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The Female Hero's Journey in Baniya's Maharani: A Feminist-Archetypal Study*

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Abstract

This article, titled "The Female Hero's Journey through the Jungle in Chandra Prakash Baniya's Maharani: Archetypal and Feminist Readings", examines Baniya's historical novel Maharani (2019) through archetypal and feminist frameworks, with particular focus on the jungle as a symbolic site of female heroism. The narrative centers on Biswoprava, the Maharani of Parbat, whose journey into the Bagkhordada forest reconfigures the traditionally masculine hero's quest into a distinctly feminine struggle for survival and resilience. Drawing on Joseph Campbell's model of the hero's journey and Carl Jung's archetypes of the shadow, mother, and warrior, the study interprets Biswoprava's endurance as an act of cultural guardianship rather than individual conquest. Complementing these archetypal insights, South Asian feminist perspectives particularly those of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Uma Chakravarti, and Nivedita Menon situate Biswoprava's sacrifices within broader structures of patriarchy, caste, and political erasure. The jungle functions simultaneously as a space of exile, betrayal, and conspiracy, and as a transformative arena where resilience generates renewal. By foregrounding Biswoprava's maternal heroism and her symbolic struggle against systemic oppression, this article argues that Maharani challenges patriarchal archetypes, expands the scope of Nepali historical fiction, and contributes to South Asian feminist literary criticism. Ultimately, the novel redefines heroism through endurance, sacrifice, and communal responsibility, affirming that women's stories are indispensable to reimagining historical memory and literary tradition.

Keywords: Maharani; female hero's journey; archetypal criticism; South Asian feminist theory; Nepali historical fiction; women's agency

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Introduction

Chandra Prakash Baniya's historical novel *Maharani* (2019) is set during the era of the *Chaubisey Rajya*, the eighteenth–nineteenth century period in western Nepal when the region was divided into twenty-four principalities. This was a time marked by political fragmentation, shifting alliances among small hill states, and frequent conflicts for power and territory. It was also an era in which women were largely excluded from official records and their voices silenced in historical memory. This study, titled *"The Female Hero's Journey through the Jungle in Chandra Prakash Baniya's Maharani: Archetypal and Feminist Readings"*, examines how the novel departs from the conventions of Nepali historical fiction, which often relegates women to ornamental roles, by foregrounding Biswoprava, the Maharani of Parbat, as a protagonist whose journey redefines the meaning of heroism in Nepali cultural imagination. The research problem addressed here lies in the limited space historically accorded to women in Nepali historiography and literature, where female agency has often been eclipsed by narratives of kings, warriors, and dynastic struggles. In contrast, *Maharani* situates Biswoprava at the center of political and symbolic action. Her trek into the Bagkhordada jungle during upheaval is not an act of retreat but one of endurance, sacrifice, and communal protection, reshaping our understanding of heroism from a feminist perspective.

The Bagkhordada jungle becomes the novel's symbolic site of trial and transformation. It embodies danger, betrayal, and vulnerability, yet also protection and renewal. Within this fraught landscape, Biswoprava emerges as a female hero who safeguards her people while embodying cultural resilience. In archetypal terms, Jung interprets the confrontation with the "shadow" as a struggle with inner darkness (112), while Campbell identifies the forest as the threshold to the unknown (85). Baniya fuses these archetypal motifs with feminist undertones, casting Biswoprava's ordeal not as passive suffering but as the moral and cultural center of her kingdom. Geographical realism reinforces this symbolism. The palaces of Kurilakharka and Dholthana, the Myagdi River, and the elevated forests of Bagkhordada anchor the narrative in historical space while simultaneously signifying stages of the heroine's trial (302). The jungle, as both wilderness and sanctuary, dramatizes the dual nature of exile and renewal, darkness and enlightenment. In Campbell's framework, such landscapes mark

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the hero's confrontation with despair and eventual transformation (87). In *Maharani*, this landscape acquires a feminist dimension: it becomes the arena in which resilience transforms suffering into hope and subaltern female agency contests patriarchal erasure.

