

Woman's Body as the Site of Violence in Parijat's *Blue Mimosa*

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Abstract

The article aims to analyze Parijat's *Blue Mimosa*, which was originally published as Śīrīśako Phūla (1965) from the feminist perspective. Feminists argue that patriarchy is unfriendly to women. They explain that because of biased patriarchal gender roles women suffer from gender-based violence. They claim that in patriarchy men have special power and privileges which allow them to dominate and control women to their benefit. They use corporal punishment and sexual violence in case women deny to submit to them. Thus, feminists protest the imposition of traditional gender roles in the process of socialization. They demand for a more egalitarian perspective towards gender which allows human individuals to live according to their interests and capacities. In *Blue Mimosa*, the female characters become the victim of gender-based violence. They are physically assaulted, raped, and murdered. Their bodies become the site where men enact violence. Thus, feminism is relevant to analyze the text. The article argues that these female characters become the victim of violence just because they are women. The article helps to understand how women suffer from gender-based violence in patriarchy.

Keywords: Patriarchy, gender roles, feminism, socialization.

Background

Though the novel *Blue Mimosa* is written by a female author, it is narrated from the man's perspectives. It deals with the likes and dislikes of men, their preferences, and their fascination towards women's bodies. Suyogbir, the protagonist of the novel is surprised to see Sakambari, the female protagonist of the novel for the first time. Both her appearance and manner defy the normativity of femininity. She abruptly enters the room, introduces herself with her precise remarks, without background, takes a cigarette, and unhesitatingly smokes in the face of her seniors. These activities of a young and unmarried lady are quite unnatural when evaluated from the patriarchal perspective. Suyogbir has embraced traditional gender roles about masculinity and femininity and expects all women to be silent and submissive. He also believes that young ladies are beauty sensitive and pay attention to their looks. But her precise

and abrupt manner is unbecoming of a woman. Likewise, her short haircut also violates the notion of feminine beauty. Despite her unfeminine activities and look, Suyogbir is attracted to her and desperately wants to possess her.

Narrated from the first-person point of view by its male protagonist, Suyogbir, the author, however, maintains an ironical distances from its narrator. Through him, she discloses the vanity of masculinity. She is sarcastic to men's pride and ego. She discloses that men need to encroach and violate women's bodies to prove their masculinity. When Suyogbir fails to attract Sakambari through flattery and other tricks, he feels restless and defeated. As a man, he has enjoyed especial power and position and has not learned to accept failure in life, at least in his dealing with women. Though he had been unable to kill any combatants in the war during his tenure in the army, he has raped and murdered three innocent women. Thus, when he fails to woo and subjugate Sakambari to his will, he uses sexual violence against her. He confesses that his activities are cowardice: "I was not only base and criminal, but a worthless and coward as well" (90). The way Suyogbir and other men abuse women's bodies create a problem for the study of this novel to find out how women's bodies become the site of violence in patriarchy. In the process of analysis this article seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How do men treat women in the novel?
2. Why do men use violence against women in the novel?

Methodology

The qualitative mode of research is adopted to analyze the text of *Blue Mimosa* which forms the primary source of information. Feminism provides the theoretical ground for the study. Relevant examples from the novel are analyzed in the light of views presented by feminist critics. They argue that women are at disadvantageous in patriarchy. Patriarchal gender roles are biased. It provides special power and privileges to men and subjugates women to their will. In patriarchy, men use violence against women in case they deny to submit to their dictates. Kate Millett points out that intimidation is everywhere in patriarchy. She explains that streetwise woman realizes that if she wants to survive in patriarchy, she would better act feminine, or else she may be subjected to "a variety of cruelties and barbarities" (Quoted in Tong 52). Susan Moller Okin also suggests that violence against women in patriarchy is justified by reference to culture, religion, or tradition (33). Thus, they protest patriarchy and its norms and values that subjugate women to men.

Feminism as a socio-political movement works to promote women's lives by providing them equal rights like those of men. It objects to the tradition that defines women as the second sex. Barbara Smith, a black feminist defines feminism:

Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement. (49)

Feminist critics work to enhance women's social, political, and economic lives. They aim to free every woman from the shackle of patriarchy that hinders women from enjoying their basic human rights.

