

**Tribhuvan University**

**Exploration of Dalit Empowerment and Resistance in Saraswati Pratiksha's**

***Nathiya***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,**

**The Central Department of English, Kirtipur,**

**Kathmandu in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the**

**Degree of Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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**Tribhuvan University**

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**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**2024**

Tribhuvan University  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Lalu Chaudhary has completed his thesis titled “Exploration of Dalit Empowerment and Resistance in Saraswati Pratiksha’s *Nathiya*” under my supervision. He has completed his research in July 2024. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Asst. Prof. Dinesh Bhandari

July 2024

## Letter of Approval

This thesis titled “Exploration of Dalit Empowerment and Resistance in Saraswati Pratiksha’s *Nathiya*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Lalu Chaudhary has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Asst. Prof. Dinesh Bhandari at Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, for his valuable time, close observation, and regular support. His directions and motivation throughout the research paper helped me to complete this research paper on time.

I am also indebted to the Head of the Department of English, Prof. Jiblal Sapkota, PhD, for his encouraging advice. Similarly, I would be delighted to extend my gratefulness to Asst. Prof. Keshab Sigdel, Prof. Dhurba Karki, and all other respected lecturers and professors of CDE for their valuable directions in conducting the research as well as in my academic success.

Furthermore, I must express my very profound gratitude to my parents, Ram Gulam Chaudhary and Desiya Devi Chaudhary for their never-ending love, support, and motivation. In the same way, I would like to share my innermost gratitude to the whole family members for their financial and emotional support throughout my years of study.

Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to my friends, Bhim Jaishi, Anita Chaudhary, Binod Dawadi, Prem Chaudhary, Gita Mahato, and Abhash Karki for their help with the research work. And, my thankfulness goes to those authors and researchers whose works have been consulted during the preparation of this thesis.

July 2024

Exploration of Dalit Empowerment and Resistance in Saraswati

Pratiksha's *Nathiya*

## Abstract

*This thesis investigates the journey of Dalits' empowerment and their resistance in Saraswati Pratikshya's debut novel Nathiya. Through the analysis of narrative accounts of the protagonist Samali Badi and other Dalit characters and their transitions from the oppressed position to resisting characters, the novel illustrates how Dalits develop agency against systemic oppression. Using Dalit Studies as a theoretical framework, particularly ideas of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, and Aahuti, this study analyses and contextualizes Samali's evolution within the broader Nepali socio-political struggles faced by the Dalits movement. The research explores how Nathiya resists the systemic discrimination imposed upon Dalits, and how it emphasizes their resilience and agency. The study highlights the novel's contribution to Dalit literature and its role in raising awareness against caste-based discrimination. Through close reading of the narrative and detailed character analysis, it raises the voice for the need for societal reformation and the recognition of Dalit voices. The Dalit characters' development of agency is depicted through their refusal to accept their oppressed status and their active struggle for equality. Ultimately, this research enriches the academic discourse on the resistance of Dalits and their transformation, offering insights into the intersection of literature and social justice. Findings reveal that Nathiya is not merely a narrative of suffering but a powerful testament to Dalit strength and their genuine call for social change.*

Keywords: Caste-Based Oppression, Upper Caste, Lower Caste, Domination, Resistance, Transformation of Dalit.

This research vividly portrays the transformation of Dalits, particularly focusing on the character of Samali Badi, who evolves from a submissive and oppressed individual into a symbol of resistance and empowerment. Initially dominated by upper-caste figures and constrained by societal norms, Samali's journey reflects the broader struggle of Dalits against

systemic oppression and discrimination. Through her characters, Pratiksha highlights the resilience and agency of Dalits, demonstrating how they reclaim their dignity. The novel employs theoretical insights from Dalit Studies, drawing on scholars like Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, to contextualize this transformation within a larger socio-political framework, underscoring the significance of Dalit voices in the fight for equality and justice. Ultimately, *Nathiya* serves as a powerful testament to the strength and potential for change within the Dalit community, advocating for societal reformation and the recognition of their struggles and triumphs.

*Nathiya*, a Nepali novel by Saraswati Pratikshya published in 2018, explores the struggles of Badi women in Western Nepal. Released in 2018, by Book-Hill Publication, it was a finalist for the esteemed *MadanPuraskar*. This work is Pratikshya's first novel, following her three poetry collections. Set between 1980 A. D. and 1990 A. D., it depicts the lives of Dalit women in the Western Dang Valley, many of whom were forced into prostitution after the Rana regime's collapse. Pratiksha has published three poetry collections: *YadhyapiPrashnharu* (2005), *BimbaharukoKathaghara* (2009), and *Bagi Sarangi* (2012) before her first novel. Born as Saraswati Lalchan in Pokhara, Nepal, she comes from a Thakali family.

Appreciating the writings of Pratiksha, Kumudini Pant writes, “For Saraswati Pratiksha, writing is an act of bravery.” Similarly, Pant quotes Saraswati Pratiksha’s words, “One day, I was working on my poems when I saw some Badi women protesting before Singha Durbar on TV, many of those women were there in their petticoats, demanding that the society restore their dignity.” It was at that moment that Pratikshya said to herself, “If I ever write a novel, it will be about Badi women.” She presents how she gets the content for her novel if she ever writes any that would be on Badi women. So, she writes about them in

her first novel, *Nathiya*. This novel comes as a result of a commitment to voicing the Badi women.

The characters of this novel are oppressed in the caste-based system. They face a lot of problems. Initially, they followed the orders given to them by non-Dalits. Later on, they resisted the system that dominated them. The objectives of this paper are to find out the reasons that oppress the Dalits by non-Dalits, to explore the causes that motivate lower castes to rebel against the upper castes, and to analyze the ways, they revolt to transform themselves and society. Every research has its limitations. So, this research also has some limitations. It is only focused on the issue of Dalits' suffering despite having so many issues like women and their exploitation, the suffering of the poor by the rich, its historical implications, and the like. It can be studied through so many theories and perspectives but this research is limited to Dalit Studies propounded by Ambedkar and Aahuti.

