

## Chapter 1

### Lakshmi and Patriarchal Society

Patricia McCormick is an American journalist and writer. She was born in a suburban area of America. She graduated from Rosemont College in 1978, followed by an M.S. from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1986, and an M.F.A. from New School University in 1999. She has established herself as a renowned writer in the world from her works. Her first novel was *Cut* (2002), about a young woman who self-injures herself. This was followed by *My Brother's Keeper* in 2005, about a boy struggling with his brother's addiction and *Sold* in 2006. *Sold* is the third novel which received great critical acclaim in the US, and gained for the National Book Awards. All these novels deal with the issues of the women. Her awards include the American Library Association Best Book of the Year, New York Public Library Best Book for the Teenaged and the Children's Literature Council's Choice.

McCormick worked as an investigative reporter before becoming a freelancer writer. She has written for *The New York Times*, *Parents Magazine*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Town & Country*, *More*, *Reader's Digest*, *Mademoiselle* and other publications she has been an adjunct Professor of Journalism at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and an instructor of creative writing at the New School University. She lives now in New York with her family.

Patricia spent some time in India and Nepal to conduct a research for this novel, *Sold*, interviewing the women of Calcutta's red-light district, girls who have been rescued from the sex trade and also the rescue workers and social service workers. She took copious notes and traced the steps taken by Lakshmi herself who is characterized in the novel. She went from a remote village in Central Nepal, through

Kathmandu and on to the teeming brothels of Calcutta. She even slipped into a jail in Kathmandu, where she interviewed a young man who had sold his girlfriend because he wanted a motorcycle.

*Sold* is a story of Lakshmi, a poor 13-year old girl from Nepal, who is sold for sexual slavery in India. Lakshmi lives with her family in a small village hut on the mountain top of Nepal. She has a goat, a baby brother, mother whom she loves dearly and a step- father. Her family is extremely poverty- stricken, but her life is full of simple pleasure, like raising her black and white speckled goat, and having her mother brush her hair by the light of an oil lamp. She has hopes and dreams for her future. She wants to continue to be the number one girl in her class at school. She also wants to earn money as a maid in the city like her friend Gita, so her family will not be so poor. It means she is trying to prove herself strong in her society by leading her family.

In course of time, when harsh Himalayan monsoons wash away all the family's crops, Lakshmi 's stepfather tells her that she must leave home, and take a job to solve her family's financial crisis. Therefore, Lakshmi's stepfather takes her to bajai Sita's store, where she is introduced with a glamorous stranger named Bimala, who has come from town. There, they talk something odd about her physical beauty. So, Bimala is trying to pay few amount. Bimala tells her that she would find her a job as a maid working for a wealthy woman in the city. The stranger tells Lakshmi to call her Auntie and takes her on a journey for several days. Eventually, Auntie, whom Lakshmi finds out is named Bimla, sells her to a man. Her final visions of Bimala reveal Bimla's blackened teeth, foreshadowing a dark element hidden behind her glamorous façade. The man tells her that he will be her Uncle, but she must call him husband. Although she is afraid of him, he gives her sweets, and takes her with him

across the border into India. Eventually, the pair reaches a place called Happiness House, and Lakshmi is sold once again to a woman named Mumtaz.

Glad to be able to earn and help her family, Lakshmi undertakes the long journey to India and arrives at "Happiness House" full of hope. As soon as she learns what kind of "works" she needs to do there, she refuses. That's why, she undergoes so many difficulties. Mumtaz runs the brothel in Calcutta with cruelty and cunningness. When Lakshmi refuses to comply (despite beatings and starvation), then Mumtaz drugs her, and some men simply rape her. She tells Lakshmi that she is trapped there until she can pay off her family's debt. But she cheats Lakshmi's earnings so that she can never leave by earning her required amount. When her virginity is broken, she is thrown out to share the main living quarters with the other girls and move about the house with more freedom.

Lakshmi's life in brothel becomes a nightmare from which she cannot escape. Gradually, she befriends with other girls in the brothel, who enable her to survive in such a dangerous hell. She takes Shahanna as her first friend at the Happiness House. Shahanna shows her some kindness, and helps her learn about the house. She is a girl with teardrop eyes and deep brown skin like the hide of a nut. Similarly, among her friends in the brothel, Pushpa is a 'coughing women', who has two children-Harish and Jeena; Anita tried to run away so, her face is disfigured when was caught and beaten. She is a 'half frowning girl' and now she is Mumtaz's spy; Shilpa is an 'aging bird girl'. Among them, Monica is described as one of the girls of highest earning prostitute in the Happiness House.

One night, one of the men, an American, gives Lakshmi a visiting card, and asks her some questions regarding her will and freedom. All women in the brothel believe that Americans are spies and liars. They only use them badly for their

fulfillment in the name of rescue. But, Lakshmi has a strong desire to leave that place at any cost. That is why she accepts the card. She keeps this card a secret, not wanting to be beaten by Mumtaz, but eventually slips the card to the boy who brings them tea every morning, hoping that he can contact the Americans for her. After a few days with no word from the Americans, Lakshmi gives up hope. There is another American that comes, and she talks to him. He promises that he will come back for her. After a few days, she gives up hope, but, then there is a raid by the police and some Americans in and the girls in the brothel hide in a cave like place. Lakshmi recognizes the voice of the American and bravely goes to be saved. Mumtaz is already arrested by the police. It seems finally Lakshmi becomes able to free herself and others from there.

