

Chapter I

Introduction

Position of Women in Nepalese Society from Vedic Age to Present

The history of Nepalese women regarding their position in the society varies from age to age. The position of women in Nepalese society was better during the Vedic period (2500 -1500 B.C) In the Vedic period women were regarded as goddesses. Uma, Parvati and Sita are its good examples. The Hindu literature propagates “Where women are honored, even the Gods are happy there”, “Housewife makes the homes as the abode of God”. The position of women in the ancient Nepalese society was very respectable. But later on, slowly and gradually, the status of women began to deteriorate considerably. Since 500 B.C, marriage of a girl became obligatory and they began to be married at an early age. Since then there began a general deterioration on the status of women. Marriageable age of a girl was reduced and widow remarriage also was banned. Hindu women were not allowed to study the holy Hindu books like the *Vedas* and the *Purans* and to perform their rituals. The Sanskrit literature strongly propagates that a sonless person gets no place in heaven after death. *Sati*, as a social evil, was prevalent which means the widow had to immolate herself wherever and whenever her dead husband was cremated. Hundreds of thousands of widows were burned alive with their dead husbands. This social evil was abolished by then the Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer only in 1920.

The selling of slave women as property was common in Nepal. Parents used to sell their daughters as slaves. Although slavery was abolished in Nepal in 1925, the system of girl trafficking to India has not been controlled up to the present day. Legal provisions to prohibit these evil practices were enacted, but their implementation is not effective. Many Nepalese women are suffering in Indian brothels even today. Nepalese women have been relegated to the subordinate position since the time immemorial. If we study the history of Nepalese society, we find male domination or patriarchal society. The Nepalese society still believes that women are for the pleasure and assistant of men and they should fulfill women's natural feminine functions. Nepalese society considers women different from men and discourages to compete with man but to depend on them for everything, especially for their identities. Nepalese women are given the limited roles of wife, mother, and mistress all of which are pleasing and beneficial to men. Society and religion both blind women to the restriction of their gender identities. Despite the legal provisions, girls cannot inherit parental property and they have to depend on the kindness of their male relatives for their survival. According to Amod Bardhan Kaundinnayan :

In the early times, there was general prejudice against allowing women to hold property. Even the wife, regarded as husband's joint owner in the family property, had very limited rights. So, it is no wonder because for a long time widow's right to inherit her husband's property remained unrecognized. Vedic texts declare women to be incapable of

inheriting any property. Almost all religious books of Hindu philosophy declare that the owner of the women's own earning would be their own husbands'. (75)

In ancient times, Manu and Vasistha did not mention their daughters in the list of their heirs. With the exceptions of gifts or dowry, the daughter had no possibility of acquiring any estate either by inheritance or by partition.

The phallic worship is made as a part of religious ceremony for Nepalese women. Nepalese women who are Hindu or influenced by this religion, worship Linga, the symbolic sex organ of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is a male deity, and to worship its sex organ means submission of women. Nepalese males never consider Nepalese women as their equals. Women for them mean for their pleasure. Udaya Nanda , a contemporary poet of Prithivi Narayan Shah , wrote in his poem that there were more than sixty girls working in the palace . We can surmise that most of these girls were concubines.

After the unification of Nepal, the position of Nepalese women has not been changed much, but Rajendra Laxmi, Lalit Tripura Sundari, and Rajya Laxmi Devi rose above male domination. Rajendra Laxmi became the regent of her two- year- old son Ran Bahadur Shah and ruled Nepal for few years. She waged wars against Lamjung, Kaski, and Tanahu and subsequently annexed them into Nepal. She defied traditional Hindu rules regarding women. She did not immolate herself at her husband's pyre, and broke the rules of dress code for widowed

Nepalese women. Lalit Tripura Sundari also became the regent of Girvarna Yuddha Brikram and ruled Nepal for few years. Likewise, Rajya Laxmi Devi even dominated her husband King Rajendra Shah and wielded enormous power. Rajya Laxmi Devi appointed Jung Bahadur Rana as a prime minister and army chief of Nepal after the Kote massacre. However, these few women who were granted power did not fare any better. They were compelled to accommodate with the wishes and styles of patriarchy. Child marriage, unequal marriage, polygamy, Sati and slavery were in climax in those times. Even the so- called powerful royal women were killed in the pretext of Sati.

During the Rana rule, the then prime minister Charndra Shamsher made Sati Pratha illegal and promulgated laws. Those, who forced single woman to burn herself alive at the pyre of her husband, were charged as murderers. In Nepalese society, girls were forced to marry before the age of puberty or before they menstruate. Chandra Shamsher also banned child marriage. It was illegal to form any kinds of unions or organizations during Rana regime, but in 1917, a committee of Nepalese women was formed by Diyba Devi Koirala , Durga Devi Dikchhit, Melawa Devi, Tulaja Devi, and Yog Mayan. Under the leadership of Mangala Devi Singh, Nepal Women's Union was formed in 1947 and they sought the women's rights. It played a vital role during the revolution of 2007 B.S. which overthrew Rana family rule. Kamakchha Devi also formed All Nepal Women's Union in 1952. After the fall of Rana regime, king Trivhuvan formed an advisory council comprising 35 all male members, and these women's

organizations vehemently protested and demanded women representatives. Dwarika Devi Thakurani was elected in parliament in Nepal's first general election and was appointed as a minister. King Mahendra banned political parties and unions in 2017 B.S. Little progress were made regarding women's rights during Panchyat era. The successful people's movement of 2046 B.S again spurred Nepalese women to come forward and fight for their rights. Ministry of Women and Social Welfare was formed in 1995 20% of representation was reserved for women which dramatically increased women's representation in grassroots politics. Despite these good signs of improvement in Nepalese women's positions, Nepalese women are still not considered equal to men. Because of the deep rooted superstition, Nepalese couples still prefer boys to girls. Dor Bahadur Bista in his book *Fatalism and Development* writes –

Many people among the Hindu high caste families worry more about their next life then about old age and are interested in having as many sons as possible to maintain the ritualistic practices necessary for a successful after life. To ensure this many people continue to have children till they have one or more male offspring. There are cases where people with a large number of female children continue to have babies in the hope of having at least one male child. (62)

This proves that the Nepalese girls are in a precarious position. Nepalese do not want baby girls. Most of the Nepalese invest heavily for their sons' education but neglect their daughters. Most of the holy Hindu books preach the inferiority of females. The *Manusmirit*, for example, states that women should be under the strict control and supervision of males. A

woman without male supervisors (father, husband or son) lives inauspiciously and precariously.

