

# Representation of a Rebellious Woman of Nepali Society in Sheeba Shah's Facing My Phantoms

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## Abstract

*A normalized female self is predefined in society and the society has preconceived image which defines role and position in general. The study outlines a female picture which is beyond unlike societal explanation in Sheeba Shah's Facing My Phantoms in which a female character embodies and represents an image of Nepali woman in Nepalese society. The bold, fearless and daring character is beyond from patriarchal imagination. The portrayed woman character, Sanjeevani is symbolic and representative of rebellious self. Her struggle is for sake of individuality and self in male oriented society. Her voice is strong enough to create and establish own female self-identity in society. The novel advocates a voice of daring woman within a short time frame of Nepali history during civil war. The rebellious picture of Sanjeevani is a futuristic in the contemporary society.*

**Keywords:** Gender, articulation, self, patriarchy, rebellious, representative, bold, fearless, revolutionary, ideology and voice

## Introduction

The novel represents periodic time frame of Nepali society during insurgency period and analyzes women's struggle against patriarchal grip. The insurgency period created platform for women to experience and understand society from closer point. The period definitely changed and redefined traditional norms and values and established new insight in our society. The novel shows ideological shift and it revolves around contemporary issue of Nepali society. Similarly, it creates scene that shows tussle between class, ideology and social practice. The protagonist of the novel represents a woman from higher class, initiates new life fighting against age long traditional forces. Her mother's presence and interfere in her life represents traditional discourse, however Sanjeevani avoids and denies protection of her mother. It is clash between traditional and modernized mindset regarding women roles. The transition period recreated and redefined patriarchal notion and specified a picture of rebellious women as Sanjeevani has been portrayed in novel. Along with political shifts, it advocates societal changes and set new perspective of Nepali society. In particular, the study focuses on changed notion of women identity within Nepali society by embodying rebellious picture of

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the protagonist of the novel. Basically, the movement is significant to raise issue of political rights of marginalized group of our Nepali community and it paved the way for societal change by breaking traditional dogmas and practices.

### **Discussion**

The significance of the novel *Facing My Phantoms* is only reflected when it is analyzed within its historical time frame. It particularly draws picture of civil war movement of Nepali society. The contemporary society was in strong grip of patriarchy and a woman self or identity was not acceptable, but the novel introduces an unruly and warring woman character. Her desire is considered as rebellious in relation to the contemporary society. This paper shows reflection of women anger and resentment in male oriented social perspective in which society even females internalize male discourse and reproduce it as representative voice of male. A female voice and manifestation of self is daring action in male discoursed society. This primary text *Facing My Phantoms* reflects a periodic time of Nepali society when Maoist insurgency was prevalent. It created and raised political agenda of minorities with which the marginal group came into front. The particular political period and women movement is reflected in Siera Tamang's review article which notes, "The women's movement in post-1990 Nepal is embedded in this history, and informs and is affected by these various political forces and currents. That the most common refrain among Nepali feminists and activists today continues to be the bemoaning of a lack of 'a feminist movement', underscores" (62). Political change in Nepali society is recurrently taking place, however gender equality is still lack in community. Along with political transformation women issues were raised but practice is insufficient and inapplicable. The novel discusses political background of contemporary society and minority's rights are popularized but practice is inadequate. Sanjeevani is one of characters from the same society who wants to change her position, symbolically women position but she undergoes many obstacles and hindrances in male-oriented society. However, her firm determination and driving force motivate her to make space and social position.

Bista (2011) focuses on Sanjeevani's consciousness of self in Nepali social context "The novel nicely depicts the changed scenario of Nepali society and the condition of women, which may be shocking for the reader. As modern women, unlike traditional women do not succumb to their fate but invite challenges into their life and are ever ready for crossing the barriers imposed upon them by the society. In the novel Shah bestows unexpected experiences and action of modern Nepali women which tempts the feminist critics (p. 48). Thus, her argument about female self-reinforces manifestation of women identity and consciousness of independence. Even if the social circumstance is uneasy, she never compromises her social representation. Instead, she denies society rather than surrender dominating ideology.

Sanjeevani, the major and representative character in novel, embodies a rebellious female self with intense desire to be self-sufficient and dependent in front of male oriented society. She insists against prevalent ideology and reinforces herself as a complete one. Her challenge to be isolated from rooted belief and the belief is unable to make space for a woman. Her voice against existing discourse and desire for creating self is reflected.

