

- Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal
- Index in NepJOL
- Permanantly Archived in Portico



## Ugly Affective Politics in “Yambunera” by Bina Theeng

Anju Tamang

Lecturer in English at Brilliant Multiple College, Sifal, Chabahil, T.U., Kathmandu

Corresponding Author: Anju Tamanga, Email: [moktananju555@gmail.com](mailto:moktananju555@gmail.com)

Copyright 2023 ©The Author(S). The publisher may reuse published articles with prior permission of the concerned author(s).

### Abstract

*This paper studies affective politics generated by ugly feelings such as fear, contempt, and shame in the characters of the story “Yambunera” written by Bina Theeng from anthology of stories named Yambunera. The first part of this paper emphasizes on ugly feeling and affective politics as the major theoretical framework. Affect theory has evolved from studying emotions to using these emotions to analyze different aspects of human life, even nature. Ugly feelings are also called negative feelings which are related to emotions. The study investigates how these negative emotions are created, circulated and politicized. The second part is examination and interpretation of the characters of “Yambunera” through the negative feelings generated in them due to the state’s brutality and discrimination. The state is the major agency of rule and control that suppresses minority communities through different mediums will the major discussion of this part. This paper explores the state’s treatment on indigenous communities which has created negative feelings in the members. The state needs to provide basic needs and rights to all citizens. However, in the context of Nepal, the state has been using different methods of exploitation and suppression of native nations though it is a multicultural country.*

**Keywords:** Affective politics, negative emotions, indigenous, minority communities.

### Introduction

Tamang nation is one of the prominent native communities of Nepal residing here from the beginning of human civilization originated in Kathmandu valley after drying out a large lake. According to the national census of 2021, Tamang is the fifth largest community in population size with 1,539,830 which is 5.8% of total population and Tamang is the fifth highest language spoken having 1,353,311 speakers. Despite having large population and oldest civilization, Tamang is a marginalized community in many sectors. A Nepali anthropologist, Dor Bahadur Bista writes, “The Tamangs live in the high hills east, north, south and west of Kathmandu Valley. They are commonly

seen on the streets of the capital city carrying large basketloads of goods by headstraps, the men and boys dressed in loincloth and long usually black, tunics, and in winter wearing short-sleeved sheep's wool jackets" (52). He further explains that the time period of Tamang residing in the south slopes of the Himalaya is not known, which clarifies about the government's negligence of studying about the tribe and an immemorial time of existence of this group. Though there are many speculations about the origin of name Tamang, the research about the origin is not sufficient due to prejudices by most of the researchers.

Toni Hagen writes in his book *Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalayas*, "Tradition has it that the Thamangs originally came from the region of Inner Tibet" (82). This suggests lack of proper information and documentation about the origin of this indigenous tribe. Not only the state has been indifferent towards Tamang people, but also used humiliating term 'Bhote'. Kiran Shrestha, in his research article "Buddhist Economics: An Ethnography of Tamang Community of Temal", mentions, "The Tamang were addressed in a derogatory manner as 'Bhote' (impure and unclean) and 'murmi'" (141). It has not even been hundred years that Tamang got the right to call themselves Tamang rather than other insulting terms.

In Nepal, the indigenous nations have always been the target for different types of violence and exploitation since the king Prithvi Narayan Shah from Gorkha expanded its territory and invaded Kathmandu valley and its surrounding. Though, it is said that Shah wanted to create a multicultural country, indigenous communities and their practices were criminalized by making laws. Jung Bahadur Rana, the first Rana prime minister of Nepal made a country code in 1854 after visiting Europe which criminalized the very existence of indigenous people.