Methodologically, this study combines archetypal criticism with feminist literary theory. Campbell's schema of the hero's journey and Jung's archetypal figures of the mother, warrior, and shadow provide one interpretive frame (85; 118). South Asian feminist theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Uma Chakravarti, and Nivedita Menon provide another, situating Biswoprava's ordeal within the layered structures of caste, patriarchy, and historical marginalization. Together, these frameworks demonstrate how *Maharani* both draws upon and resists archetypal structures, reimagining women not as passive dependents but as active agents of survival and transformation in Nepali historical literature. The purpose of this article is thus twofold: first, to examine how the jungle functions as a symbolic space for the female hero's journey; and second, to show how *Maharani* disrupts patriarchal archetypes by foregrounding female endurance, sacrifice, and agency. By analyzing Biswoprava's journey through archetypal and feminist lenses, this study argues that Baniya's novel contributes a crucial intervention to both Nepali historical fiction and South Asian feminist literary criticism.

Literature Review

The study of Chandra Prakash Baniya's *Maharani* is enriched by engaging with two intersecting critical frameworks: archetypal criticism and feminist literary criticism, particularly South Asian feminist thought. Together, these approaches provide the methodological foundation for interpreting Biswoprava's journey through the Bagkhordada jungle as both an archetypal quest and an act of feminist resistance. While archetypal criticism illuminates the universal symbolic structures embedded in Biswoprava's transformation, feminist literary analysis exposes how patriarchal structures shape, confine, and yet are resisted by women in history and literature. By integrating these perspectives, *Maharani* emerges as a text that not only dramatizes a universal hero's journey but also foregrounds specifically Nepali and South Asian struggles against patriarchy, caste hierarchies, and political erasure.

Carl Jung's contribution to archetypal criticism is indispensable here. Jung describes archetypes as "forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths" (112). These recurring figures and motifs,

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Jung argues, structure the human imagination and appear in dreams, legends, and literature across cultures. Biswoprava embodies such archetypal roles throughout the novel. She appears as the nurturing mother when she protects her people, as the warrior when she endures exile and betrayal, and as the shadow-confronting hero when she is forced to reckon with treachery and loss. Joseph Campbell further develops these ideas in his classic study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. For Campbell, the hero's ordeal represents a universal stage in which the individual is tested at the threshold of transformation: "the ordeal is a deepening of the problem of the first threshold, and the question is still in balance: does the candidate have the courage, the knowledge, the capacity to endure?" (85). Biswoprava's trials; her coerced marriage to Bhadribum, her trek into the wilderness, her sacrifices for the survival of Parbat clearly align with this archetypal schema. Yet her journey also subverts it, because her heroism does not emerge through conquest or external battle but through endurance, sacrifice, and collective guardianship. In this sense, Baniya's text reworks Campbell's universal framework by embedding feminine resilience at its core.

Feminist literary criticism complicates and deepens these archetypal readings by highlighting the gendered nature of agency and subjectivity. Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion that "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" (267) underlines the cultural construction of femininity. In *Maharani*, Biswoprava's transformation dramatizes precisely this process of becoming. She transcends the limitations imposed upon her as a wife and consort, taking on political, cultural, and moral responsibilities traditionally denied to women in patriarchal societies. bell hooks extends this point through her notion of the "oppositional gaze," which emphasizes women's active resistance to being reduced to passive spectators of patriarchal narratives (115). In embodying resilience and refusing to be erased from history, Biswoprava provides readers with a figure of oppositional identification. Her endurance resists the male-centered historiography that has long marginalized women's contributions to political and cultural survival.