Bennet, Lynn writes :

Supported by the principles of disciplinary theories the high caste males justify themselves in limiting the freedom of their women. A high caste Hindu widow, therefore, cannot attend festive occasion like weddings and Vratabandha (initiation ceremonies). Orthodox Hindus consider it unlucky and inauspicious to see the face of a woman who is widowed. (46)

Because of these restrictions Nepalese women get very little opportunity to socialize themselves. Nepalese society considers a woman excessive and loose who knows and talks too much. A woman, who is close-lipped and active at looking after the household, is considered an ideal woman.

After the successful People's Movement of 2062/63 BS most of the discriminatory laws have been annulled. Nepalese women's representation in all sectors is guaranteed by allocating 33% reservation for women. The number of women as members of parliament in the re-enacted parliament is encouraging. First time in the history of Nepal, four women cabinet ministers and a state minister are appointed in the present council of ministers. Abortion has been made legal, which allows the women to abort unwanted pregnancies. Inheritance law has been further amended in favour of Nepalese women. Hopefully, male domination in the Nepalese society would end with the advent of new Nepal.

Treatment of Women in Nepalese Literature

It is an undeniable fact that literature is the mirror of contemporary society. It is necessary to study Nepalese literature in order to know the treatment of women by Nepalese

litterateurs in various ages. Most of the litterateurs seem to have been in favour of keeping Nepalese women in the traditional way of life. Nepalese's poet Laureate Bhanu Bhakta Acharya penned a poem *Badhu Shiksha*, where he wrote about the duties of a daughter-in-law. According to *Badhu Kshichha*, a daughter- in -law's foremost duty is to do household chores with perfection and satisfy the needs of other family members. A daughter- in- law must speak softly, must obey the orders of other family members, and must not complain in extreme cases too. A daughter-in-law must have a smiling face no matter how deeply she might be suffering deep inside her heart. The drama *Shakuntala* was translated in Nepali language by Shambu Prasad Dhungel (1946-86 B.S) In the drama *Shakuntala* , the sage (Shakuntala's adopted father) says-

Always serve the seniors and make your husband happy

Love your husband's other wives and don't be jealous

Be polite and accept whatever happens

Remember! it is the duty of a true daughter. (tr.)

Shankuntala's duty is to respect the seniors, to keep her husband happy, not to quarrel with her husband's other wives, never to complain, and to speak politely even if greatly hurt. The sage says that daughters are burden for parents and he is greatly relieved after the marriage of Shakuntala. The sage's thinking and advices to his adopted daughter reflects the mind-set of translator Shambu Prasad Dhungel in general and contemporary Nepalese society in particular. Bal Krishna Sama, the greatest Nepalese playwright also urged to women of Nepal to respect, obey and remain faithful towards their husbands no matter how much pain they may inflict. The greatest Nepalese playwright Bal Krishana Sama writes –

A patriot never dies even if his country is in shambles

A loyal wife never dies even if her husband is a crook. (tr.)

In the play *Mukunda Indira*, Mukunda is shown as an irresponsible man who does not love Indira and stays in a foreign country for too long. He is not faithful to Indira and is a playboy. Despite his own questionable character, he suspects Indira's fidelity and agrees to come home only if Indira could prove herself clean. Indira does not dare to rebel against her husband. She suffers too much because of her husband but still regards her husband as a God. The play *Mukunda Indira* shows that women must remain loyal and faithful towards their husbands even if their husbands create problems for them and treat them very badly. It is accepted as the birth right of the husbands to rule over the lives of their wives.

In later years, litterateurs urged Nepalese women to revolt against male domination. Gopal Prasad Rimal's play *Mashan* urges Nepalese women to seek equal rights, and to be ready to revolt against the male domination if the need arises. His play *Yo Prem* is about Nepalese women's awareness. This play urges Nepalese women to reject outward love of unscrupulous males, who regard women only as temporary bed partners. The play *Yo Prem* also spurs Nepalese women to condemn and expose the male bigamists. Bisheswar Prasad Koirala's novel *Tin Ghumti* also instigates Nepalese women to revolt against forced or arranged marriage. The protagonist of this novel Indra Mayan rejects her proposed bridegroom and instead weds her lover Pitamber. Indra Mayan is from Newar caste and Pitamber from higher caste Brahman family. This novel's main theme is marriage without love is meaningless, and must be rejected.

Women are still being confined in Nepalese patriarchal society. Women are being stifled both in marriage and social life. The female freedom, womanhood and , oppression of women, were the subjects that were not permitted to be spoken by the women until few decades ago. Gradually Nepalese women started questioning the male chauvinism. The search for identity and

their places in the otherwise male dominated society became the crucial female issue in recent years. Suppressed women long aspired to be free from male domination, and domesticity but this desire is still dormant in Nepalese society.

In the western society too, women were regarded not equal to men until the 19th century. The contemporary codes and conducts were so stringent that women were provided with etiquette books. One such etiquette book titled *Duties of the Wife* says:

Never let your husband have cause to complain that you are not agreeable aboard than at home; nor permit him to see in you an object of admiration as respect your dress and manners, when in company, while you are negligent of both in the domestic circle. Much unhappy marriage has been occasioned by neglect in these particulars. Nothing can be more senseless than the conduct of a young woman, who seeks to be admired in general society for her politeness and engaging manners, or skill in music, when at the same time, she makes no effort to render her home attractive; and yet that home whether palace or a cottage, is very center of her being the nucleus around which her affections should revolve and beyond which she has comparatively small concern, (Culley 122)

Women began to realize the implications of these harsh impositions. By 1890 the women question had been a matter of public discussion. Upper-class white women were attending college in record numbers, entering the professions previously barred to them. They formed innumerable women's organizations: social, intellectual, political and philanthropic. Lower middle class women came together to work long hours for low wages, and organizing they did was to combat working conditions in the textile mills and sweet shops where they were

employed. Many women were active in attempts to better their lot. Women's independence became a central issue during this period. The feminist upsurge was initiated by women who had attempted to function politically in the reform movements of their days. The New Orleans's *Daily Picayune* was the first major American newspaper edited by a women and its pages supported a variety of women's cause in late 19th century.

