

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

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Abstract

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 women's predicament. 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 society. The main problem of the study is to present how Ahuti has presented the present condition of Nepali women in society. This article is qualitative. So, narration, description, and comparison, are the tools to analyze, and interpret the data. It is found that the poem concerns the Nepali women's problem. Women are mistreated in society. They are taken as the means of entertainment. The major character 'Sanikanchhi' in the poem is the symbol of all the Nepali women.

Keywords: domination, exploitation, freedom, violence, women's predicament

Introduction

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

(Singh, 2067, P.jha)

Through this expression Sudha Tripathi, a literary figure in Nepali literature, reflects the real position of women in Nepali society. Women have been victimized in our society from time immemorial. ‘Sati Pratha’ can be taken as an example of the brutal exploitation of women caused by so called orthodox patriarchal concepts. Regarding the brutal act of ‘Sati Pratha’, Deuba

(n.d.) 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” (p.6, para. 2nd).

Nepali women are still facing a number of several social, cultural and gender-related problems. The issues regarding women and their vulnerability have occupied the pages of Nepali literature for ages. In such a 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. The poem is translated into English by Manjushree Thapa. Marginalized groups of people, women and politics are the major subject matters that Ahuti deals with in his works. 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 my analytical study.

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 women. The tortured women either die or leave the home but they hardly can 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 for well during her post-natal period. In the drama ‘Dulahi’ on her death bed replies to her husband Krishna with tearful eyes after giving birth to a son, ‘My duty is finished and what could I do being cured?’ (Rimal, 2066, p.47). The suffering of women, violence against them and their struggle to exist in society is also discussed by the playwright Bal Krishna Sam in his play *Mukunda Indira*. The suffering of the major woman character Indira and her devotion to her inhumane husband can be described in

The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor: Raise of Consciousness in Women) her sentence: "Women are fortunate to listen even the scolding of their husbands" (Sam, 2067, 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 knock her husband as, "You sinful monster! Why do you torment an unarmed person? Come and fight with me if you are male" (Vikal, 2007, p.29).

Cultural domination and violence against women are international issues 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, "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" (Kingston, 1989, 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 murdered 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..." (Houston, 1993, p.167). So, the problem of this research paper covers an international issue regarding violence against women.

Statement of Problem

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. Violence against women is not a new subject matter in Nepali literature. Husbands, mother/daughter-in-laws or other family members are the causes of violence against women. The tortured women either

die or leave the home but they hardly can 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 for well during her post-natal period. In the drama 'Dulahi' in her death bed replies to her husband Krishna with tearful eyes after giving birth to a son, 'My duty is finished and what could I do being cured?' (Rimal, 2066, p.47). So, the main problem of this research paper is to reflect how Ahuti presents the problem of Nepali women in the above-mentioned poem.

Objectives of the Study

The research article has the following objectives:

- i) To analyse the poem critically correlating the position of Sani Kanchi with Nepali women, and
- ii) To depict the position of Nepali women in the present society.

Methodology

This article is qualitative. It mainly concerns with the critical analysis of the poem in connection with the present predicament of women in Nepali society. To present the critical analysis of the poem, the poem itself and the images and symbols used in the poem are taken as the primary sources for the study. Similarly, books, journals and articles are used as the sources for secondary sources of data for the study. As a qualitative research article, narration, description, and comparison are the tools used to analyze, and interpret the data.

Interpretation and Analysis

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 society. The poem is centered on the problem of 'Sanikanchhi' who comes to her husband's house with new hopes

The Nine-hued pheasant and the daughter-in-law of the poor: Raise of Consciousness in Women) but gets harsh treatment. She cannot bear the brutal behavior and revolts against it. The patriarchal hegemony is prevalent in our country since the past is a root cause for the suffering of women like 'Sanikanchhi'. The society takes a son as the ladder of climbing up to heaven for the parents after their death and a daughter is taken differently as a sort of economic burden because they are associated with the dowry system. The role of women as sources of love and care is ignored in our society. Women are taken as a means of entertainment. They are oppressed and deprived of the opportunities in society. Such excessive oppression invites an explosion when the oppressed group cannot bear anymore. 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 conscious of their tyranny and revolted against and so was the case of the monarchy in Nepal. Similarly, the present movements of women are also the outcome of excessive exploitation of them. They are involved in different revolutionary activities to gain their rights and freedom. In the poem, Ahuti mentions how oppressed women are compelled to be involved 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 represent all the married women in Nepali society who are suffering because of their marriage. Ahuti presents the problems of the whole Nepalese woman in the poem through her character. Illiterate, hardworking, gullible and tortured are the adjectives that 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” (Thapa, 2009, p.158) makes it clear that the pheasant is free like a 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 are contrasted with the trouble of ‘Sanikanchhi’. As the speaker states:

“She covers over the colors of her life.
Having lost her dreams as a pearl lost in refuse
she 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.”

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 life are lost. Her overall life is confined with the dirty 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 a 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, the speaker states:

“She stepped across the threshold as the bride of the house
Just as in darkness the full moon comes bearing light.” (Thapa, 2009, p.158)

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So, Sanikanchi came to her bridegroom's house with new hopes and aspirations. She came to her new house as the moon came 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 head to toe. Her arrival at 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 submissive in her new house. The following verse clarifies her condition in her new house:

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 (Thapa, 2009,
p.159)

Through her activities, the readers can easily feel the difficulties of Sanikanchi. She is 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 the 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 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 Nepali women. ‘Sanikanchhi’ cannot bear the sufferings in her husband's house and goes to her parents' house. To her surprise, she gets

harsh words from her parents and neighbors. Then she returns to her unfeeling house. She makes a strong decision. She starts to speak against her dissatisfactions.

Sanikanchhi is an example of such socially and culturally oppressed Nepali 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 injustice she faces in her house. She stops massaging her husband's 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 was synonymous to 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. succeeded and people got Loktantra, Sanikanchhi also succeeded in gaining 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!” (Thapa, 2009, p.162)

This given extract clarifies the Sanikanchhi's consciousness regarding her position in society. She is conscious of her rights. She is even conscious about women's right. So, she is involved in the movement. She does not even fear the police. She speaks boldly like a lion in front of the police. Her

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

Thus, the analytical study can conclude that Ahuti has differently addressed the problems faced by women in Nepali society. Besides revolution, consciousness regarding their position in society is an important factor for women to get justice. Instead of escaping from the problems, women should be bold enough 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 a typical Nepali married woman and through her character; the troubles, problems and feelings of the Nepali women are well presented. Ideological revolution encouraged women to fight for their rights.

Findings and Conclusion

This study mainly concerns the analysis of the mentioned poem by Ahuti. By analyzing the poem from the socio-cultural perspective, it is found that the poem is concerned the problems of Nepali women. Women are mistreated in society. They are as taken the means of entertainment. The major character 'Sanikanchhi' in the poem is the symbol of all the Nepali women. She comes to her husband's house with new hopes but gets harsh treatment. When the ill-treatment crosses the limit, she revolts against it.

It can be concluded that excessive oppression invites explosion. When the oppressed group cannot bear it anymore, they ultimately revolt. Such oppression and exploitation also bring consciousness among the general people. In a nutshell, the poem reflects the tragic condition of the Nepali women and their desires for freedom effectively. The bird itself is a symbol of natural freedom.

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