



Feminist Interpretation of the Novel *Yogmaya*

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Abstract

The present study entitled *Feminist Interpretation of the Novel Yogmaya* is an attempt to identify and analyze feminist issues in terms of gender discrimination; women's position in society, inequality, patriarchy, and gender roles in the fiction *Yogmaya*. The survey research design under qualitative approach has been adopted to accomplish this study. This study embodies ten different extractions as samples to analyze and interpret the issues in feminism. The required data were collected using purposive non-random sampling procedure and observation checklist guideline as a tool for this study. The data have been analyzed and interpreted descriptively. The findings were: there are extreme discrimination, inequality, and intolerable domination by patriarchal society; the girls are taught to be obedient, well-mannered, and submissive to men and family authority from early childhood so as to satisfy all the requirements of male and the practices of male dominated society for their entire lifetime.

Key words: Feminism, Gender Discrimination, Inequality, Patriarchy, and Perspective

Introduction

Feminism is one of the significant literary aspects to visualize the underlying issues, facts, details and realities concerned with women in the verbal communication, conversation, talk, formal treatment of a subject etc. in speech or written texts. According to Madsen (2000, p. 200), "Feminism deals with women and their status in society and asks questions about oppression, consciousness and gender". Feminist perspective evaluates the manners how the issue prioritizes the political, social, cultural, economic, psychological and religious domination against women. The authentic establishment of feminism is said to have existed from the Women's Liberation movement of the 19th century (Green & Lebihan, 1996). Feminism enormously raises the voices for the similar rights of the women in the society, nation and even the universe. It primarily sheds lights on the domination and the exploitation of the females by men in the patriarchal society. Because of the patriarchal society, system and superstitions, women have been regarded as subordinate position in the societies.

Yogmaya is a Nepali fiction authored by novelist Neelam Karki Niharika. *Yogmaya* has been awarded by the most prestigious award given for literary genre in Nepal 'Madan Puraskar' of the year 2074. The very fiction has raised the several issues concerning the



dominance, discrimination, inequality, oppression, exploitation, and negligence and so on of the then society and which in turn, seem to remain similar to the present society in altered forms and styles. However, this fiction primarily begins its plot development rooted in the issue related to female in eastern part of Nepal. In the initial phase to middle part, it enormously strikes the mind of the readers by the issues, challenges and problems confronted by *Yogmaya*. Afterwards, the fiction widens its veins towards the multiple issues that can be analyzed from the eyes of feminism. This study is delimited to the feminist perspective in the novel *Yogmaya*.

Objectives of the Study

To identify the issues of feminism in terms of gender discrimination, oppression, male dominance, women's position in society, inequality, patriarchy, gender roles in *Yogmaya*.

Research Questions

1. What are the issues of feminism in terms of gender discrimination, oppression, male dominance, woman's position in the society, inequality, patriarchy, gender roles in this novel?
2. How does the novel *Yogmaya* increase issues of feminism in the society?

Literature Review

In the fiction, 'when *Yogmaya* was born, there was a huge restriction on women within the boundaries of their home or family. But, *Yogmaya* is able to lead and inspire lots of people to stand up and raise the voices against an oppressive regime and the social norms of that time. She is also capable of observing the root causes of problems and offer solutions to move ahead for a better future and prosperity, not only for women but also for all aspects of society. Based on *Yogama's* life, the struggle for ending every kind of discrimination in the society is included in the fiction. The very fiction has raised the several issues concerning the dominance of men over women, discrimination, inequality, oppression, exploitation, and negligence of women in the then society. However, this fiction primarily begins its plot development rooted in the issues related to female at that time. In the initial phase to middle part, it enormously strikes the mind of the readers by the issues, challenges and problems confronted by *Yogmaya*. Afterwards, the fiction widens its veins towards the multiple issues that can be analyzed from the eyes of critical of feminism. But, as this study is delimited to the feminist perspective in the novel *Yogmaya*, *Yogmaya* is represented as the lead character



in the fiction. The lead character *Yogmaya* is also found to be addressed by the names *Maya/Mayadvi* or *Thulihajur* in the initial phase of fiction and from the middle part respectively.

