

## Misrepresentation of Female Characters in Siddhicharan Shrestha's

### Selected Poems

Siddhicharan Shrestha (1912–1992), popularly known as "Yuga Kavi" (poet of the age) basically wrote with an urge for social transformation. He was active to overthrow the autocratic Rana regime during 1940s. Shrestha's verses employ characters who stand to exercise freedom, independence, social justice and empowerment. They appeal people to exercise freedom through revolution. Though the poet calls on young people to join revolution, his verses are lopsided as they portray males as capable of leading the revolution, advocating for equality, and strong enough to fight against autocratic rulers. In contrast, the poet has sympathetic attitude towards the female characters in the poems.

Most of the female characters in Shrestha's poems do not have proper agency. They are shown weak in decision making due to their dominated social status. His semi-epics like *Mangalman* and *Urvashi* are the poems that contain ample instances where women are represented in a negative way which becomes the focal issue of this research work.

The study of Siddhicharan Shrestha's poems reveals that though he talks of social ills and need for change; he does not give proper agency to the female characters that ultimately fall in the pit of misrepresenting women as inferior as forged by patriarchal imagination. Shrestha's poems bring both human and social issues along with the description of nature which are ultimately deployed to speak for social transformation. He is among the few romantic poets who have given expression to the repressed emotions of the people in verse. Shrestha's poems have been read widely as a call for revolution. His semi-epic *Mangalman* and *Urvashi* have been analyzed by different critics through various perspectives.

Mohan Sitaula observes *Mangalman* as a vision of the new society. He further explains that the insights of Siddhicharan Shrestha transfers to the protagonist Mangalman. The zeal of reform can be experienced in this poem. This poem has pictured a historical development of democracy and its aftermaths in Nepal. Sitaula observes the poem as a social, historical and political tragedy, and contends, "Though it ended as a tragedy, *Mangalman*, the protagonist and *Mangalman* the short epic, leave behind an optimistic vision of a new world. This noble work, as a character, theme and arts is representative voice of the suffering and striving souls of the world"(95).

Similarly, Abhi Subedi interprets the poetic arts of Shrestha as an attempt to correct the political paradox and awaken people to assimilate with the spirit of time. He writes on *Mangalman*, "In his long poem written about a subaltern low caste *Mangalman* who remained active in the heart of the Newar town before and after 1950 in which the poet creates a combination of history, myth and rebellion" (55).

Likewise, Usha Thakur, on the other hand, argues that *Mangalman's* protagonist wants to uproot the exploitative behaviors of so called elite group. He desires to establish the justice-based society where every man can feel equality. Hence, she interprets about the poem, "Siddhicharan poetic persona wants to delete the feelings of disparity and outburst the vicious circle of castesism" (66; My Translation).

Shrestha's poetic creation has been critically read and published through the periodicals, too. Dilliram Mishra contends, "Shrestha's poem 'My Beloved Okhaldhunga' has good representation as Madhav Prasad Ghimire's eulogy *Gauri*. Moreover, we can listen the echo of immense patriotism and empowering current like in *Mangalman*" (Mishra 6).

Mohan Lohani also writes on the revolutionary character, Mangalman, who is full of revolutionary fervor. For him, Mangalman is a tragic hero who fights against injustice. Lohani observes the protagonist Mangalman as a person who cannot fit in an aristocratic society. So, he contends about *Mangalman*, "Mangalman is utterly disillusioned and dismayed at prevailing social injustice, malpractices and incongruities such as casteism and discrimination" (58).

Likewise, Devi Nepal, reads Shrestha's *Mangalman* as an epic that is primarily based more on reality and less on imagination. Mangalman is a symbol of patriotic feeling; however, his ending is more pathetic and satirical for a patriotic personality such as Mangalman. Devi Nepal writes:

Nobody came in demise of Mangalman. Even a dog cleared a way for Mangalman's death procession but the high post leaders, who were made by Mangalman, did not participate. The epic ends with a tragic tone that it is disrespect for a patriotic person who accepts death for a nation. (157)

In addition, Kritinidhi Bista, thinks Shrestha's contribution in Nepalese literature is worth admiration. Bista is of opinion that Siddhicharan's poetry is like a vast ocean of boundless attributes. He thinks Mangalman as person who possesses the qualities of a great soul. Bista argues:

Mangalman reflects his real poetic personality and attitude to life and society. Mangalman, seemingly an unassuming character, possesses qualities of a great soul, ever struggling with and sympathetic towards those in misery and distress. Mangalman dies fighting against injustice, tyranny and exploitation. One might ask: 'Why has the poet chosen

Mangalman rather than someone of higher status as the protagonist of his long poem? Therein lays the poet's forte. (19)

Likewise, Sanjeev Uprety, discovers revolutionary desire in Shrestha's Mangalman. Mangalman is relevant even today in Uprety's view. Uprety is of the view that Mangalman is a modern Nepali hero. His tale glorifies the common people life with patriotic spirit. Taking this argument, Uprety observes, "His poetic narration of *Mangalman* Nepali's story brings to the public space the struggles of a common person who fought against tyranny under tremendous odds" (98).

