

Chapter I: Introduction

Playwright Abhi Subedi and Portrayal of Nepali Women

Heard melodies are sweet

But those unheard / Are sweeter - - -

Keats: Ode on a Grecian Urn

This research intends to study the historicity of women's silent stories that are embedded into culture though it is difficult to give in such short survey a definite interpretation of a great poet and playwright Abhi Subedi. His plays especially *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* promote the female's position as he gives prominent role to his female characters. In these texts, women characters like Maiju and Bhiksuni Purnima have been portrayed at the centre of his writings but unfortunately the women are bound to live in old conventional territory created by patriarchy. They are not free from the norms and values of their culture so that they have to be doomed to hide their real existence. Finally his characters feel the necessity of freedom to live their own life freely. So, they leave their familiar spaces to carve out their democratic self and social, political and intellectual status. For that the playwright presents such characters who directly do not come up in the battle field to struggle; rather they remain silent and go away by leaving their the then existing spaces in search of meaning of life. Thus, this research aims at addressing the women's resistance to assert their status in the society.

In fact, dramas are representational work of art. They cannot be completed unless they are performed on the stage. Textual interpretation lacks something to find its deeper meaning. But as a student of literature one cannot forget the importance of text too. Reading a text and finding its existence is also a significant task of reader. Many critics and writers do have different views and attitude regarding this matter.

According to a drama critic Edwin Wilson, “Unlike a novel, a play is written to be performed. In same respect a script is to a stage production as a musical score is to concert, or an architectural blue script to a building. It is an outline for a performance” (7).

The object of this study is to make an exemplary analysis of silence in the work of literature by developing argument on how it can be meaningfully interpreted. Silence, in simple term, is the lack of words or sounds to communicate which fails to embody strength, courage and healthy resistance to losing voice or relationship. But silence, in a broader sense, as non verbal language, is versatile enough to be a subject of study for the linguists, researchers and the critic. In spite of the fact that it is traditionally conceived to be a meaningless, absence of language, it can be studied as a part of language for a fuller understanding of what is called language itself.

Silence is the background to all verbal languages: words function only when placed properly against what may be called the “page” of silence. Silence can add to the rhetoric effect of speech, make poetry poetic and dramatize drama. So, the writer intentionally uses silence as a method to express something abstract. Besides the intentional use of silence to mean something that could have been said in words, silence is used for indicating resistance, attention, alertness, reverence, defiance and to convey nuances of emotion. Mental states and emotions, especially in their extremes to get communicated without the use of the words. When silence occurs during speech, it opens up path for meaning even beyond the reach of words. Silence is an essential part of communication because speech is “not always necessary, sufficient or easy to use” (Jaworski 50). At times, speech fails and things go better unsaid, leaving silence to communicate. However, silence usually goes together with speech. So silence, not only as the absence of sound but also that of the words, works

with words in its background.

Reading literature needs considerable amount of reading the silences, not only silences that the verbal texts unavoidably consist of, but also those which the writer has deliberately and artistically created. Reading dramas requires even more creative and critical efforts for creating the spectacle of the dramatic world in “the imaginative theatre of the mind”, not only out of the verbal text, but also out of the silences in it (Klaus 774). Silence is more versatile in works of literature than in ordinary communication. It is not only when the writer mentions of the character’s silence but also when they leave things unstated that we find ourselves provoked to lend keener ears. Silence can be a trope to resist any kind of domination.

This research, in other words, attempts to reassess the meaning of silence in the life of women. Just as voice has been observed by many feminist critics as central to women’s experience and exercise to power, this research derives a conclusion that silence should be understood as a trope of resistance. It is a suitable avenue to assert power and knowledge to search for women’s own space or location. The simple equation of voice with authority and silence with victimization needs to be reexamined in the spirit of recent challenges to the notion of women’s unitary voice. Just as women’s voices are multiple and diverse as our culture and personal histories, so the meaning of silence being unwilling or unable to speak can be seen as complex and multidimensional. Such a reassessment is timely because it allows for a new perspective on the psychological sources of women’s, indeed, anyone’s subjective experience and power.

The playwright Abhi Subedi dramatizes the life of Nepali women limited in Nepali cultural heritage. In both the plays, Subedi depicts the theme of quest for social status for the development of female capacity, ability, knowledge and truth. The play

Dreams of Peach Blossoms tells the story of women in male dominated society.

However, the women have consciousness of the social injustice upon them and there emerges a voice against such domination; a female resistance. A young woman, Maiju who is about to be getting married and sent off like the historical character Bhrikuti who was married off to the Tibetan king in the early part of the Christian era, appears to be resisting her marriage that would take her away from home. She is an archetype of all the young women who were thus married off. As Maiju asks: “How many girls did leave this place? How many are now leaving?”(66). Regarding this context, American critic Davis Carol puts forth the opinion, “The story of women’s powerlessness in the face of male supremacy touches and awakens them to the lineage of their customs [. . .]. Relegated to strictly defined social roles the women in the tales told by this play seek to discover the significance of their identity and existence” (186).

Likewise, in the play, *Fire in the Monastery* the representation of women in the monastery is very remarkable. By giving major role to nuns, the playwright presents the nun who leaves the main monastery to express her sense of protest which is the depiction of women as a rebel. This play strongly raises an issue of woman. The determination of Bhiksuni Purnima is a protest, a demand of time. The journey of Purnima, beginning from the monastery for the service of human beings, is a voice of time and a female awareness. She expresses her inner desire to her friend Singing Bhiksuni:

That is why I am going away, because I think a woman a Bhiksuni can serve fellow human. My work will now start. I take pride in the fact that I am a woman. A woman’s life is not a failure. Only the style of work is different. Whenever I go, I am still the Bhiksuni of this Gumba

[...]. I am not going away leaving the Gumba, it is only that I am trying to change the style of my prayer and meditation. (77)

Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi, the editor/publisher of *Across* quarterly and a feminist critic, finds Abhi Subedi's characters as heralding new times and consciousness in women. Bhiksuni Purnima's journey outside the monastery is a protest in the form of silence. According to Rayamajhi, Lord Buddha is equal to all. The play better asserts the reality that one Bhiksuni also can disseminate the message of peace and love in the outside world. The journey from Siddhartha to Gautam Buddha awakens her too. She is a woman. So, her journey is further challenging from the point of view of gender. From the point of view of thought of her life, it is a new journey. Rayamajhi in her book *Can a Woman Rebel?* Argues that Purnima's act of leaving monastery is very rebellious and demand of time. She further opines, "When the nun, Purnima leaves the stage, she was asserting the power of a woman. This first journey of a woman inside Sama theatre today to research and prove the meaning of a woman's existence and her power heralds new times for women" (29). In the same manner, Arun Gupto, in his text *Understanding Literary Theory* too finds Bhiksuni Purnima's journey meaningful to rupture narrow space of women in the society. He writes:

By the end of the scene of III, Purnima, the female monk decides to leave monastery after the library is burnt. She talks to her friends that her life seems to be for others. It means to work with people of the world leaving the life of monastery. By leaving the monastery Purnima is trying to break the conventional space of women. (62-63)

The play *Fire in the Monastery* revolves around the Buddhist philosophy and monastic life, but has got a contextual presentation in the play. Moreover, the leaving of Gumba, where Purnima has been staying for many years as Bhiksuni, is dominant

form of female resistance. Purnima says, she is leaving Gumba not for other reason but to “show what a woman, Bhiksuni can do in this life” (76). She is tired of living the same kind of monotonous life in Gumba. Even she does not know the meaning of life. After all she realizes that she has to go somewhere outside the Gumba for the sake of humanity. Then she leaves the Gumba silently in spite of Bhiksu Gyan’s warning.

Abhi Subedi’s *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* presents the life of young woman who unwillingly goes to the house of her husband by leaving her homeland. She becomes passive observer of all the activities that have entangled her into the network of patriarchal limitations. But within her passive posture, she is resisting the dominant discourse which compels her to be silenced. Maiju, the female protagonist, knows many things that she has to do everything against her interest but she does not actively revolt and by doing so, she exposes herself as passive and submissive woman. But there lies the silent resistance within her gestures, expressions and desires. Her feelings and expressions suggest her intense desire for creating a new space far distinct from that of the space where she is brought up. She wants to change on what she is taught and made to do. Similarly she does not recognize whether her marriage is a “joy of time or pain”(71). Whatever she does, she does for preserving the faith of her culture. Her acceptance to marry with the man selected by her parents indicates how faithful and obedient she is to her family and culture. She is ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of her culture. She gives up her dreams. But in fact, she is stepping ahead towards freeing her from the conventional norms through silence.