*The Muluki Ain of 1854: Nepal's First Legal Code* translated and compiled by Rajan Khatiwoda and his team discusses about five categories of caste divisions in Nepal made then (30). The Bahun, Chhetris and high caste Newars are included in sacred thread-wearing caste who are considered to be in the highest level of the hierarchy. Likewise, Non-enslavable Alcohol-drinking caste division includes Magars and Gurung natives who were even allowed to join army. Then, Enslavable Alcohol-drinking caste including Bhote which means Tamang, Chepang, Majhi, Hayu, Darai and so on. Water-unacceptable but touchable castes with Muslims and Westerners and Water-untouchable caste with Dalits at the lowest strata was divided (61). Tamangs were treated as slaves to do different kinds of manual labor for the palaces then without any payment. This illustrates pathetic condition imposed by the state on Tamang. The legal and government system by the state marginalized Tamang community. Parshuram Tamang asserts in his book *Tamang Jati*, "Tamang were prohibited from getting into public services. They were enforced to carry the load for military as *pipa* which can be even see nowadays" (My translation, 123-24). This indicates that even the state imposed law to keep this nation back.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The marginalization and exploitation by the state on indigenous communities are the examples of affective politics which has created different types of negative feelings among indigenous communities. There is no one definite definition of affect theory as many theorists have been bringing different and new scope of application of this theory. Brian L. Ott, in his article "Affect in Critical Studies" accepts the trifurcation of affect and its perspective. The first part of study of affect as element which is originated from psychology and neuroscience. This concept

was developed by psychologist Silvan S. Tomkin's theory of primary affects with the combination of Antonio Damasio's theory of basic emotion. They have laid the foundation of affect theory for study of different human emotions and their analysis as affect. Later, other theorists extended affect theory into other fields of study as second part of affect theory. Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi and Nigel Thrift. These scholars have expanded the study of affect from the theory of autonomous affect to emphasis on materiality. The third perspective has created the practice of applying affect on communication and cultural studies. The scholars like Christian Lundberg, Sara Ahmed and Gernot Bohme have contributed in the development of affect theory by using major historical accounts (1). This shows the ever evolving nature of affect theory taking different forms given by various scholars. Therefore, the theory of affect can be used to study only human emotions which is the traditional concept along with the study of politics, gender studies, and queer studies and so on.

Affect is a form of force that different bodies use on one another. Lott clarifies about this concept by using Bruce Spinoza's theory. He writes, "For Spinoza, then, affect involves the intensive force that bodies exert upon one another, increasing or decreasing their capacity to act and the elemental state generated by and encounter between two or more" (2). So, affect is any force which has the capacity of body to affect other bodies and it can be affected by others too. Gregory J. Sigworth and Melissa Gregg claim that affect arises from in-between-ness which is the capacities to act and be acted upon (1) in "An Inventory of Shimmers" from *The Affect Theory Reader*. They have defined affect as the force which has the capacity either affect other bodies or be affected from other. Marta Figlerowicz also accepts various definitions of affect theory in "Affect Theory Dossier: Introduction." She presents affect theory as a medium between humans and biology or neuroscience, study of subjectivity, encounter by accident by sociology and defense of negative feelings as well (3). It shows different forms of affect theory.

Aestheticism has been prominent in affect theory from long period of time. The feelings such as admiration, love, sacrifice and so on have got an important space in different literature and criticism. However, negative feelings have been neglected from the mainstream of analysis. Sianne Ngai claims that ugly feelings' application has been discarded due to negligence, "the question of relevance-that has often haunted the discipline of literary and cultural criticism" (3). This explains negative feelings as unaesthetic ones which do not have any space in literature.

Sianne Ngai studies different types of negative feelings from political perspective also. She claims that ugly feelings which have been neglected in the mainstream of study such as envy, paranoia, disgust and so on can be analyzed to study psychological aspect of human beings along with resistance against capitalist system (3). The negative feelings that have been considered as not useful for the proper study of human aesthetics should be applied for the critical productivity. She further writes:

Each ugly feeling will thus be examined in a cultural context where it seems particularly charged or at stake, ranging from contemporary feminist debates over the perceived problem of aggression between feminists to an American cultural discourse that from the antebellum period forward has found it compelling to imagine the racialized subject as an excessively emotional and expressive subject. (7) This explains that ugly feeling is analyzed in different areas from feminist study to race theory.