Most of the characters in the novel are from low social class, low economic status but they come in conflict against such patriarchal norms and values. Lakshmi's mother, Ama, is described as a typical village wife. She bears her family's struggles by being the only working adult in her household. Lakshmi's stepfather, a lazy gambler, is Ama's second husband in the novel. He spends his days at the tea shop gambling and conversing with the old men and sees no value in Lakshmi. For him, Lakshmi's life is worthless at home. He is always willing to spend the family's earning on unnecessary selfish items for him only.

### **Review of Literature**

Since the publication of *Sold*, it has been reviewed from various perspectives. It has been viewed from postmodern perspective. Focusing on the indeterminacy of the fiction and open-ended nature of the Lakshmi's story, Robyn Sheahan says, "[B]ut then a lifeline is thrown to her. Will she risk taking the opportunity offered to her? How likely is it to succeed? Will life outside the brothel be even worse than life

within it?" (2). The questions in these lines are open-ended and the responses of them are indeterminate showing the open-endedness to the story and indeterminacy of meaning.

In the same way, Deepak Adhikari, indicating intertextuality of the fiction mentions.

Flipping through the pages of *Sold*, I was reminded of Sandra Cisneros, the Latino author of *The House of Mango Street*. In several vignettes, Cisneros weaves the story of Esperanza, a Mexican-American girl growing up in the United States. The common things in these novels are the methods of storytelling. Unlike Esperanza's, Lakshmi's world is that of deprivation, object poverty and hardships.  
(para. 4)

The story telling method of *Sold* is similar to that of the House of Mango Street and protagonist Epseranza to some extent, is similar to Lakshmi. Both novel presents the fragmented stories of the protagonists.

Likewise, focusing on structural pattern of the novel, Gallo Don says, "[I]n this novel told in brief vignettes that read like free verse, thirteen years old Lakshmi explains how she is sold by her desperately poor parents to what she believes will be work as a maid in the home of rich family" (112). The characters from low class social status, gap between the poor and the rich and, the free verse style of the novel show the postmodern feature of the fiction.

Focusing on the setting of the novel and nature of the protagonist, Monika Lakshmanan says:

Lakshmi's story is set against this predetermined rhythm of poverty, death and womanhood. Beset by debts and colonialism, her stepfather

sells her to a prostitution ring. Lakshmi, who is convinced that she is going to work in the big city as a maid [...] sold at a tremendous profit to 'Happiness House'. A brothel in the Calcutta red-light district. (qtd. In Rogers 99)

Above lines depict Lakshmi's background against which her story is woven.

Moreover, it shows Lakshmi's life in the prostitution house who is sold there to her unexpectation.

Similarly, Anita Beaman, focusing on the patterns as well as nature of the story and that of the protagonist, says:

*Sold*, Lakshmi's story, is providing brief glimpses of the poverty of Lakshmi's mountain village, the love of her mother, and the bleak reality of life in the brothel. This style often leaves me wanting more of the story- more details, more development, but I think it is best for Lakshmi's story, since details would be almost too much to bear. (2)

The protagonist of the novel is from low social status full of suffering and hardships. Moreover, this novel presents the hard reality of life in the brothel.

Focusing on the realism of the study Greta Nelson posits:

In telling Lakshmi's story, Mc Cormick explores the nightmarish reality of so many women in Nepal and India. By exploring this evil through the words of an innocent female protagonist (whose name is tellingly, the same as the Hindu goddess and mother of All Life), the author implicitly argues that the practice of sexual slavery is symptomatic of the backward state of women's rights in both India and Nepal. (2)

According to Nelson, the story is the story of all Nepali and Indian economically

backwarded women who are sold in Indian prostitution houses for sexual slavery. The protagonist Lakshmi, ironically, is the same as that of the goddess of property and prosperity. It presents the hierarchy between the god and the man.

No critics have been found to have analyzed the work pointing out the female issues. Though it is one of the main themes of the novel, it has been left untouched. So this issue is the main problematic of the present study. To find the solution of the problem, the answer to the questions like- Why is Lakshmi sold by her parents?, How Nepalese women are suppressed inside and outside the country?, What incites Lakshmi to combat the malpractices against Nepalese females, and how does she succeed in her moves? seem pertinent.

The novel *Sold* will be analyzed from the perspective of feminism. The objective of the study is to explore the reasons why Lakshmi was sold, to point out the domination and exploitation upon Nepalese women inside and outside the country, to identify the reason behind Lakshmi's struggle.

This study assumes that Lakshmi, the representative of female character in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*, denies the norms and values of patriarchy and Happiness House and struggles for freedom.

Cormick describes how characters suffer from patriarchal domination through the portrayal of the protagonist, Lakshmi. This study marks the significant contribution by bringing the characters like Lakshmi, Gita, Anita, Shahana, etc. in the preview of critical analysis to reveal the condition of the female in the society. In addition, this study digs out causes of suffering and attempts made by female to overcome the pathetic situation.

Lakshmi is a daughter from poor family, as she has a desire for an independent life, she is restricted by familial norms and values. She is taught by her mother what

she needs to do and need not do as a female. Late, she is trapped by her parents, neighbors and sold to the brothels of Calcutta which is called Happiness House. It all happens only in her early teenage. While she enters Happiness House, it creates confusion and tension on her, and she tries to escape from there. But she has to pay off the debt to Mumtaz who bought her. So, she is forced to be involved in prostitution.