Abhi’s plays *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* both abound the life of silent women, like Maiju and Bhiksuni Purnima. Their competence to language has been portrayed by the phallogentric social structure. Maiju comes to

realize that her marriage relegates her into a sluggish life, and wants to amputate her marriage through silence. Silence plays a decisive role in her negation; perhaps her limited speech would leave it untold. Maiju, from the hellish atmosphere by means of silence protest comes to live in a splendid world. On the other, Purnima clearly recognizes the monastic life after the fire in the library to be the sole cause of her torn-self condition. Thus rather than accepting her condition as her fate, her struggle and her refusal to stay in the monastery being a Bhiksuni demonstrates her refusal not to succumb to the will of the betrayer. Arun Gupto, again by commenting on the departure of Purnima, writes a literary review in “The Kathmandu Post”:

There is a scene in *Agniko Katha* where Purnima, a female monk leaves the monastery after the library is burnt. She leaves so as to see the essence of monastery into life outside. When I saw the last scene where the actress Nisha Sharma, the female protagonist Purnima, goes into audience, the idea of spontaneity struck to me. This whole act symbolizes the strength of carrying the learning process into daily lives. (feb 27)

We find the good portrayal of the women’s hidden stories that are embedded into history and culture. These women’s silent stories are not much heard in any form of discourses. But Subedi, through his plays, is trying to make heard the unheard stories of women. He has brought women to the fore in his both plays. *Fire in the Monastery* depicts the human feeling and the condition of nuns in a certain monastery that reveals some understanding about monastic life. The central female character Maiju in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* goes away by force. Her resistance against social evils remains soundless or unheard. But, Purnima, willingly leaves the Gumba. Both Maiju and Purnima realize the lack of freedom, but cannot oppose against the social

culture and religious dogmas. They seem to be very passive listeners. In general sense, their silent posture is deplored as a symbol of passivity and powerless by taking that those who are denied speech cannot make their experience known and thus cannot influence the course of their lives or history. But this research argues that silent position of women represents a heroic act of defiance among marginalized women, more subtly, when there is gap in direct communication, it not only reveals cultural suppression but also alternatively, represents women's deployment of silence as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse.

Contemporary feminist writing is presumed to have taken up the roles of silence and voice to represent their stories. There are varying forms of resistance to oppression expressed by women. There are many different ways to which women react against violence. Aside from the danger involved in criticizing and organizing against the dominant power in a language they understand, speaking in a tongue not one's own requires feminists presume grappling with unspeakable in many forms. Whether emotion be of repression or depression, it seeks meaning of language, and images available to it. A number of strategies are adopted which enables women to disrupt the societal expectations without forfeiting the chance to be heard.

As a matter of fact, Abhi's *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* continue to be haunted by the vastness of problem of adjustment for women and both plays make us imagine about a meaningful life of women. The silence in these plays is multivalent which not only conveys the horror of social and cultural domination upon women but also the loneliness and isolation of the apparently sudden resolve to flee. This play articulates the unarticulated by which the victims arrive at their decision. Though Maiju is born free she is caught by rites and rituals of her culture. She is forced to accept unwanted marriage, is enslaved in others

desires and happiness and is removed and silenced by the evils of her surrounding. Maiju has many reasons to feel repressed about relating the story of her marriage which will exploit her freedom of life. Marriage is a social chain which binds women into certain territory. So, her persistent efforts to avoid her exploiter, in spite of the difficulties and challenges, reveal her extraordinary commitment not to speak but to be silenced.

However non-communication does not refer to the state of silence, and vice versa. There can be violent protest even without speaking any words. Maiju's facial expressions, her gesture and style of walking on the stage as well as her curious queries about her life too denote her protest against the cultural domination. Though she speaks with her friends and reveals her sadness with the poet, the male protagonist, she is caught up by silence. Here the words that she speaks, are controlled by the language of males. The language, through which she speaks, is incapable to make her voice heard so, her speaking also equals to silence. That is why she makes silence as a tool to revolt against the suppression.

Few critics such as Maureen A Mahoney and Carol Gilligan find problems in the silent posture of women. They believe that "voice" or speech not only represents a mode of thought or moral logic, but also signifies the ability to express feelings as well as thought, to embody strength, courage, and a healthy resistance to losing voice and relation. It is also well-said that having a voice enables one to speak freely. The loss of voice or silence becomes harmful because it is cause and result of low self-esteem, poor or inauthentic relationship and inability to take action in the world. Such critics define women's silence in terms of feeling of fear, humiliation and inferior complexity. Women's condition to remain silent is misunderstood and misinterpreted by them. But this research tries to justify that the notion of not being able to speak or

not being heard, defined by those critics goes wrong.

In fact, silence or voiceless condition of women can be analyzed as an aggressive response to the violence of dominant cultural practices. Women's silences viewed from the view point of established patriarchal values seem to be meaningless. But if they are viewed from inside, by making reading a kind of participation, they become expressive and meaningful. So by depicting the women characters soundless and passive, the author as a conscious intellectual personality, goes against the silencing tendency of male-oriented society. Subedi thus attempts to bring women in the main stream cultures.

In *Fire in the Monastery*, singing Bhiksuni and Bhiksuni Purnima actively resist those norms and values that were subjected to them. They try to be bold and courageous and speak directly about the suppression but infact they are unable to do so because the restrictions imposed upon them. In the same way, in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*, Maiju, the protagonist, is also not heard. She remains passive forever. Though she attempts hard to get empowerment. Her silence does not vanish from her life. At the end, Maiju remains in the same web of patriarchal domination. But singing Bhiksuni and Purnima are somehow heard in comparison of Maiju. They at least get the answer of their life and see own vision for future.

Singing Bhiksuni is a very good singer. She has a capacity to attract the attention of people through the art of singing. But once when she sings a folk song in the monastery among the monks and the nuns, she is objected by one of the monks of the monastery. As he warns her, "Stop singing the folk song. This does not coincide with the atmosphere of the Gumba, neither with the rehearsal of the dance drama. Tomorrow that singing will not have a place. The one who plays the Main Lama should say that the real-life acting can really not take place" (25-26). The monk here

as a male agent teaches the singing Bhiksuni about the morality what she should do. He instructs her that her singing is not allowed in the Gumba. By stopping her from singing, the monk is trying to hide the intellectual aspect of woman. He does not attempt to understand her creative mind that empowers her to get knowledge and truth of life. That is why he rejects her song. And once again she becomes silent.

But Singing Bhiksuni, being a minor character of the play, has a great role. She recognizes the male's intention and attitude even in the monastery. She, instead of accepting her situation as her luck, demonstrates her struggle and her aggressive refusal to be cultural compromised. As she argues:

I sing the song of Buddha

I sing out of joy

Today I am extremely happy

Today I should sing as much as

I want. (26)

Singing Bhiksuni replies the monk from the core of her inner thought. Her goal of life and encouragement of Purnima helps her to fight against the misdemeanor of the monks in the monastery. She gets answer of her life in the art of singing. She finally involves in singing by deconstructing the limitations that are made only for nuns in the Gumba. While doing so, she does not express her contempt and anger against the monks but speaks voicelessly. Though she is forced into shame and silence, her victorious efforts suggest that she is simultaneously resisting. She is speaking being silent. She expresses her desire and intention publicly but within her sound, the evil marks of patriarchy seems to be playing a role of obstacles to empower her life. So, she desperately wants to reveal her traumatic through her silenced stature.

When Bhiksuni Purnima shares her experiences and feelings with the singing

Bhiksuni, she learns many things about her life. The singing Bhiksuni now only realizes the significance of “being a woman.” Then Purnima makes an announcement that she is going away from the monastery to live with others, to serve for others. Singing Bhiksuni proudly and confidently puts forth her decision not to be submissive but to be open and determine her goal of life by involving in singing songs of Buddha:

I have not flowed anywhere I have not gone anywhere. If I will go I will return toward life. I will also try to understand my importance as Purnima didi said. I will sing. What I learnt initially was also that. What I know right now is also the same thing. Knowledge will not pain me. I will sing. Even if I know, I will sing. If I don't too, I will sing. But as didi said, I have found a thing. I will know who I am. I will take pride on being a woman, a Bhiksuni. I will always take pride. (78)

Here, she repeatedly says “I will sing.” It is an answer of her life. In fact, she is forbidden to sing song, but she wants to break such chains and declares her pride on being woman. She too wants to know who she is. The question about the existence of female body haunts her too. She thus searches the meaning of her life that could procure her a means of livelihood.

In this way, in both the plays, Subedi shows the victory of women over patriarchy. All economic, religious, social, historical and cultural institutions are by and large controlled by men. All these things are taken as pillars of patriarch. This is well knit and deep rooted in its system which makes it invincible and natural. But it is the demand of time as well as very necessary to abolish such system which victimizes females. In the play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*, Maiju, leaving her homeland and her lamenting friends behind, crosses the river when she identifies herself with the river. This crossing the river is symbolic of her power and consciousness of new times to

avoid the patriarchy which has always taken her as a part of history. Similarly, in the *Fire in the Monastery* Bhiksuni Purnima deserts the Gumba because she also realizes that norms and practices that she has to follow in Gumba are made by males which are imposed on them in the name of religion. Once she says to her friend that if a Bhiksu leaves the Gumba, he is not condemned but if a nun once goes out from the Gumba, she is called sinner. So, to be away from such discrimination, she decides to go away from the Gumba. In short in both plays, playwright has kept females in the supreme place to show that women are also bold enough to decide whatever is better for their life.