South Asian feminist scholarship sharpens these insights by situating women's struggles within the specific socio-historical contexts of caste, kinship, and patriarchy. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in *Feminism Without Borders*, critiques the homogenization of "Third World women" and calls instead for contextual specificity: "the assumption

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of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, is both analytically reductive and politically limiting" (22). This warning is crucial for analyzing *Maharani*. Biswoprava cannot simply be read as a universal female figure; her struggles are rooted in the layered hierarchies of the Chaubisey Rajya, where political alliances, kinship duties, and gendered expectations intersect to shape her ordeal. Uma Chakravarti's seminal essay "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy" further highlights how women's subordination in South Asia has historically been organized through caste and kinship structures, reinforced by the state (579). This insight illuminates how Biswoprava's body, choices, and silences are disciplined within patriarchal power structures, even as she resists them through endurance and sacrifice. Nivedita Menon, in *Seeing Like a Feminist*, argues that feminist politics must disrupt "the everyday practices that naturalize inequality and render women's labor invisible" (64). Biswoprava's sacrifices her emotional labor, her self-denial, her decision to prioritize communal survival over personal happiness are precisely the kinds of invisible endurance that Menon highlights, yet in Baniya's retelling they are made central to the historical narrative.

Nepali literary scholarship further contextualizes the significance of *Maharani*. Abhi Subedi has observed that Nepali historical fiction has often reproduced male-centered narratives, relegating women to ornamental or secondary roles (77). This critique resonates with much of Nepal's literary tradition, where queens, wives, and mothers are background figures in the stories of kings and warriors. However, recent feminist works have sought to reverse this pattern. Nilam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* (2018) dramatizes the life of Yogmaya Neupane, a female ascetic and revolutionary who resisted Rana oppression, while Saraswati Pratikshya's *Nathiya* (2018) portrays the struggles of Badi women marginalized by caste and sexuality. Both works demonstrate how women's endurance and rebellion can challenge dominant historiographies of Nepal (48; 102). Govinda Raj Bhattarai, one of Nepal's leading literary critics, has consistently emphasized that women in Nepali fiction are not simply ornamental figures but embody both cultural continuity and social resistance. In his works on Nepali literature and postmodern criticism, he highlights how women characters frequently act as symbolic carriers of tradition while simultaneously becoming sites of struggle and transformation in the face of patriarchy. This insight is particularly relevant to *Maharani*, where Biswoprava's role as queen illustrates both the

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preservation of communal identity and the enactment of resilience against betrayal and displacement. By centering women as agents of survival and renewal, Bhattarai's critical lens affirms feminist readings of Nepali historical fiction that foreground women as active participants in cultural and political processes rather than passive subjects (56). This observation strengthens the archetypal-feminist interpretation of Biswoprava's journey: she is not merely a symbolic mother figure or tragic consort but a dynamic heroine who bridges continuity and change, embodying resilience in ways that contest patriarchal erasure and reposition women at the center of Nepali cultural imagination. Extending Sharmila Rege's Dalit feminist standpoint to Nepal further clarifies how caste and gender intersect in women's lived realities (14). Within this evolving literary tradition, Baniya's *Maharani* is a significant intervention. By recentering Biswoprava's jungle ordeal as heroic resistance, the novel expands the boundaries of historical fiction and affirms women's central role in the collective survival of communities.

Archetypal and feminist frameworks, taken together, demonstrate how *Maharani* operates on multiple levels. On one level, Biswoprava's journey follows Campbell's universal structure of separation, ordeal, and transformation (87). The jungle functions as the archetypal site of trial, embodying both darkness and illumination. On another level, however, the same jungle is not a neutral mythic space but a gendered one, embedded in patriarchal politics, marital subjugation, and dynastic conspiracies. Biswoprava's resilience transforms the jungle from a place of exile into a space of renewal, where her endurance critiques systemic patriarchy and affirms collective survival. In this way, Baniya's narrative simultaneously affirms the universality of archetypal structures and underscores the specificity of Nepali women's struggles.

Moreover, *Maharani* intervenes in broader debates about the representation of women in South Asian literature. Scholars like Uma Chakravarti and Nivedita Menon remind us that the task of feminist criticism is not simply to insert women into existing narratives but to challenge and destabilize the very frameworks that naturalize inequality (579; 64). By portraying Biswoprava's heroism through endurance and sacrifice rather than conquest, *Maharani* disrupts the patriarchal archetype of the male warrior-hero and offers a new model of female heroism rooted in resilience. Her story

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resonates with other South Asian feminist reimaginings, such as Mahasweta Devi's narratives of tribal women or Kamala Das's explorations of female subjectivity, but it is distinctively Nepali in its historical and geographical grounding.