Feminist critics insist that patriarchy uses literature and other cultural texts to create and perpetuate gender stereotypes that are disadvantageous to women. Patricia Waugh points out that feminists are interested in literature as a powerful means of creating and perpetuating belief systems. Simone de Beauvoir claims that great literary writers are responsible for creating and perpetuating the myth of eternal feminine. She argues, "Literature was subject to implicit social ideas about the roles of men and women" (Quoted in Waugh 326). Critics like Beauvoir protest the negative representative of female characters in literary and other types of texts.

In *Blue Mimosa*, Parijat deviates from the stereotyped depiction of female characters. Her female characters cannot be categorized into the dichotomy of good or bad ones. Especially, through the portrayal of her female protagonist, she protests the patriarchal restriction imposed on women. The protagonist believes in individual freedom and claims for women's existence independent of men. She denies to submit to men's will. Thus, she suffers from gender-based violence. Other women also become the victim of violence. Their bodies become the space where men intact violence. The protagonist, Suyogbir think that women are handmade or puppet for men's pleasure and use violence against them. Hence, feminism is relevant to analyze the text.

Review of Literature

Critics and readers have been fascinated by *Blue Mimosa* ever since its publication. Critic Hom Subedi claims that Parijat is the most reviewed writer of Nepali literature (121-122). However, in the initial stage of its publication, many critics were not sure about the moral teaching of the novel. They were bewildered by the unconventional nature of its female protagonist. But they appreciated the newness of theme and style of the novel. Most of them were convinced by the aesthetic pleasure provided by it, despite their grudges against the moral of the novel. The popularity of the novel was heightened by the preface to the novel written by critic and essayist Shankar Lamichhane for the first edition of its Nepali version as *Śirīṣako Phūla*. He has high regard for the novelist and appreciates the newness of the theme and subject

matter of the novel. The novel centers on the theme of absurdism and nihilism. He also evaluates the poetic quality of the novel as par excellent and declares that the contemporary age belongs to Parijat (n. pag.).

Unlike Lamichhane, Govinda Bhatta finds the novel quite worthless. For him, it is like a beautiful flower of paper written in a beautiful language that has no use-value. He worries that the novel may have corrupting influence on the reader (123-28). Despite Bhatta's worry, readers have continued appreciating the novel. Murari Aryal contends that Parijat is a towering novelist of Nepali literature and *Blue Mimosa* is an uncontested Nepali novel. According to him, the themes of absurdism and nihilism expressed in the novel is the effect of her understanding of the devastation wrought by the Second World War on human life (59).

Indra Bahadur Rai, the renowned critic of Nepali literature has analyzed the novel as an absurdist novel. He claims that the novel inaugurates the theme of absurdism and meaninglessness in Nepali literature (196). Ever since Rai's analysis, most of the critics of Nepali literature have read the novel as an absurdist one. Krishnachandrasingh Pradhan also comments upon the notion of meaninglessness revealed in the novel. (345). Likewise, Rajendra Subedi also highlights the novel's absurdist approach revealed in the experiences of its male protagonist, Suyogbir (308). Krishnahari Baral and Netra Atom also mention that *Blue Mimosa* is a pioneering novel that heralds the theme of nihilism and absurdism in Nepali novels (187). Most of these critics agree on the theme of the novel. They are also fascinated by the poetic quality of the text.

Indeed, Parijat is read so much from the absurdist approach, that Arun Gupto, an academician and critic, argues that over-reading of the novel from absurdist and existentialist approaches mars the beauty of the novel (10). He insists that the novel should be read from other angles. Simone Gautam, too, is in line with Gupto. He analyzes the varied experiences of women as depicted in Parijat's novels and finds them being influenced by feminist thought developed in the West during the sixties. He analyzed the voiced and voiceless personas of Sakambari, the protagonist of the novel. According to Gautam, Bari bears several persona-petals (149). Unlike the traditional demure women found in a patriarchal society like Nepal, she is vocal and shows no hints of shyness. Gautam finds this persona petal dominant in Bari. Though other critics have analyzed the novel from a feminist perspective as well, none of them has made a detailed study about the violence instigated upon the female's body in the novel. Thus, this article aims to analyze the use of violence against women in the novel.

