

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Postmodern Metafiction: A Study of McCormick's *Sold*

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Abstract

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* is a story of Lakshmi, a poor girl from rural Nepal, in the form of a series of vignettes weaved on the basis of her own research on Nepali girls trafficking and selling of girls to brothels in India for sexual slavery. Poverty-stricken Nepali girl Lakshmi is sold to the brothel in Calcutta where she suffered a lot due to the intolerable extreme sexual exploitation of customers in the brothel. McCormick has weaved the story of Lakshmi on the basis of her own research in the form of a number of vignettes in order to show Lakshmi's fragmented life story. Therefore, it is a blending of fact and fiction and hence a metafiction. *Sold* has postmodern metafictional tenets: self-reflexivity and circularity of narrative, intertextuality and indisciplinary of text, interaction between fact and fiction, and indeterminacy of meaning and open-endedness to the story. McCormick has written *Sold* in the form of postmodern metafiction in order to show the fragmented life story of Lakshmi due to patriarchal, poverty-stricken, and utilitarian society of rural Nepal as well as document the pathetic story of sexual violation of Nepali poor innocent girls and to give voice to the suffered ones who are sold in brothels of foreign countries for sex workers. In this way, McCormick's *Sold* is a postmodern metafiction.

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Chapter I. General Introduction to McCormick's *Sold*

Patricia McCormick is an American novelist and *Sold* is her most widely discussed and National Book Award Finalist novel of 2006. *Sold* is a story of Lakshmi, a poor thirteen-year-old girl from Nepal, who is sold into sexual slavery in India. McCormick weaves Lakshmi's story in a series of vignettes on the basis of her own research on Nepalese girls trafficking in brothel in India. Lakshmi lives with her family in a small village hut in the mountains of Nepal. Her family is extremely poverty-stricken, but her life is full of simple pleasures, like raising her black and white speckled goat, and having her mother brush her hair by the light of an oil lamp. In the 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 introduces her to a glamorous stranger who tells her that she would find her a job as a maid working for a wealthy woman in the city. 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. But she soon learns the unthinkable truth: she has been sold into brothel for prostitution in Calcutta.

An old woman named Mumtaz rules the brothel in Calcutta with cruelty and cunning. She tells Lakshmi that she is trapped there until she can pay off her family's debt. But she cheats Lakshmi of her meager earnings so that she never leaves by earning her required amount.

Lakshmi's life, in brothel, becomes a nightmare from which she cannot escape. Still, she lives by her mother's words- 'simply to endure is to triumph'- and gradually, she befriends with the other girls in the brothel that enables her to survive

in such a terrifying hell bound new world. Then the day comes when she must chance to reclaim her life.

Written in spare and evocative vignettes, this powerful novel renders a world that is as unimaginable as it is real, and a girl who not only survives but triumphs. The story ends as Lakshmi is writing for a kind-hearted American who promises her to rescue her from the hell-hole. In the denouement, Mumtaz is already nabbed by the police but Lakshmi's fate is left ambiguous. The novel poses a question on its beautiful yellow cover. Can she ever be free? The final answer is not definite but the probable answer, not final, to the question is 'no' because the cross-border trafficking of girls still goes on unabated.

The characters in the novel are from low social class and low economic status that lived poverty-stricken life and suffered a lot due to the financial crisis in their families. Lakshmi's mother, Ama, is described as a typical village wife. She bears her family's struggles by being the only working adult in their household, but she still manages to be beautiful at least in her daughter's eyes. Lakshmi said that her Ama with her crow-black hair braided- her cinnamon skin and her ears hung with the joyful noise of tinkling gold is more lovely.

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. Similarly, Lakshmi describes Auntie Bimala as a modern woman who takes Lakshmi on a long journey into the city where the naïve farm girl thinks she is going to work as a maid. Uncle Husband is described as a 'slapping man', who takes Lakshmi across the border to the place where she is to work. While on their journey, he orders her to

call him husband, probably because he did not want to attract any negative attention of security personnel towards them.

Mumtaz, the owner of the Happiness House, is portrayed as a cruel and selfish woman. She is known for her ruthless punishment such as locking girls up for weeks. In the brothel, Lakshmi meets many girls like her and befriends them. She describes Shahanna as her first friend at the Happiness 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 woman', Shilpa is an 'aging bird girl', Anita is a 'half frowning girl' and she is Mumtaz's spy. Among them, Monica is described as one of the girls of highest earning prostitute in the Happiness House.

In the novel, the American, an undercover cop comes to Lakshmi as a customer but when they came to her room, he asked Lakshmi if she wanted to leave the place. He ends up coming later with American police to save Lakshmi.

To write *Sold* on the basis of research, Patricia McCormick travelled to India and Nepal where she interviewed people who had experienced the system of sexual slavery, the women of Calcutta's red-light district and girls who have been rescued from the sex trade in the sexual slavery houses. The system has native girls believing they are going to get jobs when they really end up in brothels with no way to escape from the confinement.

Thus, the novel is the blending of facts and fiction. The story of the fiction is narrated by Lakshmi, protagonist, with the reflection of her family background, detailed information regarding other characters, and her own suffering in the brothel in first person narrative perspective. The novel portrays existential crisis, absurdity of life and sense of alienation of the protagonist with the open-ended story to Lakshmi. The other minor characters in the novel are also from low social class. The stream of

consciousness technique is used to disclose the continuous overflow of mental events, of suffering and of the characters.

McCormick's *Sold* is a story of a Nepali girl, from a remote village, presented in the chapter style of a series of vignettes. The protagonist Lakshmi is from a low social class extremely suffering from acute poverty in her family. She is in search of work in the city to earn her livelihood as well as to solve financial crisis of her family. Thus, she goes to city with her stepfather in search of job but to her unexpectation she finds herself in Indian brothel after she is sold there to Mumtaz, owner of the brothel, by her stepfather. She suffers a lot in the Indian brothel due to the Mamtaz's torturous activities and extreme sexual exploitation by the customers of different nature in the brothel. Lakshmi, confined in the brothel, feels sense of alienation, absurdity of life, and frustration to her own life even in the crowd of many girls inside the brothel. McCormick has structured the novel in the pattern of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* in a series of vignettes. The Cisneros' protagonist Esperenza is similar to McCormick's Lakshmi. But unlike Esperenza's, Lakshmi's world is like the hell in the brothel full of suffering, abject poverty, frustration, and hardships. The novel has openendedness since there is no final resolution to the story of Lakshmi. After reading the whole story in the fiction, the researcher comes up with the question why McCormick weaves the story of Lakshmi in a series of various vignettes with the blending of both fact and fiction leaving open-ended story of Lakshmi.

McCormick weaves the story of Nepali girl Lakshmi in the form of a series of vignettes on the basis of her own research on Nepali girls trafficking to show the fragmented life of Lakshmi and to give voice to the grief-stricken terrified Nepali young girls who are sold to and sexually exploited in brothels in foreign country.

The objective of the study is to explore Lakshmi's fragmented hell bound life full of sufferings in the brothel in Calcutta. The research aims at discovering sense of alienation, frustration, and suffering of the girls who are sold in Indian brothels and their extreme sexual violation and exploitation in the brothels.

Regarding *Sold*, after its publication in 2006, various critics have posited their critical responses. In this connection Greta Nelson, focusing on the nature of the story, posits:

In telling Lakshmi's story, McCormick 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 horror story of all Nepali and Indian economically backwarded women who are sold in Indian prostitution houses for sexual slavery told through the self-conscious narrator Lakshmi. The protagonist's name Lakshmi, ironically, is the same as that of the goddess of property and prosperity. It blurs the hierarchy between the god and the man and is the prominent feature of postmodern fiction.

