

# The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor: Raise of Consciousness in Women

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## Abstract

*The major concern of this analytical research article is to pinpoint the issue of woman violence through the light of the poem. Violence is not a new term in connection to the problems of Nepali society. As a conscious member of the society, the poem entitled “**The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor**” by the modern Nepali poet, Ahuti, drew my attention. So, to analyze the poem critically connecting its issue to the victimized women in our society is the main objective of the article. Nepali women have been facing such ill behaviour since ancient time. “Sati Pratha” can be taken as an example of brutal exploitation to women caused by so called orthodoxically patriarchal concept. Nepali women are still facing a number of social, cultural, and gender- related problems. How the poem entitled, “**The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor**” deals with the issues regarding the problems of women in the society is the major concern of the article. . The major aspect of this article is to reflect the suffering of women in our society, violence against them, and their struggle to exist in the society and so on. As a qualitative research article, description, narration, explanation etc are the major tools to analyse the given text. In short, consciousness regarding women's position in the society is an important factor for women for getting justice. Instead of escaping from the problems, women should be bold to face them.*

**Keywords:** Gender, marginalized, oppression, patriarchal, violence

## Introduction

“Social structure has given emptiness to women and perfectness to men.”

(Sudha Tripathi, *Samanantar Akash*. p. ‘jha’)

Through this expression, Sudha Tripathi, a literary figure in Nepali literature, reflects the real position of women in Nepali society. Women are being victimized in our society from the time immemorial. ‘Sati Pratha’ can be taken as an example of brutal exploitation to women caused by so called orthodoxically patriarchal concept. Regarding the brutal act of ‘Sati Pratha’, Arju Rana Deuba states, “. . .the *satis* of old were given doses of heroin and tied to the pyre so as to knock them out and ensure they didn’t jump off”(The Kathmandu Post. 12 Jan. 2013, p.6, 2<sup>nd</sup> para.). Nepali women are still facing a number of social, cultural, gender-related problems. The issues regarding women and their vulnerability have occupied the pages in Nepali literature for ages. In such situation, the typical problems of Nepali women mentioned in the poem entitled, “The nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor” by the modern Nepali poet, Ahuti, drew my attention to analyze the poem. Is revolution only a weapon for women to fight against violence? How does the poem deal in a different way about the problems of Nepali women? These are the major concerns of this analytical article.

Violence against women is not a new subject-matter in Nepali literature. The Nepali drama *Masan* by Gopal Prasad Rimal, novels like *Rupmati* by Rudraraj Pandey and *Samanantar Akash* by Padmawati Singh and many other literary genres deal with the theme of women’s predicament. Husbands, mother/daughter-in-laws or other family members are the causes of violence against the women. The tortured women either die or leave the home but they hardly be able to revolt against it. The predicament of Sanikanchhi after marriage can be comparable with ‘Dulahi’ in the drama *Masan*. In ‘Masan’, Krishna marries her just to get a son. After giving birth to a son, she dies because she is not cared well during her post natal period. In the drama ‘Dulahi’ in her death bed replies her husband Krishna with tearful eyes after giving birth to a son as, "My duty is finished and what could I do being cured?"(Second half, Scene, III P. 47). The suffering of women, violence against them and their struggle to exist in the society is also discussed by the playwright Bal Krishna Sam in his play Mukunda Indira. The suffering of the

*The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor: Raise of Consciousness in Women* major woman character Indira and her devotion towards her inhumane husband can be described in her sentence: "Women are fortunate to listen even the scolding of their husbands"(Act III, scene IV, p.56).

Similarly, Ramesh Vikal's story "A pair of innocent eyes" also depicts the struggle and courage of women. Dilmaya, a major character in the story, raises her womanish voice to the gunmen as they knocked her husband as, "you sinful monster! Why do you torment an unarmed person? Come and fight with me if you are male"= p. 29).

Cultural domination and violence against women is an international issue too. Maxine Hong Kingston in her novel *The Woman Warrior* presents such violence against women. Listening to the 'talk story' from her mother about her aunt who had given birth to an illegitimate child, the narrator describes the reaction of the villagers as, "At first they threw mud and rocks, at the house. Then they threw eggs and began slaughtering our stock . . . they smeared blood on the doors and walls" (p.4). In the same way, Velina Hasu Houston, a Chinese American playwright also describes the excessive violence against women as Ahuti does in the poem. In her play *Tea*, Himiko, a woman character, could not bear the torture of her husband and murders him. Her daughter was also raped and murdered. Because of unbearable pain, Himiko commits suicide. Teruko, another character in the play speaks about Himiko as, "Himiko Hamilton, thirty-nine, a widow of Chief Warrant Officer William Hamilton, passed away in her home from a self-inflicted gunshot wound...." (Scene I, p. 167).