The primary method is to analyze and interpret the primary text. Additionally, secondary sources like critical reviews, interviews, and other scholarly materials available in libraries or the internet have been used to develop wider perspectives on the issues. When citing examples from the novel, the free translation method has been applied to ensure clarity and precision. The theoretical framework for this analysis is grounded in Dalit Studies by Ambedkar and Aahuti who have been instrumental in interpreting the novel's themes and narratives. Through this lens, the research evaluates the stories within *Nathiya*, providing a deep insight into the experiences and perspectives of Dalit characters.

Regarding the significance of this study, the researcher posits that this approach would deepen the understanding of Dalits' condition and their strategies for empowering themselves. Highlighting the violence and prosecution faced by Dalits to overcome the injustices they have faced, the novel functions as a source of inspiration for other Dalit characters to uplift themselves. While addressing issues such as rape, oppression, and

discrimination, and then using them as tools to fight back the novel itself is a testament of hope and justice. This paper aims to contribute to the academic discourse on the growing awareness and resistance among the Dalit community in Nepal. Readers and others may analyze the text from different perspectives. It aids in defining and understanding the problem, identifying research objectives, and outlining the scope of the work. Additionally, it helps individuals grasp the Dalits' concepts and behaviors that are privileged in the narratives. This research is also significant for future academic studies because it explores the definition of Dalits, their terms, and their awareness in contemporary society.

Through this novel, the novelist depicts the extreme impact of caste hierarchy on Dalit women of the areas of Nepal, specifically Dang Valley, Nepalgunj, Banke, and Rajapur, Bardiya. Pratiksha challenges these practices through the realistic incidents experienced by fictional characters like Samali, Kamala, Chandrika, Lachhima, and others. The research questions of this research paper are; what are the reasons that oppress the Dalits by non-Dalits? What causes them to rebel against the upper castes? How do they revolt against caste hegemony to transform themselves and society?

As this novel was published, so many reviewers have put their views reviewing this novel with appreciation and criticism. Sujita Adhikari reviews this novel and she writes, "Samali Badi is the protagonist of this story. . . Samali's family understood that a beautiful girl in the house meant they wouldn't have to worry about their finances anymore. . . Samali does not want to remove her *Nathiya*. But her choices do not matter." Here, she writes about the plot of this novel and how it impacts her as a reader. So, this review is limited to the summary of the novel.

Mentioning the legal struggle of *Nathiya*, Dinesh Kafle, in his article writes, "The first of those events was the Supreme Court's judgment, on April 27, on the case filed by the Badi Council against writers. . . Saraswati Pratiksha, author of *Nathiya*, later wrote that her role

was that of Gayatri Spivak's intellectual who speaks for the subaltern because the subaltern herself cannot speak." Here, Kafle views this text as related to the use of its words which is also raised by the Badi Community. He mentions that the novel also faces court and comes out as a masterpiece without being banned.

Ratopati mentions Narayan Wagle's views on *Nathiya* where he says, "The work presented in simple language is the best of contemporary narratives. He mentioned that the novel is more poetic than the novel by saying that the novel dares to speak against the excesses by giving a fictional form to the exploitation and excesses committed by men on women" (my trans.: Chaudhary). Here, he praises Pratiksha's dare to write against the domination of men over women. Wagle also points out the use of simple language in this novel with poetic beauty. so, this review is limited to its use of simple, clear, and poetic language which has successfully presented social reality. He also appreciates it for its content of women's exploitation.

Adhikari provides a summary of the novel whereas Kafle highlights the legal struggles *Nathiya* faced after its publication. Wagle concentrates on the language used in the novel. Thus, these reviews are limited to discussing the summary, legal issues, and language. However, these reviewers have not examined the novel from the perspective of Dalit empowerment and resistance. They have neglected to delve into the depth of the lower castes' suffering and their fight for social justice depicted in the novel. Additionally, they have overlooked the significance of untouchables' incessant resistance to caste hegemony and their societal status, which often relegates them to roles of followers, shyness, cowardice, servants, and objects of lust. Reading the novel from Dalit consciousness and their transformation is unexplored yet perspective.

Therefore, in contrast to the aforementioned reviews, this research paper aims to explore the novel through the lens of Dalit Studies, highlighting Dalits' roles in social

reformation and the importance of their voices for achieving dignity and equality in society, comparable to that of non-Dalits. The researcher employs this perspective because it offers a fresh approach to interpreting this novel. The researcher draws on theoretical insights from Dalit theorists such as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Bishwabhakta Dulal 'Aahuti', and others to analyze Pratiksha's *Nathiya*.

This study draws on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's insights from *Annihilation of Caste* to illustrate the *Varna* system, explain how the Dalit figure vanishes in the non-Dalit world, and describe how Dalits are humiliated, silenced, and relegated to the lowest societal position. Additionally, it incorporates Ambedkar's ideas on how Dalits should advance to dismantle the caste system and suggests methods for creating a society free of caste-based discrimination.

The research has also utilized Aahuti's concepts from his *Varna System and Class Struggle* and *Caste Debate*. It incorporates his ideas regarding the origins of the caste system in Hindu society, the discrimination and domination faced by Dalits within this system, and how Dalits can secure their rightful place in the same society, to bolster the researcher's argument.

Caste occupies a significant place in the discourse on literature and society. Dalits are identified as the group that has been oppressed and discriminated against due to their caste for an extended period. Numerous terms are used to refer to Dalits, including lower caste, *achhut*, lower dogs, untouchables, and others. In this study, these terms are used interchangeably, though *Dalit* is predominantly employed. The term *Dalit* was first used by Jyoti Rao Phule and later spread its use by Ambedkar in India and Nepal.

When there is a point of origin of caste and caste-based discrimination in India, Bishwabhakta Dulal 'Aahuti,' in his *Varna System and Class Struggle*, mentions, "In the South Asian subcontinent, about 5,000 years ago, Aryans of white complexion entered present-day India from Europe through Iran. At that time, India had the civilization of

Australoid-Dravidians who were blackish, yellowish, and reddish” (126). Here, he discusses the origins of caste discrimination in India.