Similarly, 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 only thing common in these novels is the method of story telling. Unlike

Esperanza's, Lakshmi's world is that of deprivation, abject poverty and hardships. (Para. 4)

The pattern of *Sold* is similar to that of *The House of Mango Street* and protagonist Esperanza, to some extent, is similar to Lakshmi. Both novels are patterned in a series of various vignettes to tell the fragmented stories of the protagonists. This is the nature of the postmodern fiction. He also posits, "[S]ome of the pieces are as short as 3-4 lines, they can be read like poetry. There are white spaces here and there in the book. The author has remarked that the empty spaces are meant to play with the readers' imagination" (Para. 6). Such nature of the text demands readers' participation in filling the remaining matters of the text and their involvement in meaning making process. The poetic lines in the text show the interdisciplinarity nature of the fiction in terms of genres.

Likewise, focusing on the pattern of the novel, Gallo Don says, "[I]n this novel told in brief vignettes that read like free verse, thirteen year 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.

In the same manner, indicating 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 as the

features of postmodern fiction. The present researcher explores these features in detail in the fiction.

Similarly, 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 the Lakshmi's background against which her story is woven.

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

Likewise, Zubon Book Reviews, regarding the fiction, tells, "[I]t is told in mostly one-to two page vignettes, which sometimes (often?) Slip into free verse. The doses of Lakshmi's suffering are small, often poignant" (7). These lines also show fragmented life of the protagonist as the feature and pattern of the postmodern fiction.

Similarly, showing the similar nature of content of *Sold* and other fictions by various authors, Donna Bickford says:

In a longer version, I will consider *Becoming Abigail* by Chris Albani, *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, *The Girl Who Played with Fire* by Stieg Larson, and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. Today I want to look at *Vita Nuova*, a detective novel by Magdalen Nabbard *Lying Together: My Russian Affair*, a memoir by Jennifer Beth Cohen. Both of these texts deal with international sex trafficking. (3)

The above lines show the intertextual nature of the fiction because the subject matter of *Sold* is based on other text and hence it is similar to that of other fictions.

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

Sold, Lakshmi's story, is told in short vignettes, 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 fiction is from low social status full of suffering and hardships. The story of the protagonist has to do with bleak reality of her life in the brothel. The view of Beaman "wanting more of the story- more details" shows the indeterminacy of the fiction. It means that readers are left to understand more events in the story which are not mentioned in the fiction. This is the postmodern feature of the fiction.

Going through the views of various critics regarding the fiction, the present researcher realizes the reading the fiction from postmodern perspective to explore its postmodern features such as self-reflexivity, intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, indeterminacy, circular narrative, and open-endedness in the fiction.

The sole basis for this research is textual analysis of McCormick's *Sold* from the perspectives of Linda Hutcheon's 'postmodern historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon contends, "[I]n postmodern fiction, self-reflexivity cannot be separated from the notion of difference because postmodern fiction/autobiography or biography links the post modern metafictional concern of narration and language directly" (*Politics* 70). The research also exploits Brian McHales' concept of 'postmodern

fiction' and Joe Morans' concept of 'interdisciplinarity'. The present research explores features of postmodern metafiction such as self-reflexivity, intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, indeterminacy and open-endedness in the fiction *Sold* by the implication of the concept of 'postmodern historiographic metafiction' in the text. It also explores biographical details of Lakshmi in order to find out McCormick's motif behind writing the fiction on the basis of her own research on Nepalese girls trafficking.

The implication of Hutcheon's 'postmodern historiographic metafiction' in *Sold* may be significant in this postmodern world to explore hidden aspects of any representations since the politics of postmodern metafiction is to record factual happenings that occurred in the course of time. It may also contribute to challenge originality of text and authenticity of author as well as to find out the interdependence of the present texts on the texts written in the past. In the present context of Nepal, this study is significant because each year nearly 12,000 Nepali girls are sold to Indian brothels by their families and traffickers for sex slavery due to extreme poverty and unemployment. To stop this tendency of trafficking of girls, it is necessary to generate awareness in uneducated and economically backward Nepali young girls. This study is also significant to explore the pathetic situation of sexually exploited Nepali girls in Indian prostitution houses and generate awareness against their probable sexual victimization.

Postmodernism is a radical revolutionary departure from modernism as well as continuation of it. Therefore, postmodernism is the condition of paradox which shows two unusual qualities at the same time. In this regards, Brian McHale posits, "[A]nd even more pungently, the term postmodernist [. . .] inevitably calls to mind a band of vainglorious contemporary artists following the circus elephant of Modernism with

snow shovels” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 3). Postmodernism is riddled with contradiction continued with paradox and it advocates a radical critique of representation and philosophy. Regarding postmodern, Jean Francois Lyotard mentions that it is the dissolution of grandnarratives. In this connection, he examines the status of science, technology, knowledge and arts and posits, “[P]ostmodern [is] incredulity towards metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the science: but that progress in turn presupposes it” (Introduction xxiv). Lyotard’s this view regarding postmodernism shows that the faith of an individual towards grandnarratives has been lost and such grandnarratives no longer function well to enrich the life of contemporary people in society due to massive development and progress of science in modern age.

Postmodern fiction demands its readers’ attention in reading it with challenges: instead of enjoying it passively, they have to delve into it to understand and get its meaning, to question their own responses, and to examine their views about what fiction is. It has a self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text’s own status as constructed, an implicit/explicit critique of realist approaches to representation and narration of a fictional world. Reading a postmodern fiction is a tendency to draw reader’s attention to his/her own process of interpretation as s/he reads it.

Postmodernist fiction does not present a stable, ordered and fixed world behind the “stream of consciousness”, rather it is a flux of discourse in which fragments and incompatible realities flicker into existence and overwhelmed by the competing reality of language. In this regard, Brian McHale contends:

Postmodernist fictions [. . .] are fictions about the order of things, discourses which reflect upon the worlds of discourse. As such, they participated in that very general tendency in the intellectual life of our

time toward viewing reality as constructed in and through our language discourses and semiotic systems. (*Postmodernist Fiction* 164)

According to McHale, postmodern fiction portrays the reality as fabricated with the help of discourses and semiotic systems. Thus, it helps the readers to posit questions regarding such constructed reality and truth with the help of language and discourse.

In the past, art and history were taken as two separate genres. Aristotle contends that a poet could speak of what might happen in future, whereas a historian could speak what has happened in the past. This tendency obviously shows the clear cut demarcation between history and fiction in the past. But for Linda Hutcheon, it is not always an accepted and a definite rule. She posits, “[H]istory writing was seen to have no such conventional restrains of probability or possibility” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 106). She further contends:

The postmodern novel has done the same, and the reverse. It is part of postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/ the past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of dichotomy, yet it is more then willing to exploit both. (*Poetics* 106)

Above lines obviously show that postmodern metafiction first breaks the line of demarcation between the genres--fact and fiction--and then employs both of them together. Hence, both the fact and fiction are directly concerned to postmodern metafiction. It is a fundamental feature of postmodern fiction and therefore relevant to ‘poetics of postmodernism’.