Violence against Women in *Blue Mimosa*

Set against the background of patriarchal society, the novel *Blue Mimosa* is told from the perspective of men. But in the portrayal of its protagonist, Suyogbir the novelist maintains an ironical distance from the narrator. The protagonist treats women as sexual objects and believes that men can have sex with them any time they like. He has internalized the traditional gender roles about men and women and behaves accordingly. In patriarchy, men are groomed to be dominating and adventurous. Masculinity is defined in terms of drinking alcohol, hanging around with friends, and having sex. For him, these are the prime activities of men. The very first sentence of the novel describes the protagonist's involvement in these activities: "After our third meeting in the bar, he invited me to his home in Vishalnagar" (1). Going to bars and drinking alcohol are normative masculine activities. The protagonist, as a patriarchal man indulges in such activities. But the tone of the novel is ironical to these activities of men.

In Patriarchy, women's worth lies in their youth and appearance. Men's interest in women's bodies is taken natural and normal. Men, in general, discuss women's anatomy unhesitatingly. Suyogbir, too, is interested in women and is very specific about their physical appearance. He boasts his capacity of guessing women's age accurately. For instance, he describes Mujura at the very first glance: "On that spot I saw a woman of twenty-six. Unnoticed by my friend, I studied her complexion, her clothes, her height and weight, her expression, the way she walked, everything" (1). It shows his inclination towards women. For him women exist as objects that can be measured, gauged and evaluated. Similarly, he describes Shivraj's youngest sister: "I saw another girl, one about sixteen. I have no trouble guessing a girl's age. She was rather dark- skinned, but attractive in the tight outfit. . . . I followed her attractive hips." He defines them as "the mimosa flower", "the hall window. (2) Suyogbir represents the ultimate expression of patriarchal masculinity (Gautam 145). For him, women are the object of look, "an instrument to satisfy one or more men's pleasure" (Wollstonecraft quoted in Tong 16). The reduction of women to object to men's pleasure is offensive from the feminist perspective. But, in patriarchy, most of the men take women as beautiful objects to be looked at and enjoyed.

Like other patriarchal men, Suyogbir, too, associates brutality and aggression with men and masculinity. He has internalized that men are by nature outgoing and violent whereas women are silent and submissive. So he gets surprised when Sakambari abruptly enters the room where they are. Her manner and appearance defy the normativity of femininity. She is bold, outspoken, and straightforward. Suyogbir narrates, "Her voice bursts in on us like a bullet" (3). He gets startled by her abrupt manner that he compares with a landslide (4). The way she takes cigarettes in the face of her seniors defies the notion of decency expected from

women. Moreover, her short haircut violates the notion of feminine beauty. Her manner and appearance show her disregards for traditional gender roles.

Sakambari's unfeminine activities challenge patriarchy. She has not embraced feminine attributes prescribes for women. Suyogbir finds her insensitive as she damn cares about others' opinions. Yet, despite her unfeminine activities, he gets attracted towards her. But she remains indifferent towards him. She has the feminist consciousness. Wollstonecraft advises women not to be the "toy of man, his rattle, which must jingle in his ears whenever diminishing the reason, he chooses to be amused" (Quoted in Tong 16). Suyogbir, a hardcore patriarch cannot accept her indifference towards him. It hurts him. He strongly holds the belief that a woman should submit to his will. So, he tries his best to woo her. He visits her and flatters her saying that long hair suits her. He feels insulted when he finds her having her hair shaved. Being helpless he loses himself in monologue: "Bari I love you" (45). He explains: "An interest in her body grew along with my interest in her. . . . I wanted to engulf the whole Bari in my embrace" (49). He desperately wants to possess her as an object of his liking.

Suyogbir compares young women with beautiful artifacts for men's use. He alludes to them with blooming flowers and asks, "If the bees can't settle here, what is the use of this flower?" (13). For him, men are like the bees that suck the flower. The underlying meaning of his remark is men can enjoy women's bodies. He reduces women's bodies to objects. It is aptly said, "Reducing women's bodies to the status of objects renders them available for visual inspection, measurement, evaluation and manipulation" (Bartky 26). For him a woman's worth lies in her body; it is a site where one or more men can play for. It is an object that a man can own, use, or dispose of it at his will. However, Sakambari finds it objectionable.

Contrary to Suyogbir, Sakambari thinks that a woman exists on her own, independent of men. She rejects to submit to a man's will. Her activities approve Toril Moi's claim:

It is after all patriarchy . . . which has always believed in a true female/feminine nature. The biologism and essentialism which lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all-female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of patriarchy. (109)

In patriarchy, the biological differences between males and females are emphasized and it is believed that females will naturally be feminine. They are said to be silent and submissive. The notion of essential femininity, as Moi insists, is a myth created by patriarchy to justify women's subordination to men.