Thus, the literature reviewed here demonstrates that *Maharani* can be read simultaneously as a universal hero's tale and a localized feminist critique. Archetypal criticism reveals the structural parallels between Biswoprava's trials and the mythic hero's journey, while feminist criticism uncovers the gendered dynamics of power, sacrifice, and resistance embedded in her ordeal. Together, these frameworks make visible the dual dimensions of the text: its participation in universal mythic patterns and its challenge to patriarchal erasures in Nepali historiography. In dramatizing Biswoprava's transformation from consort to cultural guardian, Baniya's novel not only enriches the field of Nepali historical fiction but also contributes to wider feminist conversations about women's agency, resilience, and survival in South Asia.

Symbolism of the Jungle as Site of Psyche and Light

In *Maharani*, the jungle emerges not merely as a physical landscape but as a symbolic space where Biswoprava's consciousness is tested, fractured, and ultimately transformed. South Asian literary traditions frequently depict the forest as untamed, chaotic, and threatening, an arena where human civilization dissolves and primal forces dominate. Yet Baniya complicates this convention by presenting the jungle as a dual arena: it is simultaneously a site of betrayal and danger as well as of resilience, spiritual illumination, and cultural rebirth. For Biswoprava, this hostile wilderness functions as the crucible of her transformation, marking her transition from dependence to autonomy, from personal desire to communal guardianship. The Bagkhordada forest embodies Jung's archetype of the "shadow," a projection of unconscious fears and destructive impulses. Bhadribum's conspiracies with rulers of five neighboring states: Musikot, Galkot, Jumla, Pyuthan, and Rukumkot are staged in this wilderness, rendering it a theater of treachery and destruction. Jung explains that the shadow represents the "unknown dark side of the personality" (112). In *Maharani*, this shadow expands from the individual psyche to encompass the political body of the kingdom itself. The jungle thus becomes a liminal space where hidden betrayal surfaces, and where Biswoprava is compelled to confront both internal and external darkness.

Yet Jung also emphasizes that integrating the shadow is central to individuation. Biswoprava does not flee from the jungle's menace but endures within it, transforming

it into a site of confrontation and eventual renewal. In doing so, she embodies the archetypal hero who confronts inner darkness, but her trials are gendered: unlike male heroes who slay dragons or conquer enemies, her triumph lies in resilience, sacrifice, and endurance. Joseph Campbell situates the forest as the threshold of the unknown, where ordeals prepare the hero for transformation (85). He observes in *The Power of Myth* that "the hero's journey is not a bed of roses but achievement after various struggles" (156), insisting that the call must ultimately serve humanity rather than personal gain (131). Biswoprava reflects this principle precisely: her sacrifices are not for individual fulfillment but for the survival of her people.

Yet where Campbell universalizes, feminist readings expose gendered silences. As Simone de Beauvoir reminds us, woman is constructed as "the Other" (267), denied agency within dominant symbolic systems. The jungle in *Maharani* reconfigures this othering: it becomes not a space of exclusion but one where agency is re-forged. Biswoprava's endurance transforms exile into empowerment, dramatizing what bell hooks terms the "oppositional gaze" (115): a refusal to consume patriarchal narratives passively. Her jungle survival rewrites the script of Nepali historiography, resisting erasure by asserting female resilience. Arnold van Gennep's model of the rite of passage, separation, trial, and return (21) offers another lens. Biswoprava separates from the familiar world of palace life, undergoes trials of betrayal, hunger, and grief in the forest, and returns not in triumph but in renunciation, embodying the moral center of Parbat. This structure echoes Campbell's symbolic "dying and birth" (47), where the old self is relinquished and a new identity emerges.