Chapter II. McCormic's *Sold* as a Postmodern Metafiction

Self-reflexivity and Circularity of Narrative in *Sold*

Self-reflexivity is considered as one of the eminent tenets of postmodern metafiction that refers to the reflection of the nature and story of the fiction by itself. Narrative self-reflexivity refers to the reflection of the work through the narration of the self-conscious narrator who is self-conscious about his/her role, status, other characters, and story of the fiction. In this sense, it is the foregrounding of writing about the writing or fictionality about the fiction through the conscious narration in postmodern metafiction. In other words, it is the exploration of nature and status of any postmodern metafictional art by itself through self-consciously narrative technique of the self-conscious narrator.

McCormick's *Sold* reflects the facts and fictions regarding the fabricarion of the fiction and it helps to discard the willful suspension of disbelief. It means that the fiction explores its own status and nature as a fiction based on author's own research on Nepali girls trafficking in brothels in India.

In postmodern metafiction, the author exploits self-conscious narrator to reflect the nature of work by itself and to raise issue of intertextuality, documentation and traces of events. In this regard Linda Hutcheon contends that some postmodern novels exploit self-reflexivity to "raise the issue of how the intertext of history, its documents or its traces, get incorporated into such a fictional context, while somehow also retaining their historical documentary value" (*Politics* 97-8). In *Sold* Lakshmi, protagonist and narrator, self-reflexively narrates herself as the sources of the story in the fiction as:

I wipe the hard mud floor with a rag soaked in dung water and explain:

"This will keep our hut cool and free from evil spirits." I show her I

lash a water jug to the basket on my back, not spilling a drop on the steep climb up from the village spring. And when I brush my teeth with a twig from the neem tree, tali copies me, nibbling her twig as solemn as a monk. (5)

From the above lines, the childhood activities of Lakshmi are reflected through her narration. Her childhood experience and activities are the basis of weaving the story of the fiction. In the fiction, the protagonist Lakshmi is a self-conscious narrator through whom the sources of the story in *Sold* are reflected.

Similarly, Lakshmi self-consciously narrates her and her mother's story of hardships as: "In the morning, Ama bends down to stir the kitchen fire and to plait my hair before I go to school. All day, as she trudges up and down the mountains, a heavy basket braced on her back and held fast by a rope around her brow, she is bent under the weight of her burden" (7). This extract shows Lakshmi's self-conscious as well as self-awareness act of narration from which we come to know the familial background of her mother in the story of the fiction.

In postmodern metafiction, self-conscious narrator connects the story of character(s) with the factual background of the fiction. In this regard Hutcheon says, "[I]n postmodern fiction, self-reflexivity cannot be separated from the notion of difference because postmodern fiction/autobiography or biography links the postmodern metafictional concerns of narration and language directly" (*Politics* 70). In *Sold*, Lakshmi describes other characters: his stepfather, Gita's uncle and other characters in the novel. She says, "[H]e asks for my stepfather [. . .] spends him on his way. Then comes Gita's uncle. He looks at our paddy, our hut, then at the baby, and says he will take half of it what we owe. The headman's wife is next" (36). In these lines, Lakshmi not only introduces her stepfather and Gita's uncle but also connects

her poor family's relation with them. It is the self-reflective nature of the fiction through the self-conscious narrator Lakshmi.

In postmodern metafiction, self-conscious narrator narrates the construction of character in the fiction. In *Sold*, Lakshmi, regarding the construction of character of different nature, says, "[T]here are old, young, dirty, clean, tall, short, dark, light, bearded, smooth, fat, thin" (146). From these lines, we come to know that fiction writer can create infinite of possible characters with a thousand possible answers.

In postmodern metafiction, self-conscious narrator sometimes goes to describe himself/herself. In *Sold*, Lakshmi describes herself as: "I am too shy to tell her I won't run off, too timid to tell her how proud and nervous and excited I am to be the first person in my family to leave the mountain" (57). Regarding her personal life she further ponders on herself as:

I try to remember each hut, each village. I try to memorize each twist in the path so I can find my way home at festival time next year. But when I close my eyes, each hut, each village, each twist in the road looks the same. And when I open my eyes and look behind us, the poinsettias stir in the wind, as if touched my fire. (58)

In the above lines, Lakshmi describes herself and her experience of her village in a new place. She seems recollecting her previous experience in her mountain and therefore as a self-conscious narrator she ponders on her personal life.

Self-conscious narrator in postmodern metafiction carefully narrates the event(s) as well as character(s) in the story. In *Sold*, Lakshmi narrates the events in the fiction by being very much careful about her action. She says, "I stare, too, at all the things I've never seen before. A man pulling a wild boar on a rope. A herd of yak hauling sacks of salt" (58). In these lines, Lakshmi is very much careful about the

events in the story. She knows well about life style in the mountainous region. Therefore, while constructing the story, she cares a lot about every event without being careless about her own life experience.

In the same manner, self-conscious narrator has double consciousness towards the events in the fiction as well as the narration itself. In this regards, Hutcheon puts, “[T]he text’s self-reflexivity points in two direction at once, towards the events being represented in the narrative and towards the act of narration itself. This is precisely the same doubleness that characterizes any historical narratives” (*Poetics* 72). In *Sold*, Lakshmi’s double consciousness is seen as she narrates herself and the events in the story as:

I study the scene in front of the bus the way I studied my letters in school. Gradually I begin to make out a kind of order in all the disorderliness, a pattern to it all. It is like a river, where the currents of buses and trucks and people and animals flow into and around each other. If you look hard enough, chaos turns into order the way letters turn into words. (68)

Above lines indicate that self-conscious narrator; Lakshmi in the fiction is equally aware of the events in the story as well as her act of narration.

Postmodern metafiction exploits overtly controlling narrator as well as multiple points of views and both of them play with the entire notion of subjectivity. In *Sold*, through the narration of self-conscious narrator, Lakshmi, we come to know the construction of the story in the novel with multiple points of views and subjectivity of Lakshmi and her other friends as she narrates:

I slip into a dream, and Gita and I are playing the hopping, one-one-leg in the dirt path between our huts. She bents, scoops a stone up from

one of the squares we've drawn with a stick, then she skips away, her long, black braid swinging side to side, in time with her singsong chant. (13)

The subjectivity of Lakshmi is entangled with the events and subjectivity of other characters. Therefore, it is clear that the issues raised in the fiction are either subjective or product of ideology not all in all exact representation. Hence, we can say that postmodern metafiction helps to put all those ideas under erasure.

In *Sold*, Lakshmi, narrator exploited by McCormick, is double conscious and overtly controlling while narrating the story. The nature and sources of the fiction reflect through her narration and she also narrates the characters in the fiction. Through her narration we come to know the interaction between and among the characters in the fiction. Therefore, Lakshmi is the self-conscious and self controlled narrator in *Sold*.

Postmodern metafiction is the fiction about fictionality that openly comments on its fictional status and discusses the nature of fiction. In this regard, Simon Malpas says, "[T]his is a self-conscious model of writing, a writing that 'meta-fictionally' comments on and investigates its own status as fiction as well as questioning our ideas of the relationship between fiction, reality and truth" (*The Postmodern* 26). This extract implies that metafiction involves a significant degree of self-consciousness about itself as fiction and apologetic address to the reader. It makes joke of its own digressive form and interrupts the narrative to explain narrator's procedures, and offers the readers alternative endings. Postmodern metafiction questions the relationship between fact and fiction self-consciously by drawing attention of the readers upon to the text. Thus, postmodern metafiction is an attempt to liberate the art from the hierarchy of fact and fiction.

