy in the nineteenth-century British fiction. In other words, it unfolds an image of a woman either as an Angel in the kitchen or a mad woman in the attic during the pre-Victorian Europe. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, repose literary imaginations of the female:

Indeed, if we return to the literary definitions of "authority" with which we began this discussion, we will see that the monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay "his" anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, birch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained "place" and thus generates a story that "gets away" from its author. (28)

Readers can discern a linear progression in the status of women in the West in the nineteenth-century embodiments of the female. Literary representations of women unfold the hierarchical Western society after the mid-eighteenth-century Western society, which reaches that point after crossing the medieval feudal society just before the Renaissance.

Metaphors of Angel in the kitchen and mad woman in the attic envision men's domineering position. In that period, man is presented as the one born out of his mother's adulterous relationship. It is, therefore, his inability to develop his subjectivity without the suffocating presence of his mother that creates his failure to accept his wife. He displaces

his fear of his mother's sexuality on his wife. He suspects his wife of having an affair like his mother even though without any substantial proof. The suspicion leads to his disgust for her. His experience of growing up and the stories of his widow mother create in him an image of women with which he has difficulty reconciling. He displaces the same image on his wife and that produces a rift in his marriage.

Ganesh has been married for three years. Before his marriage, he lived with his mother in a small house in Chhetrapati, Kathmandu. His father had died when he was small, so he hardly remembers him. But he still has the memory of the rumour that went around that "he was not his father's son" (85). Ganesh, like most of the men, would like to conceive an ideal image of his mother. The story of his mother's adulterous relationship instils doubts in him. Although he grows up under the love and protection of his mother, he always realizes his mother is a contaminated being. He cultivates an ambivalent feeling toward her; he is attracted to her, but at the same time he fears her sexuality. Thus, "The female sexuality [...] invades [Ganesh] in the person of [his mother's image], and once there, it utterly contaminates sexual relationship" (Adelman 257). It is this fear of women's sexuality that he has to confront and come to terms with.

Ganesh remembers that it was his mother who had chosen his wife. He was enamoured by his wife's beauty and charm. His mother had been right when she had praised his going-to-be-wife in glowing terms. After his marriage, even the neighbours showered praise on his wife wishing that her "beauty would usher in good luck for the rest of their lives" (86). The warmth of these comments had kept him happy for two years. But lately, he had felt a certain weariness in his being. He wondered if his wife provided any space in her thoughts for him. This sudden turn of events comes about from his earlier fear of women's sexuality and the fidelity that he had developed as a growing child when he heard his mother's stories. It is not without doubt that he finds a parallel between his mother and his wife. Looking through their photographs he feels that both of them look directly at the camera in the same way. The resemblance of his wife with his mother uncovers underlying primordial structures in the female figures.

The incident leading to the first doubts, about his wife, in Ganesh's mind is symptomatic of his dyadic image of the "contaminating maternal body" (Adelman 256). Ganesh notes how at the temple of Lord Pashupatinath when they were looking at the dirty Bagmati River, his wife and a young man strike up a conversation. She laughed with abandon at the comment of the young man, which disconcerted him. Implicit in the image is the paradoxical idea of holiness and filth. The river as the representation of fertility and life is symbolic of the mother and the extension of feminine sexuality. Ganesh's wife, like the river (and his mother), represents filth and purity at the same time. Hence, it is natural that Ganesh's doubts should take shape in this spot where the holy temple/river is contaminated with human filth; it is here that he envisions his wife as analogous to his mother's image for the first time, it is here that for the first time; his wife becomes the subject of his suspicion.

Besides the symbolic reading of the river, the beginning of doubt for Ganesh in the temple of Pashupatinath is also significant for another reason. The allusion to Lord Siva conjures up the mythic story of Lord Siva and his son Ganesh, the elephant god. Another name for Pashupatinath is Siva, one of the triadic supreme gods in the Hindu pantheon. Ganesh, the protagonist, bears the name of Lord Siva's son. Interestingly, the elephant god's birth does not have any direct role of Lord Siva just as the protagonist's father in the rumoured story of his birth. Lord Ganesh is his mother's creation and the story of his birth involves the elephant god's devotion to his mother at the expense of his life at his father's hand.