Badhu Shiksha, and *Duties of the Wife* were contemporary poems, but the western women fought for their rights, and also were supported by many male feminist writers. Western women gained their rights as par with male counterparts but the eastern women in general, and the Nepalese women in particular became conscious of their rights only in the middle of the twentieth century. Rana oligarchy relegated Nepalese women into the status of slaves. It was only after the dethronement of Rana oligarchy, Nepalese women slowly started voicing their concerns. Many women slowly started voicing their concerns. Many organizations, related with women's rights were formed. Slowly and steadily the number of girl students started increasing in schools, colleges, and universities but the women are still denied equal opportunities in many sectors. The position of women in Nepalese society is still in a sorry state.

Though Nepalese written history can be found from the time of Licchabi ruler Man Dev , the playwright Abhi Subedi tries to tell us the history of Nepalese women from that period to present in his poetic play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*. Three distinct time periods overlap and intrude upon one another as the poet reminds his audience of its cultural lineage. The most ancient period referenced is that of the legendary Nepalese princess Bhrikuti who was married to Tibetan King Tsrong Tsen Gampo. Bhrikuti was forced by this marriage to live in exile from her beloved homeland and, having gained the Buddha's begging bowl in her wedding dowry, spread

Buddhism in Tibet. Of her, as an archetype of women exiled by arranged marriages, the Guard (a character in the play) says:

This girl is getting married
And going away
Forever from here
Where she may have to sit
Quietly listening to a tongue
She's never heard before
She may be
Thinking of that time (70)

The poet (another character) replies:

And, oh yes, the time
She'll have to create for herself
She'll make a space
In the sky and earth
A great pagoda
Bridge between and heaven
Where her mind will hover
Like clouds
Where she'll create *mandals*
To keep the time she will spend
And the places she bridges
As fountain heads of all this minds

As the girl Bhrikuti did

In the land of fleecy clouds. (71)

Bhrikuti played a role in the building of Tibet's first and most important Buddhist temple, and Bhrikuti is considered a reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhism's Green Tara. In Nepal today, Bhrikuti's heroism, determination, and spiritual purity in the face of travail are highly praised, while her arranged marriage and consequent exile continued to justify the tradition of arranged marriages and exiling of daughters to the unfamiliar homes of their new husbands. Abhi Subedi writes that although we openly admire Bhrikuti for good deeds, we never were sensitive about her feelings, discomforts and beautiful dreams which were faded away like that of *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*.

In his poetic play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*, Abhi Subedi tells his audience about the treatment of women in Nepalese society. It was not the wish of Bhrikuti to marry a total strange alien in a far off place whose religion, customs, traditions, and language are different, but it was the wish of patriarchal society who wanted to save their motherland not by fighting valiantly with the invading forces but by meekly surrendering and fulfilling the demands of an enemy by giving Bhrikuti as a bribe.

The poetic play shows how the kings, feudal lords, and Nepalese society made the women meek animals, and used them according to their needs. The women too have dreams but are never realized and get faded away because of male domination.

Bhrikuti's cultural descendants are introduced in the second layer of time. A young Newar girl laments her unwanted marriage that will send her away from home. Here the playwright reminds us that the condition of the girls has not been improved in Nepalese society. The condition of Bhrikuti and that of today's Nepalese girls are identical even though the time span is about

sixteen hundred years apart. Male domination was there in the 7th century when Bhrikuti was forced to marry to an alien, and that kind of male domination still exists in Nepalese society. Nepalese girls are not permitted to be with their parents. They are not permitted to be with their lovers. Maiju is a polite form of address to women. The play uses this appellation for the all women characters. The scene of Maiju's departure is heartbreaking. Everybody feels sorrow and dismay because Maiju does not want to leave her birthplace. The society forced her to marry against her will.

When Maiju is forced to leave for her husband's house the guard sympathizes:

Today she does not want to leave
The world where she grew
She does not want to go to another place
In the city of stone Gods
Stone pagodas
And stones of different order
She is the child of Bhaktapur town
She is a baby of this wooden cosmos
Her place is here among us fixed
She still dances in our eyes
Oh, poor *Maiju*
How shall I forget her (69)

The story of women's powerlessness in the face of male supremacy touches the senses of audience. Relegated to strictly social roles, the women in the tales told by the play *Dreams of*

Peach Blossoms seek to discover the signification of their identity and existence. Maiju wonders and asks:

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 pain

That lurks behind wooden cover? (71)

Maiju asks these questions but nobody is able to answer. The flowing of the Bagmati River is associated with Maiju. Today's Bagmati flows past the holy temples with the offal and waste of a city that takes no action to offset the consequences of the immense pollution it creates. No one takes responsibility for protecting or cleaning the river just as the character (poet/king) does not take responsibility for protecting women.

The suppression of women started in Nepal long ago. The sufferings and agonies of women can be heard in folk stories. Some even believe that the souls of the women, who were forced to marry and sent to far off places, return at night. Some even say that wedding scenes can be seen at night where women like Maiju unwillingly sit for the ceremony. Abhi Subedi writes in his preface quoting the guard:

The guard of the palace told me that he heard music at night;

he had seen wedding scenes where Maijus were unwillingly sitting

for the ceremony. People played drums and song. They organised feast.