Uprety's interpretation about Mangalman as a modern Nepali hero highlights the contribution made by a male during the revolution to overthrow the tyrannical Rana regime. He is portrayed as a hero who embodies patriotic spirit. He becomes the person of public space because he is a male. His death has been taken as a glory of Nepali revolution to end the tyranny of Rana. Uprety valorizes masculinity strength of Mangalman.

Chunda Bajracharya, a noted Siddhicharan scholar, has analyzed Shrestha's literature in quite distinct way. Bajracharya is of the opinion that Shrestha is profoundly influenced by *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Jatak*. Moreover, she finds Shrestha's composition is amply touched by great personalities rising out from the very society he lived in.

Regarding Shrestha's depiction of women in his verse, Bajracharya argues:

His stories depicts women as evil characters wicked to the step children, loving their husband just for the sake of getting profitable approval, using jewellerys much above their economic disposition, betraying their lovers for social advantage and the like. Similarly, there are women characters who unable to satisfy themselves sexually from

unmatched marital relations take forms of mermaids for their satisfaction. Instead of depicting women working for social welfare, he has depicted those who are the reasons for social disintegration. (85)

Siddhicharan Shrestha's another semi-epic *Urvashi* has also attracted numerous criticisms. Govinda Raj Bhattarai contends that Shrestha's semi-epic, *Urvashi*, reflects the poet's different personality. Indeed, Shrestha has recomposed the tale of Urvashi and Arjun in the epic in a symphonic way. The poet's revisit to the story of *Mahabharata* deciphers the cruel Rana regime in Nepal. He argues:

*Urvashi* shows a conflict between physical pleasures and spiritual call. Temptation towards the worldly pleasures and power to renunciation creates tension in this epical work. Finally, physical pleasure is overpowered and which is the defeat of Urvashi and may of the poet's too. (87)

Janak Lal Baidhya is of an opinion that *Urvashi* is an epic which reflects the poet's own failure in his life. Regarding Shrestha's portrayal of female in the epic, Baidhya argues:

The female protagonist Urvashi is a metaphor to human's desire to have comforts. As a man is dissatisfied with goods and goodwill so is Urvashi. The nymph has been derogatively personified in the poem. The poet compares his failure, unsuccessful, and discomforts with the destiny of Urvashi. The poet compares himself as Arjun, who has the ambition to overthrow the Ranaarchy so he has to forsake *Urvashi*. (130; My Translation)

Yadunath Khanal observes *Urvashi* as, "an encounter between Urvashi and Arjun followed by the latter's refusal to respond to the former's solicitations" (23).

Khanal asks whether the poet's position is of Arjun or Urvashi. Khanal finds the poet's confession in the preface by identifying himself with Arjun. In the poem, Khanal finds Arjun conquers his mind.

Moreover, Khanal interprets Shrestha's *Urvashi* in the manner of the 'Kamayani' of Jayashankar Prasad. Khanal views the poet's representation of Urvashi and Arjun in a symbolic manner. So, he assumes, "Urvashi and Arjun are represented to symbolize two aspects of human personality, the man and his aspiration" (23).

Usha Thakur views, "The conflict between heart and mind gave birth to the story of Urvashi. Arjun represents masculinity, whereas Urvashi represents submissive and charming nature of femininity" (67).

Likewise, Keshav Prasad Upadhaya argues that in *Urvashi*, Arjun has been represented as decent, cultured and virtuous, whereas Urvashi, though, she is a nymph and master in dance and music, is presented as lowly character. Furthermore, Upadhaya contends, "Urvashi stands for arrogation, whereas Arjun is privileged as a forsaker in the short-epic" (69; My Translation).

The survey of the existing on *Mangalman* and *Urvashi* also hints that the issue of representation is the key issue in the texts. But they have not sufficiently explored how women have been misrepresented due to existing belief system that they are submissive and emotional. Hence, the poet has also failed to provide proper agency to those female characters.

Not only the poet but also the critics seem to have a bias views on the semi-epics. Some of them observe Mangalmanas 'a tragic hero', 'a great soul', and 'a modern Nepali hero' and so on, whereas the female character is explained as a low soul, pessimistic and anti-revolutionary character. Similarly, the criticisms on *Urvashi*

explain male as a spiritually elevated and conscious minded character whereas the female character is described as hysterical, unconscious, irrational and submissive character. So, this research work tries to explore that gap in the study of Siddhicharan Shrestha's poems.