The study of indigenous knowledge in the global context and Tamang issues in Nepal is considered to be insignificant. With the state's marginalization against Tamang nation since the invasion by Gorkhali king Prithvi Narayan Shah, Tamang philosophy has been minor. To bring the research of Tamang community forth, Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* is important. She further claims, "Something about the cultural canon itself seems to prefer higher passions and emotions-as if minor or ugly feelings were not incapable of producing "major" works, but somehow disabled the works they do drive from acquiring canonical distinction" (11). Therefore, the study of negative feelings making it as the form of canonical research like Tamang study.

Eu Jin Chua agrees with the approach of Ngai's use of ugly feelings for the study of marginalization against weaker ones. She writes in her article "Review of Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*" for *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature*, ". . . there are many things to feel bad about when one lives amid-through-the injustices, inequalities, and alienating effects of late capitalism, and it would do well us to pay attention to these ugly feelings as they appear in cultural texts and artworks-and ourselves-in order to diagnose such conditions" (1). This also suggests that the study of negative feelings can be used as the methodology to combat injustices.

The individual feelings are not only limited at personal level but rather they affect others too. Sara Ahmed claims that bodies are impacted to take shape after having contact with the objects of the surroundings (1). In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, she studies the act of emotions helping to shape the 'surfaces' of person's body and collective bodies. (1). The affect by the generation of emotions has collective significance too. It makes impact on community collectively and later others also display the affect. She asserts that the naming process of emotions also involves politics. She explores that while naming the emotions also creates different types of impacts on the objects they make. Giving different names to the emotions also can be taken as reference to understand the impacts that they make (14). Her classification of different emotions which creates body politics is also studied.

## Literature Review

Bina Theeng's *Yambunera* is an anthology of thirteen stories which has gained national critics' attention. Many critics have written review on this book. However, there is a lack of literary criticism with theoretical analysis. Dilip Bantawa, in his article for *Sahityapost*, an online literary magazine writes, "Especially "Yambunera" is the story woven with the series of events that the author's experiences, geography, views and tales heard after 2052 BS" (My translation). This shows this story is about the true-life events and experiences faced by the indigenous people living in hills of Kathmandu.

Likewise, Prakash Thamsuhang has written a review article for the *Naya Patrika*, a national daily of Nepal about *Yambunera*. He studies this anthology as the voice of subaltern community by the member. He further explains about the conflict between the state and culture. The state doesn't like cultural diversity. Therefore, the selfish state always restricts the culture of marginalized community. (My translation). From this, we can understand that this book works as the voice of voiceless people which challenges the discrimination done by the state.

Similarly, Tulasi Acharya writes a review for a digital newspaper *Samaya Samachar* on this book, "I want readers to read these stories. Enjoy the taste. Understand the lives of Kathmandu and nearby it. Realize the existence of other classes. And, identify the culture, language, lifestyle if not

then recognize their society and surrounding” (My translation). This review also focuses on the recognition and respect of marginalized communities which are far away from the mainstream of government.

In the similar way, Babu Saheb has similar opinion about the representation of *Yambunera* as the voice of marginalized community in his review for *Sahitya Post*. However, he writes, “Therefore, these stories are not only the voice of Yambu or nearby Yambu only, it is the representative voice of the exploited communities around the country” (My translation). This statement also regards Binu Theeng’s stories from *Yambunera* as the voice of the communities which are excluded from the mainstream and exploited in different time periods of Nepal even by the state.

## Discussion

Different writers have reviewed the book *Yambunera* as the voice of marginalized community without any theoretical framework whereas this paper explores the story, “Yambunera” from this collection by using negative feelings of Ngai analyzing different politics played upon the native characters in the story. Ngai claims that the anxiety is projected externally through different bodily movements. She writes, “The notion of anxiety as already involving some form of outward trajectory” (211). This means anxiety is emerged from outside activities. She further explains, “realistic anxiety emerges in the context of an external threat” (211). This is projected on Sommaya, the major character of this story who is frightened very badly when she hears the voice commanding her to stop. In the story, “My heart increased its weight. My body became heavy. I couldn’t take a glance to the direction from where the voice came. My chest heaved faster than usual. My feet stuck. I felt restless” (My translation, 45). In this story, the emotion of fear has the worst effect of anxiety on the indigenous people who have been utilizing different resources from the forest from the time immemorial due to state’s politics against their access on the resources. Many indigenous nations of Nepal have been dependent on the forest nearby for their survival for long period of time. However, the government’s declaration of national parks near to the residents of natives has negative impact on their lives.