Postmodern metafiction openly and self-consciously comments on the fictionality and fictional status of the work. In *Sold* the narrator Lakshmi self-consciously and openly comments on its fictional subject matter. Describing the subject matter in the fiction of the novel, she says:

In the meantime, I am writing in my notebook about the strange things I have seen so far: all the houses here have glass suns like the one in Gita's hut. And the men carry devices that thrill like birds and cause them to shout Hello! Hello! And everywhere I look; there are pictures of beautiful, full-hipped women and handsome men with glossy hair. I am not sure, but I think they must be movie stars. (81)

In the above lines, Lakshmi mentions the sources of the story. According to her, the story is based on her description of strange things she has observed in the houses and on their walls.

Postmodern metafiction questions the reference and auto-representation. In this regard, Hutcheon says, “[I]t problematizes the activity of reference by refusing either to bracket or to reveal in it [. . .] it says that there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference” (*Poetics* 119). In *Sold*, McCormick questions auto-representation and reference, emphasizes self-reference and also advocates variable reality denying the final truth. McCormick, through her narrator Lakshmi, says, “I don't know why I am in this strange house or where Auntie Bimala is. It seems as though this Auntie Mumtaz is my new mistress” (94). She further says, “I think of the women with the rolls of roti dough at her waist and wonder why she lives in this darkened cave building if she so rich” (95). It means that *Sold*, a postmodern metafiction, self-consciously depicts the discursive nature of references through the self-conscious and controlled narrator Lakshmi. Therefore, the

novel is self contradictory being paradoxical and double in meaning. This self contradictory nature of the fiction helps to subvert and deconstruct the boundary between or among different disciplines.

Postmodern metafiction attempts to make the readers aware and active participants and self-conscious part of the meaning-making process. In this regard, Hutcheon says, “[P]ostmodern arts attempt to make the receiver into a Brechtian, aware participant, self-consciously part of the meaning-making process” (*Poetics* 86). In *Sold* McCormick wants to make the readers not as passive receivers but expects them to engage actively within textual circumstances. For this purpose, the author leaves so many blank white spaces to be filled by readers. From this technique of the author, narrator of the story calls for the attention of the readers to the happenings that occurs according to time and to take part in the meaning-making process accordingly. Therefore, the fiction as a postmodern metafiction demands the active participation of the readers to understand its story to draw multiple truths from it.

In postmodern metafiction, the story and its meaning is reflected through different components incorporated in it. In *Sold* we can find the self-reflexivity in different elements such as in setting, vignettes, tone, voice, and even in use of language. For example, the vignettes pattern of the novel is meaningful to the fragmented life of the protagonist; village hut setting in the beginning of the novel is symbolic of poverty and so on. By employing these elements, McCormick asserts the hidden purpose of her entire work

In *Sold*, the researcher has found the fictionality of fiction, self-conscious narrator, writing process of the fiction, questioning to the reference and representation, demanding readers’ active participation and awareness, revealing the story and its meaning through different components, complexity, blurring the

boundary between fact and fiction, contextualization and interlink between the subjectivity of Lakshmi and the world of her work as a sex worker. Therefore, the researcher found self-reflexivity as a prominent element of postmodern metafiction in *Sold*.

Regarding narration, a number of theorists have defined the way of narrating stories in the fiction. In this context, Mieke Bal explores the theory of narrative and defines a narrative text as “a story that is told in a medium, that is, it is converted into signs” (*Narratology* 8). She further refers to narratology as the “theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artifacts that tells a story” (1). It indicates that narrative system employs certain components of narrative such as characters, time, and place and so on to achieve the goal.

Similarly, Denial Pundey posits, “[N]arrative is equated with the production of historical, literary, cultural, and even scientific knowledge” (*Narrative after Deconstruction* 1). It implies that narrative after deconstruction has brought different types of knowledge together by means of language. And deconstruction is the most elaborative theory of language that shows the paradox within itself and influences the understanding.

Postmodern metafiction rejects linear, progressive notion of time, civilization, history, society as well as chronological order of subject matter of the story in the fiction. This is called circularity of narrative in post modern metafiction. In *Sold* the circularity of narrative can be seen in the Lakshmi’s narration of the events of the story of the fiction. In the middle of the story, in the brothel Lakshmi narrates her school days activities and says, “[I]n the village school we were taught to add, subtract, multiply, and divide” (147). She further says, “[T]he teacher gave us difficult problems, asking us to figure out how many baskets of rice a family would have to

sell to buy a new water buffalo” (147). Again she returned to talk about her business in the brothel and says, “[I]f I bring a half dozen men to my room each night, and each man pays Mumtaz 30 rupees, I am 180 rupees closer each day to going back home” (147). Such a narration of Lakshmi ruptures the linear progress of the story in the fiction because during the narration of the present events in the brothel in the story she revisits her past events in the village and narrates them by breaking the chronology of the story. Similarly, the breaking of the chronology of story in *Sold* is obvious from the Lakshmi’s following narration:

Each morning and evening Mumtaz comes, beats me with a leather strap, and locks the door from behind. And each night, I dream that Ama and I are sitting outside our hut, looking down the mountain at the festival lights, and she is twining my hair into long dark braids.

(109)

Above lines shows Lakshmi’s postmodern technique of narrating story since she goes back in past to narrate the events by breaking the chronology of story in the present as a circular narration.

Postmodern metafiction rejects the traditional concept of historical development as a series of determinate cause and effect. Undermining cause and effect is a primary feature of postmodern rejection of Victorian modes of linearity and stable narrative. McCormick’s *Sold* rejects concept of historical development in chain of cause and effect. In the same regard, Lakshmi says, “[M]y new custom is to wait by the window each afternoon so that I can see the David Beckham boy coming home from school. That way, I can put his book back in its hiding place before he arrives” (160). This extract shows the disruption of the chain of cause and effect in every action since there is no order and hierarchy of the actions in *Sold*.

The crisis of linearity in postmodern fiction occurs due to the portrayal of different characters' life story in it. In *Sold*, we find narrator Lakshmi's story within her family's story. In the fiction Lakshmi's narrative story is about her Journey from backwarded village to brothel in India. But she narrates her family's story time and again to connect her story to it and tell her own life story in the fiction. In the same context Lakshmi narrates, "Ama and I walk down to the village, my little brother riding on her back. As we draw near the bonfire, Ama presses a coin into my palm" (42). She further says, "I tell her I'm not a child anymore. I tell her not to waste her money. But she insists" (42). From these lines it is clear that while narrating her story Lakshmi narrates her mother's and her brother's story. It causes the crisis in narrative linearity in *Sold*.

Therefore, *The Holder of the World* rejects linear progress of story in the course of time, civilization, and traditional concept of historical development in the chain of cause and effect. It also has portrayal of story within story, and dual notions of progress. Thus, all these elements contribute to the circularity of narrative in the fiction.

Interaction between Fact and Fiction in *Sold*

Postmodern metafiction destabilizes the hierarchy between fact and fiction. In this connection Linda Hutcheon contends:

Such novels both install and then blur the line between fiction and history. [. . .] but the simultaneous and overt assertion and crossing of boundaries is more postmodern. [. . .] postmodern fiction actually uses detail or historical data. Historical fiction usually incorporates and assimilates these data in order to lend a feeling of verifiability to the fictional world. (*Poetics* 113–14)

From the above lines, it is obvious that postmodern metafiction blurs the boundary between fact and fiction self-consciously with the assertion of what it has done. It means that both fact and fiction are embedded in postmodern metafiction and hence it is neither truly real nor false.