But when he told these stories to people they did not believe him, which made him very sad. This story did have a metonymic value for my

interpretation of history. I personally do not believe in the guard's story but what opens up from the incidents is that there are innumerable possibilities for a playwright to explore and being to focus the aspect of human history which have gone down in the pages of history as silent moments in human relationship with the times. In Nepalese history for example, I have a caveat that all those moment in our written, oral or silent histories were pleasant and glorious. The valorization of Bhrikuti's marriage to the Tibetan king in the 7th century, for example has been part of immortal sagas of this country. But the tension and agonies involved in such tropes of history are glossed in the grand narrative. Poetry is the only medium to capture such moments and silent spots in history. In this poetic play, time moves on several planes. It is not linear. It is a complex process. It is a Meta history. People live the myths of history but dismantle its so-called glorious moments.(47)

Subedi uses the ephemeral nature of theatre to highlight the ephemeral nature of history and connects the love and pain of the women with the exploitation of culture. Nepalese women suffer in the name of culture and tradition. Human drama of agonies and joys are hidden behind the cultural narratives. Women are treated by history paradoxically. Abhi Subedi's descriptive skill about the anguish borne by the women in historical context is highly acclaimed by critics, despite disagreement regarding his comparison of Maiju with the river Bagmati and not attempting to change the course of women's history. Commenting on the anguish borne by women throughout history, Sangita Rayamajhi writes:

Behind the artistic facades lies the anguish borne by the women (not men).

By identifying Maiju with the river Bagmati, the poet has not attempted to change the course of women's history at all. It remains a story to be told and yet a story not to be repeated. Nepal's cultural heritage is valorized for their aesthetic purpose and the tangibility of forms of images and icons. But what is also important is that this heritage is also a name for the expectation that you discern in the eyes of the viewer. So dreams are marketed in broken words, stories of love and tragedy are told and retold, and culture becomes formless waiting, to take shape in words and interpretations.... What strikes me most about this play is the depiction of the women's untold story behind the façade of heritage in moving words of dramatic and poetic subtlety. (12)

The poet (a character) laments the disintegration of the cultural heritage. Our cultural heritage is colourful and vibrant, but like *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* they remain only a dream. The architectural monuments and ancient arts stand as reminders of a culture which reach out to audience through pain filled voice of the women. Love and tragedy, hunger and pathos are found hidden behind these cultural heritages. The women are not authorized to transcend the space that patriarchy had allotted to them long ago. The women are still struggling for their identity and existence. The poet character wears the dress of the King who forced Maiju to get married to a far off land banished the lovers of the girls, and inflicted pain. The poet, after wearing the dress of a King, talks to Maiju and finds her pain too overwhelming for him to bear and says "women is such a creature who finds her tongue wherever she goes." Maiju says that she knows the language of pain and woman is a martyr whose story is not written. She says that she has a sky of her own and she grows with her dreams. The history is written by swords. Men shed blood, kill

the innocents and accuse women for it. According to Maiju, male history is the grave of women and the epitaph is written by men,

Remarking that he is as unable to change the course of history as he is to change the course of a river, the poet/king determines to shed his royal mantle and return to his own identity and time. He realizes that he is powerless to help the women transcend their prescribed roles. The pain of Maiju's history is too tangible. The poet decides that it is wiser to write his poetry from the safety of an emotional distance where, he says "it all echoes like the morning breeze" (74). He abdicates responsibility just as men today abdicate their responsibility with a shrug when it comes to changing the way men and society treat their women.

Throughout the play Maiju is associated with the flowing of water and with a particular river, the Bagmati , a holy river, yet now a polluted one that runs through the heart of Kathmandu . Subedi's association of Maiju with the Bagmati conjures images of sanctity and sacrifices a Nepalese woman's life. While the Bagmati river of Maiju's time may have been "pristine" the Bagmati of today is filthy. Kathmandu city takes no action to offset the consequences of immense pollution it creates. Protecting or cleaning the river is ignored just as the poet/king does not take responsibility for protecting the women or changing the course of their travail. The poet scoops up a handful of water from the Bagmati, smells it , and drops it all with an expression of a disgust. The modern world unanticipated in the past of Bhrikuti and Maiju and countless nameless women, rears its filthy head and intrudes upon Maiju's hope that river may be the stage upon which her drama plays .The hopes of the past reach out to an audience despairing of the unfulfilled promises of the present. Today's audience learns that the culture of their ancestors was rich and their way of life secure, though clearly uncomfortable for women. Today many Nepalese feel obliged to reinvent themselves and, in the identifying marks

of an indigenous cultural heritage. *Dreams of the Peach Blossoms* calls up the creative collective cultural memory of origins and traditions in an effort to stem the tide of materialism, of arbitrary cultural acquisition, and of disregard for that which makes Subedi's characters collectively, quintessentially, uniquely Nepali. *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is at once a romantic yearning for days ways gone by. It is a harsh criticism of the historic domination of women by men, and a brutal demonstration of the marketing of history and heritage to foreigners.

Although Nepal's constitution stipulates that all citizens are equal, and no one will be discriminated just because of race, religion, or sex, gender related discriminations do exist in Nepal. For example, a girl can be an heir of her parents' property only if she remains unmarried. But, single or married, males have the absolute rights over their parents' property.

In order to be equal with men, Nepalese women should collectively fight for their rights. They must form a pressure group which would pressurize the law makers to nullify or amend the discriminatory laws.

Chapter 2

Feminism and Literature

One could argue that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order to reduce and eventually overcome the discrimination against women. In the 1840s the Women's Rights Movement started to emerge in the Seneca Falls. The convention of 1848 and the resulting Declaration of Sentiments claimed for women the principles of liberty and equality expounded in the American Declaration of Independence. This was followed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's founding of the National Woman Suffrage Association. But even before the emergence of organized suffrage movements, women had been writing about the inequalities and injustices in women's social condition and campaigning to change it. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. At the same time, French women were fighting for the extension of the rights promised by French Revolution to women. Feminism is thus a term that emerged long after women started questioning their inferior status and demanding an amelioration in their special position. Even after the word feminism was coined, it was not still adopted as term of identification by many of those who campaigned for women's rights. Even many of the women's rights organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, did not call themselves feminist; the term feminism had a

restricted use in relation to specific concerns and specific groups. It is only more recently that the label feminist has been applied to all women's rights groups indiscriminately. R. Demlar points out regarding feminism:

There are those who claim that feminism does have a complex of ideas about women, specific to or emanating from feminists. This means that it should be possible to separate out feminism and feminists from the multiplicity of those concerned with women's issues. It is by no means absurd to suggest that you don't have to be a feminist to support women's rights to equal treatment, and that not all those supportive of women's demands are feminists. In this light feminism can claim its own history, its own practices, its own ideas, but feminists can make no claim to an exclusive interest in our copyright over problems affecting women. Feminism can thus be established as a field but cannot claim women as its domain. (13)

Histories of feminism are associated with the historical appearance of strong feminist movements at different moments as a series of 'waves'. The first wave feminism is used to refer to the late nineteenth century and early-twentieth century feminist movements that were concerned with gaining equal rights for women, particularly the rights of suffrage. 'second wave' feminism refers to the resurgence in the 1970s, when protest again centered around women's inequality. A basic version of the categorization would divide feminism and feminists into three loose groups: liberal and radical feminism. More recent surveys have also added on the categories of psychoanalytical feminism, post modern or post structuralist feminism, black feminism, and so on. The lucid analyses of feminist theorists and movement provided by writers such as A. Jaggar

(1983), R. Tong (1992) or S. Welby (1990), among others, should not be underestimated as important resources for students of feminism and for feminists themselves. Feminist writers focus on the women's rights and their emancipation. Feminists debate for the equality of sex. To eliminate the oppression and discrimination on the basis of sex is the aim of feminists. During the nineteenth century there were some women writers who focused on feminist perspective. They were Jane Austin, George Eliot and Bronte sisters. In 1833, Oberlin College was established for co-education. Only traditional and conventional education was offered to women. French feminist Simone De Beauvoir wrote a famous book *The Second Sex*, one of the most important books on feminism where she wrote "one is not born rather becomes a woman" (297). Simone De Beauvoir raised questions and issues that were vital for feminist inquiry.

The American Woman Suffrage Association, during the nineteenth and twentieth century fought for the emancipation and betterment of women. Because of the movement voting rights were given to women in 1920 and the movement again subsided for many years.

The feminist literary criticism came into existence as a political movement in 1960. It sought social, economic and cultural freedom and equality between both sexes. 'Women's Movement' of the 1960s culminated the feminist literary criticism of today. Feminist criticism, in the first phase of it, focused on the woman as a reader, and then the woman as a writer. Elaine Showalter, a feminist writer, in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" writes first focusing woman as a reader. She says that woman is regarded as the consumer of the male produced literature. Its subjects include images and stereotypes about women. Misconceptions about women are abundant in male constructed literary history. Contrary to the woman as a reader, the woman as a writer include the psychodynamics of female creativity linguistics and the problem of female language ; the trajectory of the individual or collective literary career, and literary

history. The representation of women in literature was felt to be one of the most important forms of socialization. It provided the role models which indicated to women and men, which constructed as acceptable version of the feminine, and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations.

The main focus of literary criticism in the 1970s was into exposing the mechanism of patriarchy. Books written by male writers provided critical attention in which typical images of women were constructed. The critical approaches of the 1980s changed the mood of feminism.

Peter Barry writes:

Firstly, feminist criticism became much more eclectic. It began to draw upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism Marxism structuralism, linguistics and so on. Secondly, it switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook and reconstructing the lost experience. Thirdly, attention was shifted to the need to construct a new canon of women's writings by rewriting the history of the novel and of poetry in such a way that neglected women writers and were given new prominence.

(Barry 122-123)

French feminist have focused their attention on language. They say that a child enters into the linguistic realm first as it comes to grasp its separateness from its mother. The language, psychoanalysis and social practices, culture and whole male centered thinking were tried to deconstruct by the feminists. They argued that language gives women a narrow range of choices. They argued that women can develop a feminine language. The French feminists think that the structure of language is phallus centric and it privileges masculinity by associating them with things and values more appreciated by culture. Feminist language is semiotic and pre-oedipal.

Roman Selden said that female counterpart can overcome the male when they can project their sexuality in their writing. Roman Selden's famous essay 'The Laugh of Medusa' (1976) depicts women's writing where the women put their bodies into writing. Binary oppositions of male and female is also rejected by her.

People who have participated in the 'Women's Liberation Movement' of late 1960s created American Feminist Criticism. Since the late 1960s, feminist criticism was developed as a part of the international women's movement. American Feminist Criticism has focused on women readers and critics. It has also focused on the text analysis. Many critics examined the portrayals of women characters expressing the patriarchal ideology. 'Feminist critique' and 'feminist reader' are two modes of American feminism propounded by Elaine Showalter. Feminist critics deal with books written by men. Showalter has divided feminist criticism into three stages. She defined the period of 1840-1880 as feminine. She says that feminist exposes the misogyny of literary practice; the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters. The period of 1980-1990 is defined as feminist criticism, which found out that woman writers had a literature of their own. The writers started advocating their own autonomous female perspective. Elaine Showalter writes:

In the third phase feminist criticism demanded not just the recognition of women's writings but a radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences. (8)

Showalter says that feminist criticism differs from other contemporary schools of critical theory. Feminist criticism evolved from several sources from extensive readings in women's literature

The Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s was the most important phase for feminist. Black feminists founded the 'National Black Foundation Feminist Organization' in 1973. Black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and others attracted the publishers and readers by not presenting the stereotypical female characters who are submissive, passive and loving in their novels. They presented strong, revolutionary female characters. Alice Walker responds her interviewer's question why she thinks that the black women writers have been so ignored in America and if she has even more difficulty than the black male writers. Alice Walker answers:

There are two reasons why the black woman writers are not taken seriously as the male black writers. One is that she's a woman. Critics seem unusually ill equipped to intelligently discuss and analyze the works of black women. Generally, they do not even make the attempt. They prefer to talk about the lives of black women writers who are not very likeable. (201)

The works of black women writers contain accurate records of the impact of white male values and practices upon the lives of black women. The concern of the modern feminist is to develop theories of sexual difference in reading, writing and literary interpretation. Feminist theory helps us to reveal the importance of female's personal and common experiences and struggles. Feminist theory analyses how sexual difference is constructed within different patriarchal societies. Feminists try to find out the women's oppressions, its causes and consequences, and also to prescribe strategies for women's liberation. Many feminist writers and critics came into women's liberation movement with different perspective and ideologies.