Anyway, for the purpose of analyzing the research issue mentioned above, the research work is divided into four chapters: the first chapter is introductory which partially reflects the whole thesis in brief; the second chapter is about the theoretical tool; feminism and silence which the research is using as methodology to analyze the text. The third is the analysis of the text in the light of ideas developed in the time of setting up theoretical modality in chapter two, and the fourth chapter concludes the thesis by restating the issue and what the research has discussed during the time of research.

Chapter II

Feminism and Silence

Women have been excluded to marginality from the existing social structure. Monologists interpretation of society by men is still audible. Feminism is a movement for the full humanity of women. The movement itself grows out of previous centuries of struggle by women to win equal rights. It questions such long-standing dominant male phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation in literature. Feminism is concerned both with the 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. So, feminists are ultimately in pursuit of a more radical change, the creation of world in which one gender does not set the standard of human value. There were few attempts of raising alarm against patriarchy. However, the notable books such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792), Sarah Grimks's *Letters on Equality* (1838), Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Declaration of Sentiments* (1948), Susan B. Antony's *Two Address to New York State Legislature* (1854 & 1860), Harriet Taylor's (with J.S. Mill) *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *The Man-made World or our Andocentric Culture* (1911) are only a few to articulate the case for women.

In the early part of this century, modernist women writers like Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson debated the question of the 'women's sentence', searching for a literary language that would fit the female experience to express. But as a self-aware and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until late in the 1960s.

Feminist literary criticism is revisionist criticism. Feminism, basically, is

political in nature. It concerns itself with the marginalization of all women. Feminists disagree with the inferior role inflicted upon them by patriarchal culture. They talk about how to unmask the culture and challenge it through literary texts. Feminist criticism includes a great variety of practices. English feminist criticism, which incorporates French feminists and Marxist theory but is more traditionally oriented to textual interpretation, is moving towards a focus on women's writing. The emphasis in each country falls somewhat differently: English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses repression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses oppression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. Nevertheless, nearly all feminists start from one fundamental perception, that is, recognition of the patriarchal structure of society, that the world is organized on terms dictated by men, and to the advantage of men. Feminists examine the experience of diverse lives of women from all races and classes and cultures. Annette Kolodny describes this multiplicity as a 'playful pluralism' (460).

Because of these diversities, feminist criticism is no more unified. But they agree upon common ground of exposing patriarchy, examining socio-cultural and psychosexual context of literature and reevaluating literature by women. So, they study contexts once believed to be 'outside' the mainstream of life and literature.

Elaine Showalter has divided women's literary development into three distinct phases where she considered literary behavior of women writers: the 'feminine' phase (1840-1980), where they imitated the masculine mode; the 'feminist' (1980-1920), they advocate minority rights and protested; and the female (1920-present) is the phase of self discovery where women's experiences are their main purpose.

The widely felt movement began especially with Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Betty Friedan along with the contribution of outstanding female authors.

They examine the female “self” as interpreted by male authors and saw these texts as models of power. Beauvoir says that women are taken as secondary to men. Men define humans, not women. Friedan, through her publications, stresses to abandon gender biasness, and enforcement of equal rights. She analyzes reductive images of women in American magazines. Millett focuses on ideology in sexual politics. She views that sex is biological difference and gender is a psychological concept. The essence of politics is power, which is pervasively interpreted according to male interest. Millet says that literature has served patriarchy. She has focused the waning patriarchy in the texts of D.H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, Jean Genet and she has also focused the receding reigning power of formalism. Millett finds that these writers distort female characters by associating them with deviance. She says that interior colonization of women by men is beyond imagination.

Showalter depicts four main areas of differences: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural. First is related to the presentation of body in the text and she rebukes those writers who write ‘outside’ the female body. Second, the language used is sex-oriented which is foreign to women. Even if they are able to use language, their expression will be alienated from discourse. So, many feminists talk of female language but it lacks the suggesting evidence. Her psychoanalytic model identifies gender differences as the basis of psyche and focuses on the relation of gender. The cultural model includes social, class, radical and variation and among women but with collective experience, which is a binding force. Various movements in feminist criticism have attacked on male depiction of women and insisted redefinition of their identity in their own writing. Thus, gynocriticism has attempted to redefine gender with the rediscovery of neglected female writers.

Women’s suffering has also until recently, remained invisible, unrecognized

and therefore unaddressed. The contemporary tendency of over privileging language can further silent women in the present by discounting the reality of their experience. This tendency has constituted a new, oppressive hierarchy just as dependent on the grammar of established relations. The exclusive emphasis on the language that is speech as the only medium of expression of experiences is a way of further disenfranchising women, for whom that language, as they are used, already allow very little power; it is also a way of denying any hope for meaningful expression once one has acquired a voice, thus further disenfranchising those who have historically been excluded from or silenced by public discourse. Their silence is the sign of a certain voice that can no longer be heard. Now, not to speak and not to act have begun to mean and open a new paradigm. So, feminism acknowledges the importance of that which lies beyond language. Feminism also asserts in finding a voice for one's experience because silence points to what is missing. Feminists have paid attention to the processes by which silence, muteness, and speechlessness has broken into language and they wanted to have silent women to articulate and decode their silences.

Silence, perhaps because it seems to be the antithesis of sound, has long been neglected in the study of women's lives; nevertheless, it forms an essential part of relation between men and women. Literary criticisms differ in their uses and interpretations of silence. Silence is better seemed to be the complement to sound, and its awareness of potential functions and meaning. These functions and meaning are relevant to the study of women's relation with man.

Feminists focus on the language so often silenced in the past. Tillie Olsen demands to "hear the silence of the centuries" in her book *Silences* (1978) and "silences bound by the variant circumstances" (33). Women themselves can use

silence to resist the dominance inflected upon them. Fishkin and Hedges are of the opinion that “the silence is resistance” which is clearly seen in the lives of popular female characters of both plays *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* like Maiju, Bhiksuni Purnima and singing Bhiksuni (5). These women are innocent women outwardly but they resist without protesting through silence.

In an influential essay, the feminist literary critic Cora Kaplan makes the point that women are denied full access to the most “influential and prestigious types of language within a culture” (180). Kaplan observes that the prejudice and irrationality of dominant group seem persistent. Women are refused full access to public language, and are forced into silence and solitude which is one of the major forms of the oppression of women within society. Nor is it entirely a matter of women’s limited education. Women had internalized the idea that speech was forbidden to them.

Recent works suggest that early women writers in English faced tangible and concrete risks if they published. Publishing was incompatible with femininity and required elaborate justification. But in literature, women poets like Anne Bradstreet, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning seemed determined to break the barrier down. Many women writers have attempted to “rediscover the whole tradition of book by women ‘silenced’ by the traditional male canon” (171). Women who do enter the public arena of language face an obvious problem. Many female writers like Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen, took male penname to avoid male censorship. The need to communicate, to bridge the gap and silence is a constant theme of feminist writing, reflected very often in the title of Adrienne Rich’s *Lies Secrets and Silence*; Amrit Wilson’s *Finding a Voice* and Marge Percy’s *Unlearning to not Speak*. But for women, to speak it would be to enter a realm that is alien and not to use it would mean being banished into silence. Women rather choose silence, a language that does

not leave speechless although that discontinues the tongue rather than alienated realm. Devid Logde believes, “As long as women remain silent, they would be outside the historical process. But if they begin to speak and write as a men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt”. (340)

Many feminists have examined the female’s response against the physical and verbal violence and have found silence as their response succeeded by many bodily gestures. Women talk almost in breath and talk in silence. The evidence of silence as women’s language are not new with feminist criticism. It is very ancient that women would talk almost in a whispering low tone, which was also suppressed because they were considered or suspected as witches. So that, Algerian popular poet Tahar Djaout suggests to speak up through the lines of his poem. As he asserts, “Silence is death/If you speak you die/If you do not speak you die/So, speak out and die” (45). The poet also emphasizes that women should break through silence and should speak out and come to world discourse. But the problem with women’s voice, another than above mentioned, is that their voice is taken as non-sense and non-existent.

Researches on the question of ‘women’s voice’ show that the silences assumed by women are not alike the meaning tradition attributes to it. Feminists observe silences arranged in the text. They examine short sentences punctuated by long silence. Thus, they examine all kinds of silences related to the women’s lives. Women are forcibly put to silence and sometimes women come themselves with silence voluntarily. In an Asian women journal, *Quilt*, Corine Kumar advocates, “We come from the vast the silence that speaks” (59). Feminist critics study both the silences imposed and silences exposed or employed. Feminists take any text and society equally. They speak while being silent, it is silent language which is pregnant

rather than vacuous. The silent woman is not a silent woman. A silent woman can be rebellious but not submissive. She can no more be ruled.