Sanjeevani has to struggle and fight against society for establishes herself and she understood the fact after she came in front of society. As Julie L. Lemley (2005) opines, it is one of the enduring questions of philosophy, the struggle to define the self in relation to the world (p.14). Similarly, she also takes strong stance and thought. It primarily emphasizes female voice, however, age-long history of patriarchal discourse cannot easily empower and liberate woman self. The movement, in some respect, uplifted female voice and female self but it is long way to find female self who has to subvert existing and establishing discourse in society. The novel identifies a daring and fearless woman character who recurrently insists her own identity and self. It is her manifestation of self in harsh and strong patriarchal nexus of contemporary society.

The patriarchal society tortures and isolates Sanjeevani to devitalize and diminish power in front of predefined and predetermined image of women. But, she desires to unleash her power to cripple patriarchal knowledge. Her family decides her marriage without her consent, so she immediately denies her parents decision and says here, "I am indeed a selfish person and live for myself along. Did I not think of only myself when I broke engagement with Nabin? My parents were shattered after that incident (p. 3). This expression loudly advocates her decision to disobey patriarchal manacles. Parents undermine and ignore herself therefore decide her marriage but she resists in favor of herself and against patriarchy. The symbolic voice of patriarchy normalizes female subjectivity on the basis of preconceived knowledge and norms but Sanjeevani instantly denies and resists against it.

Simon De Beauvoir(1997) discusses that husband to rein in wives to total subjugation if they want to avoid the ridicule of dishonor. They must be denied training and culture, forbidden to develop their individuality, forced to wear uncomfortable clothing, and encouraged to follow a debilitating dietary regime(p.160). Beauvoir argument against patriarchy is as prison house where female should undergo several sufferings and sorrow. Males use discursive method to confine women in patriarchal boundary. The society creates knowledge and power against women as Beauvoir argues that this program exactly, confining women to the kitchen and to housework, jealously watching their behavior; they are enclosed in daily life rituals that hindered all attempts at independence(p.161). As said here, Sanjeevani also denies marriage proposal to escape from manipulation. Her strong sense of self always empowered and motivated to fight against domineering discourse.

Individuality and society always remain in tension in terms of ideology and thought. Individuality can have personal thought with which the person rules oneself, however society is equally dominating factor which influences person innately. A person has self-conscious and sense of identity; however social aspect and ideology dominate and manipulate self within moral discourse. Sanjeevani embodies as such quality of rebellious woman, however she has to face threaten and challenge in patriarchal society.

Bista remarks her identity that Sanjeevani is a well-educated, independent, headstrong girl. She never compromises with her wishes and desires. She is bold, strong and sometimes even wild. She herself accepts that she is selfish as she knows that one needs to be selfish if s/he wants to get freedom and happiness. (p. 51). Bista reviews and analyzes her challenging role in the contemporary society but she shows her invincible self-ego that always leads her to find her role and identity society. For this reason, she denies all her family proposals regarding her personal life.

The novel *Facing My Phantom* creates a periodic political change along with restoration of democracy in Nepal. Along with issue of democracy it established marginalized rights. It rigorously discusses struggle between self and society. However, the strong nexus of patriarchal discourse, the major character Sanjeevani seeks her personally reflected identity even if she has been imprisoned within repressive ideology. Sanjeevani's strong sense of self frequently asks her question of identity and speaks within herself, "that very innate self in me, the self that is wild, the self that is a wanderer and the self that never stays constant" (2). Unlike patriarchal defined woman identity, she desires to be self-guided and motivated independent woman. She succinctly disagrees with her mother after she convinces her to be moral. The morality is another discourse of the same society. Sanat, mother of Sanjeevani, advocates patriarchal thought as she has internalized. She has been brainwashed in society and advocates patriarchal thought. Her dialogue in novel shows her as spokesperson of male discourse. But, Sanjeevani ignores her advice however her mother coercive interference. Her consciousness of self-identity and individuality stops her to be submissive and fragile in front of society. As she reveals her resentment against manipulative society. Now there rages in me a war between two selves. Am I the wild woman that I am born to be or am I the harnessed woman that I am expected to be? I ask myself this question each day. I am trapped in this dilemma. I suffocate each day, wondering who I really am. Am I Sanjeevani, the one moulded into an acceptable form? (p. 2)

Her contemplation and thought of being an independent being disagrees against patriarchal notion of woman identity. A typical definition of good woman and bad woman stigmatize women in society. Sanjeevani is much aware about societal definition and perspective toward women. She adds here, "it was her fairy tales, myths and stories of the good woman, the bad woman, the daring woman, the evil woman,

the wicked woman reigning the world” (1). This thought justifies her consciousness and nascent feeling against dominating ideology. She clarifies and explains nature of society in which many categories are constructed to create image in society. Even knowledge is reinforced and internalized which ultimately roots in societal mentality. For this reason, Sanjeevani dissents her voice against grandmother however, it hurts her emotionally.