In the fiction, there are characters like; *Tulasaka Baa*, *Tulasa*, *Giri*, *Padamlal*, *Devilal* etc. who play the significant roles. Similarly, the conversation, story, act, sequence, scene, meaning and so on by the language of characters differ individually for whom they are expected to address in the fiction. Therefore, I also felt the necessity to study the language usage critically. Further, I wanted to interpret and raise the awareness that how such usage of language in conversations, actions, events and act sequences of the fiction are creating inequalities among people in the societies. Especially, I had selected the fiction *Yogmaya* for this study to bridge the gaps and analyze ideologies, power, and superstition etc. in relation to the modern society.

Brief Introduction of the Parameters

Feminism comes into existence through the struggle for women's right against the injustice carried out in the society. In human history, women's existence is observed through male point of view as a result of which women are always considered as secondary. Kaplan (1998, p.6) remarks feminism as "Feminism has developed...a political language about gender that refuses the fixed and trans-historical definitions of masculinity and femininity in the dominant culture". (Green & Lebihan, 1996, p. 229) In addition to this, the basic aim of the feminist theory is to understand certain aspects of gender difference and gender inequality. Considering the aspects of feminism, it concentrates on the various themes. This study for feminist critical discourse analysis is developed from the ideas of Fairclough (1992), Lazar (2007) and other various scholars. To make this study more meaningful, we have set the five different parameters to analyze and interpret the issues of feminism. The brief introductions about those five parameters are presented as follows:

Gender discrimination means unequal treatment or perception of an individual based on their gender. It takes place because of socially and biologically constructed dichotomies of inequality and chromosome respectively. Such biasness affects the understanding of people. According to Wardhaugh (2002, p. 309), "Gender is social construction (but heavily grounded on the sex) involving whole gamut of psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females". Therefore the present study also sheds light upon this issue of gender discrimination more importantly among various issues in feminism



In the society, women are given secondary status making them inferior to men in multiple areas viz. decision making, leadership, participation etc. of human life. In this regard, Singh (2014) argues that equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to build and sustain democracy. Women's involvement in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country.

So, it concentrates on the promotion of women's rights in the society. Considering the position of women in society, it tremendously attempts to understand the aspects of gender difference, how they have caused gender inequality and try to terminate the differences. Under this parameter, women's conditions in the society from the fiction *Yogmaya* been analyzed.

All women in our societies are not provided with synonymous right and opportunities as of men. Women are left behind the common framework of human civilization, prestige, opportunity, liberty, and priority in our societies (Lazar, 2007), Due to which inequality between male and female is in high level. Inequality is the state of being biased in terms of status, rights, and opportunities. It is a concept very much at the heart of social justice theories. This very parameter under feminist analysis attempts its best to disclose the ground reality of inequality to terminate or equalize the position of both women and men synonymously in all spheres of human life.

Patriarchy means male supremacy, to societies where men as a group dominate mainstream positions of power in culture, politics, business, law, military, society and policing, for example, societies like ours. In addition to the above extraction, patriarchy emphasizes male rule, male dominance and male superiority in a whole community, society and even a whole world. Due to which females are still confined to the four walls of the house, no matter what we have progressed theoretically about feminism till the date.

Gender means the categorization of people into male, female or in neuter category. But such division is largely depended on the biological features which are usually determined before the birth. According to Thomas and Wareing (2001, p. 66), "Gender refers to social category which is associated with certain behavior". In addition to this definition, when people are discriminated on the basis of such gender based behavior, prejudices take place. And feminism tremendously resists this biased behavior in accordance with gender role. In societies women are to take care of children and houses as for that men's role is to earn money (Braunstein & Folbre, 2001; Monagan, 2010; Demirbilek, 2007). The role of women in patriarchal family, society and social environment shapes and affects women's labor.