Shrestha's *Mangalman* highlights the protagonist, Mangalman's activities like involving in revolution, experiencing the custody to end tyranny of Rana rule. His leadership to overthrow the tyrannical Rana regime is admired by the poet. Moreover, he is explained as a visionary person. On the other hand, his beloved Sundari Laxmi's contributions are not mentioned in the epic. Being Mangalman's beloved, she definitely helped him to lead the revolution. But the semi-epic has lopsided her contribution. She is shown as an irrational and non-visionary character. So, the epic includes numerous binary oppositions like, rational/emotional, visionary/non-visionary, modern/traditional, literate/illiterate, hero/ordinary, bold/submissive, protector/needy, and so on.

Similarly, Shrestha's *Urvashi* also has the issue of misrepresentation. Urvashi as a nymph falls in love with Arjun, but her feeling towards Arjun leads her to the state of humility. She is negatively presented throughout the epic. Thus, Hall's insights about representation, and some feminist criticisms substantiate to analyze and interpret the primary texts of this research work. So, the researcher explores and analyzes the poems borrowing the concept of Stuart Hall's "Work of Representation", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," and Simone De Beauvoir's "The Second Sex".

The poet attempts his best to treat both sexes equally, but to some extent, he also becomes the victim of canonical authorship, as Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak mentions in her popular essay, 'Explanation and Culture: Marginalia', in her world

famous book *In Other Worlds*, "This common cause is an espousal of, and an attention to, marginality– a suspicion that what is at the centre often hides a repression" (141). Spivak's comment on the issue of centre's repression to the margin can be vividly justified from Shrestha's poems, too. Shrestha seems to have the thought to eulogize the male characters' contribution. However, he does not properly acknowledge the females' aspirations. The canonical authors specially sing the song of bravery, rationality and heroism and discards the emotion, ordinary and marginal characters so is the trend of Shrestha's poems. Therefore, Shrestha also becomes the victim of canonical authorship.

The brief synopsis of Shrestha's *Mangalman* and *Urvashi* are worth of mentioning in this thesis for clarifying the issue raised in this research. Siddhicharan's *Shrestha's Mangalman (1961)* is a tragic semi-epic which revolves around the life of a character named Mangalman. He was born in Ghabanani, Kathmandu in July in 1925 AD to his father Ganeshman and mother Ganeshkumari. By the age of eight, he had helped the victims of earthquake in 1933. He was an atheist as well as altruistic in nature. He did not use to like any discrimination among the people on the basis of caste, class and creeds.

When Mangalman reached his youthhood, his father made him work for an army officer. But he could not tolerate anarchy of tyrannical Ranaism (1846-1950) in Nepal. He led the mass movement to overthrow the Ranaism. He got arrested and put in custody charging him protesting against the Rana regime.

While he was spending custody life, his mother died of diarrhoea. He was released to attend in his mother's funeral ceremony. Despite his father's disagreement to raise voice against the Rana regime, he continued to protest. He was thrashed and given severe torture in jail. Many of his friends were released from the prison in 1950



after the inception of democracy in Nepal but he did not stop to protest against the government's unequal socio-political policies.

Mangalman fell in love with a girl, named Sundari Laxmi. The girl was very beautiful but she hailed from *pode* (a subcaste of Newar) community who is supposed to be untouchable. Mangalman proposed her to marry but she denied reasoning she was from lower strata in the society. Though she helped Mangalman in revolution, she did not accept his marriage proposal. In this case, the poet charges her of being ignorant and non-visionary.

Mangalman was dissatisfied with monarchical system, too. He continued to protest against the Panchayat System (single party based political system in Nepal that started in 1960 and ended in 1990) and its policies. He again got arrested by the police. He was severely tortured in the jail. He got infected from various diseases like tuberculosis. He was humiliated by his colleagues and relatives. At last, he died inside the prison. But unfortunately, no politician, relatives and his friends came at his death ceremony.

The poet overpraises Mangalman's struggles, whereas Sundari Laxmi's contributions to introduce democracy have been neglected. She disappears somewhere in the middle part of the semi-epic. Laxmi is shown as a non-visionary character that lacks a confidence in life.

Likewise, Shrestha's another semi-epic *Urvashi* (1960) is Hindu-based (*Mahabharata*) mythical epic. It narrates Urvashi's life story in the heaven. The epic highlights Urvashi's failure and frailty. According to myth, the goddesses were threatened by a group of monsters. The monsters attacked in the heaven. The deities were mostly terrified with the chaos of the devils. So, they requested Arjun to save them. Arjun saved the goddesses by defeating the monsters. The entire heaven gave a

special reception to Arjun. Urvashi along with her friends presented dance in the ceremony. Arjun got impressed by Urvashi's dance. Similarly, Urvashi also got influenced by the bravery of Arjun.

Urvashi preferred to marry Arjun. So, she visited Arjun's bedroom at a night in the heaven. She wished Arjun would accept her love. But Arjun defied Urvashi's love proposal. He not only unaccepted the love proposal of Urvashi but also humiliated her. He suggested her not to be emotional in affair. He urged her to avoid ignorance claiming that she was quite uneducated. Though Urvashi wanted to love Arjun, she was charged as an uncultured and awful nymph.