Feminism will be the theoretical base for this research. The hypothesis will be proved with the support of different critics like Simone De Beauvoir, and the domain concerned. This research will be based on primary and secondary resources as well as materials available in libraries, bookstalls and on the internet websites. The text and follows the footsteps of the supervisor provided with.

This project particularly digs out the efforts made by Nepalese women to survive and through the characters like Lakshmi by taking the theoretical support from feminism. Moreover, taking the nature of study, given time and resource materials, this thesis does not analyze about the fragmented life of personal characters and the historical relation of Nepalese women and Indian.

This study will make significant contribution mainly in two areas of concern. First, it focuses on the domination, exploitation and repression on females in family, society and out of country within patriarchal social framework as represented in the novel *Sold*. Secondly, it will discover how a woman fights against such exploitation in brothel.

The proposed thesis will have the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Lakshmi and Patriarchal Society

Chapter 2: Feminism: A Weapon of Female Liberation

Chapter 3: Lakshmi's Enslavement and Suffering

Chapter 4: Lakshmi's Struggle and Liberation



## **Chapter 2**

### **Feminism: A Weapon of Female Liberation**

Feminism advocates women's rights for the equality of sexes, identity and freedom. It deals with women's activities, works and aims from female-centered perspective. It criticizes patriarchal culture, examines the experiences of women from all areas and classes, rejects the marginalization of woman's, voice against constructed issues. It seeks to liberate women, creating a new society in such a way that patriarchy is eliminated.

Feminism questions why a female is regarded inferior in relation to male. Feminism tries to explore the female experiences of anxiety, confession, pain and concern that are different from males. Feminists call for a movement to fight against all kinds of injustices and oppressions by the patriarchal society which is based on race, gender and sex. There are different phases and dimensions in feminism such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, French feminism, black feminism, Third World feminism, psycho feminism etc. Mary Wollstoncraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, etc. are prominent feminists.

From very beginning of human civilization, women were considered as inferior and second class. It was believed that women were made to fulfill men's purpose, they were expected to serve men physically, sexually and mentally. They have always been dominated, violated and subjected under male supremacist ideology. Feminism is the social movement that seeks equal rights for women winning them equal status as men and freedom to decide their career and life pattern. This movement itself has grown out of previous centuries of struggle by women to win equal rights. It questions the long-standing dominant male phallogocentric ideology, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation of females and feminine nature. In a

sense, feminism is an outcome of aggressive feeling of self-consciousness among women who reject their own passivity, and aim to develop women's personalities. Sheila Ruth, about this movement, posits her view as follows: "A conceptualization of the women's movement that strikes me as more helpful and more constructive is simply that of women moving toward greater strength and freedom both in their awareness and their socio-political position" (444).

Women's movement advocates and aims to feel the women's strength and freedom mentally and socially. Conventionally, women are taken to be weak in terms of education, culture and body structure whereas males are considered as strong in every aspect of life. Due to this deep-rooted gender conception, men dominate women. Thus, the main target of the feminists has become to change or revolt against such misconception on gender construction to identify, and find a remedy for all kinds of oppression and subordination. In this way, feminists are ultimately in pursuit of a more radical change, the creation of the world where one gender does not set the standard of human values.

Different scholars argue differently to pin out the origin of this movement. Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the abolition of slavery and the American Civil Rights Movement have been responsible for the origin of feminist movement. 'Feminists criticism' in the eighteenth century had been a continuous agitation for women's rights -political, economical and cultural, the freedom and equalities of sexes. However, feminist criticism is actually a part of discourse of the new feminism emerged in Europe and America in the late 1960s to revive political and social issues of women. It emphasizes a different kind of reading to literature breaking the traditional monolithic way of examining literature from feminist point of view. The task of feminist criticism is to concern on women's access to language in the lexical

range from which words can be selected on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression.

Toril Moi has indicated the advantage of recognition of feminist criticism and theory which are useful to learn about social, institutional and personal power relation between the sexes. Moi says: "feminist criticism then is specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for genders in literature" (204).

Patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation in literary feminism are concerned both with representation of women in literature and with changing women's position in society by freeing them from oppressive restraints. Unjustified is the condition under which most women live. Women strive to be able to do anything and everything men do, because, after all, they are just the same as men.

In nineteenth and twentieth century, women had to come across various challenges as the writers in the society. Feminism became a dominant approach in literature only in the late nineteenth century. It had two centuries struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements. The campaign was started earlier formally through the writing of Marry Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). She opines that a woman or a girl is affected by the misinterpretation of the life style of society. This work was unique in suggesting that the betterment of women's status be effected through political changes as the radical reform of national educational systems. Such change should benefit all society. So, she attacks the sentimental novels of her time for their pernicious influences on women's intellectual development. Everything women see or hear in sentimental novels serves to fix impressions that call forth emotions giving a sexual character to the mind:

Women subjected by ignorance to their sensation, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice. (398)

It challenged the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women receive the same opportunities as men in education, work and politics.