Feminists have pointed to the way in which, historically, a natural difference between men and women was assumed, and have analyzed the ways in which this difference was given

various social, political and economic meanings in different societies and civilizations. They argue that women have been given an inferior secondary status in the societies because of these assumed natural differences. This secondary status of women can be explained by the fact that within the multiplicity of cultural conceptions and symbolizations of women that exist and that have existed in different societies. There is constant belief that women are closer to nature in their physiology, their social role and their psyche. Women have been perceived as 'close to nature' whereas men have been perceived as 'closer to culture' more suited for public roles and political association. For this reason, women have been relegated to a secondary status in society. It is understandable, then that as soon as feminist began to campaign against women's secondary social status, they began to question the assumed natural differences between men and women, and the consequences of these assumed differences on social organizations. The question then arose of how to challenge these assumptions of differences. Should women deny sexual difference and claim equal rights on the basis that they are the same as men? Or should they, on the other hand, argue that they are equal but different? This equality difference debate is one that has remained central to feminism, and has become even more complex and varied with modern social and scientific developments. Although some people argue that men and women are equal but different, it seems impossible to argue for difference without creating some kind of hierarchy. This debate over equality and difference has been couched in various terms over the history of feminist activism. This divide does not cut neatly between feminist groupings, with the split reappearing in the categories of radical feminist, cultural feminism, post structural feminism and son on. Ann Snitow argues, this divide is fundamental at various levels of analysis-material, physiological and linguistic. She writes;

For example, US feminist theorists don't agree about whether post structuralism tends more often toward its own version of essentialism (strengthening the arguments of maximizes by recognizing an enduring position of female otter) or whether post structuralism is instead the best tool minimalists have (weakening any universalized, permanent concept as woman). Certainly poststructuralists disagree among themselves and this debate around and inside post structuralism should be no surprise. In feminist discourse a tension keeps forming between finding a useful lever in female identity and seeing that identity as hopelessly compromised.(17)

Feminists identify women as a specific social group with a collective identity that forms a basis for struggle.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, women's inferior position is not a natural or biological fact but that is created by the society. One may be born as female of human race but it is civilization which creates woman and defines what is feminine. This social construction of 'woman' has meant a continued oppression of women. The social roles and modes of behavior that civilizations have assigned to women have kept them in inferior positions to that of men. The liberation of women depends on freeing women from the social construct of the eternal feminine which has reduced them to a position of social inferiority.

Dreams of Peach Blossoms redefines the role of Nepalese women. The female role in the society is consciously narrowed down. Nepalese girls are raised according to the rules and laws of society. The play laments that although we valorize the good deeds of Bhrikuti , we totally ignore pain and sufferings inflicted upon her by the patriarchal society of Nepal. People often realize the importance of cultural loss when they are displaced and dislocated. The dislocation

and displacement of the individual gives the sense of loss of culture and dignity. It becomes the fate of individual to live the life of solitariness and isolation in the alien culture. The nostalgia for the past culture and roots haunt the individual. The problems and hardship are to be endured by Nepalese girls who marry with total strangers because of the selfish motives of patriarchal society. Maiju, the protagonist of *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* questions the relevancy of her marriage and the consequences:

Where it is that you want to send me
What language that I don't know
Do you want me to speak in a country?
Where there'll be no one who knows me. (73)

The play urges all Nepalese women not to be meek and obey the orders of patriarchal society. It incites Nepalese women to revolt against male chauvinism. In Subedi's opinion, Nepalese males regard the women as universal creatures. They compare women with nomadic people who wander everywhere, and wherever they go, they must adapt with new surroundings. The king (a male character) says:

A woman is the most universal of all creatures
Who will find her tongue wherever she goes. (73)

It is a well known fact that history is written by the victors, or the strong people. Discourses are made by the society, and everybody regards them as universal truth. Abhi Subedi rewrites the history based on these facts. He also asks Nepalese women to denounce some discourses which are biased against the Nepalese women. It is now time to question the truthfulness of history written by males. The protagonist Maiju says:

Your concern is history

That is written by swords
I am a prestige that you stake
In flash of your weapons

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 grave of woman
Where you write the epitaph. (73)

The play urges Nepalese woman to strive and create their 'self' by freeing themselves from the established patriarchal norms. Their identities should not be limited within the boundaries of their household. Patriarchal society considers them good women only if they behave according to the prescribed rules of the community. But it is the time for women to raise their voices against the oppressive system of patriarchal society. Traditional roles of Nepalese women must be redefined. Nepalese women should raise their voices against the discrimination. They must not accept any favors from the male dominated society. The protagonist Maiju says:

O King , don't do anything
I know you'll not do anything for me
That'll alter my story
That you have been narrating for so long! (74)

The play urges Nepalese women to violate the patriarchal norms and values, and search for their own identity. Nepalese women should not live the life of a parasite. Nepalese women should not be controlled by males. They must have full control over their lives and destinies. The males will never treat Nepalese women as their equals. The males will never grant equal rights to the Nepalese women. They themselves should unite and fight for their equal rights.

Chapter 3

Symbols and images in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*

A symbol is any sign which stands for another concept. It is a sign for expressing the invisible by means of visible and sensuous representations. The main aim of symbolism is to implicate things rather than state them plainly. Every feeling of a person is different from that of the other, and it is impossible to render these sensations through the conventional and universal language. So, the poet invents the special language which will be capable of expressing his/her feelings. Such a language makes use of symbols. The symbols represent and communicates a coherent a greater whole by means of a part. Abstract ideas and emotions are expressed through the use of symbols. M.H Abrahams, defines words as symbols. According to M.H Abrams:

A symbol, in the broadest sense of terms, is anything which signifies something else; in this sense, all words are symbols. As commonly used in discussing literature, however, symbol is applied only to a word or a set of words signify an object or refers to something which suggests a range of reference beyond itself. (260)

A symbol incites and invokes the mind to linger and to penetrate more deeply. Symbols express feeling, not through direct description, but by reacting in the mind of the readers. An object standing for something else not by exact resemblance but by vague suggestions can be called a symbol.