Aahuti again opines, “This system of inviolable division of labor is the *varna* system with four *varnas* of *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*... and *Shudra* were required to do the most difficult and service works. This *varna* system originated about 3,500 years ago in Indian society. First imposed by the rulers... later it was imposed on the whole Indian society” (127). Aahuti explains that the *varna* system. Initially enforced by the ruling class, this system eventually became pervasive throughout Indian society.

In a similar manner, Gyan Prakash, in “Becoming a *Bhuniya*: Oral Traditions and Contested Domination in Eastern India,” states, “The natural metaphor of rank begins in the Hindu classics, where the four *varnas* were created from the body of the primeval man: Brahmans arose from his mouth, *Kshatriya* from his arms, *Vaishya* from his thighs, and the *Shudra* from his feet” (158). In a sense, he traces out the mythological origins of the *varna* system in Hindu scripture.

Mentioning the origin of the caste system and caste-based discrimination in Nepal, Katherine Kuo writes, “Prior to 500 B.C., Nepal was inhabited only by indigenous ethnic groups and had no caste system. . . Hindus started to migrate to Nepal, bringing their caste system with them. . . They also aggressively promoted the Hindu religion, and many indigenous groups adopted the caste system.” Here, Katherine Kuo blames the Hindu people for suppressing the indigenous community of Nepal.

Similarly, Kuo further writes, “Nepal has 4 major castes – *Brahmins* (bureaucrats and professionals), *Chhetris* (security forces and professionals), *Vaishyas* (businesspeople comprised of all native ethnic groups), and *Shudras* (all Dalit castes, which make up around 25% of the total population).” Here, Kuo writes that Nepal consists of four primary *varnas*; *Brahmins*, *Chhetris*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras*.

As the title of this research has included the term '*Dalit*' in the context of Indian and Nepali society, particularly in Hindu society, caste, Ambedkar, in his "*Annihilation of Caste*" writes:

Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from commingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down.

Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change. (286)

He argues that caste is not a tangible barrier like a wall or barbed wire. Instead, it is a concept and a mindset. Therefore, the destruction of caste requires a change in people's perceptions and beliefs, not just the removal of physical barriers.

Talking about the Dalit movement in the Indian sub-continent, Ambedkar prominently dominates the pioneering leadership. Rajendra Maharjan and Shiva Hari Gyawali in their book '*Buddha and Karl Marx*' state Ambedkar is someone "Who had led the *Dalit* movement against the Hindu caste system, *Brahmanical* values, and caste-based untouchability that had relegated millions of workers and artisans to "*-Shudra-*" and "untouchable" . . ." (6). Maharjan and Gyawali highlight Ambedkar's leadership in the Dalit movement.

Maharjan and Gyawali further describe Ambedkar, and his importance for the *Dalit* movement, and select Ambedkar as a theorist for any academic research:

The *Dalit* movement initiated by Dr. Ambedkar has today become a major path toward people-oriented democratic transformation. Ambedkar's ideas, which have permeated from street protests to university classrooms, from parliament to rooms of research institutions, are not in a position to be ignored... Dr. Ambedkar ... who was a huge source of knowledge; and who had a world of experience- deserves study, research, and discourse from many perspectives. (10-11)

Maharjan and Gyawali further emphasize Ambedkar's significant impact on the Dalit movement and his relevance as a theorist. So, he has been used here as one of the major theorists for this paper.

Thomas Cox mentions, “Badi girls grow up, they learn from their mothers, sexually mature sisters, and other Badi women... Within a few months after reaching menarche Badi girls begin to engage in prostitution themselves. Some girls start on their own, but most are prompted to begin by their parents” (52). This paragraph highlights the specific caste-based exploitation of Badi girls, where prostitution is a hereditary occupation enforced by social norms within their community. It underscores the lack of agency these girls have due to this systemic discrimination that perpetuates their exploitation. This situation is a result of entrenched caste-based practices where *Dalits* are marginalized and forced into specific roles, often degrading and exploitative. Even the Badi girls are forced to prostitute by their own parents. The same kind of scene is also painfully presented in the novel.

When Samali rejects the proposal of commencing prostitution, “Samali’s mother tried to convince her” (Pratikshya 39). Samali’s mother pressures her into prostitution, a common practice among Badi families. This reflects the traditional and tragic normalization of prostitution within untouchable communities, where familial force runs the cycle of exploitation enforced by the caste hierarchy.

To show the happiness seen on the faces of the Badi community when they give birth to a girl as she is the source of income through prostitution, the narrator narrates, “There was a distinct principle in the Badi settlement- who would get birth with earning material, she would get respect. The birth with earning hands would be worthless. The worthlessness of every male would reflect in his name as well...” (Pratikshya 18). The Badi community exhibits joy at the birth of a girl because she is seen as a future source of income through prostitution. This level of happiness highlights the severe exploitation of

Badi women, whose value is reduced to their ability to earn money through sex work. This perspective underscores the economic and social oppression faced by the Badi community, where women are commodified and men are deemed worthless, reflecting the deeply entrenched caste hierarchies and the systemic exploitation of Dalits by upper-caste people.

To show the oppression of Dalits, Aahuti opines, “Even now, it is common to burn houses of *Dalit*, to gang rape *Dalit* woman, and not to charge anyone for such crimes. Still, nowadays, many so-called high-caste people consider despising, oppressing, and disgracing *Dalit* as their rights and duties” (68). Aahuti draws attention to ongoing violence and discrimination against Dalits, such as gang rape, which often go unpunished. This highlights the persistent dehumanization and marginalization of Dalits, underscoring the need for urgent legal and social reforms. In the novel too, scenes of rape are presented.

In the novel, the antagonist, Bekhaman Raj Bhandari, an upper-caste man, has paid the highest amount to put off the “*nathiya*” of Samali. Her parents and friends trick her and leave her at Bekhaman, he says, “My darling, it was my luck to put off your *nathiya*.” Bekhaman attempted to catch her forcefully but Samali leaped three meters away from him and screamed, Samali says, “Wolf!”... Samali was the witness of her own rape... she was raped” (Pratikshya 47-48). Bekhaman pays a high price to remove Samali’s nose ring, a symbol of her forced entry into prostitution. Despite her resistance, she is violently overpowered and raped. This narrative illustrates the brutal sexual violence inflicted on Dalit women by upper-caste men, demonstrating their powerlessness and lack of accountability. Samali’s violation is a stark reminder of the systemic abuse and dehumanization faced by Dalit women in exchange for money and other commodities.