Methodology

Researchers used qualitative descriptive approach for analysis and interpretation of data. Survey research design was adopted to collect data since data were collected from the fiction *Yogmaya* non-randomly. The nature of descriptive approach is exploratory and open-ended. It deals with multiple realities. The basic elements of this research are words or ideas since it is grounded on interpretative nature. This study is based on content analysis. Content analysis is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, characters or sentences within texts or sets of texts to quantify this presence in an objective manner as it is defined by Ojha and Bhandari (2017, p.139).

The population of this study was the discourse extractions related to female issues from the fiction *Yogmaya*. Fourteen extraction as samples have been selected through purposive non-random sampling procedure. In order to successfully complete this study, observation checklist as a tool has been used to collect data. Kumar (2005, p.119) defines observation as a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomena as it takes place.

Discussions and Results

Being based on the data gathered from the fiction *Yogmaya*. Data are analyzed and interpreted in terms of five different parameters, viz. gender discrimination, inequality, gender roles, status of women, and patriarchy. For this, of the extractions are kept under each parameter in order to arrive in newer findings of this research. Similarly, while translating Nepali cases into English researchers have focused on the gist of the cases and elaborated them in light with the theoretical issues of feminism. Below is the analysis and interpretation of the data gained from the fiction *Yogmaya*.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination is one of the significant aspects within feminist theory of literary criticism. It is the term that causes the distinctions between male and female, especially in terms of their roles, reputations, positions and responsibilities in political or commercial contexts.

*Hāmā'imā'imānchhēāphnāḍōlibāṭabhitri'ēkōgharabāṭabidānapā'iniskanubha
nēkōkātrōmābēridāmātrahō.Natrajēparēpanisahēraibasnuparchhadēkāgharā.*



{We, the women are only get freed without permission of home only when we die. Otherwise, we should tolerate everything happening in husband's home. } (p. 96).

The women are kept in proper control and should also tolerate everything happening either bad or good at the home where they are married to. In other words, the women are told to be much more disciplined and obedient to manage the household tasks from the day they get married in life. Women are not allowed to make their choices and interests on their own rather they should go on satisfying all the needs and demands of the entire family members to fulfill little bit of their desires as Badiama tries to convince Maya in the fiction. Besides, they should endure everything and expected to get freed only when they are dead. It displays the absolute discrimination between male and female due to the gender factor. Below is another sentence showing the similar gender discrimination as:

Ēklīawalājanānālā'ibāchchnadinnayōsamāj.Jahājā'ūsāntikōsāsphērnāpā'udin au.Jēparchhasāmanāsangaigaraulā,him'matgara. Phērayastāpahiran.

{This society doesn't permit single, helpless woman for living. You even cannot breathe peacefully wherever you go. Whatever happens we will face together. Throw such clothes. Pluck up the courage.} (p. 113).

This sentence depicts how the society and its people make discriminatory behavior and domination to the single women because of being gender. Here, the lead character Maya is being convinced to revolt against traditional norms and values, because the societal periphery did not let her live peacefully. She is requested to change her white clothes for making her strong and also capable of tackling the unnecessary domination, because wearing the white clothes symbolizes any woman who wears white clothes is a widow. And such single women face lot of challenges and harassments because of being a widow. The men who are also single after their wife's death do not confront such hardship which exhibits the gender discrimination between male and female by the society.

Women's Position in Society

The roles of women, treatment done to them and distinctions made on the basis of gender-oriented features determine the women's position in society. Under this sub-heading, the positions and aspects of gender biasness and their sources of cause are analyzed and interpreted from the fiction *Yogmaya*. For this, extractions concerning the issue of women's position in society are derived out of the novel *Yogmaya* as follows:



Chhōrībīgārñēāmāhun. Dēkōgharkhānachhāḍībhāgīākīchhōrīlā'īMā'itīmāāsra yadinamilchha? Anikhānchhānchhōrīlēghar? Ajhaṭā'ukāmānachaḍhāMāyākīām ā.