French writers, in the late nineteenth century, first used the term symbolism. They reacted against the descriptive precision, objectivity of realism and the scientific determination of naturalism. The importance of suggestion and evocation are emphasized by symbolism. Everything has some meaning in symbolism. Symbolism is the use of symbols to stand for

something especially in art and literature e.g. ‘cloud ‘ symbolises rain and obstacle, ‘rose’ symbolises love, ‘tiger’ symbolises power. Direct statement or descriptions are not able to convey the feelings and sensation of writer. A writer’s feelings and sensation can be conveyed only by symbols and images. According to Oxford English Dictionary: “A symbol is an image, object, etc. that suggests or refers to something else” (1211)

An image is a picture made out of words, and that a poem may itself be an image composed from a multiplicity of images. Images may also include auditory, tactile olfactory, gustatory or kinesthetic as well as visual qualities. The images in a poem give the reader a moment of illumination beyond normal apprehension.

Abhi Subedi’s poetic play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is suffused with symbols and images. Symbols, such as Bagmati river, Nyata pole (pagoda temple of Bhaktapur), carved out woods, old rags, empty jars, water spouts, chiseled stones, the earth, the moon, the sun , rainbows, dragons, old pots, pans, antiques etc are found in this poetic play . All the characters seek the imaginary space behind poetic images and symbols, and that is what the play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is about. The moon bleached garden, freak streets, cobbled yards, Bhaktapur town of yesteryear, the wooden cosmos, rattling sound of water in dry lake, women crying in the eyes of stones, bare trees with rustling sound of leaves, amputated arms of women’s artist lovers, and Maiju, the archetypes of Bhrikuti who are married off to alien land are some of the images that are tangentially related to the main plot of the poetic play.

The play incorporates remarkable symbols. Abhi Subedi has created symbols and images from the various domains. Most of the symbols used in the play are private symbols. The main purpose of using private symbols and images is to prove that male domination was there in historical times and still exists in our Nepalese society. Subedi wants to remind us through his

symbols and images that some legacies of our ancestors are despicable and must discard them, but some of the very good legacies of our ancestors must be preserved. Subedi asks us to preserve some of the cultural heritages which are our souls and identities. Abhi Subedi uses various symbols to express the deep meaning of the play. The readers of the play need to get its deep meaning through the symbols and images. Abhi Subedi's symbols and images emphasize the primary importance of suggestion and evocation in the expression of private mood. The symbols and images may be understood from a careful study, but some remain in darkness and others cannot convey all that they mean to him. For this reason, *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is a bit difficult to understand in its first reading. Sometimes, the reader is at difficulty because the perception has two or more than two alternative concepts. The author has created his images from various domains, and also has used his own private symbols, which make *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* more difficult. Almost every word is a symbol and is used not for its common purpose but for the associations that evoke reality beyond the senses.

The play is set in a distinctly timeless Durbar (palace) square of urban Bhaktapur which is regarded as the cradle of Nepalese culture for well over two thousand years. Bhaktapur is also home to the indigenous Newar people. In Bhaktapur as in much of Nepal, it feels as though the future has descended, abruptly and irrevocably, upon the past. At the very start of the play, the character of the poet wrestles with confusion of times. Outside the ornately carved palace of an ancient king, the poet remarks that "images scamper" as stories unfold not in linear order but back and forth across time. The poet says:

Images Scamper

Time freezes in fingers

That ceased to pluck at the sitar

And play tabla
In the midst of the people
Like peach blossoms
Under the sky of this wooden colour
Nyatapal breaks the sky
In five resplendent layers
In the sun and rainbow (60)

The scampering of images symbolises the passing of the times very quickly, and the freezing of time symbolises the position of women in Nepal, which has remained stagnant since the time of historical daughter Bhrikuti. Some Nepalese women tried to rebel against male domination, but it was nipped in the bud, and the small scale rebellion against sex discrimination was disappeared like peach blossoms which last only for few days. The symbol 'sun' is used to indicate strong males and the rainbow indicates short lived dreams of Nepalese women. According to Subedi, Nepalese women also have their own dreams and aspirations, but are never realized. He writes:

Oh, listen to the sound of the water
In the dry lake
Listen, to the rustle of wind
On the trees that only stand in shadows (60)

The images like the sound of the water in the dry lake, and rustle of the wind on the trees, which do not exist but stand only in the shadows indicate the fragility of Nepalese women's struggle against male domination. It may sound contradictory to say that there is a sound of

water in the dry lake, and rustle of wind on the trees that do not stand or exist, but what Subedi means is Nepalese women have their freedom only in imagination. Nepalese women have no freedom even to choose their life partners. Many Nepalese girls leave this country after marrying aliens, but it does not mean that they are not patriotic. It is not their wish, but are forced to marry foreigners. To this, Maiju, the protagonist of the play often asks:

Why do these eyes-seats of love, bath in tears?

Why these minds do split like pomegranates

That crack under the pressure of the sun's arm? (63)

The protagonist says that their (women's) eyes are filled with tears when they are married and leave this country. Their loyalties are divided into two like split pomegranates. Nepalese women are compared with pomegranates that crack under the pressure of hot sun. The pressure of the hot sun's arm symbolizes patriarchal society of Nepal. The play urges Nepalese women not to disappear like the moon and shadows. It reads:

But you shouldn't disappear like moon

Like shadows from the nooks (63)

The symbols of moon and shadows are used to symbolize the meekness of Nepalese women. Besides indicating their meekness, the symbols the moon and shadows also signify that the domination of males in Nepalese society will subside provided Nepalese women should seek their rights, and continuously fight for the same despite many failings and difficulties. Maiju, the protagonist says:

Tears are not failings

We will conquer with them one day (64)

The protagonist asks her peers not to be disheartened and warns the patriarchal society not to underestimate Nepalese women's strength. Maiju is hopeful that the day will definitely come when Nepalese women become victors, but not vanquished. Tears flow from the eyes of women when they leave their motherland, but tears are not the signs of failings, instead they are the signs of sowing seeds of rebellion against male domination. Patriarchal society takes credit for good things, whereas women's contribution is totally ignored. Whenever something unpleasant happens, the males blame the females. The males themselves initiate wars and blame females for it. Many deaths in wars, and other genocides occur because of the stupidity of males, but women are made scapegoats. Of these, the Maiju says:

I know it's the language of pain

A woman is such a martyr

Whose story is not written

... You shed blood and say

A woman did it

You kill the innocent

And say this is woman's roles in history (73)

History books are written not by the vanquished but by the victors. Nepalese society considers Nepalese women as vanquished, so their true history is not written. Women are blamed whenever something happens. Nepalese women know that patriarchal society will not do anything good for them. The society's perception is that males are superior to females. The superiority is bestowed to them (they think so) by God, and they cannot alter the course of

women's destiny. Although most of the men in the society know that males and females are equal, and it is wrong to keep the women under tight control of men. They are afraid of speaking against long established social norms. The king (a character) says:

What dost thou want me to do?