## Methodology

The research article I am going to carry out is qualitative based research. So, the primary sources of data are based on the characters, events and images used in the poem. As a qualitative research work, characterization, description and narration are the major methodological tools adopted here. The "characterization" of the major character Sanikanchhi and her role functions as a major tool to reflect analogically the condition of Nepalese women in our society.

## Objectives of the Study

The article is about the social issue regarding the women related violence. So, the main objectives of the study are:

- i. To correlate the problem of the Nepalese women with the main character and issue of the poem.
- ii. To make the readers aware of such issues.

### **Analysis of the poem**

Unlike other writers, Ahuti presents the problems of Nepali women differently. Ahuti encourages the women to react strongly against any domination and to revolt against violence. But in the poem, Ahuti makes Sanikanchhi revolt against the excessive domination in her family and becomes able to establish her position in the society. The poem is translated into English version by Manjushree Thapa. Marginalized group of people, women and politics are the major subject matters that Ahuti deals in his works. The poem is centered on the problem of 'Sanikanchhi' who comes to her husband's house with new hopes but gets harsh treatment. She cannot bear the brutal behavior and revolts against it. The patriarchal hegemony prevalent in our country since the past is a root cause for the suffering of women like 'Sanikanchhi'. Women are still confined within the four walls of the kitchen. The discrimination between son and daughter is a significant factor behind such pathetic condition of women. Beside it, women are culturally and religiously dominated in the society. The society takes a son as the ladder of climbing up to the heaven for the parents after their death and daughter is taken differently as a sort of economic burden because they are associated with dowry system. The role of women as sources of love and care is ignored in our society. Women are taken as means of entertainment. They are oppressed and deprived of the opportunities in the society. Such excessive oppression invites explosion when the oppressed group cannot bear any more. There are many examples of such explosion in the history of our country. The end of the 'Rana Rule' is also the result of its excessive oppression against the general people. People got consciousness regarding their tyranny and revolted against and so was the case of monarchy in Nepal. Similarly, the present movements of women are also the outcome of excessive exploitation over them. They involve in different revolutionary activities to gain their right and freedom. In the poem, Ahuti mentions how the oppressed women are compelled to involve in movements if the boundary of oppression crosses its limit. 'Sanikanchhi' is a typical oppressed Nepali woman mentioned in the poem. 'Sanikanchhi' is a common noun to

*The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor: Raise of Consciousness in Women* represent all the married women in Nepali society who are suffered because of their marriage. Ahuti presents the problems of the whole Nepalese women in the poem through her character. Illiterate, hardworking, gullible and tortured are the adjectives which can be used to refer to the many women of Nepal and also to 'Sanikanchhi' in the poem.

Using analogy as a rhetorical strategy in the poem, Ahuti has expressed his ideas regarding the tragic condition of the Nepali women and their desires for freedom effectively. The nine-hued 'pheasant' is a symbol Himalayan 'breeze' which is a symbol of natural freedom. The line "... its wings like a wayward Himalayan breeze scattering a nine-hued rainbow while dancing the open sky" (p.158) makes it clear that the pheasant is free like breeze. The bird flies freely. It looks as beautiful as the rainbow while dancing in the open sky. The freedom and happiness of the bird is contrasted with the trouble of 'Sanikanchhi'. As the speaker states:

She covers over the colours of her life. Having lost her dreams as a pearl  
lost in refuseshe sits by the dirty dishes next to the rubbish and looks at the  
pheasant with spread wings carrying in her eyes tears like the  
ocean.(p.158)

In these lines, Ahuti expresses the troublesome life of 'Sanikanchhi'. The troubles of Sanikanchhi are inexpressible. The beauties of her life are covered by her troubles. Her beautiful dreams in the life are lost. Her over all life is confined with the dirt in her husband's house. Her whole life is filled with tears. Her troubles are all created by her marriage. Her troubles are the results of patriarchal society where women are culturally docile, meek and submissive. Poverty, illiteracy and ignorance are equally responsible for the predicament of women in Nepali society.