Urvashi did not tell any bad to Arjun. She departed with Arjun telling that if he had liked her, he would have owned her at any cost. However, it was her choice so that she was badly treated. The epic concludes with Arjun's suggestive tone that Urvashi should have morality to reach at the top of the summit of success. Here, success gets measured with the patriarchal doctrine that is a female cannot take a right decision herself because she is a female.

The male has been represented as a protector of the female in particular in semi-epic *Mangalman*. The poet's *Mangalman* is an epitome of socio-justice oriented literary work but the wish of Sundari Laxmi is murdered by the poet because her logic of practical move for the untouchable society is put aside. The protagonist Mangalman is highlighted as spirit of common people's aspiration. The poet sings the song of Mangalman's hardships. In contrast, the role of female character, which comes from so-called Dalit community, is not properly acknowledged. Thus, it is a condition as explained by Parth Chatterjee borrowing the insight of David Arnold, "History therefore does not record the truth, truth lies outside history; it is universal unchanging. Truth has no history of its own" (167).

David's insight is relevant in this context because Mangalman is the hero of Siddhicharan's epic, *Mangalmanas* discussed by the critics. His struggles and contributions have been praised. It is a history of Mangalman. He represents a high spirited social worker. But, on the other side of the same history, Sundari Laxmi is represented as submissive and fragile. Her contributions for the betterment of the society were not of less value. But that is not depicted accordingly.

Mangalman is a social activist who is presented as a hero fighting against the anarchy to free the people from its tyranny. He finds that it is not easy to bring changes in ordinary people's life. So, he thinks there must be the forceful push to break the vile of the society. For it, he announces:

Ek dhakka deu-deu swarna yuga khulchha

Biswasko yehi boli Mangalman bolchha. (793-794)

*(Give one push. One forceful push*

*Then the gate of golden age opens.)*(MyTranslations)

Shrestha argues that Mangalman is an inspirational person. He wants to unite all the people to hit the palace of dirt and dark. Dirt and dark connotes the conspiracy and corruption of rulers. If the people hit the head of the bad rulers, there will appear the golden gate, which leads to the guarantee of social justice, liberty and equality.

In addition, Mangalman argues that it is his message to the people from his courageous heart. In other words, he corroborates his revolutionary part of line and envisions the free society with the help of line and envisions the free society with the verdict of people.

Mangalman assesses the life standard of Nepali people even after the establishment of democracy in 1950. He dreams to bring morning light by defeating the thorns along the way. So, he expresses in the epic:

Jhismise ujayaloma bato kadnaikanda

Tara hami hidnaiparchha panchhayara badha.(799-800)

*(In the faint morning light, along the road full of thorns,*

*Proceed we must undaunted, clearing away what blocks)*

Mangalman believes that it is sure to clear away the obstacles along the road because the destination is obvious. He seems to be enlightened regarding the indispensable and inevitable liberal society which may radiate as equal as the sun's light. The thorns on the way are quite dangerous since they bear the vices. To enjoy the reign of virtue, he again calls the people to show their courage. The courageous people can establish the political system which they really want. The blockade on the way can be swept if the people are united and undaunted. Similarly, *Mangalman* is sure regarding the emergence of creation through the revolutionary root. So, the poet writes:

Samjhanako phoolbarima imanko phool

Mangalman srijanako krantikari mool. (805-806)

*(A flower of sincerity he was that in memory's garden blooms.*

*A revolutionary root he was Mangalman creation own.)*

The poet metaphorically explains the virtues of Mangalman. So, he argues that he is a follower of sincerity. He is synonymous to honesty.

Shrestha's verses very implicitly explore the binary opposition of citizen/alien, rich/poor, young/old, male/female, and so on. These binaries tend to substitute for each other. They struggle to displace one another because the representation of one group lies when another is displaced. It is a continuous process. Stuart Hall also has similar opinion regarding this, "These binaries are constantly being undermined, as

representations interact with one another, substituting for each other, displacing one another along an unending chain" (10).

Though Shrestha's Mangalmanis interpreted as a role model for the common people, the epic has shadowed the role of Sundari Laxmi. Laxmi is a girl from a so called untouchable group, i.e. *Pode* community. Mangalman desires to marry with her but she constantly refuses the wedding proposal of Mangalman. Here the poet writes the following lines:

Mangalman vivahako kura aghi sarchha

Tyo kurale Chayaminilai teen chhakka parchha

Chalan ko dailo kholi bolchhe rupamati

Hridayako devatako chahanna oo khati (511-514)

*(Mangalman forwards the proposal of wedding*

*Chaymini felt quite astonished*

*Revealing the tradition, spoke Rupamati*

*She dislikes perishing of her deity.)*

Sundari Laxmi also loves Mangalman. She is having her meal by sweeping on the street. She has some consciousness of transformation but she refuses the marriage proposal of her lover, Mangalman, arguing she is not permitted to have any decision in her life. For the same situation, Spivak points out:

Though women are proficient in doing many jobs, they are not allowed to make any kind of initiatives in their lives. The gendered subalterns are playing the role of mere shadows to please their men. The role of the shadow comes to an end when the light goes out of her husband. Then the women have no more existence except to trace the shadow of the dead. (133)

Though Sundari Laxmi remains unmarried to Mangalman, she loves him more than he does. She wants to uproot the social problems of the then society, like untouchability and its aftermaths. She wants to participate in the movement to bring the social justice in her society. The poet cannot empower Laxmi politically though the protagonist, Mangalman, has been presented as hero. In this respect, her representation in the poem lies in the margin. She has been represented not only as a girl from lower- strata in terms of social class but also mentally subjugated to the contemporary social values. In the poem, she says:

Kasto kura garnuvako Mangalman kaji

Tapaiko patni huna kasari hu raji ! (515-516)

*(What a talk made Kaji Mangalman*

*How a spouse to you be I can!)*

The female character, in the poem, Sundari Laxmi once again loses her space. The poet does not empower Sundari Laxmi and posits her outside the mainstream and treats her as marginal as if she has not contributed anything for the betterment of the society. Spivak's following idea becomes relevant in this context:

The third world women are discriminated on the basis of gender, color and caste. 'The Other' always occupies a position outside the mainstream of life and they are treated as marginal who do not contribute anything to the welfare of the society. The psychological reason behind the treatment of women as the 'other' is to subjugate them under the patriarchal dominance and utilize their servile existence whenever needed. (131)

The female character of the epic *Mangalman*, who represents the lower and untouchable community that is *Pode*, one of the Newar castes, is not given proper agency in comparison to Mangalman. The poet composes the following lines:

Agyanako badalma Chyaminiko chitra

Mangalman rumaliyo tehi chitrabhitra. (531-532)

*(The clouds of ignorance the Chyamini possesses*

*Mangalman rotates around the picture.)*

There is an apparent sketch of binary opposition in the poem because the male character, Mangalman, stands as a witty and knowledgeable person, whereas the female character, Sundari Laxmi, is represented as an illiterate and ignorant creature. In other words, male's identity is positively sketched while female's identity is derogatively depicted. So, the regime of misrepresentation of the female characters is associated with formation of identity and knowledge as Stuart Hall explains, 'Representation, here, is closely tied up with both identity and knowledge' (5).

Shrestha's *Mangalman* obviously posits male in a leading role. Though he is from lower strata of the then Nepalese society, he can howl against the dictatorship. The poet has selected a male character that is aware of the social-political transformation. So, he says in the poem:

Karayer hidnu bhane pakrine vaye

Nabolera basau bhane anayekai jaye. (641-642)

*(If howling against, fear of being imprisoned*

*If unspoken, injustice may win)* Here the male character, Mangalman,

has courage to revolt against the Ranarchy. This shows that the poet gives proper agency to male character, whereas the female character, Sundari Laxmi is deprived of proper agency because she seems to be lacking to howl against

the existing norms and values. When Mangalman proposes her to marry with him, she refuses:

Manishko sauravma jatbhat hunna

Tara pani samajle yo kura mandaina. (527-528)

*(No practice of untouchability in humanity*

*But, the dogma prevails in society.)*

The poet portrays female character as a dependent who is controlled by social circumstances and cannot contribute to bring social change, whereas the male character is depicted as an independent who can change the existing norms of the society. In this context, Beauvoir observes:

Men are considered essential subjects (independent selves with free will), while women are considered contingent being (dependent beings controlled by circumstances). Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women have meaning only in relation to men. Thus, women are defined not just in terms of their difference from men, but in terms of their inadequacy in comparison to men. (6)

Siddhicharan Shrestha's another literary work; *Urvashi* is also a semi-epic that takes mythical characters from a grand epic *Mahabharata*. According to the myth, a group of monsters attacked the heaven. The gods and goddesses in the heaven were terrified with the evils of the monsters so that the gods asked Arjun to help them. Arjun fought against the monsters and defeated them. He brought happiness in the heaven. Explaining the celebration of victory, the poet writes:

Danav badhi badhdai aai

Swarga dagauna khojda

Jorjulum aau utpat bhai



Surgana tikna nasakda,  
Surganale ani Arjunsita gai  
Sabinay maddat mage,  
Asur harai Arjundawara  
Surako subha din laye.(193-200)  
*(A flood of monsters claimed the heaven  
The divine power got shaken  
Arjun was asked to help them  
The gods were rescued by Arjun.)*

The entire heaven was delighted and a splendid ceremony was organized to welcome Arjun in the heaven. The gods and goddesses including the nymphs rejoiced the ceremony with pleasure. Arjun is praised in the following way:

Aaj tesaiko utsav khatir  
Phool ra joban rasle  
Swagat Arjunlai gareko  
jay jay jayko layele. (201-204)  
*(The grand ceremony in victorious mood  
The flowers and fluids with youth-hood  
Let's welcome Arjun praiseworthy  
Triumph, triumph and triumph of symphony.)* )

The involvement of Arjun and his victory for the existence of heaven is praised. This myth celebrates merely the virility of the man not the woman. By focusing the victory of Arjun, the poet privileges the masculinity and posits the man as subject as Simone De Beauvoir postulates:

Any myth implies a subject who projects its hope and fears of a transcendent heaven. Not positing themselves as subject, women have not created the virile myth that belongs to them alone: they still dream through men's dreams. They worship the gods made by males. And males have shaped the great virile figures for their own exaltation.

(196)

Similarly, in *Urvashi*, the poetic persona metaphorically states the story of Pururawa and Urvashi in Satya yuga. According to the legend, Pururawa once fell in love with Urvashi. Though Pururawa was not handsome enough, Urvashi married to him. But after some years, Urvashi and Pururawa got divorced. In Dawapar yuga too, the males were attracted to see Urvashi because she was very beautiful. The poem emphasizes on the aspect of beauty of Urvashi:

Bho-bho yasari dher nahera

Manma lagla balchhi

Birseyeu ki katha aghiko timile

Pururawa ra Urvashi. (20)

*(Nay, nay, donot upon such a gaze*

*Your heart may be in a bail*

*Did you forget the popular*

*Tale of Pururawa and Urvashi?)*

The excerpt of the epic has derogatively represents Urvashi in the beginning of the epic. She has been depicted with negative traits. If they look at her, she may bring misfortunes as Pururawa had experienced in Satya yuga. The poetic persona, without finding the factors of divorce between Urvashi and Pururawa, accuses Urvashi of bringing misfortunes in the life of Pururawa. In this way, Urvashi, in the epic has been

presented as if she brought downfall in Pururawa's life. Simone De Beauvoir explains such situation in the following way:

She is an idol, a servant, source of life, power of darkness, she is the elementary silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip, and lies, she is the medicine woman and witch; she is man's prey; she is his downfall, she is everything he is not and wants to have, his negation and *raison d'etre*. (196-197)

The titular character in the epic, *Urvashi*, served as a dancer to welcome Arjun in the heaven; so she is described as a dancer in the heaven. She once married to Pururawa and left him; so she is his downfall. Taking these references, the poetic persona implicitly asserts that Urvashi is a medicine woman.

The poet portrays the female character Urvashi as a blockade. So, she is alleged as if she was there to destroy the meditation of Arjun. She is represented as a destroyer and a hurdle on the supreme path:

Tap bhanga garauna shram garda

Niskeki yo nari! (327-328)

*(To divert the meditation*

*She came with the aim)*

Again the poet's lines give a space to observe the dichotomy between gender that is femininity and masculinity. Urvashi is represented as a destroyer, whereas Arjun is praised as a wise creator, rescuer and god, who, was likely to create something better.

Moreover, Urvashi is misrepresented as the evil temptress or a demon who leads a man to havoc. In this context, Spivak states:

The literature produced by male authors, indoctrinated by the ideology of patriarchy, provides a prejudiced, mutilated graph of women.

Women are misrepresented either as angels, the true emblem of purity and innocence, of service and sacrifice or as the evil temptress, the demon ready to tempt and lead man to havoc. (5)

*Urvashi* repeatedly hegemonies the titular character *Urvashi*. When she gets impressed by the bravery and personality of Arjun, she loses her heart and wants to hug Arjun. Recapitulating the moment, she says:

Jhandai- jhandai halna pugeko

Arjunlai angalo!

Chhi; ma Apsara, nakachari kasto! (391-393)

*(I was about to hug Arjun*

*Disgusting, what a shameful nymph I am!)*

The poetic persona composes *Urvashi* as a girl who does not have any proper identity. She thinks she is "nakachari" (shameful) to Arjun. In addition, the poet makes *Urvashi* that she doesn't have any remarkable thought in her own. Here, *Urvashi* is portrayed as man's other. In this context, Beauvoir argues, "The word woman, therefore, has the same implications as the word *other*. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other; she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man's world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is" (20).