Sakambari has this feminists' consciousness. So she denies playing the passive role assigned to women. By comparing herself with the insect-killer flowers, she insists that women are active agents who do have individual freedom like that of men. Hence, she protects men's encroachment in women's life as she argues, "The flower won't be spoiled; it is secure." She further adds:

If a flower buds for itself and opens for itself and, as if accepting some compulsion, falls whether it fights the black-bee or not, then why should it fall suffering the sting of the black-bee? It falls only for itself. It falls by its own will. (14)

The extract reveals her understanding of man-woman relations in patriarchy. A woman remains unsafe in the presence of a man. Men, in general, use violence to dominate and control women, to make them do as per their wishes. But Sakambari rejects this. She denies any man's intrusion in her existence.

Suyogbir feels belittled and insulted in the presence of Sakambari. To be rejected by a woman is a sign of failure for him. He has not learned to be failed, at least in his dealing with women. He has been able to get what he wanted from them, even though he has to use force. This is the first time he has ever been weaker than a woman. He feels restless and helpless. "Covering my shame, but frightened inside, I kept repeating in my mind, 'My dear Sakambari, I love you'" (45). It shows his pathetic condition. Though he feels being humiliated and insulted he wants to be closer to her. "The Better I knew Bari, the more I become entangled with her, the more I became hypnotized, the more my interest in her sharpened" (49). He is passionately in love with her as he shares, "I wanted to cry out, 'But, Pure Sakambari, let me also be purified, let me live'" (50). He contemplates how he can control her. The feeling of rejection drags him down the lane of his memory.

He remembers enjoying women's bodies using violence. He had enjoyed women's bodies though he had been living in a camp that was devoid of women. He raped, seduced, and have sex to quench his sexual desires whenever he liked. His description of the scene, where he met the Chhin girl alone in the forest and his decision to enjoy her, reveals his macho psychology:

It was about midnight. Unaware of the presence of soldiers camouflaged there, she stood forgetting herself . . . if anyone can be called a thing of heaven, it was she, in that place. It was not possible just to sit and look at her there alone . . . (52)

Guided by the patriarchal mindset, and the stereotype soldiers' nature, he decided to enjoy the lonely girl. He reports, "I wanted to plunder that moment" (53). She was a prey for him: "I felt

like a leopard ready to pounce from the bushes" (54). Then he coaxed her; he tried his best so that she would let him use her body. But she did not yield. Rather than surrendering to his will, knocking him down, she moved away. He could not bear this as he claimed: "I could not bear defeat. Besides, as a man, I was angered by the behavior of a primitive girl. Immediately I got up and, grabbing her from behind by the hair, I struck her across her tender lips." Yet, she persisted. This annoyed him.

Generally, men are taught not to give up in anything they try. It would be unmanly for them. Suyogbir must have thought that as a man he could use force to get hold of her. He used power and force so that he could hold of the beautiful body of the Chhin girl. Being brutal he used violence against her. The extract below suffices this:

Inflamed, unable to control me, I struck her on the head with my rifle-butt and she fell over, unconscious into the bushes.

In this way, she became mine, completely mine. Who was there in this desolate place? Who was there to see? I could do anything I wanted with this living corpse. (55)

Suyogbir generalizes that men have limitless sexual urges. For him, a man can be violent and brutal to satisfy his urges. He narrates, "I played with every part of her, enjoyed every pleasure. If I were an animal I would have been satisfied, but my human instincts were not satisfied." Even after knowing that she was dead, he tortured her "I scratched her naked breasts with my savage nails until they bled. I bit her lips, her cheeks, her neck until they bled" (55)). It shows his general understanding of the man's nature.

Traditionally, brutality and violence in men are seen as natural. Aggression and violence in them are accepted. And it is believed that women are vulnerable because of their bodies. Men's desire to have sex with young women is taken to be for granted. That is why, they tend to use violence to get control of the woman's body, which is reduced to a sexual instrument for men's pleasure. This notion is supported by Suyogbir and other soldiers' activities. Suyogbir raped the buffalo-herding girl and left her bleeding in the bush letting another soldier rape her more. He narrates, "Arranging her skirt to cover the fresh spots of blood, she raised her hands and meaninglessly wiped two teardrops, her narrow pain, from her small eyes." He had no sympathy for her. Rather when another soldier appeared in the scene, he showed her the bleeding girl. He says that when the friend went towards the girl he felt "a little easier" (58). The following day he heard that she was found in the pool of blood. Yet, he did not feel guilty. Rather, he reasoned there were so many people dying the horrible death because of the War. It reveals his understanding of men's psychology in general and the psychology of

soldiers in particular. He explains that it would be futile to expect mercy from the soldiers who were there to kill or to be killed.