McCormick's *Sold* destabilizes the boundary between fact and fiction. It fictionalizes the facts regarding Nepali girls trafficking explored on the basis of McCormick's research on it to fabricate Lakshmi's story. McCormick's following statement makes it clear:

As part of my research for *Sold*, I traced the path that many Nepalese girls have taken—from remote village to the red-light districts of Calcutta. I also interviewed aid workers who rescue girls from brothel; provide them with medical care and job training, and who work to reintegrate them into society. (*Sold* Author's Note)

Above lines show McCormick's research on Nepali sex workers who are sold in brothels in India. The facts explored in the research are employed to construct Lakshmi's story in *Sold*. It is clear that the story of Lakshmi goes parallel with the factual sexual slavery story of other poor village girls who are sold in India for sex workers. Thus, it shows the blurring the hierarchy between fact and fiction.

Postmodern metafiction is shaped by contextualization of the works of the past with radical changes in fragmentation. In this regard, Hutcheon opines that postmodern metafiction observes "qualities of totalizing order, only to context it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality and, often, fragmentation" (*Poetics* 116). In *Sold* Lakshmi's fragmented story is constructed in the context of factual information of sexual slavery of Nepali girls in India. McCormick says, "[S]ome go to door-to-

door in the country's most isolated villages to explain what really happens to girls who leave home with strangers promising good jobs" (*Sold* Author's Note).

The implication of postmodern metafiction is to rewrite the factual events in the form of a fiction. Therefore, postmodern metafiction is not only fiction but also facts that are palpably betwixt and between. It means that the entanglement of facts and fiction is postmodern metafiction. To show the interaction between fact and fiction in *Sold*, the researcher realizes to trace some facts on Nepali girls trafficking and sexual slavery in brothel in India in the backdrop of which McCormick fabricates Lakshmi's story.

An estimated number of twelve thousands Nepali girls are trafficked and sold every year from Nepal to foreign countries for prostitution. Nepali sex workers who account for about forty percent of the neighbors countries' (especially in India only) total sex workers. The high demand of the Nepali girls is due to their fair complexion and attractive Mangolian feature which is preferred to their dark skinned counterparts. Various pretentions are used by the agents to persuade the simple, uneducated, and innocent Nepali village girls giving allurements and expectation of happy life. In the hope of pleasure and material prosperity under the influence of deceptive agents, gullible girls follow them and finally are sold in various brothels in their unexpectation. Tired of the discriminatory treatment given to girls by the parents and burned under the incessant world load of farm and household together with the hardship of poverty in which no nice and adequate food and clothing are available to them, it becomes quite easy for the girls traffickers to traffic and sell them. The gullible girls expect for better and enjoyable life, lucrative jobs, and even the hope of becoming cine heroine.

In postmodern metafiction, we see the direct interaction of fact with fiction.

In this regard Hutcheon posits:

Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history. [. . .] the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcibly challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality. (*Poetics* 109-10)

In the above lines, Hutcheon means that postmodern metafiction crosses the boundary of fact and fiction to challenge the originality of art and transparency of historical referentiality.

In *Sold* McCormick fictionalizes accounts and events of Nepali girls trafficking and sexual slavery of Nepali girls in brothels in India. The discriminatory treatment given to girls in rural Nepal is seen Lakshmi's following narration:

And so I act the part of the dutiful daughter. I bring him his tea in the morning and rub his feet at night. I pretend I do not hear him joining in the laughter when the men at the tea shop joke about the difference between fathering a son and marrying off a daughter. A son will always be a son, they say. 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 a stew. (8)

In the above lines, the discriminatory treatment of girls by giving priority and preference to son is revealed obviously. The girls are confined in the household works and are put in the subservient position in the house by making busy them in works. Due to this reason, Nepali poor girls try to escape from such inferior position and hardships of life in the family in search of free and better life.

Postmodern metafiction raises various issues related to history, culture, politics, and economics and so on with their direct interaction with fiction. In this regards Hutcheon posits, “[P]ostmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction of historiography and fiction that deserves more detailed study [. . .] and the ideological implication of writing about history” (*Poetics* 113-14). From these lines, it is clear that interaction of fact and fiction raises lots of issues in detail in order to recount the factual documentary.

McCormick, in *Sold*, exposes sexual victimization of Nepali poor girls in brothel in Calcutta with the interaction of fictional figures and factual account of the incidents. Lakshmi’s following statement makes it obvious:

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 or breath. 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. (103-4)

Above narration of Lakshmi reveals her forcible sexual exploitation by a customer in the Mumtaz’s brothel. This incident is the interaction between fictional characters Lakshmi and customer in the backdrop of real situation in the brothel. It is true that innocent girls become the victims of sex slavery even they have no interest in it and hence they try to avoid forcible sexual violence but in vain as the protagonist Lakshmi does in the story. Through this incident, McCormick tries to expose the sexual

victimization of Nepalese girls by agents who sold the girls in India and the brothel keepers for sexual slavery.

Some girls are assured of getting married in India and some agents get married the girls in order to get them seduced. But when they get landed in India, the girls find themselves sold and purchased and brought to prostitution houses. Such girls are tortured into submission and locked into the room poorly fed and forced to entertain sexually twenty to thirty customers every day. How long they could withstand that inhuman treatment done to them. However, sooner or later they gradually used to the trade. It is the fact of brothel keepers in India for sex trade and pathetic situation of innocent girls due to the extreme inhuman sexual treatment in the prostitution houses. McCormick fictionalizes pathetic and inhuman sexual violence of Lakshmi on the basis of the real facts of sex trade and suffering of Nepali poor girls. This becomes obvious from the Lakshmi's following narration:

Each day, a thousand people pass below my window. Children on their way to school. Mothers hurrying home from the market. [. . .] Each morning and evening Mumtaz comes, beats me with a leather strap, and locks the door behind her. [. . .] Tonight when Mumtaz comes to my room, she sees that her strap has left raw sores on my back and neck, my arms and leg. So she beats me on the soles of my feet. (109-10)

Above lines show the extreme suffering of Lakshmi in the brothel due to the inhuman activities of Mumtaz, brothel keeper, in India. On the basis of real facts of brothel keepers and sufferings of the girls locked inside the brothels, McCormick fictionalizes the story of Lakshmi.

Intertextuality and Interdisciplinarity in *Sold*

Intertextuality is the interdependence of the literary texts in the present on the texts that were written in the past. It means that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is a ‘mosaic of quotations’ and that any text is the ‘absorption and transformation of another’. So, intertextuality is the shaping of text’s meaning by other text(s) and hence it refers to the author’s borrowing from and transformation of text(s) in the past or reader’s reference of one text in reading another. Graham Allen defines intertextuality as:

Postmodern architects practice what we can style an intertextual architecture which appropriates styles from different eras and combines them in ways which attempt to reflect the historically and socially plural contexts within which their buildings now have to exist.

(Intertextuality 184)

From the above lines, we come to know that intertextuality refers to the appropriation of styles from the past and exploit them in the present to reflect the sense of the past in the present in order to point out the nature of work. It means that intertextuality, for Allen, is “something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates” (1). It indicates that, in a sense, intertextuality is the repetition of text written in the past.