{Mothers spoil their daughters. How can she stay in her parental home leaving her husband's home? How is she supposed to take care of her home then? Maya's mother, don't pamper her.} (p. 98).

According to aforementioned extract, it shows the women's position in a negative way in the society. Here, Maya's mother is accused for pampering Maya by her father. When Maya could not continue the marital relationship and escaped back to parental home, she was a bit little sympathized by her mother. But her decision did not make any sense. This shows that the distinction in women's position as subordinate to men in the society. Next extraction related to similar issue is as follows:

Bā-āmālā'īnabhēṭityahīmarinēbhōbhannēlāgyō. Rō'irahē.

Gharakōbuhārtansahananasakēraē'uṭīJēṭhānīparnēlēāphnōśarīrphālēkī thin.

{I thought I would die there without meeting my parents. I wept on. A Jethani (sister-in-law) killed herself being incapable of undertaking the household chores.} (p. 90).

In this extract, the lead character Maya shows the torture confronted by another woman of the same society. This strongly depicts that women are better to be dead rather than to be unable for conducting domestic chores successfully. It shows the women's position in society is valueless that's why the society accepts even the death of women when they kill themselves being unable to manage the home effectively. Another example related to women's position in society is presented as follows:

Hērchhōrīgarkhānasajilōhudaihunna. Buhārtansahananaparnēkunbuhārīlā'īh ōlā? Sabaikōustaiho. Bha'ēbīs-unnā'is. Aba ā'indāyastōgaltīkahilēnagarnu. Ṭikērabasnuparchhabābaidēkāgharā.....

{Look daughter, it is so hard to manage domestic chores. Who do you think who is not supposed to do domestic chores? Everyone has almost the same case. Never make such a mistake now onwards....} (p. 103).

In accordance with the above mentioned extraction, females are taught for being polite, tolerable, obedient, punctual and submissive to the authority either at husband's home or parental home. Here, Maya's mother attempts her best to convince Maya to remain positive despite the problems and challenges she had faced in her husband's home. She not



only attempts to convince Maya but also requests not to make any mistake in husband's home onwards. This shows the discriminative behavior upon females that they are told to endure every sort of problems in life. Besides, Maya had to be understood but rather her mother suggests her daughter to conduct household tasks more carefully and further says everyone has almost the same case to make her silencing the domination done to her instead. The case mentioned below also advocates the women's position in society as:

Manlāgdōgarnus. Mailēbhanēkōsunēkōkahilēpōhōra? Ō

bēlāpanityatiṭāḍhānadimchhōrībhandātarēkōhō'ina.

Mājābīā'imā'īkōkēchalchha?

{Do as you like. Have you ever heard my words? Even then I told you not to marry the daughter far away but you neglected. Who listens to this worthless woman?} (p. 105).

In this case, women are shown as subordinate to men in the society. Similarly, it also depicts that women are incapable of making righteous and meaningful decision in their lives which in turn nothing except the biasness made to them. In the extract above, Maya's mother tried to suggest some ideas and thoughts to her husband but he did not listen to his wife. It displays that women are worthless and incapable for making meaningful decision at the time of need. This also questions the existence of women, what they are born for as a consequence of distinction made for being female gender. The extract below is another representation of women's position in society as:

Mastanidā'unapā'unupani ta karmamailēkhīlyānupardōraichha ta dulaḥī!
Kēgarnu-

ēkaṭakbhāgyābāṭaṭhagi'ēpachisabaitirabāṭasadhaiṭhagi'irahanērachharapō.

{Bride, you should be fortune enough to have a sound sleeping. What can be done! Once you are cheated by fate, everyone keeps cheating you.} (p. 109).