Baniya dramatizes this vividly. Near the Kali Gandaki, the narrator describes: "A princess who offered all her desires, aspirations, happiness and even her body on the altar… had to sacrifice her husband as well" (346). Here the sighing river and silent jungle mirror despair, while the swaying trees and birdsong hint at renewal. By the novel's end, Biswoprava reflects: "The mountain has taken everything from me… I have made a donation. Now I only have one life" (348). This renunciation crystallizes her metamorphosis. Through sacrifice, she achieves a symbolic rebirth as cultural guardian, no longer bound by personal ties but sustained by communal responsibility. Forests occupy a central role in South Asian cultural texts. In the *Ramayana*, exile into the forest becomes the testing ground for Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana. In the

Mahabharata, the Pandavas endure trials in the wilderness before their return. In Buddhist traditions, the forest is the site of renunciation, where Siddhartha Gautama achieves enlightenment. Baniya draws on these resonances, but with a crucial feminist reconfiguration: unlike Sita, who is defined through chastity and obedience, Biswoprava resists betrayal and assumes political guardianship. Unlike Rama, whose heroism lies in conquest, her heroism is grounded in sacrifice.

By situating *Maharani* within these intertextual traditions, the jungle emerges as a culturally saturated metaphor. It resonates with South Asian mythic memory while simultaneously challenging its patriarchal conventions. Biswoprava's endurance contests the expectation that women in exile should remain passive, instead recasting the forest as a feminist site of political resistance. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the jungle may also be read as an uncanny space. Freud defines the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) as the return of the repressed, where the familiar becomes terrifying. The forest embodies this logic: it is both the protector of the kingdom and the site of its deepest conspiracies. Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection further illuminates the jungle's duality: it is a space of contamination and danger but also of renewal, where boundaries between self and world dissolve (3). Biswoprava's endurance in this abject wilderness dramatizes how women's suffering, traditionally repressed in history, returns as the very ground of cultural survival.

Ecofeminist critics such as Vandana Shiva and Bina Agarwal argue that women's relationship with nature is historically mediated by both oppression and resilience. Forests in South Asia are not only ecological spaces but also gendered ones, where women gather resources yet bear the brunt of ecological degradation. In *Maharani*, the jungle functions similarly: it threatens Biswoprava with exile but also provides the resources, such as shelter, spiritual wisdom, and terrain for her survival. Her endurance resonates with ecofeminist claims that women transform marginalization into collective resilience, aligning survival of community with preservation of nature. Finally, the jungle in *Maharani* is inseparable from the political geography of the Chaubisey Rajya. During this period, forests were not merely wilderness but contested zones between principalities. They provided natural defense, resources, and sanctuaries for resistance. Bagkhordada, in this context, represents both the vulnerability of Parbat and its capacity for resilience. By situating Biswoprava's

ordeal in this landscape, Baniya reconfigures geography into symbolism: the survival of the forest becomes synonymous with the survival of culture itself

Mother Archetype and the Female Hero

Chandra Prakash Baniya's *Maharani* aligns Biswoprava with the archetype of the mother, reimagined as a political and cultural force. In Jungian terms, the mother represents nourishment, protection, and continuity, recurring across cultures as an embodiment of psychic reality (118). Biswoprava assumes this role not only for her family but for the entire Parbat kingdom, emerging as a guardian whose self-sacrifice ensures survival in a period of instability.

The jungle reinforces this archetype as a symbolic extension of maternal nature. Traditionally portrayed as hostile, wilderness here becomes the protective yet testing ground where Biswoprava demonstrates endurance. Though not formally enthroned, her actions define her as the kingdom's moral center. Bagkhordada, vast and dangerous, mirrors the maternal body: simultaneously sheltering her people and demanding resilience from their queen. Her words capture this transformation: "Duty is considered the greatest for humans. I also had to make a willy-nilly decision… I should not lose the person I loved the most, and… I should not be evicted from the throne" (304). This declaration reveals her willingness to subordinate personal happiness to collective responsibility.