Similarly, the poet portrays *Urvashi* as a girl who is passionate character. The following lines negatively mark her as such:

Kam ukasne batavaran chha

Nirab adhi raat,

Sambeng Arjunlai bahauna

Indriya sukhako badha!  
Ke hola hai, aab ke hola  
Praye: nagna Urvashi!  
Arjunlai bhuj bandhan ma  
Kasna chha ati utauli.(580-587)  
*( In erotic environment  
At mid-night  
Booming the sexual excitement to Arjun  
What might happen?What may happen?  
Urvashi gets excited in her naked body  
To hug Arjun)*

The excerpt raises one important question. Why does the poet portray Urvashi naked? She is depicted as a hysteric character that loses consciousness. The poet portrays Urvashi in this way because he takes Urvashi is an inferior to man (Arjun).Furthermore, the poetic persona in *Urvashi*, puts his argument regarding the virtue of Urvashi to Arjun in this following ways:

Pyas lagyo vandaima ke  
Ma pieu ryal-sigan? (715-716)  
*(Does it mean to sip saliva,  
if I feel thirsty?)*

The speaker perhaps has used the term "ryal-sigan" metaphorically to connote the sexual activity with Urvashi is lustful. He is probably against the pre-marital relationship with a girl, but the way the poet has represented the female character, Urvashi, sounds stereotypical. Instead of the term 'ryal-sigan', he could use other terminology.

Some critics like, Janak Lal Baidhya and Yadunath Khanal argue that Siddhicharan's treatment to Arjun is a metaphor for an ambition and aspiration. At the same time, Urvashi is portrayed as an obstacle for Arjun to reach the summit of his goal. Here, on one hand, the poet suffers from high cultural thought; on the other hand, Urvashi herself locates as marginal character since she is merely a dancer in Indra's court. She neither enjoys power nor any position. Hence, through these lines, the poet derogatively presents the character of Urvashi. She is represented as a woman who is full of lust, greed and passion.

The poet valorizes Arjun's thought. He treats Arjun as an elevated and educated person though he tries to escape from worldly activities. Arjun predicts his failures if he weeds to Urvashi. He claims Urvashi's love is just a passion in the following lines:

Uthna chha garho, girna chha sajilo,

Maile girna hudaina,

Pyaro, ramro vandaima yo

Vishlai piuna hudaina. (759-762)

*(It's easier to fall down than raise*

*I must not fall*

*I ought not to take poison*

*Though it smells pleasant.)*

The above mentioned lines of the poem portrayed male as an autonomous, stable entity, whereas female as unconscious, lustful and emotional. Regarding the portrayal of the characters, Stuart Hall observes, "The conventional notion thinks of 'the subject' as an individual who is fully endowed with consciousness; an

autonomous and stable entity, 'the core' of the self, and the independent, authentic source of action and meaning" (55).

The poetic persona represents Urvashi as poison. It means she is a causative agent of downfall. In other words, she is wicked and evil. Here a question arises; if Arjun had the desire as Urvashi has, he would be represented as a brave, macho-man or legitimate head whose job was to continue the generation (lineage). Many epics have glorified the heroism of the male character as they adopt all possible strategies like murder, conspiracy, war to get their heroine. However, these dark sides of such hero are discarded or distorted. He is shown as a sacred or pious man. But in the epic *Urvashi*, the titular character is represented as a lustful character.

The act of misrepresentation of Urvashi perpetuates throughout the epic. Arjun is represented as a person, who has an aim to climb a summit. He does not want to reside on the bottom of the hillocks. Here, the following lines reflect the dichotomy regarding gender disparity:

Dekhda dekh dai shikhar ujawalo

Kina ma ruku yo phedima. (811-812)

*(Why do I rest at the bottom of hill*

*if light shimmers at the summit?)*

The above-mentioned lines of *Urvashi* implicitly support the male-centric view that the female has no determination and destination of their life. It connotes that only the males live with ambition. In other words, the poetic persona valorizes the male's aspirations extravagantly, whereas the women as the "phedi" or the foundation is either ignored or underestimated. In this way, Siddhicharan has sung the songs of male and shadowed the role of women in the society. Here, the formation of subjectivity of women once again negatively constructed as Spivak postulates:

Subjectivity, historically constructed and expressed through the phenomenological equation of self/other, necessarily rests masculine "selfhood" on feminine "otherness". The self and other make a pair in which the other is subordinated. Man is identified as the self and women as the other, the self treats the other as supplement. Thus, womanhood is negatively constructed in patriarchy. The subject centre of dominant discourse in terms of power, agency and autonomy has been a universal subject which has established its identity through the invisible marginalization or exclusion of femininity. (29)

When Urvashi appears in the room of Arjun at mid-night, Arjun addresses her as a mother. The poetic persona relates regarding this situation in the following lines:

Kati ber ubhi, sangna birsi

Chalnasaket chalina,

'Kasari ma bhaye 'aama' bhanne

Unle prashna garinan. (933-936)

*( Standing for a long as if an unconscious being*

*She became motionless*

*How she became a 'mother'?*

*She did not ask the question.)*

Urvashi actually wants to question to Arjun regarding his charge against her. But she does not interrogate him because she became unconscious while she was talking to Arjun. The poet depicts her as an unconscious being. In other words, she is treated as an object that is deprived of knowledge and power to involve in discourse, whereas Arjun is portrayed as a subject who bears a kind of knowledge. In this context, Hall argues, "The subject can become the bearer of the kind of knowledge



which discourse products. It can become the object through which power is relayed"(55).