The twentieth century major feminist writers like Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir made a great contribution to feminist theories with their major famous works. Woolf, in her *A Room of One's Own* has explored the situation of women writers explaining how women are imprisoned within the domestic premises and are restricted to use pen. Women followed their duties set by patriarchal society without any question and they never tried to challenge it. She questions, "Whether part of the housework was her task" (34). The male structured society compelled women to think that was their destiny and women did not think necessary to revolt against this thinking. Her central argument is that women do not have a money and a room of their own or separate space for writing. The social and economic obstacles extended before them always obstructed the women's creativity. She has attacked that the patriarchal society had always prevented women from realizing their creative possibilities. She asserts that libraries can be locked but freedom of women's mind cannot be locked.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* established the principles of modern feminism. She focuses on the pitiable condition of women in patriarchal society. The main theme of the book is that what is masculine and feminine identity and behavior are largely cultural constructs generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our

civilization. She argues that women are not born feminine but rather conditioned to be feminine by patriarchy, Beauvoir articulated an idea that is now called social construction in her now famous words, "One is not born a woman, one becomes one." (Moi, 92). Beauvoir maintains that women should not be content with investing the meaning of their lives in their husbands and sons, as patriarchy encourages them to do. As Jennifer Hansen observes, "Beauvoir strongly believed that marriage... trapped and stunted women's intellectual growth and freedom" (2). Beauvoir claims that women are trying to escape their own freedom to fulfill their husbands and son's desires. She points out that, unlike other oppressed groups - for example, oppressed classes and oppressed racial and religious minorities - there is no historical record of women's shared culture, shared traditions, or shared oppression. They have been, in this sense, "written out" of history, not considered a topic worth covering.

Furthermore, she observes that women lack a concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit... They have no [collective recorded] past ... no religion of their own... They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men - fathers or husbands - more firmly than they are to other women. (11)

The development of whole feminist literary critical theory can be found in the existence of feminism from the very earlier literary history. At first, females were presented as stereotypical figures. Later on, women writer became conscious and insisted for a literature of their own. Because feminist issues range so widely across cultural, social, political, and psychological categories. Whatever kind of analysis is undertaken, however, the ultimate goal of feminist criticism is to increase our understanding of women's experience, both in the past and present, and promote our appreciation of women's value in the world.

## Chapter 3

### Lakshmi's Enslavement and Suffering

There is a great debate on the issue of representation of the patriarchy raised by feminists in historiography. There are already a dozen of books written in the issue of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the concern of the intellectuals. Females are supposed to be the voiceless people who are marginalized from the mainstream of the society. There are a lot of efforts to give voice to them, writers try to represent them in the text and the true representation of them is very rare. Who speaks for the female? Does s/he give justice to the females in the text? These are the issues which are going to be dealt in this part in relation to the text *Sold* by Patricia McCormick.

McCormick deals about the issues of female in her novel *Sold*. She takes Lakshmi as her protagonist and tries to depict the harsh reality of the females in the rural area of Nepal. The dominant numbers of the characters in the novel are also females. She hovers around the issues related to the female. She talks of the menstruation and the discrimination during this phase. She talks of the rape of a girl after her intoxication. She talks of the fear of a wife from her husband. She herself is a female and her depiction of the marginalized group of the society i.e. female is quite realistic.

From the very first page, we are plunged in to the main character Lakshmi's world of poverty and deprivation-the scarcity of food, a leaking roof, a drunken gambling stepfather who looks at her "the same way he looks at the cucumbers" (7). Yet Lakshmi, despite her circumstances, has hope for her good future. She struggles to continue her education, and wants to be the number one girl in school. She grows cucumbers in the hope of financing a new tin roof for her family hut.

Lakshmi's dreams of being able to have "luxury items" (1) like a tin roof for

their hut, enough food not to be hungry all the time, and nice clothes. She dreams of having enough food to eat and a tin roof instead of the hay-roof but her father is not conscious about it. But in reality they live in very pathetic condition. They have to struggle round the clock to join their hand and mouth. They are deprived of the basic human needs let alone the luxurious life. Lakshmi describes the significance of the tin roof as:

A tin roof means that the family has a father who doesn't gamble away the landlord's money playing cards in the tea shop. A tin roof means the family has a son working at the brick kiln in the city. A tin roof means that when the rains come, the fire stays lit and the baby stays healthy. (7)

They are geographically and economically marginalized. But still the male character, Lakshmi's step father holds very authoritative role within the family but they accept it as taken for granted, "Ama says we are lucky we have a man at all" (14).

Lakshmi wishes to go to the city to work as a maid so that she can send money for home to help her mother and brother. But her mother doesn't want to let her: Ama strokes my cheek, the skin of her work-worn hand as rough as rough as the tongue of newborn goat. "Lakshmi, my child, "she says. "You must stay in school, no matter what your stepfather says" (7). There is a clear hint of antagonistic relation between the daughter and the stepfather as the mother insists her daughter to keep her study forward though her father opposes.

Even in the difficult situation Lakshmi is happy, the innocence life of her in the lap of Himalayas is romantic. Even in their poverty- stricken rural home, Lakshmi finds pleasure in the beauty of the Himalayan Mountains, the sights of Krishna, her betrothed, and the cucumbers she lovingly tends, and then sells at market:

We drew squares in the dusty path between our huts and played the hopping-on-one leg game. We brushed each other's hair a hundred strokes and dreamed of name for sons and daughters [...]and in the fall, when the goatherds came down from the Himalayan meadows, we hid in the elephant grass to catch sights of Krishna, the boy with sleepy cat eyes, the one I am promised to in marriage. (9)

Before Gita left the village, they played together and talked about their future after marriage. Lakshmi had fallen in love with Krishna and wanted to marry with him. But Krishna did not know about it.