Joseph Campbell describes the hero's ordeal as a stage that "tests the courage, knowledge, and capacity to endure" (85). Biswoprava exemplifies this ordeal, yet her trial diverges from Campbell's masculine paradigm of conquest. Her heroism is defined by inward resilience, emotional strength, and the capacity to absorb suffering for others. By transforming endurance into communal guardianship, she reconfigures the mother archetype as a dynamic form of female heroism. Thus, *Maharani* expands motherhood beyond the private realm into political and cultural stewardship. Biswoprava embodies sacrifice and resilience that challenge patriarchal assumptions of women as passive or silent. Her journey redefines the maternal archetype not as a static symbol of care but as an active, heroic force sustaining both kingdom and cultural identity.

Biswoprava's path in *Maharani* can be read through Joseph Campbell's stages of the hero's journey. Her departure occurs as she leaves the safety of the palace and enters the wilderness, compelled by her duty to protect Parbat. The initiation is marked by her survival in the jungle, where she endures hunger, fear, and betrayal, gaining resilience and insight. The return, though not a triumphant conquest in the masculine sense, is realized through sacrifice and endurance, which preserve the dignity and continuity of her community (85). By invoking Campbell's model, Biswoprava's trajectory aligns with archetypal structures of the hero's quest, yet her journey simultaneously subverts the masculine orientation of the pattern. Unlike the conventional hero who conquers external foes, Biswoprava's triumph is inward, rooted in endurance, sacrifice, and moral guardianship. This feminist reconfiguration demonstrates that heroism need not be defined by conquest; it can also emerge through resilience and communal responsibility, thereby expanding the boundaries of archetypal criticism when applied to women's narratives.

Carl Jung's archetypes surface throughout her character. As mother-figure, she nurtures and safeguards her people; as warrior, she faces the wilderness with strength; as shadow, her trials test her vulnerabilities (135). This fusion reworks archetypal motifs into a distinctly feminine heroism defined by survival and sacrifice rather than conquest. The novel dramatizes this process through political conflict. Biswoprava, married to Malebum of Parbat, becomes ensnared in Bhadribum's conspiracy to destabilize the kingdom. His plan to stage a false marriage with her in order to assassinate Malebum reveals the intersection of personal betrayal and political treachery (302). In this moment, her personal life becomes inseparable from the kingdom's survival. Forced to choose between love and duty, she consents to sacrifice her relationship with Malebum to safeguard unity. This renunciation aligns with Campbell's ordeal stage, in which the hero must endure profound loss for a greater good (85). Yet, unlike Campbell's masculine model, Biswoprava's heroism lies in endurance, self-denial, and communal responsibility. Her dialogue crystallizes this choice:

> "My majesty! I didn't take the decision of sacrifice without getting carried away by my emotions. I donated my physical body to remove the worry that the kingdom of the brothers of the Parbat would be divided and for the progress, prosperity, and peace of the crown prince." (303)

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This self-abnegation elevates her above conventional roles of women in Nepali historical fiction, recasting her as tragic heroine and cultural guardian. From a feminist perspective, her sacrifice echoes Simone de Beauvoir's recognition that women are compelled to relinquish personal fulfillment for family and society (267). Yet, unlike passive submission, her renunciation becomes an active assertion of agency transforming grief into collective preservation.

Campbell explains that the ordeal stage deepens the hero's trial: "The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination" (100). This framework illuminates Biswoprava's struggles, which are intensified by systemic patriarchy that deprives her of autonomy while demanding her sacrifice. As Mary Wollstonecraft lamented, women are kept in a "deplorable state… made to take on an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength" (206). Biswoprava embodies this paradox: silenced by patriarchal norms yet resisting them through resilience.

Ann B. Dobie defines the archetypal hero through self-sacrifice and the willingness to redeem society (56). Biswoprava aligns with Jung's conception of the hero who confronts unconscious forces and emerges transformed for collective good (135). Her endurance demonstrates moral courage, patience, and inner strength, redefining the hero's journey in terms of feminine resilience. The symbolism of light reinforces this transformation. In the darkness of the jungle, glimpses of illumination signify her empowerment and vision of survival. By enduring betrayal and exile, she integrates what Jungian psychology terms the "self" through patience and acceptance. Thus, the novel subverts patriarchal notions of fragility, presenting Biswoprava as an agent of both physical endurance and spiritual illumination. Through sacrifice, resilience, and symbolic transformation, *Maharani* reconfigures Campbell's and Jung's archetypal patterns into a feminist narrative. Biswoprava embodies a heroine whose trials redefine heroism as guardianship, endurance, and moral resistance within Nepali historical imagination.