Intertextuality refers to making a text a ‘mosaic of quotations’ by offering sense of the past in the present. It is beneficial for postmodern authors, readers or critics to refer to works that aims at fictionalizing actual figures or events. Hence, intertextuality is one of the prominent features of postmodern metafiction. In this regard, Hutcheon contends:

The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts, in this way, the view of certain contemporary historiographers: it offers a sense of the present of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces—be the literary or the historical. [. . .] There is always a paradox at the heart of the ‘post’: irony does, indeed mark the difference from the past, but the intertextual echoing simultaneously works to affirm—textually and hermeneutically—the connection with the past. (*Politics* 125)

In postmodernism, parody and intertextuality are interchangeable terms. Linda Huchon says, “[P]arody -- often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality -- is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders” (*Politics* 89). It implies that parodic intertextuality shows how present representation comes from the past and what the politics behind this representation is. Therefore, intertextuality in postmodern metafiction does not disregard the reference of the representation but “uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated today from that past” (90).

McCormick’s *Sold* is based on Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* since both are written in the form of vignettes. *The House on the Mango Street* is the coming of age story of Esperanza, a preadolescent Mexican American girl living in the contemporary United States. A marked departure from the traditional novel form, *The House of Mango Street* is a slim book consisting of forty-four vignettes, narrated by Esperanza and ranging in length from two paragraphs to four pages. The novel opens with a description of the Esperanza’s family’s house on Mango Street. Esperanza narrates the house as:

The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn't a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it's not the house we'd thought we'd get. (1)

She is dissatisfied with the house, which is small and cramped, and does not want to stay there. Esperanza narrates, "I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. Once I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go" (3). The young narrator Esperanza, recalls how her family did not always live on Mango street and only moved to it in the 1970s after living in a terrible place.

In deceptively simple language, the novel recounts the complex experience of being young, poor, female and Chicana in America. Esperanza says, "[I]t wasn't as if I didn't want to work. I did. I had even gone to the social security office the month before to get my social security number. I needed money" (31).

In the pattern of *The House on Mango Street*, McCormick divides *Sold* into one hundred and seventy eight small vignettes ranging in length from single line to three-four pages. The single line vignette in the novel is "[A]fter five days of no food and water I don't even dream" (113). It is the story of a thirteen years old Lakshmi, a poor girl from rural village of Nepal. Like Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*, Lakshmi is the protagonist and narrator of the story in the fiction. She narrates about her village and her family condition like Esperanza in the Cisneros' novel. She narrates, "[O]ne more rainy season and our roof will be gone, says Ama. [. . .] 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" (1). In this way, the novel opens with the

description of Lakshmi's small tin-roofed hut and her family as in *The House on Mango Street* does Esperanza. Like Esperanza, Lakshmi is a young self-conscious narrator and from her narration the story of the fiction is reflected.

In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza details the hair of her family members as she looks upon each of them with fondness. Each one's hair has a different type and style to it. She says, "[M]y papa's hair is like a broom, all up in the air. And me, my hair is lazy. It never obeys barrettes or bands. Carlos' hair is thick and straight. He doesn't need to comb it. Nenny's hair is slippery slides out of your hand. And Kiki, who is the youngest, has hair like fur" (Cisneros 7). Yet, Out of all her family members' hair, she treasures her mother's hair. She sees it like candy circles and softness, and mostly, she thinks it smells like fresh bread. In this way, from Esperanza's self-conscious narration we come to know the story of the fiction. Similarly, as a self-conscious narrator, Lakshmi in *Sold* narrates her family members with their features. She narrates:

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 names of our sons and daughters. We pinched our noses shut whenever the headman's wife passed by, recalling the time she broke wind strutting past us at the village spring.

Through the Lakshmi's narration, the incidents of the story are reflected like it is in the Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*.

The House on Mango Street is narrated by the adolescent Esperanza who tells her story in the form of short, vivid tales. The story is narrated in the first person "I", giving the readers an intimate glimpse of the girl's outlook on the world. Similarly, the story in *Sold* is narrated in the first person perspective of adolescent self-conscious

narrator Lakshmi from which the readers get an intimate glimpse of the young and innocent girl's outlook on the selfish and corrupted society.

In *The House on Mango Street*, with the help of the concise and poetic vignettes Cisneros uncover dual forces that pull Esperanza to stay rooted in her cultural traditions on the one hand, and those that compel her to pursue a better way of life. Throughout the book Cisneros explores themes of cultural tradition, gender roles, and coming of age in a binary society that struggles to hang onto its collective past while integrating itself into the American cultural landscape. In the same manner, in *Sold* McCormick presents the dual forces: poverty and patriarchy. Due to these forces Lakshmi is compelled to leave her home in search of job to solve financial crisis of her family. The Lakshmi's story told by her in precise and poetic vignettes shows her fragmented life from her village to her stay in the brothel in India. It also shows her struggle made to adjust her unexpected place, prostitution house in India. Therefore, in both novels the stories in the fragmented vignettes show the fragmented life story of both of the protagonists in the respective novels.

Intertextuality in postmodern metafiction offers a sense of the past in the present through the previous texts. This intertextuality paradoxically echoes the connection of the present works with the past textually and hermeneutically. Therefore, *Sold* is an intersexual parody of *The House on Mango Street* and echoes its connection with the latter textually and hermeneutically.

In postmodern fiction different traces of history, sociology, politics, economics, geography and so on can be observed. In this connection, defining interdisciplinarity Joe Moran says, “[I]nterdisciplinarity interlocks with the concerns of epistemology—the study of knowledge—and tends to be centered on problems and issues that cannot be addressed or solved within the existing disciplines, rather than

the quest for an all inclusive synthesis” (*Interdisciplinarity* 15). For Moran, interdisciplinarity of the postmodern texts has the relationality with previous texts or forms. Moran suggests postmodern readers to incorporate a comprehensive insight to analyze postmodern texts and he critiques more radical nature of knowledge.

Postmodern metafiction, through intertextuality, makes the readers aware that facts are not the transparent record of any definite ‘truth’. In this regard, Dominick La Capra argues that “the past narratives [are] in the form of text and textualized reminders – memories, reports, published writing, archives, movements, and so forth” (qtd. in Hutcheon, *Poetics* 129). In *Sold* we find different facts explored by McCormick during her research on sexual slavery from Nepal to India. McCormick’s following statement makes it clear:

As part of my research for *Sold*, I traced the path that many Nepalese girls have taken—from remote village to the red light districts of Calcutta. I also interviewed aid workers who rescue girls from brothels; provide them with medical care and job training, and who work to reintegrate them into society. (*Sold* Author’s Note Para. 2)

From the above extract it is obvious that *Sold* consists of different factual information explored from the research on girls trafficking which are interrelated to construct the story of the fiction. And this shows the interdisciplinary nature of the fiction.

Therefore, *Sold* challenges the conventional forms of fiction by blending facts in it.

Postmodern fictions raise a number of issues like geography, economics, social norms and values, fiction, autobiography and so on with the interaction between or among them. In the same context, Hutcheon contends, “[P]ostmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction of historiography and fiction [. . .] issues surrounding the nature of identity and subjectivity [. . .]

ideological implications of writing and history” (*Poetics* 117). In *Sold* the issues of geography, economic condition of remote villagers, autobiography of Lakshmi, and biography of other characters are raised. This becomes obvious from the Lakshmi’s following narration:

Most of the men his age leave home for months at a time, taking jobs 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 stopped telling time long ago, and goes up the hill each day to play cards, talk politics, and drink tea with the old men. (8)

From the above extract, we come to know that *Sold* raises issue of economic condition of the villagers to construct the story of the fiction. This nature of the fiction shows its interdisciplinary nature and its implication is rewriting the economic history of the villagers out of interaction between fact and fiction.