Girls are considered as animals in the society where Lakshmi lives, they get values till they are useful if not they are thrown in to the gutter like the squeezed lemon: "A son will always be a son. But a girl is like a goat. Good as long as she gives you milk and butter. But not worth crying over when it's time to make the stew" (14). Girls are taken as the means of fulfilling man's desire and childbearing machine. Women and children have little value. Still in this harsh situation Lakshmi finds pleasure. She enjoys the love of her Ama and baby brother. She had a friend, Gita (recently gone to the city to work as a maid for a wealthy woman) and her goat. There was perhaps some pleasure in her life, and self-respect, until her life changes drastically and completely when she is sold for 800 rupees by her nasty, lazy, gambler stepfather, herself to be a maid in the city.

McCormick's portrayal of the characters and the situation of the remote area of Nepal are pictographic. As Lakshmi is the spoke person of the writer, she describes each and every event that occurred in her life minutely. She takes us in a journey from rural village of Nepal to the center of India. The situations of the females whether they are in village or city are same. They become the victim of poverty, exploitation



and domination. They do not do anything by their wish, they do not act according to their desire, and they are simply the agent to fulfill the needs of the elites. McCormick is giving voice to such character of the society and Lakshmi is a typical example of it.

Lakshmi describes her life with the description of her stepfather:

My stepfather's arm is a withered and useless thing. Broken as a child when there was no money for a doctor, his poor mangled limb pains him during the rainy months and gives him great shame. Most of the men of his age leave home for months at a time, taking job at factories or on work crews far away. But no one, he says, will hire a one-armed man. And so he oils his hair, puts on his vest and a wristwatch that stops telling time long ago, and goes up the hill each day to play cards, talk politics, and drink tea with the old men. (14)

Lakshmi's stepfather hand is broken when he was child but they could not go for the doctor because they were poor and couldn't afford the doctor. Doctor is something which is out of the reach of the poor, so the case is with her stepfather. But this man appears as a feudal ruler in the family, he does not do any work in the family but holds the decisive role. He is the person who rides the motorcycle and wears the city coat and hat which he loses in gambling. He is not aware about the roof which is leaking, he is not touched by the hunger of the family, and he is not concerned about a pair of earring of her wife which is mortgaged in the landlords for few rupees. It shows that the male plays the major role though their contribution to the family is worthless and it is the real case of the Nepalese society. The condition of Lakshmi and her mother is very miserable. Lakshmi is just thirteen but she has become half-mother because she has to care of her small brother and do all the domestic works. Her mother marries to her stepfather not for the sake of her biological need but to get

protection because presence of a male in a patriarchal society is obligatory. She is around thirty but "when she is standing upright to scan the sky for rain clouds, my Ama's back is stooped" (13). These two characters are the example of the females who are deprived from their access to health, food, entertainment. They also seem old before their age. They are confined within the four walls of their house. The world outside of it is alien to them and McCormick is able to depict their situation.

McCormick very clearly describes the calendar of this region according to the work and woes of the women. The months of this region is neither marked by Baisakh, Jestha nor by January, February, rather it is counted by the suffering of the women:

This is the season when the women bury the children who die of fever. In the dry months, the women collect basketfuls of dung and pat them into cakes to harden in the sun, making precious fuel for the dinner fire. They tie rags around their children's eyes to shield them from the dust blowing up from the empty riverbed. This is the season when they bury the children who die from the coughing disease. . . (16)

In the cold months, the women climb high of the mountain's spine to scavenge for firewood. They take food from their bowls, feed it to their children, and silence their own churning stomachs.

McCormick shows the strong knowledge of Nepali words and culture as she represents it in her text. She uses the typical Nepali words like Ama, Muthi, Bajai, Ananta etc. in her writing. She is also aware of the Nepali norms and values which she presents as it is. Lakshmi's mother suggestion to Lakshmi regarding her menstruation can be taken as an example of it:

"You must stay out of sight for seven days," she says. "Even the sun

cannot see you until you have been purified.” She even says, “Don’t come out for any reason, if you must use the privy; cover your face and head with your shawl.” [ . . . ] and never look at growing pumpkin or cucumber when you are bleeding. Otherwise they will rot. (20)

Menstruation is the natural process but rules and regulation area made for the women during this period. For example, one should not touch in growing plants. In this way, women are tied in all step of their life. When she asks Ama, her mother, why women must suffer so, her mother replies, “This has always been our fate... Simply to endure... is to triumph” (22). The females take suffering and domination as taken for granted. They accept it as their fate. This ideology is actually the outcome of the age-old patriarchal assumption which is fostered further by the elite class. And Lakshmi is determined to triumph against all odds.

In this way McCormick depicts the reality from the eyes of Lakshmi without exaggeration. She presents the condition of the females in the male chauvinistic society where the worth of female is equal to animal. The history remains silent to the suffering of this class. It talks of the glorious events only. It talks of the beautiful Himalayas but it does not see the suffering of the women like Lakshmi who are living at the bottom of those Himalayans. They are always and all ways marginalized. The voices of the females are either unheard or made silence in the history. Their existence is made unseen in the history. McCormick by writing this book tries to give voice to those unseen and unheard people of the society. She tries to give voice to the character like Lakshmi and her mother who represent other thousands of women living throughout the world. She tries to create a little space for those hitherto neglected class in pages of history. So the mother holds the greater space in the novel than the father.