Silence has meaning. Silence is an expression just as much as being a political is a political stance. So, the notion of silence sketches out new prescription for hearing silence appeals. Women's silence does not exist in a literal and traditional sense rather it exists only in non-literal sense. When it exists, it exists as a decision. Silent women become not opaque for the other but their silence opens up an array of possibilities for interpreting that silence. In the same way, Steiner says, "silence has 'another speech than ordinary saying,' but it is meaningful speech nevertheless" (72). Now, it has almost become undebatable proposition among critics whether they are from feminism or outside it. With this meaning, the long silences whether they stemmed from physical coercion and linguistic subjugation or deliberately adopted silence by women get meaningfully scrutinized, hitherto been dismissed. As silence is so expressive part of women's lives, so the silence in women characters of any text for the feminist criticism. It is because silence represents what is unsaid and unspoken and unsayable and to speak is to say less and imply much. Silence can be as indispensable to linguists as it has become for feminists. So, recent linguistic philosophy assigns a special function and prestigious authority to silence.

The difficulty with silence is that many critics (anti-feminists) do not accept silence as a mode of communication and they value only speech and say that speech is what is language. But such claim is observed today and thus has gone less effective. Silence as part of communicative interaction can be one of the forms of speech act may take filling many functions. So that, it should be considered along with the production of sentence tokens as basic formational unit of linguistic communication, because most of the modern critics are of the opinion that silence is also a means of

expression that can carry meaning in the act of communications. It is part of language, which had previously seemed nebulous and vague, or else shameful and unmentionable. Susan Sontag says, "Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech and an element in a dialogue" (11). So, linguists and critics have taken it as a proper domain of study.

Women are excluded specifically from linguistic functions like preaching, teaching and saying the formulae associated with important rites. The biblical injunction of St. Paul is that the women should be silent in church. They believed that if women began to talk they would profane a sacred language. An illustration of women's linguistic marginality in public and ritual speech is provided by the etiquette of the traditional Anglo-Saxon Wedding reception. In terms of visibility, the roles were distributed evenly between women and men. All the women are ritually silent. The bride's father proposes a toast to a happy couple, and the groom replies on their behalf. He toasts the bridesmaids and the best man replies for them. Men speak, women are spoken for, and here we have an epitome of women being not heard. Women's participation in linguistic function is not tolerated just as children's participation is not. So, women in a culture are noticeably silent and deferential.

There are other strands to be unraveled in the question of women's silence. Kaplan quotes Sophocles's aphorism that "silence is a women's glory" (169). This suggests the male privilege that boys inherit as their birthright. Injunctions of silence are frequently directed quite explicitly and particularly to wives. For instance, in some cultures women observe a period of silence immediately after marriage. They might be permitted to speak only in the home and censored if they break silence outside. Book of advice to (American) brides surveyed by feminist linguists also exemplify this, albeit more moderately, urging women to listen to their husbands rather than

initiating talk of their own. Thus women suffered not only from overt restriction on their speech but also from negative value judgments on their ability to speak effectively. Thus, women were reduced to the 'good listeners.' So, feminist criticism takes this matter of women's silence and their exclusion from public language as their focus. Until now, the so-called giraffe women among the Padaung people in Burma's Kayah State, their necks are elongated by "adornment" rings, and their throats constricted and speak in breathy. Padaung men find this erotic and take pride in the thin 'inherently feminine' voices of 'soft-spoken' Padaung women. Men want to perpetuate the status quo. These are cultural aspects which are silencing women, by the patriarchal structure of sexism and racism, and also through modes of language perception and definition. Therefore many French feminists advocate a revolutionary linguism, an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech.

When women are denied full resources of language, they use limited linguistic range. For them, language becomes not a handy medium but a foreign language. The holes in discourse, the blanks and gaps and silences are not the spaces where female consciousness reveals itself but the blinds of a 'prison-house of language'. Women are forced to speak in something like a limited foreign tongue, a language with which they might be uncomfortable. Thus, Dale Spender argues that women are at a "disadvantage working with the male-reigned language" (267). Women, without the ability to symbolize their experience in the male language, either internalize male reality or find themselves unable to say anything. Thus Spender points out women's alienation and their silences. The problem faced by women about this language is that it is insufficient to express their feelings. Women struggling to reinterpret the world have noted that language does not in itself guarantee communication, and that words are often inadequate. Thus, women cannot express their own experience or feeling

because not suitable linguistic medium exists. From this point of view it is crucial to reclaim language for women. So, many feminists concentrate on women's access to language and think of using the same language. However, many other feminists rather suggest to reinvent another less oppressive language and to reject male, oppressive phallogocentric discourse.

Helen Cixous emphasizes a different female language, which threatens to "disrupt the conscious order of speech" (257). Likewise, Mary Jacobus has proposed a woman's language that works within male discourse but also would disrupt it and write what cannot be written. Shoshana Felman insists to reinvent women's language, which would no longer be defined by the "phallacy of masculine meaning"(10). There is some ethnographic evidence that in certain cultures women have evolved a private form of communication out of their need to resist the silence imposed upon them in public life. But, at the absence of suitable linguistic medium, women seek resort to silence. George Steiner says, "Silence is an alternative" (74). But the dominant language (male language) may impede the free expression of alternative models and perhaps may inhibit the very generation of such models. Group dominated in this sense find it necessary to structure the world through the model of the dominant group. Previously, women's silence was dismissed as irrelevant and nobody bothered to attend the question as how can women say what they really mean. It is seldom pointed out that the use of verbal insults is almost always an integral part of incidents in which women are physically and sexually assaulted.

Thus, the language itself constitutes an act of violence and actively recreates the same cultural beliefs. In many cases, verbal violence is the 'main event.' Women do not have a parallel powerful language with which to hit back. Many commentators have noted that more words are available to insult women than men, especially in

sexual terms, and that words for women's bodies are more taboo than those for men's because it is "erotically charged and drenched with sexual symbolism" (Showalter 33). As it is "contaminated by patriarchal ideology" (Jefferson 205), such words denote women as sexual prey. Julia Stanley observes, after scouring the Oxford English Dictionary and finding 220 terms for women as prostitutes, that "male prostitutes have no such richness of terminology associated with them" (279). It seems that young women fear having the terms applied to them. In other words, the proliferation of terms that function as sexual slurs on women's reputation is used as a weapon to keep women in line. Muriel Schulz calls this "the semantic derogation of women" (9).

Men use language as an efficient means of exercising dominance over women. It arises from the men's prejudice against women and their fear of women's 'natural' power. They use verbal language to exploit women. Women try to avoid that oppressive language. Once again, it is important to note that women do not have reciprocal right to treat men in a similar way. Troil Moi observes, "while it is true that many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men, it is also true that some have managed efficiently to counter male power" (206). And women have no such verbal linguistic weapon to turn against them. So they take recourse to silence, which is outcome of both physical and verbal violence and in silence they empower their anger and protest.

Many take silence as complement to lying and concealing but women have nothing to hide and conceal rather they have to express and make inside out. So Sontag opines, "Silence keep thing open" (20). It is words or speech, which closes off thoughts. Sometimes women speak but in a manner that their male counterpart or say, readers of any literary texts, cannot hear. Silent women may not lack a language but

they do not communicate verbally. It lies in the domain of meaning both within and outside the apparently express discourse. The communicative value of silence can be extended to the use of silence in art and many other discourses. Silence can be a versatile tool in the hands of artists. The contemporary artists are concerned with silence and advocate silence and they view that expressing the ineffable is an essential function of poetry. Indeed, the search to express the inexpressible is taken as the very criterion of art. Artists use language to express silence. The poet seeks refuge in silences. Artists are more satisfied by being silent than by finding a voice in art. Silence is their ultimate end. By silence they free themselves from servile bondage to the world. Silence at its best is an invitation.

In society, men are defined as uppers and women are lowers, reinforced by socially embedded gender roles, by power structures and by the bottom line that men are taller and stronger and can shout louder. The lack of verbal language does not render women powerless. History, Reality and Truth are desire and relative to power. Feminists do not want to have power in the sense men have defined it—domination, violence and bloody revolution. Speech is not only the measure of Truth, Reality and History. There is a politics at work here. In an andocentric world, male power is power *over*, enactable by a man via whatever mode he chooses. The talkative male has power not only to express himself but also power over her female addressee. But there is another politics alive underside perception; above that is a silent woman who can express whatever they like and have power over their male counterpart through any strategies they wear. Because sometimes the silent one feels under assault by the other's speech. Sometimes, the talkative one feels assaulted by the other's silence. Thus, the talkative one can be taciturn, the silence one can be loquacious. Feminists want to strike the male notion of history, Reality and Truth and want to have equal

share and power.

Power can either be acquired or contested through silence. For this purpose, women may keep silent. Thus silence includes an array of function ranging from the role of auditor in a communicative exchange to providing social control, to demonstrating deference, to indicating emotional closeness, to managing personal interaction. Some interactional functions or silence may be viewed as primarily psychological in nature as an expression of anger. Women keep silent to mark the note of decent, especially when it accompanies with anger. Feminist campaigners have observed the lives of such women who either have been physically tortured or linguistically banished.