*Naya Patrika* has published a news in which the government declared seven hundred Households of Helambu Rural Municipality-1 inside buffer-zone of Langtang National Park. Though the huge portion of the forest is above the village, the National Park declared ward number 1 as the buffer-zone which has put the local people in grievances. Due to assault from the National Park for few years, most of the locals from Melamchi Ghyang and Tarkeghyang have migrated to other places” (My translation). This illustrates that the state is systematically in the mission to marginalize indigenous people and snatch their land. In a personal discussion with the author, Bina Theeng told that after the state declared the south eastern forest of Kathmandu district as Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, the Tamang nation of the area were forced to change their way of celebrating clan worshipping ceremony.

The state’s approach against the marginalization and exploitation is reflected in the fear of Sommaya who is helpless. The affect of fear and anxiety is presented in her body movements which is not only related to the mental condition but also her body. This fear is associated to the history which is reflected on Sara Ahmed’s claim, “the fear opens up the past histories of association” (63). The history of fear is connected to the past encounters of Sommaya and her friends. Sommaya

and her friends were assaulted by the guards of the national park when she was eighteen years old. When they were collecting firewood from the forest, they heard, “Hey, get down girl.” Sangmo was terrified by such rude voice (My translation, 52). The state declares national park randomly without discussing the natives living in the areas from the time immemorial and decrees them criminals. The native are treated the worst even without any offences, “It is a crime to enter inside national park without permission. You must not take any grass, firewood, fodder. Did you hear? Boys, take these girls along with their load. The one with thick eyebrows grabbed Sangmo’s arm. Sangmo petrified. Terror appeared in the eyes of Sommaya, Punam, Lali and Sanu” (My translation, 53). It shows the act of criminalization of native people without any crime and physical assault by male guards on females.

The fear and anxiety not only impact the people bodily. It has social effect too. Sara Ahmed writes, “the relationship between fear and the alignment of bodily and social space, in particular, by considering how fear shrinks bodily space and how this shrinkage involves the restriction of bodily mobility in social space” (64). The incident of assault by the security personal when she was eighteen years old made Sommaya get afraid even in the starting of the story. Later on the fear from the guards of national park to collect firewood compels Punam and Sanu to leave their village and go for foreign employment, “Sanu, Punam and Lali put wings towards Malaysia” (My translation, 54). In this way, the affective politics of the fear on these three girls is seen by their flight to foreign land though they don’t.

Fear is associated with the object. The people become afraid if they see any object that cause them fear. Ahmed claims, “Fear’s relation to the object has an important temporal dimension: we fear object that approaches us. Fear, like pain, is felt as an unpleasant form of intensity” (65). This shows the presence of object generates fear in people. In the story, the object that causes Sommaya scared is the army boot and the sound it makes. Whenever she hears the sound made by boots on dried leaves, she gets afraid. “She realizes someone’s feet have been cruelly presented on foddors. She gripped right hand on the handle of khurpa. She recognizes the sound that is coming from the boots stepping hardly on foddors” (My translation, 46). Thus, the source of fear for her is the sound of boots. She becomes afraid and alert if she hears the boots.

The anger and disgust against the government can be seen among the marginalized communities which is created by the discrimination and exploitation. Ngai writes, “disgust has no keywords associated with it and has largely remained outside the range of any organized critical practice or school” (333). So, as the subject matter of indigenous people has always been excluded from the mainstream, disgust is also unused in major works of critical study. Likewise, Ahmed asserts, “Disgust reads the objects that are felt to be disgusting: it is not just about bad objects that we are afraid to incorporate, but the very designation of ‘badness’ as a quality we assume is inherent in those objects” (82). So, disgust comes with the social concept of being or having bad qualities in objects or people. She further exclaims, “Food is significant not only because disgust is a matter of taste as well as touch - as senses that require proximity to that which is sensed - but also because food is ‘taken into’ the body” (83). Therefore, the food becomes highly discussed matter in disgust because it includes sensation through skin.