The financial position deteriorates to the point where Lakshmi's stepfather decides that she must go to the city and get a job as a maid. She is sad to leave her mother, but hopeful that she can earn money to send home and help her family:

This news is like a tiny earthquake, shaking the very ground beneath my feet. And yet, for Ama, I stand firm. "This is good news, Ama, "I say, my voice full of boldness I did not know I had. "There will be one less mouth to feed here, and I will send my wages home." (54)

Lakshmi shows the condition of her family and wants to see the happiness of her Ama so that, she does not show her pain and tension before Ama.

McCormick further portrays the life of her main character Lakshmi which is full of agonies and pains. The words simply fail to describe the pathetic life of her in the brothels. Lakshmi is now sold to an unknown lady in 800 rupees, half is paid now and other half is supposed to be paid in future. Her own father sells her to the hand of butcher; she is bartered in exchange for a hat, a carton of cigarettes, a bag of sweets and a bottle of rice wine. We do not see the agency of Lakshmi till this point. She bears everything that falls on her. But she makes her own decision when she buys something to her mother and feels proud:

While he is busy haggling with Bajai Sita over a watch that has caught his eye, I place two things in the basket: a sweater for Ama and a coat for the baby. It is a rich and happy day for our family, an 800-rupee day, a festive and auspicious day, and so I add one more thing for Ama: a costly treat that only the headman's wife can afford- a bottle of Coca-Cola, the sweet drink that people say is like having tiny fireworks in your mouth. My stepfather scowls, but he doesn't say anything. On any other day, he wouldn't tolerate such defiance,

especially from mere a girl. But today I'm no mere girl. (61)

Lakshmi feels proud to this small decision she made. She doesn't know that this proud of her simply turn in to the misery. A child in the hope of restoring happiness in the family and in the hope of getting tin roof for her house makes a journey toward uncertainty. "Eyes forward, no sense looking back" (62) says Lakshmi's new Auntie as the journey to the city begins. "My bundle is light, my burden is heavy" (66), thinks the young girl as she passes through other villages. Lakshmi's journey continues, she is alone with her memories, in her innocence, thinking of what her family can buy with the money from her "sale". This is the condition of the women in Nepal and especially in third world countries. Lakshmi describes this discrimination when she passes across the villages:

Auntie and I have been walking for two days and a half. We have passed through seven villages, each one invisible to the other because of the mountain between them, but each one the same, with women pounding laundry on rocks at the village fountains and men sitting cross-legged in the tea shops. (67)

As Lakshmi journeys on to Happiness House, her new home with expect of good future. However, home and happiness are far from the truth. Mumtaz, a vile woman, a madam begins a cruel awakening for Lakshmi in to the debasing life of prostitution. Refusing to co-operate, Lakshmi is punished. Her hair is cut off, the shorn head now of a disgraced woman, and she is locked alone in a dingy, putrid room for five days without food or water, belted by Mumtaz-the inhumanity of submission.

Beside Lakshmi, there are other girls who are in the same condition as that of Lakshmi. Monica is one of them. She is beaten up by her own father when she tries to return to her village, believing she has paid off her debts. For Pushpa, the sick and

dying widow, mother of two young children, Harish and Jeena, living has no worth if she had not the kids. There is also the alcohol dependent Shilpa, spy for the monster, Mumtaz, and Shahanna, who offers Lakshmi help and advice. Harish the son of Pushpa who teaches Lakshmi English and gives her a shiny new yellow pencil as a gift, and the street tea boy who gives her tea and Coca Cola for free are the person who are supposed to be heralders of freedom to Lakshmi but they disappear suddenly.

Hot chilies grounded and rubbed in to the genitals for punishment, a child whose hand or foot is cut off, maimed for life then sold by Mumtaz to a beggar woman to fetch a few extra rupees for the woman surviving on the street are some of the heart-rending events of the novel. As the story progresses, the realization slowly dawns on us that it is not Lakshmi's goals and dreams, but her very survival which is at stake. We begin to realize that as Lakshmi becomes woman.

The life in the brothel is very grueling and full of agonies. The girls are compelled to live a hellish life. In the author's note McCormick writes, each year, nearly 12,000 Nepali girls are sold by their families, intentionally or unwittingly, into a life of sexual slavery in the brothels of India. Worldwide, the US State Department estimates that nearly half a million children are trafficked into the sex trade annually. A large number of girls from the rural village of Nepal are sold each day. They are uneducated and suffered from the poverty; the families also will not have any option except to sell their sons and daughters. Lakshmi too becomes the victim of the poverty and sold into the brothels. When she becomes aware of her situation that she is sold by her father to Auntie and Uncle Husband and finally to Mumtaz and her price also exceeds from 800 to 10,000 rupees, she weeps bitterly never to weep again. In such situation, she lives with remembrance of her past which was impossible to regain. She describes the Happiness House when she is enclosed in a cave like dark

room:

There are posters of gods and movie stars on the walls.

An electronic sun hanging from the middle of the ceiling.

A rope bed.

A palm frond machine that stirs the air.

And iron bars on the windows.

A corner of the room is curtained off with a length of cloth from an old sari. On the floor, a plastic bucket sits next to a hole in the floor. I can tell from the stink that this is privy.

I sit on the bed and try to picture Tali's little pink nose.

The mists dancing around the swallow-tailed peak.

The tawny grain fields.

Ama's crow-black hair.