Similarly, a Dalit scholar, Brijesh Kumar states, “Dalit literature is the outcome of sufferings, oppression, and exploitations of a group of people for centuries. It is not the pain of a single person, nor is it a matter of one day- it is the painful voice of lakhs of people,

experienced over thousands of years” (91). Kumar emphasizes the collective nature of the experiences that Dalit literature draws upon. It includes the historical and generational trauma of millions of Dalits who have endured systemic oppression over centuries. The literature is a collective outcry against the suffering and a testament to the enduring resilience and resistance of the Dalit community. In the novel too, all Dalits face discrimination. All of their experience is the same, and their suffering has been experienced for centuries and centuries.

When Samali realizes that she is raped, she speaks to herself quietly, “To be a daughter of Badi is to be sinful. Other sins are invited by own sin; and, they are just minor sins” (Pratikshya 57). Upon realizing she has been raped, Samali internalizes the stigma associated with being born into the Badi community, seeing herself as inherently sinful. This reflects the internalized oppression and the psychological impact of caste-based discrimination, where Dalit women are made to believe in their own inferiority and culpability for the crimes committed against them. Other Badi girls also have experienced the same events in their lives.

At the marriage ceremony of Ratnaman, Samali and her team are called for dance and entertainment. After seeing Samali and her performance, Ratnaman says to Samali, “You are so beautiful. Your dance was fabulous. I have seen such a beautiful girl and dance, first time in my life. I will come to meet you soon....” (Pratikshya 35). He plans to meet and exploit her sexually. At Ratnaman’s wedding, Samali and her team are invited not just to perform, but to trap her as prey for hunters like Ratnaman. This scenario showcases the objectification and sexual exploitation of Dalit women by upper-caste men, who use their social power to abuse and discard them without any fear of punishment.

To show the fate of the Badi women who choose prostitution which is their ancestral profession, Samali says, “Manakali Badi got married to Marwadi in Nepalgunj two years ago by eloping with him. Later, she came back slowly to Pakraiya, her

hometownwithherfracturedlegandfragmentedheart...”(Pratikshya 102). Samali recounts the tragic story of Manakali, who, after marrying and leaving prostitution, is forced to return to it with a broken body and spirit. This narrative highlights the inescapable cycle of exploitation and the lack of viable alternatives for Dalit women, reinforcing the systemic barriers that keep them in subjugation and poverty. She is not the only one having such experiences, there are so many Badi men and women with the same experience. When Badi women have to go for sustenance they are bound to follow prostitution.

Control over property, social power, and religious faiths are the main reasons behind the perpetuation in society- how the Badi community can be an exception to this. In this line, Ambedkar mentions, “Religious, social status, and property are all sources of power and authority which one man has to control the liberty of another.” (230). Ambedkar highlights religious, social, and economic power structures are used as tools to enforce caste discrimination. Due to a lack of property, Dalits are forced to sell their bodies to men from the upper caste. Upper caste people dominate them in the name of religion, social, and property which is also mentioned in the novel.

Bekhaman puts off Samali’s “nathiya” brutally. The narrator explains the events: “Donottouchme!” Samalishouted. Bekhamandidnothaveanypatienceto listen to her shouting. “Do youknow,howmuchmoneyhaveIpaidtoputoffyournosering? Now, it’syourturntopaybacktome”. Bekhamanroared. Hislegs, hands, andbody parts roared. Bekhaman attacked brutally to every soft part of Samali’s body in the nameofputtingoffthenosering... Shewasfullofbloodinhisbrutalattacks.(Pratikshya 47-48)

Bekhaman savagely removes Samali’s nose ring, physically assaulting her and disregarding her pleas for mercy. The depiction of violence reflects the extreme brutality that Dalit women endure at the hands of upper-caste men, emphasizing the power imbalance and the

normalized violence against marginalized communities under the disguise of transactional property.

Similarly, in another case, religion functions as a means to brutalize Dalits' thinking. On the birthday of Sujata, the only daughter of Samali, Samali and Professor Diwakar go to the temple to offer *puja* for the well-being of Sujata. Diwakar asks, "Why do not you worship yourself in the name of your daughter?" Samali with her obligation says, "Temple gets impure when we, Badis enter inside it. We are only allowed up to the door of the temple, not inside the temple" (245). Here, religion subconsciously is used as a weapon to dominate untouchables by upper caste people. So, to oppress, religion and temple are used.

Badi women are termed as commodities. When the customers utter '*maal*', Samali does not understand its connotative meaning at the beginning. But she realizes what it means later, and says, "When body business goes extreme down, then the body cannot remain as body, it becomes as material alias *maal*...the material does not have right to cry...the material does not have right to feel the pain...the material does not have right to shock even in the midnight" (Pratikshya 81). Samali learns that '*maal*' refers to women being reduced to mere objects of the flesh trade. The dehumanizing term underscores the commodification of Dalit women, who are denied basic human rights and dignity, a consequence of the pervasive caste-based exploitation. Here, Dalit women are derogated due to their economic vulnerability. So, it can be said that property and social status are used to control the Dalits.

Hindus are condemned for the caste system and this is one of the major blames the Hindu community faces and defending, Ambedkar opines the reasons for this accusation, "Caste cannot improve, and has not improved, race. Caste has, however, done one thing. It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus" (241). Ambedkar criticizes the caste system for failing to improve the race. Instead, he believes that caste has thoroughly disrupted and degraded Hindu society, leading to disorganization and demoralization. The

scene related to it is also mentioned in the novel. Guman Singh is a contractor who put off *Nathiya* of Raitabi. When their illegitimate daughter, Ranjita grows up and reaches puberty, he again comes to put off *nathiya* of Ranjita. Raitabi requests Guman Singh not to put off *nathiya* and clarifies, “Ranjita is own daughter of Guman Singh” (Pratikshya227). However, hesays, “Isthereany fatherof awhore’s daughter; so that, do you tell me Iam her father”(227)? It shows the cruelty and immorality of the upper-caste men. Guman Singh dismisses his paternity over Ranjita, the daughter he fathered with Raitabi, using the derogatory term “whore” to dehumanize them. This incident highlights the upper-caste men's cruelty and their refusal to acknowledge any responsibility towards their Dalit offspring, perpetuating cycles of abuse and social ostracism. It also indicates that caste does not unite, but rather divides and immortalizes Hindus overall. Due to his caste, he does not recognize his own daughter and becomes ready to sleep with her.