Feminists have also studied the relation between violence and silence and have come to a conclusion that victim may go beyond verbal language leaving verbal communication behind in the reign of silence as their angry response. In this sense, silence is the furthest extension of their reluctance to communicate. When they refuse to speak, it works as a resistance breaking off genuine communication for the sake of what they believe in. It shows women as resourceful and creative, using strategies of resistance to linguistic restriction, physical coercion. The silence cannot be indicative of passivity and approval or powerlessness. Rather it is a way to find new path and guidance in one's life. As Osho Rajneesh, an enlightened mystic defines silence as a powerful source to get enlightenment. In his world famous book *The Voice of Silence*, he dictates:

Out of the silence that is peace

A resonant voice shall appear

To hear the voice of - - -silence

Is to understand the only voice of guidance. (Osho 226)

He believes that the silent image of the women is the image of powerful deity. When women remain silent they get chance to hear the inner voice coming from silence to get inner peace and power. That is why silence in the life of women should be understood as an intellectual tool to acquire peace and happiness.

Thus, it is not always matters are sound but sometimes gap within discourse and what is not said deserves measured notice. Such a focus on gaps casts shadow over traditional practices. Silence has many strands of meaning. Tradition prepares us to take it as a token of approval and trains us to untie it accordingly. But, silence is more pronouncing as time is going afresh and as it is gaining impetus from the outpourings of literary theories and it takes form as a code negation against patriarchy. Feminist criticism talks more about the role of silence in the lives of women because their experiences are unwritten; their status is marginalized; their presence is almost invisible and their voice silent. Women have been resisting the patriarchal history by applying different devices. They also defend the cruelty inflicted upon them by closing their lips and innocent eyes. But they also use it to protect against patriarchy.

Chapter III: Textual Analysis

Silence as a Trope of Resistance in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery*

The departure of female characters from their familiar spaces in the both plays *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* comes from the discourse of silence. In this chapter the situation of women that makes them go away outside to an unknown territory to assert their existence of being women will be discussed. Thus it deals with the textual analysis of these two plays as well as the protest of women in terms of the discourse of silence.

The play *Dreams of Peach Blossom* is a short poetic play by the veteran Nepali playwright Abhi Subedi in which he has tried to capture the indigenous tradition, drama and music in symbolic form through the poetic language and images and projected the images of the historical “treatment of women by strong men. . .” in Newari culture (Preface, 45). The playwright has sought to capture the ethos of Newar culture and its impact on women. The playwright Subedi is positive about the equal status of women in patriarchal society so women have been given elevated position as the poet protagonist in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* says:

She'll have to create for herself
She'll make her space
In the sky and earth
A great pagoda
Bridge between earth and heaven
Where her mind will hover
Like clouds
Where she'll create Mandalas

To keep the time she will spend. (71)

But unfortunately the women here are trapped themselves within certain cultural and social structure of patriarchy. They are not authorized to transcend the space that patriarchy has long assigned to them. So, the women are bound to raise their painful voice voicelessly against such an evil of the society which relegates them to certain limitation and boundaries. These women, now, start dreaming for the upliftment of their life but their dreams are not fulfilled. The poet-protagonist speaks in the poetic and symbolic language that there are the dreams in the carving art of Bhaktapur, and these dreams are still there reflected behind the carved wood. Those dreams behind the carved wood are still not fulfilled. He says:

But dreams were here

Are here now

They were then dreams for those

Who lived behind the carved wood.

[. . .] Time here is silhouette

He speaks of this time in the language of no words. (60)

The dreams behind the carved wood are the dreams of those innocent women who are deprived of freedom. They only have dreams but cannot bring them in real life because they are silenced in the name of culture. Even time itself cannot speak about their dream due to the lack of language of words and the dreams of those innocent women get withered or unfulfilled.

In the play, when the female characters appear on the stage, they stand like statue. They move in group by scattering around the stage but remain silent. Their arrival on the stage and departure from the stage carry the sense of resistance. As the author's stage direction reads:

At this suddenly many young women come on the stage making swift movement as they scatter around the stage. They walk across the stage and then stand around the frozen guard in similar position. They are dressed in the costumes preferably those worn by Newar women of Bhaktapur in earlier times. (61)

From this above dictatorial note, it is obvious that women are doing each and every activity under the control of patriarchal standard that demands women to be faithful, calm and passive. Patriarchal standard also refers to the marriage institutions which snatches the happiness of females. These young women suddenly appear on the stage. Their movement, way of speaking and dressing are shaped by patriarchy. They walk very slowly and speak in low or slow voice as if their voices are controlled by any extra forces. They wear an expression of awe. Their facial expression and slow movements round the stage reveal that they are not happy with their life. They seem to be following whatever they are commanded to do speechlessly. Their whole body is decorated in the cultural dresses through which they are being dominated in the name of culture for it is a form of cultural domination over female. They have strong desire to revolt against such domination but they cannot do directly. These girls come on the stage to share their joys and pain among their friends but become mute. This position of women standing without any voice can be the response to the male violence. These women are disgusted with patriarchy but cannot express their disgust in language. Therefore, they speak being silent and revolt by going away from such tendency of males, which is the trope of protest against the patriarchal norms and values.

Maiju, the central character, who is about to be getting married, is in the bridal dress. She is fully decorated, and shares her pain and agonies with her friends. She

seems to be very submissive and silent. She quietly sits among other girls by emulating the gesture of anger and pains but cannot object anything else. Rather she bears everything silently. This capacity to tolerate the pains without resisting patriarchal impositions directly reveals her heroism. As the guard, one of the characters of the play explains:

The girl is getting married
 And going away
 Forever from here
 Where she may have to sit
 Quietly listening to a tongue
 She has never heard before. (70)

Though, Maiju appears to be resisting her marriage that would take her away from her home, but, after all, she is a woman. She has to follow the rules and regulations of her culture, and she is forced to leave her birth place, and go to the husband's house where she may feel the lack of language. That is why she has to sit quietly listening to others. To such response, the poet-protagonist says "A woman is the most universal of all creatures who will find her tongue wherever she goes" (73). In this expression, women have no particular language. Along with their movement, their language too gets changed. Maiju knows very well that marriage is the cultural bondage which snatches the female freedom. But still she remains silent because her language of revolt is soundless. When she is told to leave her homeland, she feels the loss of her own personality and existence. So she questions herself and tries to discover the significance of her existence. Maiju wonders:

Where does it all begin?
 Where does it end?

Who can tell me what I am
 A river or a woman
 A joy of time or a pain
 That lurks behind the wooden covers? (71)

Here, Maiju is in the state of confusion. It shows her fragmented, oppressed and spilt mind. So she forgets her own existence. She cannot say whether it is pain or happiness. She, throughout the play, is associated with the flowing of the water and with the particular river Bagmati. Carol Davis opines, “Subedi’s association of Maiju with the Bagmati conjures images of sanctity and sacrifice-attributes that characterize a Nepali woman’s life” (188). Maiju does not know who she is. She therefore asks a question to tell her who she is whether a river or woman. By associating her life with the flowing river the playwright attempts to show her tangible life which goes on like a river but without any goal and desire. She is bound to be the puppet in the hand of brutal time. It happens to her because she is forced to live in exile from her beloved homeland due to marriage institution.

The play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* contains at least three distinct time Periods-past, present, future overlapping and intruding upon one another. As the poet reminds audience of its cultural lineage the most ancient period reference is that of the legendry of Nepali princess Bhrikuti, who in 641 was married to Tibetan king Tsrong Tsen Gampo by force. After marriage Bhrikuti created her identity by spreading Buddhism in Tibet. This woman history makes every one aware that the position of women in the society has not been changed. As Bhrikuti was forced to marry in past history and now in modern time too Maiju like Bhrikuti is bound to accept the unwanted marriage. But this reference gives us an advice to be like Bhrikuti and need to create our own identity. The young Newari woman, Maiju who laments upon her

unwanted marriage that will molest her dreams by sending away from her home. But still she bears everything silently. She could raise voice directly and adopt some aggressive nature like Kali, goddess of power but she does not do so. For her, making sound or shouting alone cannot make her bold. She uses her intuitive reasoning power and adopts silence as a mode of resistance. Instead of her, the male character guard says:

Today she doesn't want to leave
 The world where she grew
 She doesn't want to go another place.
 In the city of stone gods
 Stone pagodas. (69)

Of course, the mother land is far better than heaven. She spends her most of time in her homeland, which has a sense of intimacy and love. This sorrow for leaving homeland can be also interpreted as happiness of searching her own space. So she is silent but within this silence, she is revolting for her betterment. She has strong desire and determination to fight against the evil of society. She has a dream that is the dream of free women voice.