Sexual arousal in men is normal from the patriarchal perspective. Masculinity is associated with men's capacity to seduce women. Suyogbir, too, is guided by this notion. He also remembers how he seduced a Matinchi giving her the illusion that he would marry her: "Without affection and money, I swallowed down everything, her being, her virginity. And I often told her, "Soon we'll marry, Matinchi" (61). Likewise, under patriarchy, marriage plays a crucial role in a girl's life. According to Beauvoir, a girl child grows getting cues of being an ideal woman for marriage. Because marriage is the only option that provides economic and social security for a woman (448). The Matinchi, too, must have dreamt of living a happy conjugal life with Suyogbir. But, he has eternalized the notion that men lack emotion and sentiment and they may be brutal to possess women's bodies. His description exposes men's brutal treatment of women's bodies in patriarchy. Even if women were fatally tortured in the process of quenching their sexual urges, it is okay for men. He approves men using violence against women to quench their sexual urges.

In his dealing with women, Suyogbir had the upper hand. He maintained his control over them. He believes in men's domination on women. So he feels restless when he cannot express his feelings to Sakambari: "I wondered how or where this woman could be controlled. What substance could melt her? What truth could touch her?" (73). It discloses his patriarchal mindset, i.e., he should be in the position to possess a woman of his desire. Shoma A. Chatterji claims that the roots of violence against women are deeply embedded within patriarchal structures that compel women's subordination, subservience, and dependence on men (31). Indeed, a woman's denial to act feminine results in corporal punishment. Highlighting this, Tong asserts:

Should a woman refuse to accept patriarchal ideology by casting off her femininity—that is, her submissiveness/subordination—men will use coercion to accomplish what conditioning has failed to achieve. Intimidation is everywhere in patriarchy, according to Millet. The streetwise woman realizes that if she wants to survive in patriarchy, she had better act feminine, or else she may be subjected to 'a variety of cruelties and barbarities' (52).

Sakambari, too, becomes the victim of sexual violence for being unfeminine. Finding her alone by the wall Suyogbir starts gazing at her and led by his passion calls her and kisses her abruptly: "I was not in control myself. I was unable to realize the situation consciously. My whole body was trembling. Impassioned, I caught hold of her white neck and kissed her soft

lips" Afterwards he tries to find her reaction, "Gathering all my power to control myself, I looked at Bari. She was also bewildered. I was beaten like a dog, like a goat" (77). Sakambari feels insulted and humiliated. For her, it is a violation of a woman's right to her body.

Suyogbir's behavior shows patriarchal hostility towards women. Under patriarchy, it would be difficult for women to enjoy freedom and right to their body. They fail to protect their self-respect. And, it would unacceptable to live a selfless life for a highly self-esteemed lady like Sakambari. So she chose silence death. Suyogbir is responsible for her death. He confesses, "I have killed Sakambari. In broad daylight I raped Sakambari Bari died proving the emotion of my true love a rape" (96). It is quite unnatural for Sakambari's nature to remain silent against the violence. However, she died in silence without disclosing his crime. Sakambari must have realized the fate of women who deny acting feminine. Even if she had protested, she would have been blamed for violating feminine ideals. Thus, to save her self-respect she died in silence living Suyogbir in remorse. She died because of his foul touch.

Conclusion

Blue Mimosa deals with men's tendency to use violence against women. Guided by the patriarchal belief system, the male characters of the novel reduce women's bodies to objects for men's pleasure. They use violence against women to control and dominate them so that they can use and abuse their bodies to satisfy their erotic pleasure. Suyogbir thrashed, knocked, and beat women with whatever he had and get hold of their bodies. He even scratched and bite the sensitive parts of the dead woman and had sex with the corpse. He thinks it is normal for men to rape and murder women in case they deny having sex with them. So when he failed to dominate and subjugate Sakambari, he kissed her without her consent. He violated her body. His foul touch leads her to death. He and his friend treat women's bodies as a site for violence. They use violence against women to control and dominate them so that they can enjoy their bodies.

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