The upper-caste men try to exploit sexually Dalit women with the fake hope of marrying them. Later, they reject them because of their caste, when *Hawaldar* of the police skips the marriage proposal of Lachhima, she says, “Icannotwait foryouanymore” “Whatelse can you doinstead ofwaiting forme? Youshouldwait.Howcan Itake you so easily” (Pratikshya26)? This scene shows the caste-based concept of upper-caste privileges of upper-caste males. Lachhima is led on by a police officer who ultimately refuses to marry her due to her caste. This illustrates the deceptive tactics used by upper-caste men to exploit Dalit women sexually, only to reject them based on caste prejudices, reinforcing their subjugation. Caste is so important for the police *Hawaldar* because he is brought up in such a society where caste restriction is practiced. So, we can say that caste has not united people but rather divided them.

While leading the Dalit movement, caste mentality aborts public outcry for reformation in society. A real threat to social activism in this deep-rooted mentality of casteism, Ambedkar opines:

A caste can easily organize itself into a conspiracy to make the life of a reformer hell. . . Caste in the hands of the orthodox has been a powerful weapon for persecuting the reformers and for killing all reform. . . Caste has killed the public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible.  
(258-259)

In a caste-based society, upper-caste people organize themselves to crush the social reformer. The same event mentioned in the novel resonates with the challenge faced by Dalit rights activists.

In this course of social reformation, a character, Professor Diwakar can be taken as a social reformer trying to do his PhD in the Badi community, hopelessly striving for his goal. So, he goes to Pakraiya where he meets Samali. He goes against societal norms and values by having food, water, tea, and the like from the Dalit community. The narrator writes, “Castes which are derogated as untouchables, there is no such house in Badi community where Professor Diwakar has not drunk water. With a smile, he not only drank water but also tea. He also ate bread made up of porridge of maize and barley” (241). The narrator highlights Professor Diwakar’s actions that directly challenge societal norms regarding the caste system. By consuming food and drink from the Dalit community, which is traditionally considered untouchable, Professor Diwakar resists and defies caste-based discrimination. The act of drinking water, and eating bread made from maize and barley in Dalit households symbolizes his rejection of the purity and pollution taboo associated with caste. His actions serve as a powerful statement against the entrenched social norms that segregate and oppress Dalits, demonstrating solidarity and promoting social equality. His role was to aware Samali and

other Badi people about their living conditions and rights in the constitution, and other laws. He gives a sense of self-esteem and meaning of life and living it to Samali. Based on this, we can call him a social activist.

The life of a social reformer is not easy in society which is driven by caste-based hierarchy. Kamala, the wife of Professor Diwakar, is also a PhD scholar. Despite this, she humiliates Samali and says,

“DoyoustillloveSamali,don’tyou?...”

“ShewasaBadiwoman,wasn’tshe? Shewasawhore,wasn’tshe? Samali who was mentioned in your PhD thesis, was that the same Samali, wasn’t she?” The thundering questions were come one after another” (Pratikshya07). Despite being a PhD scholar, Kamala derogatorily questions her husband’s affection for Samali, a Badi woman. Caste-based discrimination persists even among the educated, highlighting the deep-rooted societal biases that continue to marginalize Dalits. Here, Kamala is just an example, there are many. Professor Diwakar ignites the sense of dignity, respect, and freedom in Samali; however, his wife is a contrast. Kamala tries to humiliate Samali and Diwakar.

Showing the defenders of caste system in society, Ambedkar writes, “It is a pity that caste even today has its defenders...” (233). Ambedkar further clarifies, “[A Hindu’s] whole life is one anxious effort to preserve his caste. Caste is his precious possession which he must save at any cost” (250). Ambedkar criticizes the continued defense of caste, noting that many Hindus prioritize preserving their caste above anything else. This perspective exposes a great threat and the deep-rooted societal commitment to save caste, perpetuating discrimination against Dalits. The same scene is also presented in the novel where people from the upper caste defend their caste and caste-based discrimination.

Similar to Ambedkar, showing the call for equality and justice as a clear goal of the Dalit movement, S.R.Jalotewrites, “Contemporary Dalit literature portrays dreadful and

humiliating events of the Dalit world. It represents inequality, sorrow, and misery of the oppressed...”(1). Here, the focus is on how contemporary Dalit literature serves as a medium to document and express the harsh realities faced by Dalits. The literature reflects the widespread discrimination, violence, and suffering inflicted upon Dalits due to their caste. By portraying these brutal truths, Dalit literature brings attention to the systemic inequality and enduring misery that characterizes the lives of many in the Dalit community.

Pratiksha’s *Nathiya* as Dalits’ literature, Dalit consciousness is a core issue of this semi-political text.

The narrator presents the scene where untouchability is practiced, “Badi girls came, everybody left the way to them! The people of the bridegroom's house were leaving the way to them; as if, Badi girls are other species, if you touch them; there will occur strong earthquake. “They may touch...they may touch” people were speaking who were near their side” (Pratikshya 32). The Badi girls face physical avoidance from others at a wedding, symbolizing the practice of untouchability. This scene underscores social humiliation faced by Badi women while the ongoing untouchability keeps them an outcast, where Dalit individuals are treated as impure and untouchable, reflecting the enduring stigma and social ostracism perpetuated by the caste system. People are behaving this way because they love their caste over humanity. At any cost, they have to avoid the touch of Dalits. This scene is a direct reflection of our society where still such ‘distancing’ is maintained.