Maiju calls her friends who are lamenting for her departure from her homeland. She asks her friends to stay on stones and woods there under the cover of sun and she would go away like the river because her memories were written in words and narrated in tales. She narrates:

Let's stay where we are carved out
 I'm carved out in words and memories
 So I'll go as river
 You are all carved on stones and wood

You stay here under the sun cover. (75)

The power of her intense desire to avoid patriarchy makes her bold enough to decide what to do. Then she holds the water of pristine river Bagmati in her palms and compares her with the river. She feels the sense of homelessness and starts journey to find the resolution of her dislocation. She wants to make her own space herself and determine to carve out her democratic self. By looking at the river alone, she is thinking of leaving her earlier domain of life. She silently moves ahead and crosses the river. Before crossing the river, her mind is full of pain and agonies and she has to remain silent under the chain of patriarchal bondages but across the river, she feels the breath of freedom and joys. She is free and now she will feel her real existence. This is her soundless voice.

In the play, Maiju is the palimpsest character who has the layers of memories. She represents the condition of Nepali women behind the shadow of cultural heritage. She, on the one hand, is obliged to follow the rules and regulation of her society, and seems to be very passive but on the other hand, she is very expressive and eloquent. She tries to get victory over silence. For that she prefers to be soundless that is silent. By doing so, Maiju redefines her silent posture as the female power to blur the patriarchal impositions. Her silent image frames the women's moments of hope and courage. Maiju, in spite of obstacles, continuously struggles for the liberation. She, as a matter of fact, remains silent which is the life of her own choice.

There are different forms of resistance such as silence, speech, starvation, or illness. Among them, silent resistance, though seemingly unworkable, bursts into aggressive resistance and leads women towards the domain of freedom, and helps to reconstruct their own space. After being free from socio-cultural and patriarchal controls, Maiju is on the way to gain her lost intellectuality. She will search her self-

identity, dignity, and social status and feel the real existence of being woman.

The young women, dressed in the typical black and red cotton dress of the Newar culture, lament on the departure of Maiju at first. Still these women are in the grip of patriarchy. So they cannot go away leaving their doggish life such as that of Maiju and think Maiju's departure as not justifiable. But at the same time, they express their happiness in pain. It is consciousness of women. They too realize that Maiju's leaving from the carved wood will be a medium to break the patriarchal chains and it is necessary to find own world. Once Maiju rhetorically asks the poet-protagonist, "Did you know that I have a sky of my own? /Did you ever see that I'm a child of songs? /Did you know that I grow with my dreams? (73) By these rhetorical questions, it is clear that Maiju is in search of "Sky of [her] own" (73). Her sky refers to world of freedom, justice, happiness and self respect. Since her birth, Maiju is regarded as part of socio-cultural phenomenon. She is strictly forbidden to flourish her dreams, though she grew with innumerable dreams of life. Here the playwright shows the analogy between the dream of the young women and the dream of peach blossoms. As the peach blossoms do not have dreams in its surface level but it too has its own dream to be bloomed and flourished. But it has to fall down before fulfilling the dreams. It is transitory. Similarly, Maiju wants to fulfill her dreams. Her dreams are so vibrant and colorful like peach blossoms but yet remain only a dream. That's why her departure from the stage evokes her ethos of life and confronts the success of life. This departure of Maiju in the play is the author's intention to highlight the women's silent resistance within the play.

The next noticeable element of the drama is its use of language-the Standard English-and its poetic forms as well as typical Newari terms. The standard language of anywhere is a symbol of dominant group. In the drama also, the Standard English

and its poetic form serve the same purpose. But the drama is able to show the resistance of women through the use of typical Newari words. For example “hiti”, ‘pote’, ‘sattals’, taremam,” ‘Maiju’ and people converse using Newari language on stage eg. “ya, nakatini la,” “chita guli jha”. . .etc. In the mean time it is worth talking about the experience of language by post-colonial societies. The Indian critic Ketu Katrak writes about the purpose of native language which is used by natives. She writes: “Most post colonial societies use standard language for state, legal machinery, other forms of English are often considered “bad” though they help to build pride and self-worth among the people (401)”. In the similar nature, the typical Newari language used in the drama helps to build pride and self-worth among the resident of Bhaktapur. On the other hand, it leads them to be aware of their own identity and they know the value of their native language. Then naturally, they start resisting to have their own identity by exploiting the standard form of language. It simply signifies the silent resistance to dominant group. So, it can be said that the dominant group is male in the drama. In this sense the resistance is against them. Thus the drama uses Newari words along with the Standard English to show ongoing resistance of women against patriarchy. Moreover women are searching their pride, self-worth amidst male domination as the critic Ketu Katrak stated that post-colonial society had ‘self pride’ and ‘worth’ while using their own form of language.

Moreover, the drama uses different Newari semiotics like rituals, music, dances, cultural places and historically significant place Bhaktapur Durbar Squire. While performing rituals and dance many people gather there. There is no restriction to anyone. Even audiences can participate there, and perform what they like. The dictatorial note writes:

Curtain open to musicians playing music. A significantly large number

of people, women and children in gala dress are talking, the words of which are only like a cantara without senseThe scene should be a free movement of people. Any number of people . . . people from the audience also can go and participate in the gathering, . . .The subject of conversation is not yet known. . . .Music becomes louder. . . . People can do any thing here. (68)

It seems a carnival on the stage. And in carnival there is no hierarchy. Every voice comes up without any domination over them. As the theorist, Bakhtin stresses that carnival is a medium of the multivoiced or polyphonic spirit which effectively opposes monolithic orders. In such situation, the dominated voice has an opportunity to get expressed. As the result, in the drama, the voice of women effectively opposes the monolithic male voice. The essayists Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkin also argue, “carnival presupposes the possibility social reform by activating the communal imagination” (83). In the drama too female characters have dream, the dream of free women voice. They therefore show the resistance to patriarchy performing a carnival. This every carnival performed by women is made unheard in social discourses. These female characters are once again bound to be speechless. But they search their way to get empowerment.

This play is harsh criticism of the historic domination of women, through which the author conveys a message to those males who do not recognize the value of women’s existence. Here the phrase ‘historic domination of women’ refers to the state of women who have been dominated since their birth. The conventional norms that they have to follow undermine their capacity and knowledge. So the women’s words voicelessly echo the love and tragedy, hunger and pathos hidden behind every stone slab as brick, and the anguish borne by the women in history directly touches the

sense of the audience. Playwright Subedi is able to provide new consciousness to the women that there is need of their own space. So, the playwright shows the victory of Maiju to carve at her social and cultural welfare.

Similarly, the another play *Fire in the Monastery* is a thought-provoking play that subtly embraces the philosophy of Buddhism juxtaposed by personal choices that the male protagonist makes journey to find the answers to the questions of life. This play revolves around the three main protagonists who are singer Bhiksuni, Bhiksuni Purnima and Bhiksu Gyan living in a Gumba. This certain Gumba is caught by fire and the library is entirely engulfed and demolished by the angry raging inferno converting knowledge into mere ashes. When the nuns and monks, who are preparing a dance for upcoming puja, hear about the fire in library, they begin to weep gently transforming cheerful ambience into a place of commotion and tension. Then, the monks and the nuns start feeling desperate and want to go outside the monastery to find peace and calm in their mind.

In this play, Abhi Subedi has brought women to the fore as in his previous play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*. Bhiksuni Purnima and singer Bhiksuni are two main female characters who want to assert the power of women by making a journey. Basically Purnima is haunted by myth of female body and the horror in her mind created by the fire in the library. So, Purnima steps over the threshold of the monastery to journey towards a future that is yet to be made and named. She opens the door of future herself and decides to leave behind everything for the service of human fellows. Actually Purnima is not totally leaving the Gumba. She herself says that wherever she goes, she will remain still the Bhiksuni of the Gumba. One thing that haunts her mind is the search of her selfhood within herself. Her selfhood, her confidence, power for life, her capacity to serve and her sensitivity to the problem of

the society awakens her from the sleep and steps ahead to improve her status in the society. She does not like to be confined herself within the monastery. She also suggests her friend singer Bhiksuni that we should have confidence and pride on being women. Purnima does not gain contentment with monastic life. So she wants to “change the style of her prayers and meditation” so that she can understand pain and agonies of human being (77). In fact, she “wants to show what a woman, a Bhiksuni can do in this life” (76). It is her final determination to work with the people of the world leaving the life of the monastery.