Krishna's sleepy cat eyes. (101)

In the brothel, there was the mixture of all things- gods and movie stars, living rooms and the toilets. These things receive equal importance for them. At this time, she remembers the beautiful nose of her little goat, black hair of her mother and the beautiful eyes of Krishna. But when she becomes conscious of her present situation, things appear reversely. Along with Lakshmi there are other girls who are living the very pathetic life. They are brought from remote parts of Nepal and India to the brothels of Calcutta. These girls are neglected by the society. They are under-represented, under-taught, non-canonical and the subordinated group who are always, directly or indirectly, prejudiced by ideologies of dominant class. Whether it is Nepal or India the situation of the women is quite similar. McCormick presents rueful lives of women living in brothel, an outcaste settlement. Lakshmi's cry in the brothel for

freedom is also stifled. She tries to revolt for the emancipation, but the way females revolts are silenced her voice is also made silent:

Then Mumtaz flies at me. She grabs me by the hair and drags me across the room. She flings me onto the bed next to the old man. And then he is on top of me, holding me down with the strength of ten men. He kisses me with lips that are slack and wet and taste of onions. His teeth dig into my lower lip. Underneath the weight of him, I cannot see or move or breathe. He fumbles with his pants, forces my legs apart, and I can feel him pushing himself between my thighs. I gasp for air and kick and squirm. He thrusts his tongue in my mouth. And I bite down with all my might. He cries out "Aghh" and I am running. (109)

It is the first attempt to seduce upon Lakshmi. She manages Lakshmi manages to escape from the old man and runs away. But she soon is captured by Mumtaz and given drugs of intoxication. She now falls in to the grip of a man, "I try to push him away, but my arm, stone-heavy from the lassi, doesn't move" (126). Lakshmi's predicament is unbearable, how can she save enough money to escape when each day is a robbery? But the horrors of her life as a prostitute push Lakshmi to her limits: "I cannot tell which of the things they do to me are real, and which are nightmares. I decide to think that it is all a nightmare. Because if what is happening is real, it is unbearable" (130).

McCormick's depiction of the reality as Lakshmi faces in the village of Nepal is realistic. The representation of the female is justifiable and she tries to give voice to those inarticulate people. But as Lakshmi crosses the territory of Nepal and reaches India with a man whom she is told to call Uncle Husband, McCormick becomes ambivalent. She Americanizes everything and presents America as the liberating



force. This white American psyche is inherent in her subconscious mind which gets manifested in the description of the incidents that Lakshmi and her friends face in the so-called Happiness House.

In the Happiness House the girls are allowed to see the TV programs. This is the only way of entertainment to them. But the program they watch is an American show- *The Bold and Beautiful*, not an Indian or Nepali show. All the girls in the Happiness House are illiterate. They cannot read and write but the program they watch is an American show. This shows how the writer westernizes the things:

When we get to the TV room, the frowning girl is pushing the button. The box comes to life, just like before. Strange words appear on the glass, and loud, happy music plays. The girls cheer. "It's *The Bold and the Beautiful*," says Shahanna. "It's from America. It's our favorite show." (142)

This show is purely an American show. The illiterate girls from the remote area of Nepal and India are said of being crazy of this program. This is the self-imposition of the writer; she unnecessarily exaggerates the things. Harish, son of Pushpa reads in a school run by an American lady. He reads American books and teaches American words to Lakshmi like "*Big Bird, Elmo, icecream, soccer*" (180). His view toward America is very positive:

Now Harish is teaching me American words from a new storybook. The book was a present from a white woman who runs a special singing-and-playing school where Harish goes on Saturdays. He says the American lady is kind. He says Anita is wrong about the Americans, that they do not shame the children of the brothels. He says this is a story Mumtaz has told her to keep her from running away.

(180)

Besides, McCormick not only leaves Lakshmi in the midst of uncertainty but there are other characters also whose future is left in the uncertainty. Monica is one of the examples of it. She somehow manages to get freedom to get back to her family. But she is unwelcomed by the family. Monica believes “they will thank us and honor us when we go home” (187) but this expectation simply turned reverse when she went back to her home. Monica describes the event as:

“Well,” she says with strange cheer. “My father recovered from his operation.” Her smile is wide, too wide. And I am afraid of her angry happiness. “He needs a cane,” she says. “But he is still as strong as a goat.” I nod slowly, unsure what to say. “Look,” she says. She shrugs off her shawl, revealing arms and shoulders covered in angry purple bruises. “He did this with his cane.” (199)

Then Monica is chased away from her family and village. McCormick takes this character back to the brothel instead of establishing her into her family and community. Later, she suffers from HIV AIDS and is thrown into the street by the owner of the brothel, Mumtaz. When she wished to go to the outside world she was compelled to live within the brothel and now she wants to stay in the brothel but she is thrown outside. She gets the freedom to speak when her tongue is snatched. And she gets freedom to walk once her legs are cut. This is not only the case of Monica, Lakshmi, and Pushpa but all the females living across the world in all the time. Their voices are made silent; they are misrepresented in the text. Pushpa, mother of two kids Harish and Jeena is another example of it whose fate is left unanswered. She is sick from a long time. But she too is thrown into the gutter like the squeezed lemon:

Then Harish comes home from school, flushed and disheveled from his

game of make-believe soccer. He beams at his mother, delighted to see her out of bed, then stops as her misery. Neither one says a word.