In the same manner, McCormick blends the genres of poetry and prose in the form of different vignettes. It is obvious from the following text from the fiction:

Then the baby awakes. And with each drip
and plink
and plop
and ping
he laughs and claps his hands.
Each drip new
Each plink
and plop
and ping
fresh and strange and musical to his tiny ears. (26)

From the above arguments, we come to know that interdisciplinarity is interdependence between or among the multiple disciplines and pastiche is the postmodern culture of turning back and hence is similar with intertextuality. These both prominent tenets of postmodern metfiction are found in *Sold*.

Indeterminacy and Open-endedness in *Sold*

The notion of single and fixed meaning of anything is challenged in postmodern metafiction with the help of intertextual parody. In this connection Hutcheon opines, “[P]ost modern intertextuality challenges both closure and single, centralized meaning. [. . .] The typically contradictory postmodernism art both provides and undermines context” (*Politics* 127). In *Sold*, McCormick provides and undermines context to challenge the authenticity of the writer and originality of his/her work even putting a plural ending on the story of Lakshmi. The story of Lakshmi is openended since there is no final resolution after American is about to rescue from the brothel. The story ends as Lakshmi narrates, “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*” (263). It is openended with indeterminacy of meaning since the author does not provide the reader with the story to show what happened after Lakshmi’s above narration.

Similarly, there is not a single issue in the fiction to provide single meaning of the story. McCormick uses different issues like patriarchy, acute poverty, selfishness, exclusion, and struggle for escapement and so on in *Sold*. Challenging single, fixed, and determinant meaning of anything, Lakshmi says, “I cannot tell which of the things, they do not 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” (123-24). This

statement regarding the construction of story of Lakshmi in *Sold* shows the indeterminacy in the meaning/truth of Lakshmi's experience.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction mocks any notion of single origin with the help of intertextuality by restoring past events as well as questioning the authenticity of locating the discourse of both fact and fiction with an ever expanding intertextual network. In this sense, history is constructed by the mutual interrelationship of dominated and dominators rather than basing on single truth or definite fact. In this regard Hutcheon says, "[F]iction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which postmodern metafiction first establishes and then crosses positing both the generic contracts of fiction and history" (*Poetics* 110). In *Sold*, there is mutual interdependence of researched facts of the author and her fabrication of the story. Regarding the construction of such a story, Lakshmi narrates, "I do not know her proper name. I only know her as Auntie. I shrug yes-no I do not know" (76). This statement shows the Lakshmi's story in *Sold* is a mutual interrelationship of dominated and dominators rather than basing it on a single truth or definite fact.

The terms 'right' and 'false' are applicable in the case of fiction because it is based on context. The context determines the nature of truth or falsity even though there is no an ultimate truth but truths in plural. In this connection, Hutcheon posits:

Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed be the right terms in which to discuss fiction, but not for the reasons offered above. Postmodern novels [. . .] assert that there are only truths in plural and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others' truths. (*Politics* 128)

From the above extract, we come to know that postmodern metafiction suggests that truth and falsity are terms used in discussing fiction since these terms are relative and depend upon the perspectives of individuals.

Mukherjee's *Sold* suggests the same fact which is clear when Lakshmi narrates, "[W]hen I have run out of words to copy, I look out the window at this strange place called India. Inside the train, the people around me are snoring. I don't understand how they can close their eyes when there is so much to see" (82). It means that fictional truth of a certain time may not be the same in the other temporal context.

Mukherjee's *Sold* challenges single, fixed and determinant meaning; mocks at notion of single origin/truth and asserts that the terms 'right' and 'false' are fictional having no ultimate reality. Therefore, there is indeterminacy of meaning/ truth in the fiction.

Open-ended postmodern narrative takes the form of false narrator. Such narrator describes the story without knowing all details of what s/he is describing. It is because postmodern metafiction demands the participation of reader to critique and decide his or her own version of truth or falsity. McCormick's *Sold* tries to establish that meaning is neither depends in text, nor in context, reader and the author. This is because the author in the postmodern metafiction does not believe in single, fixed and exact meaning rather believes in multiple meanings. Lakshmi narrates, "Uncle Husband isn't young and handsome like Krishna, and I can never tell when he might grow angry and slap me. But I am grateful, in this strange new world of moving thunder and invisible borders, that he is my Uncle Husband" (83). This extract shows Lakshmi's multiple way of moving ahead in her life. Her nature cannot be understood easily and therefore she leaves her progressive story in the cross roads

even in the middle in order to demand readers' participation for making the progress in the story on the basis of their understanding.

Finally, in her unexpectation Lakshmi reached to Indian brothel, stay there with other prostitute girls, as a sex worker and struggles for escapement from there throughout her living in the brothel. Therefore, the fiction does not offer any resolution to Lakshmi's story and hence *Sold* has openendedness to the Lakshmi's story and indeterminacy of its meaning.

McCormick's Motif of Writing *Sold*

The politics behind self-reflexivity and intertextuality in postmodern metafiction is to make postmodern readers aware of what the texts assert or question by making them habitual to deal with textualized traces of any text. Regarding the politics of postmodern historiographic metafictional art, Hutcheon says, "[P]ostmodern art cannot but be political, at least in the sense that its representations—its image and stories—are anything but neutral, however 'aestheticized', they may appear to be in parodic self-reflexivity" (*Politics* 3). Intertextuality in postmodernism is often used by marginalized groups to attack the center. Hutcheon advocates double coded politics of intertextuality that "both legitimizes and subverts that which is parodied" (97). Moreover, such strategies are often used by postmodernist feminists in postmodern metafiction to point out historical power of cultural representations and to contextualize it in order to destabilize it. From this extract it is clear that the politics of intertextuality and self-reflexivity in postmodern art is to parodize the issue presented in the hypotext to destabilize the notion of the past and construct the alternative way of reality.

McCormick fabricates story of her own protagonist Lakshmi, a poor girl from rural Nepal, based on Cisneros' Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*. To expose

the history poverty of backward rural Nepal and suffering of Lakshmi in the brothel in India, McCormick fabricates pathetic heart-rending story of Lakshmi with some similarities and some differences to Esperanza in *The House Mango Street*.

Thus, McCormick's *Sold* is a provocative novel contrasting the cultures of the rural Nepal and the Indian city Calcutta in which the threads of the story unravel amid the lushness of her prose and the intensity of events. In this context Lakshmi narrates, "[I]t is hard to walk in my new shoes, harder still to push through streets jammed with scrawny rickshaw men hauling plump passengers, naked children pawing through rubbish heaps, stray dogs nosing through gutters filled with human waste" (89).

In *Sold* McCormick undermined patriarchal ideology of the people of Nepali rural areas. She exposed the bitter reality of poor girls of rural areas of Nepal by exposing extreme domination of females by malpractices of patriarchy. This becomes obvious from the Lakshmi's narration of the things that are taught to Lakshmi by her mother:

Once you are married, she says, you must eat your meal only after your husband has had fill. Then you may have what remains. If he burps at the end of the meal, it is a sign that you have pleased him. If he turns to you in the night, you must give yourself to him, in the hopes that you will bear him a son. If you have a son, feed him at your breast until he is four. If you have a daughter, feed her at your breast for just a season, so that your blood will start again and you can try once more to bear a son. If your husband asks you to wash his feet, you must do as he says, then put a bit of the water in your mouth. (15-16)

Above extract shows McCormick's critique of norms and values under the Nepali patriarchal society. She exposes that due to such uncongenial and unpractical practices of patriarchy Nepali females suffer a lot.