According to the aforementioned case, it shows the women's tragic situation in the society. This further clarifies that the women are exploited everywhere once they are cheated by fate as well. In other words, women even cannot have sound sleeping as per their individual interests and wishes. Moreover, women are criticized and evaluated with societal norms and values to determine their character and perceptions upon as represented in the fiction *Yogmaya*, while the men do not encounter such challenges, so it is the discrepancy made on women's public and societal position due to gender factor as given in the novel.



Inequality represents the differences done against females in terms of unequal life, domestic abuse, sexual violence and private and individual matters as mentioned in the fiction *Yogmaya*. Therefore, this is one of the significant parameters to analyze the issues of inequality in accordance with the fiction *Yogmaya*.

Hāmīchhōrījātiakṣarasangakhēlnapā'i'ēnakēgarnu?

{I too was reared up playing in mud from birth to now, I played with mud, what to do? We daughters never got chance to play with alphabets!} (p. 71).

Regarding the extraction above, it clarifies that how the females were unequally treated then, at the time of *Yogmaya*. It means females were only supposed to perform household tasks without letting them expose to outer world and education from the four walls of house and domestic chores. Here, when Maya's daughter-in-law, Ganga requests her sister Maya not to involve in weeding the plants, Maya replies Ganga that she was never allowed for schooling. She further adds that she always played and reared up with mud altogether. She could not do anything because she was a girl. And girls were restricted by societal and religious misbelieves. This depicts the unequal behavior done to females as mentioned in the fiction. This can be understood more clearly by the similar case as given below:

Kina bhāgīhīdēkī? Di'ēkīchhōrī,

kasailā'īnabhanīgharbāhirapā'ilārākhnahunchha?

TailēāphnākhuṭṭāmābancharōhānisaNānī.....

{Why did you run away? How can the married daughter step outside the home secretly? Daughter, you trapped yourself in problem.....}(p. 94).

In accordance with the aforementioned extract, it represents that females are not permitted to step outside the home without informing their parents or elder brothers for unmarried and husbands for married ladies respectively. If they go against this pre-determined norms and values practiced by the society, females are accused as characterless, disobedient, stubborn etc. and as a consequence, they are not accepted by the family and society. Here, when Maya goes back to her parental home escaping from her husband's home, she is being warned for crossing the boundary by a neighboring woman, Badiama. This shows that women are habituated for tolerating the inequality. For this, when Maya attempted to revolt against this biasness, she herself was not supported by another women, being a women in itself.



Patriarchy

According to this parameter, the undermined and dominated women's autonomies and equalities by patriarchal society are analyzed. For this, eight of the issues concerned with patriarchy are extracted from the fiction for their analysis and interpretation in order to reach in meaningful findings and conclusion for this research study.

Bhōlityatrākāmchhansut

aba.Tulasākābālēē'utōgōdālēbistārōghachēṭēratēlghasirākōmērōhāthatā'ē.....

....dubaigōdāēkṭhā'ujōdēradhōggarē.

{Sleep now; there are lots of work for tomorrow. To remove my moisturizing hands, Tulasaa's father slowly pushed with a leg.....Then, I bowed down at his feet.} (p. 30).

In this extract, women are portrayed as subordinate to men, while they are also taken as work machine who primarily takes all the responsibilities of household tasks. In addition to this, Ganga's husband orders his wife to sleep earlier instead of completing the woks of following day and have the proper rest for. Here, Ganga fulfills the duty of massage and also bows down at both feet of her husband before she goes for sleeping. This indicates the discrimination caused by the patriarchal ideology and practice that the women are supposed to make as much services as possible to satisfy their husbands, whereas the same human body of women is neglected and imposed extra work pressure on females. In the same way, the following extraction also helps us to understand more clearly about patriarchal discrimination as:

*Gōtrasārēraarkālā'īdi'ēkīchhōrīunarukaisampattibhai.Uṭhā'ērālyā'unamilyō?S
abailē t khā'ēkaichhanghar.Kāmgarēramārinthyōra?*

{The married daughter is her husband's property now. Can she be brought back? At least, everyone has managed their home. She wouldn't have died even if she had worked somewhat.} (p. 104).