Ganesh, the protagonist, does not know who his father is. He would want to imagine his mother in the image of the Goddess Parvati, but he realizes that his mother is contaminated like the Bagmati River. He envisions himself as contaminated since his contaminated mother has conceived him. In a sense, he is like Lord Ganesh as the lord was also created out of Parvati's perspiration, but unlike Parvati, his mother is not divine; so, he is also contaminated like his mother. Hence, his wife "becomes dangerous to [him] insofar as she becomes identified in his mind with the contaminating maternal body, the mother who has borne him (Adelman 258).

In addition, his wife's mention of the politician's "fat wives" (86) brings his wife's relation to another type of contamination through corruption. Ganesh's dilemma is compounded by the fact that despite his utter dislike of his mother, he was always "Mama's boy" (87), hiding behind her sari. Now his wife's sari has replaced the dichotomous comforting and disturbing presence of his mother.

Ganesh's infantile fears and desires are evident in this symbolic plunge. It can be seen in two ways. First, his plunge is his desire to unite with the mother, the pond symbolizing the womb. He wants to transport himself to the pre-oedipal stage, to sink into the fluid and forget everything. Ganesh, however, cannot do so for he is reminded of the "monsters with long tentacles that supposedly live at the bottom" (88). The contaminated body of their mother does not provide him a resting place and instead, monsters are waiting to "tear [...] into his flesh" (88). Second, his plunge into the pond reflects his wish to kill himself. As Ganesh feels he; is the product of his mother's body, he feels he is contaminated too; therefore, he desires to kill himself. Since water is also analogous to the feminine and maternal image, he cannot carry out his death wish in the water. He is forced to take himself out of the pond. Moreover, later in the daytime, when he sees the dirty water of the pond" (95), he feels horrified. The pond again symbolically manifests the contaminated body of his mother. The place he had chosen for his eternal rest turns out to be another contaminated spot.

Ganesh's revulsion at his wife is again evident in his reaction when she tells him about the wedding. She recounts the huge tent and the number of guests that she had seen. She also talks of the diamond necklace and how she met a man who had asked about him. But Ganesh feels humiliated because his wife does not ask about what he has done in her

absence. He knows only two ways of reacting to his wife, either with lust or with disgust and anger. Even then Ganesh cannot bring himself to satisfy his lust for her because every time he desires her, he is reminded of his contaminated mother. Having sex with his wife would contaminate him since she is also conceived as his whore mother. At the same time as he has been born of his contaminated mother, he is afraid that he will contaminate his wife by having sex with her. Hence, Ganesh is attracted to his wife, but at the same time, she repels him. She is both the agent and locus of contamination since she is a woman. Because he cannot have her but as he still desires her, he displaces his desire on an imaginary lover. He thinks of going to his friend's house and telling him, "My wife is having an affair" (91), even though he does not know it to be true.

Ganesh, to find an outlet for his desire, is forced to project it on someone else. The stronger his desire gets, the more he tries to stifle it. He struggles every time his wife tries to come close to her. When he returns from the carnival, she is worried about his restlessness and tries to calm him down by rubbing his chest. He immediately springs up with the excuse that he is hungry. That night when he sees "a figure, fading and reappearing" (92), he is seeing his own displaced self. His desire grows stronger; he now senses some other presence in his house and suspects his wife. In connection with the mother-daughter relationship not only sees an imaginary lover of his wife, but also starts believing his imagination to be true. He displaces his desire onto his neighbour, the bald man. Seeing his wife talking to him and accidentally bumping into him on his return from the office one day, he confronts his wife accusing her of infidelity.

Ganesh's struggle is a struggle to separate himself from his mother's contaminated image. Mahler and her associates in *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* state that in any human being "an old partially, unresolved sense of self-identity and of body boundaries, or old conflicts over separation and separateness, can be reactivated (or can remain peripherally or even centrally active) at any stages of life" (4-5). Ganesh's unresolved sense of self-identity and body boundaries seemed to have reactivated when he saw his wife laughing and talking with abandon with another man over the Bagmati River in the temple of Lord Pashupatinath. He is unconsciously reminded of his conflicting vision of his mother's adultery and his desire to unify with her. His sense of being one with the mother is constantly challenged by her whore image. In a similar context, Bimal Kishore Shrivastwa exposes a strong emotional bond between the male and the female in his "Realism and Naturalism in Samrat Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love*" that underscores shared underlying patterns:

Ramchandra's unexpected visit vibrates Malati's mind and soul, and she keeps wordless about how to respond to him in such a situation, but she becomes sentimental. Then they gradually begin to behave normally. As time passed, they began to date frequently. Now their relationship between a teacher and student changes into lover and beloved. (143)

Ganesh could never disassociate himself from this image, which when re-triggered starts to haunt him with renewed vigor. Without his mother around, he projects the whore image onto his wife and recoils from her. He strongly desires his wife/mother, but at the same time recoils away from her because she represents the whore wife/mother. Because his desire to unite is so strong, he displaces it first on an imaginary lover, and later on the bald neighbor. He takes so strong an offence to his friend's calling him "Mama's boy" (94) that he stuffs himself with the local liquor. Such anger results because Ganesh has not been able to reconcile with his mother's image.

On the bus to the Durga temple, Ganesh dreams of sacrificing goats with the *khukri* (knife). Along with it, he dreams of his mother stooping before him, smiling and whispering. The blood running down his nose and over his body to the earth means that he is cleansed of the contaminated image. The sacrificial blood is symbolic of the washing away of his mother's suffocating presence. The replacement of his mother's face with his wife's indicates Ganesh's ability to accept his mother's separation at last. His wife shakes her finger at him means that she is telling him not to let his mother's image smoulder him; she is here urging him to let her go. Finally, when he sees his and the dancing bald man's face become one, he has achieved separation from his mother. He can, finally, see that the bald man, and the dancing man with the mask in the procession are his other selves. The separation-individuation process is complete and he can now reconcile with his present, with his wife.

Ganesh is tired after his psychological metamorphosis. He has undergone tremendous change. He now knows his self, having separated from his mother's image. Even when his wife calls him "My Mama's boy" (98), he does not feel angry like he used to. He now takes it into his stride and receives his wife's affection. And once he learns to accept his wife for who she is, he feels his fatigue disappear. Although for a moment he remembers his wife's lover, he does not feel the pang of jealousy. Instead, he finds that the bald man turns faceless indicating that he was always a figment of his imagination. With the face fading into oblivion, it leaves Ganesh as a total psychological being moving forward to a new life with his wife. His moving forward toward Goddess Durga, another manifestation of Parvati, is but Ganesh's movement toward his mother. But this time he can walk hand in hand with his wife. He does not feel the hatred as earlier. He can face his mother with his wife at his side.

Feminine Absence and Androcentric Constructs in "During the Festival"

As seen in the previous reading, at the psychological level, the story delineates the dread of Ganesh over female sexuality, particularly his growing jealousy over his wife's sexuality. His experience of growing up and the stories of his widow mother create in him an image of women with which he has difficulty reconciling. He displaces this image on his wife and that produces a rift in their marriage. Ganesh's father had died when he was so young that he could barely remember him. He, however, remembers the story of the man who had been his mother's lover for many years. Ganesh's perception of his mother is rather

ambivalent. He loved her very much and was attached to her, but her sexuality frightened him. It is this fear of women's sexuality that he has to confront and come to terms with.

After two years of marriage, his initial joy is made sour when slowly the image of his wife as a sexual being, like his mother, creeps into his mind. He is first reminded of it in the temple of Lord Pashupatinath. This soon leads him to become suspicious of his wife; he creates an imaginary lover for her and is tormented by the thought that perhaps he does not have a place in her thoughts. In the end after much suspicion and a showdown, he is reconciled with her once he undergoes both psychical and spiritual transformation symbolized by the sacrificial vision that he sees on the bus.

As much as the narrative posits the development of Ganesh's subjectivity as its main concern, the signification of Ganesh's wife and his mother works to undo this comfortable sense of narrative meaning. It tells a different story, a story of the Nepali androcentric culture where the female is identified merely as one's possession. Her identity is determined in terms of whose daughter she is before her marriage, and whose wife or mother she is after her marriage. Throughout the story we do not find out name of Ganesh's wife; she is always referred to as "his wife." Similarly, we do not have the name of Ganesh's mother too.