Harish simply pulls his little tin trunk out from the bed, and the two of them begin packing their things. (203)

Harish is just eight years old and her sister has just started to walk. Pushpa is sick because of her frequent sexual exploitation. In this situation, Mumtaz asks them to leave the house. She is so cruel that she asks for the small daughter if they want to remain there. The girl is just landed in the world and Mumtaz weaves the dream of her virginity sale. Now, where does she go with her two children? How does she exist in this world? McCormick remains silent to her future too.

While Lakshmi is in the Happiness House, there comes an American as a guest who is said of being a worker in an institution against girls trafficking. Lakshmi had never seen the white people, what she had heard was that the American people are bad. She is amazed by his sight. She does not believe in the words of Anita that these people are bad and treacherous. Lakshmi describes him, "He is too friendly, this pink American man. He grips my hand in greeting, a strange and uncouth gesture that makes me pull back in alarm. He says hello in my language. This pink man is the first man here to ask my name, but I don't give it to him" (209). Lakshmi describes the kindness of American man who asks her name for the first time brothel.

Similarly, Shahanna is taken by the police when she is caught by the police during the raid. What happens to her future after her release from the police?

McCormick doesn't talk about it. There is only the prediction made by her friends:

"They probably stripped her naked and left her in the gutter," she says.

"They probably beat her and left her for dead," she said. I cannot stand to hear them talk about my poor, good friend, and so I rise and leave

the table. The last thing I hear is one of them saying that we'll never know the truth. (223)

In brothel, girls are taught the negative concept about Americans and police. So, when Shahanna was taken by police Anita and Shilpa make such prediction about her.

Besides, there are other characters as well whose future is left in the complete darkness without any hope of life. Shilpa is turned drunkard. She is made addiction of drinking alcohol. She drinks to forget her past. She is traumatized by her frequent exploitation, and she too is left to die untimely. Anita is paralyzed because of severe beating when she tried to escape from the brothel. She is still in the service of prostitution. All her feelings and emotions are buried in to the coffin before she dies. She is now only the living corpse. How long does she remain in this hellish condition? Kumari, another girl, she is punished by chilly smeared in her private organ. What happens to her?

One afternoon an American came in her room as her customer but he did not show any bad action. He simply asked her will to leave the hellish place. Firstly, she did not believe him. Later he made her believe in him by showing different beautiful pictures of shelter and other girls. After some days that American came with police. He called out her but Lakshmi is tightly clutched by her friend Anita. And she begged her not to go. They believed that Americans are liars. However, Lakshmi had strong will to leave that place. So, she strongly ran down the steps. She saw Mumtaz whose arms pinned behind her back by two policemen. Mumtaz lunged in Lakshmi's direction and spat. But the policemen held her back:

I see my American. There are other men with him, Indian men, and the American lady from the picture.

"My name is Lakshmi," I say.

"I am from Nepal."

"I am fourteen years old." (269)

Lakshmi frees herself as well as her friends from there. the so-called liberation of Lakshmi from the brothel is done by the American. The American appears as the rescuer of her. He appears as the god who gives Lakshmi emancipation. But she does not talk about what happens to Lakshmi after that liberation (?). What does Lakshmi do now? Where does she go? How does she exist in the unknown world outside? McCormick remains silent about it. Similarly, McCormick does not spend a word to describe the effort of other Nepali and Indian people who, keeping their life in risk, gets into the brothel to rescue the girls. McCormick remains silent to the contribution of them. It means McCormick presents that women from developed countries are more conscious about the females right than the third world countries.

## Chapter 4

### Lakshmi's Struggle and Liberation

The basis of McCormick's *Sold* is her own research on the Nepali girls' trafficking and selling to foreign countries for sexual slavery. Therefore, it shows the exploitation upon females from the representation of a poverty stricken Nepali girl Lakshmi. She is sold by her own father to Bimala, who is from city and unknown for Lakshmi. She is taken as a material to fulfill the needs of family. Bimala sells her to a man. This man sells her to brothel. In this way, Lakshmi is sold three times. In the brothel, she is extremely exploited both physically and mentally from the rulers of Happiness House and their customers.

The characters in the novel are from low social strata who suffer a lot due to the financial crisis in their families. As well as they are dominated from the patriarchal social framework. While Lakshmi is in her house, she is discriminated and suppressed by her father and society. She is not allowed to work as per her wishes, and her study is not counted more important. In her society females are taken as animals not more than that. In another side, her condition is unbearable in Happiness House. It means females are not secure inside and outside the country.

McCormick's motif of writing *Sold* is to expose the pathetic situation of Nepali uneducated poor girls who are compelled to leave their villages in search of jobs. But unfortunately or without their expectation, they are sold in prostitution houses and forced to live pathetic hell bound life. This is the cause of unfair patriarchal practices from which females want to escape in search of better and free life. In this novel, Lakshmi also wants to earn money to escape from poverty and again tried to escape from brothel to get freedom. But firstly, she is trapped by girls' traffickers and secondly, she is helped by an American where her future is not clear and certain.

Although Lakshmi becomes able to get out from there which she wants heartily. The research has found that the issue of the representation of females in literature is very critical. In this novel, McCormick gives voice to the male dominated poor females of Nepal and the girls who are sexually exploited by questioning Nepalese unfair patriarchal society through the mouth of her bold protagonist Lakshmi who bravely went against such social malpractices. Therefore, we can study this novel from feminism perspective.

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