The sentences above present the women as no longer the matter of concern to their parental home once after they are married off by the family. Similarly, women are expected to do all the domestic chores to manage their home as if it is the only duty of females to maintain their household tasks. Here, when Maya goes back to her parental home, being unable to manage her home due to extra work load, she is scolded very badly by her father. Instead of sympathizing and advocating the wrong doings of daughter's home, her father did not understand the situation. Rather accuses his own daughter for being incapable of



managing extra work pressure. This is all due to the discriminations made on females in terms of patriarchal ideology and its practices. The following example also clarifies similar issue as:

In accordance with this parameter, the discriminations made in terms of gender role and societal perspectives to foster those prejudiced behaviors that are analyzed and interpreted. It means, gender based biasness between males and females are explained in this section. For this, eight of the extractions are derived from the fiction *Yogmaya* to analyze gender concerned issues as given below:

*Ghās-dā'urālā'tjaṅgalpasēkāmāthigā'ukāpānch-sātchhōrī-
buhārībhārīli'ērāpharkidābāsaghārītalaPadhērāmābisā'ēkārachhana..
{The five-seven daughters/daughter-in-laws of the upper village had entered
the jungle for grass and fire woods. They were having a rest in Padhero
(public place to collect water), below the bamboo bush.....} (p.133).*

With reference to the above extraction, it indicates that women are made only for physical labor in the family. Similarly, women are also represented as talkative as these are women's inborn qualities to dominate them due to gender factor. For this, five to seven daughter and in-laws are bringing grass and firewood to their homes to fulfill their domestic tasks. Further, they are having a rest on the midway to their home where they are making criticisms of Maya, which signals the biasness caused due to gender. Below is next example of gender related discrepancy as:

*Amrisākōnayākuchōbanā'idi'ēkāthēTulasākābālē.Chalannagarīrākhēki.Tyahīj
hikērakunādēkhikasērlā'udailagīdailōnērathupārē.....
{Broom, made of Amliso, tied by Tulasaa's father was kept unused. I took the
same broom and swept the floor from one corner of the room to the door and
heaped there.....} (p. 32).*

Here, the given extract advocates the women's roles as sweepers, cleaners, and helpers etc. to perform daily household activities for maintaining the family. In addition to this, women have to perform these tasks as women are only made for those works at any cost. This sort of discrimination is understood and pertaining in the society since Ganga is doing all those domestic chores herself as mentioned in the fiction *Yogmaya*. In the same way, the following sentences also clarify the how the gender roles as:



Conclusion

The existing research was a qualitative study to analyze and interpret the issues concerned with feminism in terms of the aspects; gender discrimination, inequality, women's position in society, patriarchy, gender roles, and political and social factors in the fiction *Yogmaya*. For this study, forty-eight different cases have been analyzed and interpreted in order to arrive in findings and conclusion being based on the objectives of the study.

The prejudices done to females in the family and society are interconnected with different aspects. Women are made biased for and about. Gender discrimination is one of the integral components that give birth to unjustifiable restrictions between males and females from the critical eyes of feminist perspective as in the fiction *Yogmaya*. Gender discrimination has caused the wrongful deeds made upon females being concerned with culture, religion, tradition, rituals, identity, language, and social life of women. Similarly, inequality brings the restrictions to the freedom and socialization of females both in family and society.

People in patriarchal society do not want females to have liberty, open choices, independent decision making for prosperous lifestyle, and women's position in the society as free bird and their equal and meaningful identity that suits women's independence. In the similar vein, patriarchal concepts and practices does not allow women to preserve their existence and originality for what women actually are. In addition, the distinctions between males and females are made in terms of their behaviors and biological features. And the women's roles and liberties have been confined within the four walls and peripheral environment of home from the outer world.

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