In postmodern metafiction, legitimacy of the grandnarrative gets questioned due to the rejection of system of knowledge by the theorists of postmodern era. The death of metanarratives in postmodernism takes the form of a false narrator who narrates the events in the fiction without detailed knowledge of them. This is due to the fact that very few are able to determine what is true and what is disbelief and there is nothing to prove whether a statement describing a real situation is true.

Regarding the critique of metanarrative Simon Malpas posits, "[P]ostmodern critique produces the field in which it intervenes: it occurs without the stable ground of a grandnarrative, but it emerges in the context of those narratives to challenge and subvert them" (*The Postmodern* 131). McCormick's *Sold* incorporates the elements of postmodern metafiction self-reflexivity, intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, circularity of narrative and openendedness which ultimately helps to critique essentialist false notion of patriarchy, social norms and values, and gap between poor and rich.

In general, McCormick exposes poverty-stricken situation of Nepali rural people and, in particular, Nepali uneducated and poor girls who are sold in brothels in India. In their unexpectation and disinterest, they work as sex workers in the prostitution houses in meager earnings and poorly fed.

Therefore, McCormick gives voice to the male dominated females of Nepal by destabilizing the hierarchy between them. McCormick questions and critiques Nepalese unfair patriarchal practices through the mouth of her bold and revolutionary protagonist Lakshmi who goes against sexual slavery in which Nepali males are also responsible for Nepali girls trafficking network.

McCormick critiques a grandnarrative of Hindu mythology, by naming her protagonist by the name of Hindu goddess of property, Goddess Lakshmi. At the same time, it is also satirical in the sense that the protagonist Lakshmi is extremely poor even by getting the name of Goddess of property and prosperity. This also blurs the hierarchy between Goddess and a simple Nepali poor girl Lakshmi in postmodern metafiction.

Similarly, McCormick critiques metanarrative of religion in *Sold* by including the description of posters pasted on the walls inside the brothel. In this connection, Lakshmi narrates:

There are posters of gods and movie stars on the walls, an electric sun hanging from the middle of the ceiling, a palm frond machine that stirs the air, a hole in the floor privy, iron bars on the windows, and four rope beds separated by old sheets that hang from the ceiling. (138)

Above extract shows feature of postmodern metafiction in which both posters of gods and movie stars are pasted together on the walls of brothels. It is one of the prominent features of postmodern metafiction.

Similarly, McCormick exposes perilous situation of Lakshmi in brothel in India due to the extreme sexual exploitation of customers in the prostitution houses. Lakshmi's following narration shows her sexual exploitation in the brothel:

A man with lips like a fish comes into my room and says, "You are lucky to be with Habib." He is squeezing my breast with his hand, like someone shopping for a melon. I try to push him away, but my arm, stone-heavy from lassi doesn't move. [. . .] The fish-lips man removes my dress. I wait for myself to protest. But nothing happens. [. . .] Then he is on top of me, and something hot and insistent is between my legs.

He grunts and struggles, trying to fit himself inside me. With a sudden thrust I am torn in two. (120-21)

Above lines show Lakshmi's resistance against forceful sexual violence of one of the customers but she utterly failed under the trip of drug deceptively fed to Lakshmi in the lassi. Finally, she is sexually abused violently even in her utter rejection.

Therefore, McCormick's politics of writing *Sold* is in order to show pathetic situation of Nepali poor girls in the backdrop of Nepali girls trafficking to sell in brothels in India for sex trade. She also exposes the poverty-stricken situation of people of rural Nepal in the backdrop of a low social class and economic status.

Chapter III. Conclusion

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* has the pattern of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* since both novels are written in the form of series of numerous vignettes. The basis of McCormick's *Sold* is her own research on the Nepali girls trafficking and selling of girls to foreign countries for sexual slavery. Therefore, it is a interaction between fact and fiction it fabricates pathetic fragmented life story of a poverty-stricken Nepali girl Lakshmi who is sold to brothel in Calcutta for sexual slavery. In the brothel Lakshmi's life becomes hell bound due to the extreme sexual exploitation by the cruel customers.

The novel is written in the series of spare and evocative vignettes in order to show the fragmented life story of Lakshmi. The characters in the novel are from low social strata that are suffered a lot due to the financial crisis in their families.

McCormick travelled to India and Nepal and interviewed the people who have the experience of sexual slavery. On the basis of her research she weaved the story of Lakshmi by blending of fact and fiction and hence it is a metafiction.

The sources of *Sold* is McCormick's research and its writing process reflects through the narration of Lakshmi. In the fiction, Lakshmi is the mouthpiece of McCormick who self-consciously narrates about her as well as events in the fiction. She also describes other characters and tells the story of the novel. While narrating the story, she is equally conscious about the characters as well as events in the fiction. Therefore, McCormick is self-conscious narrator in the fiction and the fiction is about the fictionality of the fiction or writing about fiction. Hence, *Sold* is a metafiction.

In *Sold*, Lakshmi is a fictional figure whose story is constructed on the basis of McCormick's research. In the fiction, McCormick fabricates the story of the novel with the interaction of fictional figures and the factual information of her research.

Moreover, the description of poverty-stricken people of rural Nepal and pathetic situation of sexually exploited innocent girls from that area is treated with the help of fabrication of fictional characters Lakshmi and other characters in the fiction. It also presents the clash between Mumtaz, owner of the brothel and Lakshmi. Therefore, *Sold* is the interaction between fact and fiction and hence blurs the boundary between them.

Sold has circular narrative without final resolution to the story of the protagonist Lakshmi. The rupturing of linearity in narration and offering alternative endings to the story is the metafictional quality in the fiction and it demands readers' active participation in meaning-making process. Since there is no final resolution offered, we find indeterminacy of meaning in the fiction. The author constructs the story of Lakshmi on the basis of the information of her research. While constructing the story, McCormick brings lots of references from her research conducted on the Nepali girls trafficking. Some of the vignettes in the fiction are written in the pattern of poetic lines. Similarly, the fiction deals with social norms and values, economic matters, autobiography and biography of the characters. Therefore, McCormick's *Sold* has intertextuality with interdisciplinarity.

McCormick's motif of writing *Sold* in the form of fragmented vignettes is to show the fragmented poverty-stricken and grief-stricken hell bound life story of Lakshmi in the brothel in India. Similarly, McCormick exposed pathetic situation of Nepali uneducated poor girls who are compelled to leave their village in search of job but unfortunately on their unexpectation they are sold in prostitution houses and compelled to live pathetic hell bound life. This situation of Nepali girls arises mainly due to the unfair patriarchal practices from which suffered Nepali females want to escape in search of better and free life but finally they end up in the net of girls'

traffickers. Therefore, 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 sexual slavery to escape from there.

In this way, McCormick's *Sold* is a heartrending fragmented life story of Lakshmi written in the pattern of a series of vignettes on the basis of McCormick's own research on sexual slavery and Nepali girls trafficking. Thus, it is the interaction between fact and fiction and hence a metafiction. Moreover, it has narrative self-reflexivity and circularity of narrative, intertextuality and interdisciplinarity, and indeterminacy of meaning and openendedness to the story. Therefore, McCormick's *Sold* is a postmodern metafiction.

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