The indigenous tradition of making alcohol from distillation process by using grains is considered as the matter of disgust for the state. Therefore, the security personals raid in native

villages and destroy their property and materials without any warrant issues time to time. In this story, the Tamang people of nearby the capital are engaged in traditional art of making alcohol. They use the money for their households, medical bills and even education for the children. However, on the command new police inspector, the whole village is destroyed in the pretense of raid. “On that day, police searched all houses of the village. Spilled rice wine. Broken all earthen pots. Took copper utensils. The village was chaotic. The women were beaten. All men were hidden” (My translation, 60). This generates anger and hatred among the natives of the village. However, they can’t do anything due to lack of any kind of access. They go back to their traditional way of living as they don’t have resources for new ‘modern’ life. They learn to reconcile with the state’s brutality and accepts their fate.

### Conclusion

“Yambunera” is the story of marginalized and exploited indigenous Tamang people. They lack the access on the state and the rights provided even though they live nearby the capital. Rather than protection and security from the state, they have been brutally assaulted systematically by making law. This assault and discrimination has led the people to generate different negative feelings such as fear, anxiety, anger and hatred against the state. They can’t raise their voice due to lack of their voice and representation in the government. Thus, they have always been the victims of affective politics of ugly feelings. This story and other stories can be studied from using other new theories for critical analysis.

### Works Cited

- Acharya, Tulasi. “Yambunera ka katha” [Stories of Yambunera]. *Samaya Samachar* 19 Sep. 2023. <https://samayasamachar.com/2020/09/19>. Accessed on 25 August 2023.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh UP, 2014. Print.
- Babu Saheb. “Yambunera: Tormo jasta Kathaharuko Sangraha” [Yambunera: The Collection of Stories like Tormo]. *Sahityapost*, Bhadra 17. <https://sahityapost.com/book-post/bp-fiction/14718/>. Accessed on 25 August 2023.
- Bantawa, Dilip. “Yambunera Kathaharuko Muhan” [Yambunera: Source of Stories]. *Sahityapost*, Bhadra 12. <https://sahityapost.com/book-post/bp-fiction/18218/>. Accessed on 25 August 2023.
- Bista, Dor Bahadur. *People of Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2000. Print.
- Chua, Eu Jin. “Review of Sianne Nagai, Ugly Feeling.” *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature*, vol.6, no. 2, Fall 2007. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/bmrc1/vol6/iss2/3>.
- Frank, Adam J and Elizabeth A. Wilson. *Silvan Tomkins Handbook: Foundations for Affect Theory*. Minnesota UP, 2020. <https://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/vgvtq>.
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University, 2010. Print.
- Hagen, Toni. *Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalaya*. Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1971. Print.
- Khatiwoda, Rajan, et al. translators. *The Muluki Ain of 1854 Nepal's First Legal Code*. Heidelberg U Publishing, 2021. Print.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard UP, 2005. Print.
- Tamang, Parashuram. *Tamang Jati* [Tamang Ethnicity]. Sailung Books Pvt. Ltd., 1994. Print.

Thamsuhang, Prakash. “Yambunera: Pahichan bihinkaa katha” [Yambunera: The Story of Identityless]. *Naya Patrika* 31 Apr. 2021. <https://jhannaya.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/1322/2021-04-03>. Accessed on 25 August 2023.

Thapa, Ramkrishna. “Nikunja bhitarka Bastiko Sakas: Bikas Nirman Thappa, Sthaniy Dhamadham Bisthapit Hudai” [Suffocation of Villages inside National Park: Development Activities are Stopped, Locals are Discolated]. *Naya Patrika* 22 March 2023, Sindhupalchowk. <https://nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/110336/2023-03-22>. Accessed on 25 August 2023.

Thamsuhang, Prakash. “Yambunera: Pahichan bihinkaa katha” [Yambunera: The Story of Identityless]. *Naya Patrika* 31 Apr. 2021. Accessed on 25 August 2023. <https://jhannaya.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/1322/2021-04-03>.

Theeng, Bina. *Yambunera* [Nearby Kathmandu]. Phoenix Books, 2020. Print.