Conclusion

Chandra Prakash Baniya's *Maharani* reimagines the female hero's journey as one of symbolic resistance and resilience. By foregrounding Biswoprava's struggles, the novel challenges the conventional marginalization of women in Nepali historical fiction and repositions her at the center of historical and cultural memory. The Bagkhordada jungle, often viewed as a metaphor for exile, danger, or destruction, becomes instead a transformative arena where sacrifice and agency converge. Within this wil derness, Biswoprava transcends personal grief and embodies an archetypal journey that fuses psychological struggle with communal survival. This reconfiguration of the hero's quest is significant because it disrupts patriarchal archetypes that traditionally confine women to ornamental or passive roles. Biswoprava does not achieve strength through conquest or violence, as in many classical hero narratives, but through resilience, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to her people. By making endurance rather than conquest the measure of heroism, Baniya recasts feminine subjectivity as active and transformative. In this sense, *Maharani* offers an alternative vision of female heroism: one historically grounded in the Chaubisey Rajya context yet resonant with global archetypal traditions of the hero's quest.

This study has also demonstrated the value of combining archetypal and feminist frameworks for literary analysis. Archetypal criticism reveals the universality of Biswoprava's separation, ordeal, and symbolic return, situating her within the mythic structures outlined by Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. At the same time, feminist readings uncover the gendered dynamics of her trials. Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" (267) illuminates how Biswoprava's identity is shaped through endurance, while bell hooks' "oppositional gaze" (115) frames her as a resistant subject who compels readers to reinterpret women's roles in Nepali historiography. South Asian feminist thinkers sharpen this lens: Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the homogenization of women's struggles, urging contextual specificity, while Uma Chakravarti's theorization of "Brahmanical patriarchy" explains how caste, kinship, and state power collectively discipline women's choices. Within these frameworks, Biswoprava's sacrifices acquire new depth, revealing *Maharani* as a text that bridges universal mythic patterns with localized feminist resistance.

The significance of this reading extends beyond the interpretation of a single novel. *Maharani* challenges long-standing tendencies in Nepali historical fiction, which

has often privileged narratives of kings, warriors, and dynastic power while relegating women to the margins. By reclaiming a woman's story as central, Baniya interrupts this tradition and reconfigures Nepali cultural memory. His novel also resonates with other feminist interventions in South Asian literature—such as Nilam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya*, which reclaims the legacy of a forgotten activist-saint, or Saraswati Pratikshya's *Nathiya*, which dramatizes caste-based oppression of Badi women. In this continuum, Biswoprava's jungle ordeal adds a historical dimension to the ongoing feminist project of writing women back into cultural and political history.

Moreover, *Maharani* speaks to global conversations on women, power, and resistance. The novel affirms that women's stories often dismissed as private or peripheral; are central to the survival and renewal of societies. By dramatizing endurance as heroic, it challenges not only Nepali patriarchal archetypes but also universal assumptions about the nature of heroism. In this way, Baniya's work contributes to comparative feminist criticism, suggesting that Nepali women's narratives, while deeply rooted in local histories of caste and monarchy, are simultaneously relevant to wider discourses on gendered resilience and agency. Ultimately, *Maharani* stands as a landmark intervention that compels us to reimagine both literature and society. By portraying Biswoprava's transformation through the jungle as a journey of sacrifice, resilience, and collective guardianship, the novel revises patriarchal histories and expands the possibilities of narrating female heroism. It affirms that women are not peripheral figures to be remembered occasionally in nationalist history but indispensable agents of survival and renewal. In doing so, it enriches both Nepali literary history and the broader field of South Asian feminist writing. By merging archetypal symbolism with feminist critique, *Maharani* not only redefines heroism but also reinforces the indispensability of women's voices in reconfiguring cultural memory, social transformation, and the imagination of a more inclusive future.

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