To bring change in the caste-dominated society, there is a need for a strong leader who can mobilize mass for the same purpose. Highlighting the importance of an individual zeal to challenge and change the caste hierarchy, Ambedkar mentions, “The assertion by the individual of his own opinion and beliefs, his own independence and interest... is the beginning of all reform. But whether the reform will continue depends upon what scope the group affords for such individual assertion” (249-250). Ambedkar stresses the importance of

individual empowerment and dissent voice in driving reformation in society. He acknowledges that lasting change depends on the group's support for individual efforts, emphasizing the role of community dynamics in sustaining Dalit rights. In the novel, such courageous steps are taken by some characters whom we can call the reformers.

Showing Samali as a social reformer, the narrator writes, "Sending her daughter away from her in Kathmandu for her study, she opens the secrets of keeping her daughter in a hostel for the study. Educating her daughter, making her capable, shares the dreams of paving a different path than her own" (247). The narrator describes Samali as a social reformer who actively works against the limitations imposed by caste-based discrimination. By sending her daughter to Kathmandu for education and ensuring her daughter's stay in a hostel, Samali is resisting the traditional caste-based roles and expectations for women in her community. She aspires to empower her daughter through education, which is a form of resistance against the caste system that often restricts the opportunities available to certain groups. This act symbolizes a break from her own past and the constraints of her caste, aiming to provide her daughter with the ability to forge a different and more liberated path in life.

When Kamala, the wife of Professor Diwakar, scolds and humiliates Samali, Diwakar says, "Samali was just Samali for me. I don't care about her profession; heartily she was not less pure as Goddess for me. You should not ask me, but you did. I told you this much. Today onward, let's not talk about her... never" (Pratikshya07). He opposes his wife's saying and approves Samali as pious to him. He does not want anything negative from his wife about Samali. Here, his resistance favoring Samali can be taken as resistance within the upper caste community. He can take him as a social reformer. Professor Diwakar can be taken as a reformer. He is not alone; Samali also joins him in his thoughts on reformation of the society. Due to him, Samali paves the way for freedom and dignified life.

In the same manner, Yukphung sir can also be taken as a reformer because of him, Jayanepal gets meaning of his life, and the discriminatory society. Jayanepal also makes Samali aware of her surroundings. Jayanepal talks about the Badi history, politics of the upper caste, and others because Yukphung sir. So, Yukphung is also a reformer who is joined by Jayanepal and others.

Mentioning the significance of Dalit literature in society, S.R. Jalote, a Dalit writer writes, “Dalit literature tells us about the cultural conflict of the socially, economically, and culturally deprived and disadvantaged group of people. It requires literature to be revolutionary, didactic, and doctrinaire...” (1). Here, it emphasizes the role of Dalit literature in highlighting the cultural conflicts experienced by Dalits. These conflicts arise from their marginalized status and the systemic oppression they face. Jalote argues that Dalit literature is not just a form of expression but a tool for revolution and education, advocating for change and challenging the oppressive structures that perpetuate caste-based discrimination. The sense of awareness is seen in Lachhima, Samali, and others which are characterized in this novel. In the scene where there is anger in the Dalit character at the marriage ceremony of Ratnaman, upper-caste men and women try to distance themselves from the Badi people. After observing it, Samali thinks, “Are Badi girls untouchables in public places and touchable in private places” (35)? She has built a sense of awareness regarding the mistreatment towards her and her people. At a wedding, Samali notices the upper caste’s hypocritical behavior of avoiding Badi people publicly while exploiting them privately. Samali’s awareness and critical observation of the hypocrisy represent a mental and intellectual resistance to caste-based discrimination. Recognizing the injustice is the first step toward challenging and resisting it. So, literature is not only a source of entertainment but also a source of awareness and revolution.

Similarly, in another scene in the novel when the police *Hawaldar* keeps on postponing Lachhima's request to marry her as he has lured her by promising her to marry, the narrator writes:

Lachhima poured the alcohol into a glass and drank it. She was fully alcoholic now. She spoke, "Tell me, when will you marry me?" Suddenly, she used the term '*timi*' instead of '*hajur*' while addressing him... "When will you marry me?" ...

*Hawaldar* escaped from there without speaking a single word. (Pratikshya 26)

Lachhima demands marriage from the police *Hawaldar* who has been postponing his promise to marry her. Her shift in addressing him from '*hajur*' (a respectful term) to '*timi*' (a more familiar term) signifies a break in the deferential attitude she was expected to maintain. Lachhima's assertiveness and refusal to continue being deferential challenge the power dynamics and the exploitation she faces. Her act of confrontation is a form of resistance against the false promises and the caste-based manipulation by the upper-caste man.

Dalit literature ignites consciousness in society against discrimination and domination of upper-caste hegemony. To show the same concept, Arjun Dangle states, "Dalit literature is not simply literature it is associated with a movement to bring about change... At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them; instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view" (vii-viii). Dangle's perspective sees Dalit literature as an integral part of a larger socio-political movement aimed at transforming society. It is revolutionary in nature, pushing for new ways of thinking that challenge established norms and critical theories that have historically marginalized Dalit voices. This literature is a direct response to the need for social change and the empowerment of the oppressed. In the novel as well, Dalit characters follow the social orders in the beginning, later, they present themselves as the agents of change.

Samali chose Ratnaman as her first client by her choice as his father was her first client of her without her consent. Ratnaman falls in love with her and becomes ready to ruin his own family, Bekhaman comes to her, apologies and says:

Ratnaman is the one and only son of mine. He was born after many years of marriage. We could not give birth to any other child after that" ... "I am in pain that he says to get married to you" ... "I humbly request you to liberate him from your love". Bekhaman apologized by joining two hands in front of Samali...

Samali says, "I have cleared my previous matter, as revenge. I cannot see any more tears in your eyes. I had to take revenge for my tears and blood. It's cleared now" ...

(Pratiksha 86-87).

Samali chooses Ratnaman as her client of her own choice, in contrast to his father who exploited her without her consent. Ratnaman falls for her, threatening his own family's stability. Bekhaman, Ratnaman's father, pleads with Samali to release his son from her influence. Samali's actions symbolize reclaiming control and agency over her life. By exacting revenge and making choices on her terms, she disrupts the cycle of exploitation imposed by the upper-caste men, asserting her own power and autonomy. It shows the changed perspective toward Dalits. Earlier, Bekhaman made her his object to fulfill his lust, but now she turns herself into a strong Dalit who can run her life as per her own choices.