Sanikanchhi is also a victim of such social evils. The predicament of 'Sanikanchhi' is similar to the character Rupmati in the novel, '*Rupmati*'. Both the characters are victimized by their marriage. But 'Sanikanchhi' still has hopes for better life. In her troublesome state, she looks at the pheasant with spread wings which stands for her hopes for freedom as the bird is free from any anxieties.

Sanikanchhi's life was different before her marriage. She had not experienced

such bitter difficulties. She had come to her bridegroom's house with new hopes. In the poem, speaker states: "She stepped across the threshold as the bride of the house Just as in darkness the full moon comes bearing light." (p.158)

So, Sanikanchi came to her bridegroom's house with new hopes and aspirations. She came to her new house as the moon comes bearing light in the darkness. In the hope of light, darkness covered her life. So, instead of her nine – hued dreams, she gets uneasiness everywhere in her chest, her face, her hands, and from her head to toe. Her arrival to the new house is a socio – cultural phenomenon. Like many of the Nepali girls, she comes to the new house burdening the load of debt on her father's head. In the same way, 'Sanikanchhi' just lives tearful life for others. She becomes totally submissive in her new house. The given verse clarifies her condition in her new house. She says:

She trembled before her husband as a mouse before a cat and she gathered the leftovers from his dirty plate always feeling afraid that he may take another wife (P.159).

Through her activities, the readers can easily feel the difficulties of Sanikanchi. She is totally powerless after her marriage. Her marriage snatches away her freedom and courage. So, she trembles before her husband as a mouse trembles before a cat. The fear that her husband may take another wife always haunts her. It is the result of social status of women in Nepalese society. The weight of her anxieties makes her a pitiable being. Being tearing eyed, she washes the dishes and scoops up dung. She opens her heart at the well and at the stone taps. She murmurs in the loneliness. Here, the troubles of 'Sanikanchhi' are similar to the troubles of Helen and Dulahi in the drama *Masan* which was written about seventy years ago. Because of marriage, Dulahi gets untimely demise and Helen has to leave her house at last. So the similarities of the women's predicament in the past and at present can be drawn from the comparative observation of these characters. Marriage has still been a trauma for the Nepali women. 'Sanikanchhi' cannot bear the sufferings in her husband's house and goes to her parents' house. In her surprise, she gets harsh words from her parents and neighbors. Then she returns to her unfeeling house. She takes a strong decision. She starts to speak against her dissatisfactions.

Sanikanchhi is the example of such socially and culturally oppressed Nepali

*The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor: Raise of Consciousness in Women* women. As Sanikanchhi realizes her optimum oppressed condition, she stops the flow of her tears. She starts to speak about her dissatisfaction and starts to sing the songs of justice in the folk tunes. She challenges the injustices she faces in her house. She stops massaging her husbands' feet and starts to speak of her dissatisfactions. She starts reading books and tries to grasp everything.

The involvement of Sanikanchhi in such revolutionary activities is similar to the involvement of Nepalese in the movement of 2061/062 B.S. The Nepalese people got the sense that the monarchy is synonymous to the despotism. So, to get their civil right, identity, status and place in the constitution of Nepal, all the political parties and ethnic groups of people involved in the movement. They discarded all types of obstacles and even got ready to sacrifice their life like Sanikanchhi who does not even fear death and dares to speak her oppressed feelings. As the people's movement of 2061/062 B.S. got succeeded and people got *Loktantra*, Sanikanchhi also succeeds to gain her right and power. The speaker says:

... said 'Long live' and also 'Death to'

And when her friend who had been taking with head held high was taken by the police and pushed around she held her friend, raised her finger and like a lioness roared, Don't touch her! (p. 162).

This given extract clarifies the Sanikanchhi's consciousness regarding her position in the society. She is conscious about her personal right. She is even conscious about women's right.

So, she involves in the movement. She does not even fear the police. She speaks boldly like a lion in front of the police. Her consciousness is triggered by the change that comes in her thinking. She takes a bold decision in her life and starts to react against her dissatisfaction which brings the entire change in her life.

## Conclusion

This analytical study can be concluded that Ahuti has differently addressed the problems faced by women in Nepali society. Beside revolution, consciousness regarding their position in the society is an important factor for women for getting justice. Instead of escaping from the problems, women should be bold to face them. In the drama, *Masan* and in the novel *Rupmati* the women characters either

die or leave their house because of violence against them. But in the poem, Sanikanchhi gathers courage and boldly faces her unfavorable situation. She is taken as atypical Nepali married woman and through her character; the troubles, problems and feelings of the Nepali women are well presented. Ideological revolution is encouraged for the women to fight for their personal right.

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