Most women have been entangled within and on inescapable web like nexus. Patriarchal discourse confuses and engages to women by creating discourse and knowledge. But Sanjeevani intends to come out from whimsical world which is completely created and recreated. Her passion for autonomous identity always encourages her to take opposite stance of society. Deniz Kandiyoti blames women that passive resistance does not let them space for society. She says, “The breakdown of a particular patriarchal system may in the short run generate instance of passive resistance among women that take the paradoxical form of bids for increased responsibility and control by men” (p. 274). Unlike the argument, Sanjeevani actively and passionately opposes autocratic rule over female. She finds possibility to establish own self therefore, she raises her voice.

The society imposes moral boundaries to be a good woman, but she instantly denies as such social view and perspective upon her personal matter. Her rebellious sense for self is reflected here, “Am I Sanju, the one who carries the stories, the dreams, the songs and the memories of the absolute, undeniable and irrevocable bond with the wild” (p. 2). A female future, experience and fate is predetermined by society. A clear picture is commonly constructed and every woman must undergo as her fate has been formerly decided. Having rooted or internalized thought of patriarchy, a woman cannot imagine independent, and free social identity. This kind of predicament narrows down women role and position in society. Sanjeevani studies grandma condition therefore, she wants to be free from bounded world. Beauvoir arguments, in this regard, reflect individuality is effaced in patriarchal society. Women have to be part of male society. But, Sanjeevani does not accept as such rooted belief and establishes her as an individual rather than a woman. Beauvoir discussion clarifies that she is no longer the desired prey or the cherished companion, because her individual existence dissolves into universality. Her individuality is mockingly contested by generalities, her spirit’s autonomy by her being rooted in the past and in the flesh (p. 228). Women identity is society in known in general but not in personal because a single definition is applicable for all women though every woman has different experience and knowledge as well as perspective. But Sanjeevani tries to maintain her unique and different thought, perspective and knowledge unlike imposed definition. Sanjeevani wants to personalize her own self from the domineering society. As being a Sanjeevani, she desires to establish her social image and leads her generation being a pioneer woman for freedom.

## Methodology

This research enriches using secondary data as archival documents through internet and printed materials. By going through literature reviews, the study surveys contemporary history and literature. The researcher puts forward this research based on library documents to maintain research gap and raises researchable issue. Even if it does not use primary data, its credibility lies on historical documents, authentic materials and relevant references. With finding and concerning literature reviews, it only has created space for authentic and existing material. The study is not a hypothetical claim rather than it is based on theoretical concepts and textual evidences. Being qualitative research, it conceptualizes theoretical as well as textual evidences to justify hypothetical claims from introductory to conclusion part.

## Conclusion

The study critically examines a daring woman and her conflict against mainstream patriarchal thought and perspective. *Facing My Phantoms*, representing a periodic history of Nepal, shows tension between female self-versus society. One of the revolutionary characters Sanjeevani desires to establish her freedom, self-identity and individuality but she does not ask for rights whereas she defines her own world opposite of patriarchal definition. Her intention behind struggle is to establish her self-defined world with society identity. The novel bears a rebellious woman character and represents rest of the women who wants to establish self and conscious for individual as well as society identity. The patriarchal society is greedy enough to provide space for woman and it is not process of begging own right in front of society but Sanjeevani is a representative woman who establishes her own self under rooted grip of patriarchal regime. The presented role of the protagonist in novel suggests an ideological shift in Nepali society. The patriarchal power is deep rooted in Nepali society which causes women's victimization therefore, to liberate women from society need collective effort. Sanjeevani is a woman with daring heart advocates women's individuality and freedom. By sacrificing her family, class and property, she signified independent and decisive female self. It is a missile for Nepali women to create and recreate space in male dominated society.

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