At one level, the lack of a name, as discussed earlier, suggests the formation of a woman's identity in terms of her husband or son. This reading, however, is disrupted when we observe that the missing signification makes the notion of "femininity" fluid. Ganesh's wife's identity, in his mind, is constantly subsumed by his mother's image. In the story, as in real life; however, the feminine image is far from powerful in the sense of representing or possessing cosmic energy. Feminine power, in an androcentric culture, is limited to sexuality that either is a power to only attract, or that which arouses fear and feelings of jealousy and disgust in people like Ganesh. She is responsible for the rift in their marriage as Ganesh "couldn't believe that such beauty could be enjoyed at no cost" (86). This is, however, a patriarchal construct. Just as she does not have a name, she also does not have a voice to tell her story. It is through Ganesh's tainted eyes that we view her, his nameless wife. Whenever she speaks, he silences her either by walking away or by engaging in some other activity. Ganesh constantly desires that he be the centre of her attention. When she talks of the wedding, the tent, the necklace etc., he feels angered and humiliated as she fails to ask, worry and fret about him. He expects her to treat him like he is her child. His demands are not being fulfilled; he imagines her having an affair like his mother.

"During the Festival" tells the story of all women in that it "escapes representation in patriarchal language and symbolism; it remains on the side of negativity, absence, and lack" (Showalter 222). Ganesh's wife and mother are lacking in the real sense of the term. Their sexuality, however, instils fear in men like Ganesh for they are gaps and lack that he cannot have a hold of. He cannot grasp and bring them to the control of the language, "The Law of the Father." This is because "'Femininity' [...] is a language of the unconscious" unlike language which is "a mixture of fixed meaning and metaphors" (Guerin, et al 204). Hence, the voice of the female characters in "During the Festival" speaks from the silence

"free of the symbolic order, sex roles, otherness and The Law of the Father" (Guerin, et al 204). These voices represent "peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" (Barry 127). They are fluid, unstable and slide into each other obstructing clear signification. The patriarchal mechanism of control over femininity exhibited by the negation of names subverts its function by the play (*jeu*) of the indeterminate signification.

"During the Festival" began with the mother and the son living together in Chettrapati, Kathmandu, ends with the son moving toward a union with the ultimate divine/spiritual mother. In between, the wife acts only as a conduit, leading the son toward ultimate union with his mother. The wife was a lack before and she is a lack in the end. Even if we take the Goddess to prevail, what it portends is that the androcentric culture would want a divine image of the mother negating and absenting her sexuality as is done, in the story, by obliterating the wife in the end. Moving forward toward the mother implicitly means moving toward the wife. Upadhyay reconstructs Nepali modernity in family life in which individuals would like connection outside the domestic sphere.

Conclusion

The psychoanalytic reading of Samrat's "During the Festival" locates the problem in the subject's mind. The reading demonstrates how the protagonist gradually achieves separation-individuation in the course of the story. Hence, we see that Ganesh's relationship with his mother determines the development or barrier in the growth of his subjectivity. We, however, note that, in this reading, we view a universal approach to the development of human subjectivity disregarding the effects of culture, politics and other influences.

On the other hand, the second reading uses a feminist overtone to highlight the voices of the absence. It deviates from locating the interest from the centre to the periphery in the sense of characters in the story. From the positioning of the story as the development of Ganesh's subjectivity, it shifts focus to the missing signification, i.e. the representation of women and the formation of their subjectivity. It also reveals the political dimension of the text by exposing the power relation of the gender divide. This reading exposes some of the androcentric presumptions of defining women in terms of men as indicated by the absence of specific signifiers, blaming men's fear of women's sexuality, and the total silencing of women by not providing them with narrative space.

The use of the psycho-feminist approaches has provided some interesting means of reading the text. They have provided new reading strategies that not only reveal the unconscious of the character or the author but also show how the play of missing signification divulges textual ambiguities. Suppose the use of psychoanalytic theory has analyzed the mother-child relationship in the development of one's subjectivity, in that case, the other reading has provided the skill to expose the disjunction in the central textual meaning. Overall, by examining the themes of feminine absence and androcentric construct in the story, a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between individual psyche and social influence can be obtained. The paper sheds light on the intricate dynamics of gender, power, and identity in modern Nepali society and paves the way to further reading.

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