Similarly, another scene where we can find a sense of consciousness and revolution in Dalits in this novel is when Guman Singh puts off his illegitimate daughter's *nathiya*, Raitabi gets mad after that event. She holds a knife and waits at the Hurikhola Bridge in the dusk. She does not attack anybody. One day, she is not seen at the bank of Hurikhola, only a bloody knife with a human penis full of blood lies on the ground. Surprisingly, Guman Singh is also not seen from that day. The narrator narrates, "This is Guman Singh's penis" Everybody was thinking it... Did Raitabi murder Guman Singh and throw him into the river?

Where did she go after murdering him? Did she commit suicide by plunging into the river? Nobody knows it... (Pratikshya225). After Guman Singh removes his illegitimate daughter's *nathiya*, Raitabi waits with a knife and later, his dismembered penis is found, indicating she may have taken violent revenge. Raitabi's drastic and violent act signifies extreme resistance against the sexual exploitation and violence Dalits endured. It is a powerful, albeit tragic, assertion of agency and rebellion against the oppressive caste-based power structure.

Suggesting the violent revolution of Dalits to annihilate the caste-based hegemony, in *JaatBarta*, Aahuti mentions, "Rejecting the idea that the anti-caste movement should be absolutely peaceful, the option of becoming a part of a justifiable violent revolutionary movement as needed should also be kept open in principle" (212). Here, he presents the alternative of salvation which is a 'violent revolutionary movement.' In the novel as well, Pratiksha has given a hint of such a daring step where JayanepalBadi gets its sense through Yukphung, a school teacher and social reformer. When Samali talks about her plan to leave Pakraiya to be safe from the oppression of Major MaanBahadur, Jayanepal also shares his plan to leave Pakraiya and move to Jhapa which is the birthplace of Yukphung sir. Jayanepal says, "Yukphung sir will not teach there. He will join politics. I will also join politics. I will do revolution with Yukphung sir" (Pratiksha 106). He says it to Samali. He understands the importance of revolution to emancipate his people. We can guess that he is not simply talking about peaceful protest as he can do that in his own place rather than this he is talking about a 'justifiable violent revolutionary movement' needed to bring a visible change in society.

Highlighting the demolition of the concept of caste which is based on religion for caste hierarchy, Ambedkar mentions, "The real method of breaking up the caste was not to bring about inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notions on which caste was founded" (199). Ambedkar asserts that to effectively dismantle the caste system, it is not enough to promote inter-caste interactions such as shared meals and

marriages. The fundamental religious beliefs that underpin caste must be eradicated. In the novel, when Samali and Professor Diwakar come back after worshipping, Diwakar asks about the hurriedness in *pujari* while doing *puja*, and Samali, in calmness replies, “That is not the *pujari*, he is an imposter in the name of the *pujari*. He has come into my room so many times, offering me the money donated by the devotees, he has climbed on me. The *pujari* who touches Badini openly in secret, the same *pujari* stops the Badini from entering the temple by calling, ‘You are untouchable, a low caste’” (246). This indicates the double standard of the *pandits* who keep changing their shapes, sizes, and roles. Based on this scene, those who practice untouchability in the name of religion, are impure and the real culprit. She is not allowed to enter inside the temple in the name of religion. So, the notion of religion should be challenged to change caste-based discrimination.

Presenting the importance of literacy and Dalit literature to Dalits, Anju Bala, a writer and activist writes:

Subaltern communities are using the traditionally denied weapon of literacy by themselves, and are exposing the conditions under which they have survived as well as directly flouting and sub-human status imposed upon them by the Hindu social order. Dalit literature questioned the mainstream literature which they call ‘Hindu Literature’ and challenged its hegemony. (38- 39)

Bala discusses the empowerment gained through literacy among subaltern communities, particularly Dalits. By acquiring and utilizing literacy, these communities expose and challenge the oppressive conditions enforced by the Hindu social order. Dalit literature serves as a counter-narrative to mainstream literature, questioning and confronting the dominant cultural and social hegemony that has historically silenced and dehumanized them. In the novel, Sujata Badi, a daughter of Samali has passed her Master's Degree. She is educated which can be seen as the tool to free her society from caste-based hegemony. When Professor

Diwakar sees the daughter of Samali who is a lookalike of Samali herself, how and what he feels is narrated by the narrator:

It was an aftershock, but it was in a different style. The aftershock was there in *Kantipur Daily*; it was with a photo feature. The feature title was: *First Badi Girl with Master's Degree*. The photo was certainly a Xerox copy of Samali. In the feature news, Sujata Badi had given all the credit for success to her mother, Samali Badi. The aftershock was very interesting and rhythmic for Professor Diwakar. (Pratikshya 08)

Education is the source of freedom as Sujata is educated. Sujata, Samali's daughter, becomes the first Badi girl to earn a Master's degree, as featured in a newspaper article. Sujata's educational attainment symbolizes breaking free from the socio-economic constraints of the caste system. Education empowers her and serves as a form of resistance against the marginalization of the Badi community.

Samali becomes successful in fulfilling her dream. When Sujata completes her Master's Degree, Samali is also present at the convocation ceremony. The narrator expresses: Samali's daughter was crying by embracing her mother, who was standing nearby her to share her happiness. She would think; may her daughter study and complete her higher Degree; and, may she not take her mother's path. What would not Samali do to grow up the seed of the dream and to make it a perfect tree? What did not she lose in life?...She had emotional feelings about the success of her daughter.... (Pratikshya 11)

The Badi women can also achieve what they dream of. Samali celebrates her daughter Sujata's academic success, having sacrificed much to ensure her daughter's education and future. Samali's determination to educate her daughter and her success in doing so is a testament to her resistance against the predetermined roles and limitations imposed by caste-based discrimination.