At first, Gyan, one of the main monks, sets out in his quest for knowledge, goes out to seek answer to the questions that haunt him, while Purnima stays back. But later her mind is also full of curiosities and questions that she likes to get answers. When the fire breaks the library to the ground, the pain of the charred books gives way to other pains that were suppressed for so long. The pain is not the pain of having to live the life of nun, but the pain of a woman experiencing her loneliness, her isolation from the belief that even Lord Buddha would forsake her once she leaves the monastery. As Purnima tells her decision to leave Gumba, at that time, one nun says that being Bhiksuni, she should not talk in that way. Leaving Gumba, and going away getting married and setting up a family these are the matters that nun should forget. But for Purnima, these all are myths made by males. Again Bhiksuni -1 says:

Just see how it is. Lord Buddha is everywhere, but once we leave the monastery, it is difficult even for him to protect us. That is why the nun can't leave. If they leave even the gods will forsake them. I'm quite surprised. If the monks leave the monastery Buddha will protect them but if we do the same he will not be able to protect us. I don't know if it is difficult even for god to care of women. (40)

In her response, Bhiksuni Purnima speaks with pain, “God look everybody equally. But one thing what you’ve said is quite correct. When the monks leave the monastery everybody thinks well of them, but if we leave, everybody thinks we are immoral, we are sinner” (40). This conversation between Purnima and her friend provokes issue of gender discrimination. The role of nuns and monks in the monastery is same but the nuns are marginalized and have become the victims of patriarchal religious dogmas. Thus, the fire in the library allows to give vent to their pent up strong emotions that even in the birth of women, God has become partial to them. According to the Buddhist philosophy, women are born as women because in the previous life, they had committed some unaccepted deeds in the society. So Buddhism also believes that to be women is a curse. All nuns in the monastery are also taught same thing. So, the singing Bhiksuni says in loud voice. “Even a Bhiksuni is a woman” (44).

Both the singer Bhiksuni and Purnima understand the biased nature even in the monastery. So they seek their way to make their life meaningful. Singing Bhiksuni gets her answer in the art of singing. And Purnima sets her journey outside the monastery to prove the meaning of women’s existence. Purnima understands very well that to be women is to acquire power and spiritual dimension. So, she, an answer to the monk Gyan’s remark that a monk too has his body, says-“yes that’s what I mean. Woman’s body is not a weakness, it is power where the meaning of spirituality can be understood” (76). Thus she feels confidence and pride on being woman and starts her journey in search of her space in the society.

All the main characters of this play are in quest of something. In the monastery, the role of the monks and the nuns has the same in their search for spirituality. Bhiksu Gyan goes outside the Gumba in his quest for knowledge and

peace. In this quest he reaches the climax of his journey when he makes a last leap to perfection on to Kailash; he has to remain a monk. That is why he returns to Gumba which is his answer to the question of his life. The Shaman, a character of the play, too, gets his answer as he says, “I need to be a Shaman. I became a Shaman. I got this answer” (63). Likewise, the singing nun too gets her answer as she declares, “I found out. . . I know I have to sing. . . I found my answer. Even if I stay inside the Gumba or outside I will live with my song” (65). As the singing Bhiksuni finds her answer in song, Purnima sets out in her quest for knowledge and truth. Thus, the playwright brings the male and female together in search of peace. Bhiksuni Purnima develops a strength, a power within her which enables her to walk out of the monastery with a mission in hand to begin to work among the afflicted, the wounded and children whose parents are killed in war. Purnima has heard the pain everywhere as she says:

Everyday I have started hearing people cry. I hear the wail of helpless children whose parents have been killed. I have found out that there are wounded people thrusting about in pain. I have heard that people lie about crying in pain and helpless without getting even a simple medicine and any service. Nowadays I hear the cries of pain even from far off village, town and everywhere. (76)

It is her mission to serve the fellow humans and create her self identity and dignity and good social status in her society. With this aim and goal of her life, she, at the end of the play clarifies her departure from the Gumba as she says after thinking for a while, “I should not coagulate like the waters, I have to flow like the water. I somehow feel I am stagnating. I have to go” (78). This expression of Purnima is very rebellious. She wants freedom and wants to take the breath in the open space that is her own space. Under the religious house, monastery, she has felt as a caged bird. But

she wants to fly freely in the open sky without any disturbance. So, she does not listen the suggestion of Gyan. As Gyan tells her to come back because the journey outside the monastery is very dangerous. He also suggests Purnima to work together there. But she thinks that she is capable of completing her mission of “being woman” other than the prescribed role of woman. She even does not look back, and does not return back. As the author’s stage direction reads, “Bhiksuni Purnima doesn’t return. Her body is a silhouette now but there is a halo of light around of her head” (79).

The play *Fire in the Monastery* ends when Purnima leaves the monastery but if we see its performance, the ending of the play is a little bit different. The playwright in an interview says:

A drama is after all for performance. It is a collective work of art. A group of playwright, director, artist, critics and audience are involved in the transformation of dramatic text into performance on the stage. After the interaction between and among the different people, there may come some changes. So, to make easy and more communicative, Nisha Pokhrel, an actress who has played role of Purnima, lits a candle and hands over it to a girl and she leaves the stage. Such types of changes do occur while performing a dramatic text on the stage which conveys new message to the audience.

If we analyze the edited ending of the play, we find that Purnima’s mission to break the convectional women space is incomplete and unheard until and unless all women raise their voice collectively. Here Purnima wants to make all the women aware to come out from the darkness of the life. She, though is silent, but creates very loud noise out of silence. In this regard, Sangita Rayamajhi describes:

Purnima . . . develops strength, power within her which enables her to

walk out of the monastery with the mission of [serving human being]. When Purnima hears the pain everywhere and as she hands over the candle by chance to a girl Pallabi Sharma Gupto, standing in the audience, the play ends with the thought of her mission that she bows to fulfill. The handing over of the candle signifies the symbolic sharing of the mission among women of all religions. (28)

Thus Purnima gets redemption from the darkness of her life that has not let her identify her identity as a free woman. In a simple term, she is directly not revolting against the evils of society which makes her live in the darkness. She remains silent every time. Even while leaving Gumba too, she does not oppose those social practices and norms that had kept her under the shadow. Instead she leaves quietly. Here her silent position should not be understood undimensionally as the condition of disempowerment, or being silenced, but carries the potential for strength and resistance. Purnima's condition of non-communication and non-speaking against the evil forces of the society can be understood as silent resistance. Remaining silent has many fold meanings. Purnima's silence is not the loss of power, but such silence has fostered her capacity to speak out silently with confidence, and authority, indeed with authenticity. Her silence is not the outcome of shame, confusion and anxiety. It is her protest that leads her life towards the free world of womanhood. Her decision to move away from monastery is the aggressive form of silent protest. This silence is the healthy response to the violence of patriarchal religious practices.

In both plays, the dramatic conflict is not of ideas or propositions, but that of power struggle of characters, who struggle to voice their respective desire. The female characters do not express themselves as much they try to conceal their true self and silence others. What they usually do is to exercise their power. For this, they ply both

speech and silence, besides their gestures, movements, actions and clothing.

We can find several tricks and sly strategies that characters deploy to gain power and voice. Whenever the male characters are present on the stage, they make all frantic attempts to silence women. In the opening scene of *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*, the male protagonist-the poet goes on speaking in poetic language and tries to make Maiju, female protagonist, whose marriage ceremony is going on there, silently listen and acknowledges his status, which Maiju upsets. He attempts to silence other many village girls who are Maiju's lamenting friends in terms of his territorial power. Once he speaks to himself:

I think I should talk to Maiju
 Across these times
 And fill up a "silence"
 That permeates history
 [. . .] more than the stories of women. (72)

Here he links Maiju's silence stature with history. Outwardly he shows sympathy to her but after all, his intention is to overpower her.

When the poet-protagonist dons on the mantle of a king to enter into past to hear Maiju's story, Maiju blames him thinking that he is the cause of her suffering. After wearing the dress of a king, he sits near Maiju and asks why she is crying, Maiju accuses the poet king about the mistreatment of women by strong men. She says:

You shed blood and say
 A woman did it
 You kill the innocents
 And say this is woman's role in history

Your history is the grace of woman. (73)

From this dialogue spoken by Maiju, we came to know about the historical domination of women. As the drama actor and critic Nagendra Bhattarai in “Actor’s Observation” observes the depiction of women and the treatment of history in the play, “History treats women paradoxically both as invisible and culpable for unpleasant event in historical times” (49). In fact Bhattarai agrees that women have to sacrifice her desire and happiness. Really male blames women without any causes. They do whatever they like and women become the victims of male’s ill-treatment, then they are forced to live soundless. But to remain silent does not necessarily mean to voiceless or passive and speaking alone cannot create true voice. No one can gain voice until and unless he remains voiceless. Silence is really complex power to achieve voice. This dialectical relationship between voice and silence is a must. Generally the loss of voice or silence is equated with loss of self or at best with an inauthentic or fraudulent self. Women’s silent stature should not be defined with their inability to struggle with the world. Their silences can bring peace in their life and help to show true guidance and true paths to step their life towards success. In fact women do not speak or are not heard because of these false relationship with the society where they are associated. In this regard, a great feminist critic Bell Hooks opines; “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gestures of defiance that heals, that makes a new life and new growth possible” (9). It means the longer Maiju and Purnima become silent and show their appearance as an immobile, the more commitment and success for new life they achieve.