The climax of marginalization comes when Urvashi responds to Arjun in the following lines with the sympathetic acceptance of inferiority:

Chhaheko bhaye makana timile  
 Luti bal le pani lintheau  
 Maile chhahanu nachhanuko  
 Artha nai metidintheau.  
 Maile chahe tara balahina  
 Chheko sakdina garna,  
 Jit chha timro, har chha mero  
 Chhaina masita aaba bhanna. (949-956)  
*(Had you wished to own me  
 You would have looted me,  
 It would be worthless  
 Whether I wanted or not.  
 Powerless, I, desired, but  
 I am unable to perform  
 What I wished,  
 You won, mine is defeat  
 I have no word to utter.)*

Urvashi, in these lines, tries to speak against the patriarchal constitution which forcefully kidnaps the desires of the women. However, she cannot cater such opportunity to stand in subjective position because the poet makes her accept her frailty in front of masculine regime. Regarding this situation, Lois Tyson's view is

relevant, "Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (85).

The epic provides easy location for Arjun to boast up in patriarchal setting by defeating and defaming femininity through Urvashi. The following lines emphatically illustrate the shrewd words of the poetic persona:

Supath pad-hata, khinna mana, ye

Urvashi, ye Urvashi!

Jivan banama Arjun gamki

Khilyo bedag bani. (977-980)

*(The sacred path, disappointed spirit, hello*

*Urvashi, Alas! Urvashi.*

*Arjun stood spotless in human kind*

*So, he brags.)*

Urvashi constantly falls into a prey of patriarchy. She is represented as a source of dirt and spots. On the other hand, Arjun enjoys safe-landing in the epic and gets life spotless. However, Urvashi is compelled to live with many black-spots in the religious history as such.

Shrestha deliberately tends to continue the binary oppositions in the conclusion part of the epic, too. He writes:

Prapti Phuleka timra dinsanga

Timro yo aprapti,

Ali par gai jab timi dajauli

Rahala matra samapti. (1049-1052)

*(It is your deficiency on the day of possession,*

*You own stoppage as a dreg*

*If you compare, standing at distant.)*

These lines of the ending section of *Urvashi* implicitly try to establish the notion of binary opposition like good/bad, light/dark, obtain/ lose, and so on. The very concept of Urvashi's wishes in Shrestha's semi-epic tends to prove the women's frailty in their life and perpetuates the patriarchal domination as a powerful hegemony in the epic imagined by patriarchal values.

Moreover, Shrestha's epic ends with suggestive tone. Here the poet suggests:

Manka ti korkar

Sudda ra nirmal man yo navaee

Paunau timi sar! (1082-1084)

*(The vicissitudes of your heart*

*You won't get essence of life*

*Unless you own pure soul.)*

The pure and impure thoughts in the epic are always connected with gendered role. The male comprises the sacred ambition, whereas the female character lacks it. In other words, the poet emphasizes that female ought to be educated. This kind of thought can be traced in Siddhicharan's *Urvashi*, where the female character is repeatedly suggested and warned. The poet portrays Urvashi as a stereotype who must be taught what she must be and must not be as Spivak contends:

The realistic portrayal of woman, who stands between these extreme cases, is conspicuous by absence in literature produced by male writers. These stereotypical images are intended as prescriptions for women dictating to them what they should be and what they should not

be. The discourse of patriarchy reads women's desire for choices and liberation of women as forms of aberrations. (5)

In this way, the poet unknowingly rotates around the vicious circle of male-dominant society. The patriarchal value which is always at the centre conceals the repression. Urvashi in the poem is treated as if she did not have voice. Ultimately, it shows that only the male can protect the existence of female.

Siddhicharan's poems represent the stories of struggles during the Rana regime. They reflect the hardships of Nepalese people due to the Ranarchy. The characters that are employed in the verse endeavor to attain the equality and justice. They want to enjoy the liberty through the expression of free will. Moreover, one can observe that the poems manifest the marginal people and their suffocation. However, they keep on fighting with centre for their existence.

In conclusion, though the characters try their level best to enjoy the equality, justice, freedom and other political rights, the women are not fairly depicted in the poems. The women in the poems are derogatively represented. They are depicted as emotional (irrational), non-visionary, low-spirited and submissive, needy, lustful, unconscious, awful, uncultured, traditional, whereas the males are represented as rational, visionary, high-spirited, autonomous, stable, bold, protector, literate, modern and hero. In this way, the two texts selected for the study presents an imbalanced portrayal of women characters. The poet fails to give proper space to the female characters. Thus, it can be concluded that Siddhicharan Shrestha's selected epics for the research reflect the patriarchal mindset of the poet who finally falls in the pit of misrepresenting women as inferior as forged by patriarchal imagination.

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