Presenting the Dalit character as the protagonists, and presenting their pains and suffering is itself a revolution in the realm of literature. Pointing the same issue, a writer and activist, RanjanaNagar writes:

Dalit literature being post-independence literature has a new form and purpose, even though the subject matter is different. Earlier, kings and queens used to be the subject matter of literature, but in Dalit literature, the poor, helpless people living on the periphery of the villages have become the subject matter. Dalit literature is concerned with the pain and suffering of these people and their revolt and struggles to carve a place for them... Its lifeblood is "Dalit consciousness." This is revolutionary as is based on social values like "equality, liberty, justice and solidarity rather than pleasure". (127- 128)

Nagar contrasts the subject matter of traditional literature with Dalit literature, highlighting the shift from glorifying elites to focusing on the marginalized. Dalit literature brings to light the struggles of the oppressed and their fight for dignity and rights. The concept of "Dalit consciousness" is central, emphasizing a revolutionary ethos grounded in the pursuit of social justice, equality, and solidarity. *Nathiyap* presents Samali as a protagonist, and other Dalit characters as the major characters. Their suppression and their resistance are presented artistically. The act of taking the Dalit character as a protagonist is itself revolutionary in the world of literature.

Everyone must raise voice against caste-based discrimination in society in our own way. Suggesting the same concept, Ambedkar claims, "You must make your efforts to uproot caste, if not in my way, then in your way" (316). Ambedkar urges active efforts to eliminate caste discrimination, whether through his methods or others. This call for action highlights the importance of diverse strategies in the fight for Dalit equality and social justice. In the

novel, Samali also takes her way to revolt against discriminated society. When Samali declares that she is not going to sell her body:

There was an earthquake everywhere. First of all, there was an earthquake in the heart of Shere Don who would come there to rest in the garden of Samali. There was an earthquake in the heart of poet, Chetnath Indreni. There was an earthquake in the functions of the police headquarters. There was an earthquake in the welcome programs of the Zonal Head to Army Brigadier office. (Pratikshya 271)

Her decision to quit her profession is an example of her loyalty to Professor Diwakar and her own self-esteem as well. Samali announces she will no longer sell her body, causing a metaphorical earthquake among those who exploited her. Samali's decision to quit prostitution is a profound act of resistance. It defies societal expectations, reclaims her autonomy, and rejects the exploitation and objectification imposed by caste-based hegemony. This is the way Samali chooses to revolt against society which demands her to be a whore without leaving her place, her village. Similarly, When Samali makes her decision to leave the place forever, the narrator writes:

There were dozens of climaxes in the life of Samali who was about thirty years old. The childhood days with Jayanepal. . . putting off the *nathiyaw* without her wish. . . and meeting with Diwakar were the multiple climaxes of Samali's life. . . She was taking a turning point in life. . . and taking a night bus to Kathmandu. (Pratikshya 275- 276)

Samali listens to her heart and goes to live her life more prestigiously. Samali reflects on the numerous climaxes and turning points in her life as she prepares to leave her past behind and start anew in Kathmandu. By choosing to leave and seek a new life, Samali resists the constraints and cycles of oppression that defined her past. Her decision to pursue a more dignified life symbolizes

a powerful act of resistance and self-liberation. Her journey to Kathmandu is not a mere journey, it also covers her long leap from dominated to liberated.

In conclusion, *Nathiya* by Saraswati Pratiksha provides a compelling exploration of caste-based oppression, particularly focusing on the plight of Dalit characters in Western Nepal. Through the transformation of characters like Samali Badi, Pratiksha not only highlights the pervasive discrimination and exploitation faced by the Dalit community but also underscores their resilience and capacity for resistance. The novel portrays a significant shift from subjugation to empowerment, illustrating how Dalit characters, initially dominated by upper-caste individuals, eventually assert their dignity and strive for emancipation. This transformation is analyzed through the lens of Dalit Studies, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of scholars like Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Bishwabhakta Dulal 'Aahuti,' and other scholars' ideas related to the empowerment of the Dalit community which helps to contextualize the struggle and resistance within a broader socio-political landscape.

In *Nathiya*, the concept of agency is vividly illustrated through the journey of Dalit characters, particularly the protagonist Samali Badi. Initially depicted as a passive and oppressed individual, Samali's evolution into a symbol of resistance underscores the transformative power of agency. Despite the systemic discrimination imposed by upper-caste figures, Samali and other Dalit characters assert their autonomy and fight for their dignity, challenging the societal norms that seek to discriminate and exploit them. Pratiksha's narrative, analyzed through the lens of Dalit empowerment and resistance, emphasizes the characters' resilience and their active participation in reshaping their destinies. This portrayal of agency is not merely about survival but about reclaiming their rightful place in society and demanding justice. Through Samali's empowered actions, the novel highlights the broader socio-political struggles of the Dalit community, illustrating their capacity to drive social

change and resist oppression. Ultimately, *Nathiya* serves as a testament to the strength and agency of Dalits, advocating for societal reformation and the recognition of their voices.

The research reveals that *Nathiya* is more than just a narrative of suffering; it is a powerful testament to the strength and agency of Dalits. The story of Samali Badi, who evolves from a submissive figure into a symbol of resistance, epitomizes the broader movement of Dalits towards self-empowerment and societal transformation. By rejecting the oppressive structures that bind her, Samali embodies the hope and potential for change within the Dalit community. This study emphasizes that understanding the depth of such characters' struggles and transformations is crucial for appreciating the novel's significance. The novel's depiction of the Badi community's fight against entrenched social hierarchies highlights the urgent need for societal reformation and the recognition of Dalit voices in shaping an equitable society.

Furthermore, the research underlines the novel's contribution to Dalit literature and its impact on raising awareness about caste-based discrimination. By incorporating insights from prominent Dalit theorists, the study offers an analysis of the novel's themes, enhancing our understanding of the systemic nature of caste oppression and the strategies employed by Dalits to combat it. The significance of *Nathiya* lies not only in its literary merit but also in its role as a catalyst for social change, inspiring readers to reflect on and challenge the caste dynamics that persist in contemporary society. Thus, this research serves as a vital contribution to the academic discourse on Dalit resistance and transformation, offering new perspectives on the intersection of literature and social justice.

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