Though with the advent of feminist political, literary and theoretical movement, the female voice has gained much ground in linguistic literature, criticism

and other expressive discourses today. Silence has not yet covered much ground in the field of study. The “voice” of women is defined in terms of their boldness and intellectual power to abandon their domination. But slowly and gradually, the researchers and the critics try to hear the women’s silent stories. Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fiskin observe the causes of women’s silence and its meaning in their book *Listening to the Silences*, “There are still . . . silences because women are not speaking, silences because women are not heard, silences because their voices are not understood, and silences because their voices are not preserved” (13). Women are still silent because their voices are not understood properly. But on the other the silence of women can be subversive of hierarchical order. The silences that mark personal and cultural loss become a means of identifying women’s exclusion from the dominant languages. That is why to remain silent is not the state of powerlessness. Instead it digs out inner reality about human life.

Most of the women who forcibly get victimized remain silent, because they dread the consequences of a violent outbreak or fear reprisals. They fear speaking about their domination for it can destroy or can create gap in family relation. Thus, Maiju forbears everything silently. She fears from familial and social exclusion. So, her inner soul revolts against mean thing of her society. Likewise, Purnima’s soul wants to revolt against the religious dogmas, which makes her life long enslavement. But if she does so, who will protect her? She will be defined as senseless or mad woman. She will be insulted everywhere because she is a woman. Both Maiju and Purnima find themselves unprotected in their community. That is the reason, they stay silently and try to the listen the voice of silence. Finally, their silences become an alternative mode of resistance and become able to fight against evil norms of their society.

But once both Maiju and Purnima come out of the societal chain, again they are silent. Their silences do not disappear. It may be their deliberate silences through which they get empowerment. So they desire to live silently forever.

Hence, Abhi Subedi dramatizes women's struggle against dominating and discriminating male-oriented socio-cultural system and search of their own feminine space of location by leaving their earlier space in his both plays *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery*. He has shown the contemporary women's adjustment problems in traditional Hindu and Buddhist culture in his plays. The central female character Maiju in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* has the consciousness of her existence and wants to explore her self-identity but being a girl, she is compelled to receive orthodox Hindu cultural practices. She is forced to accept her unwanted marriage in the name of preserving culture and history. She is called the daughter of cultural heritage. So, she cannot oppose that religious and cultural imposition and oppression imposed upon her, and remains silent. In the cultural texture of an ancient artistic city like Bhaktapur in Kathmandu valley, the image of representation of the female power makes this play more dramatic and powerful. Similarly, in *Fire in the Monastery*, the human feeling of nun is presented in dramatic form. Playwright Subedi, by giving the prominent role to female characters, has done justice upon women. Women characters have been placed at the centre as powerful pivot round which the play revolves. His brilliant capacity to depict the life experience, the sensitivity and the feelings of the nuns of the monastery evokes a thought to his readers and audience about the life of the nuns and their positions in the Gumba.

In both plays these two female characters Maiju and Bhiksuni Purnima are the victims of patriarchal religious tradition and they are trapped in silence. But this very silence of these two women can be an avenue to power. So, they are finally exposed

to wider and open socio-cultural scenario where patriarchal, religious as well as traditional way of thinking and behaving have been changed, loose and open. For that both Maiju and Bhiksuni Purnima aim at carving their own identity themselves. Their movement, the physical and spiritual dynamism helps to understand their own experiences of marginalization. They expose their confidence and pride on being women. So, they deny patriarchal and religious notion which always tries to limit rather than any development. Though they feel the loss of voice and do not speak directly. They only realize their situation that is conditioned by the dominant social and cultural practices. That is why Maiju finally leaves her homeland and goes away by crossing the river. She does it without protesting. Bhiksuni Purnima too leaves the monastery in search of the meaning of her life which is an art of resistance to oppression. These women thus open the door of opportunities to express their self torn apart between desire for freedom and the denied role in family and society by deconstructing the space within the cultural and family boundaries. When these characters leave the stage, they become able to have free imagination about their life because their journey now becomes meaningful. Their departure from the dominant discourse has become a sign of protest. Although they are silent, this very silent departure has reflected a posture of female resistance rather than a defeat.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Abhi Subedi, a well-known Nepali writer, thinker and academician, fictionalizes women's struggle against dominating male-oriented socio-cultural system and is able to show how women come out from the conventional limited spaces in search of their democratic self and social status in his two plays *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery*. Apart from this, Subedi shows how historical, cultural and religious dogmas treat women and how the women overpower such tendency through silence to communicate their bitter experiences. Actually Abhi's women characters seem to be very passive observers of their surroundings. They both Maiju and Purnima are powerless and submissive because they suffer from exploitative social system. They also suffer because they are women.

But this thesis argues that Maiju and Purnima are agents of revolutionary changes in the life of women. When Subedi projects the lower stratum on them, he paints their external filth in the blackest of hues; however, he sees nothing but light in the souls of women. Voice or speech alone does not add any rhythm and warmth to their destination, rather it increases their painful stories. Denunciation of patriarchal injustice and the search for a strategy against subjugation play vital role in this regard. Thus silence in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* bears testimony to the deepest layers of Maiju and Bhiksuni Purnima's sense of victimization and oppression. Significantly, their silences become representative of the breaking of the conventional norms.

In both plays, female characters are the main protagonists. The whole story of the play revolves around them. Both female protagonists find adjustment problem where they have been living since long. Maiju, in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*, belongs

to a new time who wants freedom. But the cultural practices that are followed by her society and family do not allow her to be free as males. Like Bhrikuti, she is gifted to an unknown man by her parents in opposition of her desires and aims. So, she feels very unhappy. She cries long and sits quietly among her other friends. But her agonies are not much heard. Her painful expression about her unknown future is made silenced although the poet-protagonist, in the disguise of a king, tries to enter into the painful story of Maiju but he fails. Such depiction of Maiju's sad and painful story behind the façade of cultural heritage touches the heart of every readers or audience.

In the same manner, Bhiksuni Purnima, in *Fire in the Monastery* finds adjustment problem and necessity of searching own democratic space while staying in the monastery. After the library is burnt, she loses her faith over there. Her mind becomes full of questions. For her, the monastery is a religious house, it is her world but she finds her world inside the monastery is narrow or very congested. She feels a sort of confinement. She realizes that the life of nun in the monastery is not as open as the monks, where monks are in superior post and nuns always have to be passive, and inferior. And even she is not allowed to speak her desires openly. That is the reason she makes decision to leave the monastery.

The experiences of being silenced unfold as a process that includes the female protagonists complicated level of consent and collusion to domination. The unfolding, indeed, the process of making silenced by the traps of cultural tradition brings female protagonists to a liminal state of consciousness which helps women to transcend the state of being silenced in their society. That is why Maiju and Bhiksuni Purnima resist domination and attempt to reconstruct their own space and social status. While resisting those evil norms and values, they use their female body via silence. Maiju refuses her unwanted marriage through silence and for Purnima too, silence plays

creative role to resist the monastic life.

This research has now led the researcher to conclude that women go against silencing tendency of dominant religious and cultural system. There is a saying-“Iron cuts iron.” In the same way, silence helps women to deconstruct the silencing attitude of dominant discourse. Indeed silence is a complex means of establishing, maintaining and perpetuating discourse and their power structure in the society. Silence, therefore becomes a part of discourse for expressing power as well as for resisting the dominant power which always under evaluates and marginalizes the woman’s space or location in the ancient as well as in the present society too.

Subedi’s both plays *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* are truly feminist texts. Despite the fact of being a male, he shows his female characters resisting patriarchal oppression through the discourse of silence. As a fact that his female characters like real social characters feel oppressed so their silent resistance against religious and cultural inequities and determination strengthens the ties of their imaginative strategies for social change. Their silent resistances are undertaken with self-consciousness, so they decide to bear upcoming risks and danger to attain their free selfhood.

This study over the female characters of Subedi’s plays proves that Subedi, being a male too, wants to assimilate with the pain and agonies of women. By doing so, he shows his great respect to those women who are silenced by any form of domination. He posts all the females in the equal status to males. For that, he, through these plays presents his female characters very rebellious. But here the critical analysis of his works discloses the reality that his female characters lack free intellectual self in the beginning. Only towards the end, they try to attain their lost intellectuality, so that they can prove themselves superior. In my view, Abhi’s

depiction of women characters in silent posture may be his awareness about the social facts which do not permit women to go against the patriarchy directly with vigor intellect. To be safe from such tendency of society, Subedi perhaps applies this strategy to depict women. By presenting women characters very calm, patient and submissive, he intends to show female's inner revolting souls. That is why Maiju and Purnima's silent position in plays is very remarkable policy of the author to show the rebellious nature of his female characters. Maiju shows her rebellious nature by reacting the poet-protagonist when he wears the mantle of a king. She also exhibits her strong revolt when she crosses the river. In the similar way, Purnima shows her rebellious nature when she gives up the life of monastery. She even does not listen the words of Gyan at the end. Both women perform each and every activity with self consciousness without taking help of males which helps to take up an independent and professional life.

To conclude, silence in the life of women gives a new mode of resistance. Silence works simultaneously, to understand own voice of true self and to fight against evil forces. I remain mindful of the fact that silence as a trope of resistance within and beyond the limits of patriarchy only can bring solace and peace in the life of women, and they open up their new life.

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