How should I turn thy history?

How shall I turn the river's direction! (73)

Here, the king laments that despite his absolute power, he is helpless, and cannot help the poor women. He asks women not to expect anything from him regarding their plights. The king confesses that he cannot ignore the customs and traditions which were inherited since the historical times. He cannot turn the river's direction. The symbol of the river's direction is used to symbolize the destiny of Nepalese women. The symbol of the river's direction also symbolizes the customs and traditions which are continuously flowing, or passing through one generation to the next.

Most of the symbols used in *Dreams of Peach Blossom* are private symbols. Abhi Subedi uses the symbols of amputated arms and legs to substantiate the old Nepalese saying *Satile Sarapeko Desh*. It is said that honest, hardworking, and patriotic Nepalese are always cursed. The poet (a character) says:

...And all these girls

Whose lovers' arms were amputated

Legs cut

So that they may not create other monuments

Like these ones. (77)

Most of the symbols in the play symbolize male domination in Nepalese society. The symbol phallus (Shiva Linga) symbolizes male superiority because Shiva Linga or phallus of Lord Shiva (a male deity) is worshipped in Nepalese Hindu society. The symbol of twenty wives also symbolizes the male domination or chauvinism in the Nepalese society. People, who had many wives, were considered wealthy or powerful until few years back. A tourist guide (a character) tells the tourists:

This palace was made by the king

Good king, you know

He had twenty wives (67)

A Nepalese woman is forbidden by the society to remarry even after the death of her husband no matter how young she might be, but men are free to keep many wives. The title *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* itself is a symbol. It symbolises Nepalese women whose life span is short but have many dreams. The dreams fade away without being realised just like that of peach blossoms. Symbolically Nepalese women are the trees of peach. The peach blossoms are forced to cease blossoming forever by external forces and rule of nature. Similarly, Nepalese women's dreams are not always fulfilled and fade away, or nipped in the bud by many circumstances, unseen forces, and laws of the society. Nepalese women dream one thing; but it happens just the opposite. The only difference between the peach blossoms and Nepalese women is, Nepalese women have many factors which hinder their dreams whereas peach blossoms have only one hindrance, that is, the law of nature. Our obstacles are traditions, customs, geo-political situation, and socio- economic conditions which are comparable with death, because these very things shatter our dreams. For example, our age old tradition of not recognizing widow marriage shatters the dreams of many widows who aspire to marry again and start their life anew. The

customs of *Kumari Pratha* deprives the *Kumari* from enjoying childhood freedom, and playing with other friends. Her dreams (to live with parents and play with neighbourly friends) are not fulfilled. She is also deprived of formal education. She is not allowed to marry.

Superstition and unfounded beliefs of Nepalese Hindu society prefer boys to girls. Couples never stop bearing children until a baby boy is born. Sometimes, a couple may have seven to eight daughters, and sell their daughters to the foreigners in the dark cover of adoption for few hundreds dollars.

In the Newar language, *Maiju* is a polite form of a addressing to women. Other women, dressed in the typical black and red *lungi* of the Newar, lament *Maiju*'s departure, and express misery of their own. One has a lover who carved the artistic images of wood and stone that adorn the great palaces. But her lover was maimed or banished, so that he could not reproduce his royal art any more. Women speak of their agonies and pain. The girl whose artist lover is maimed and banished sees the face of her banished artist lover walking on the stoned pavements.

The freak street symbolizes the western invasion of Nepal. The freak street mentioned in the play is the gathering place of hippies, who have flocked to Kathmandu since the early 1960s. On the freak street, Shiva's creative powers are sold off at bargain prices. This scene includes the commercial exploitation of *Bhrikuti*'s name and that of *Kailash* (the most sacred mountain in Tibet) and highlights the feeble associations Nepalese may have with their past. These scenes of the present day Nepal symbolize that authentic cultural memory is rapidly becoming a rare commodity. It is the juxtaposition of past and present, the jostling of the scenes of the contemporary Nepal with that of long ago.

Abhi Subedi's symbolic use of words signifies women's sufferings in Nepalese society, decadence of cultural heritage, and selling off precious antiques to the foreigners at the bargained

price. We also see in this poetic play the hollowness of modern Nepalese society, and moral degradation.

Some of the symbols stand for Nepalese women's submissiveness. The symbols peach blossoms, broken pitcher, stone spout, backyard, tears, and sitar melodies symbolize Nepalese women's submissiveness. A young woman says:

I sang like peach blossoms
I filled pitcher in the hiti
That fell and broke
I saw the Queen take bath
Under the stone spout (66)

A woman singing a song like peach blossoms symbolizes her surrendering. The peach blossoms also surrender and disappear in the lap of nature. The broken pitcher symbolizes the broken dreams of Nepalese women. Stone spouts are artificially made by men, and could be dried up any time. The queen is seen taking a bath under the stone spout which means she readily accepts male supremacy. Tear is the symbol of defeat and submissiveness. Subedi has frequently used 'tear' as a symbol to show the defeat, and submissiveness of Nepalese women .eg. tears are not failings (64) I have shed millions of tears in sitar melodies. (66), you've written your history with my tears (74), but we all meet at the confluence of tears! (75), when I have seen them and wept (78)

Subedi also uses some silhouetted images. He writes:

Oh, listen to the sound of water
In the dry lake

Listen, to rustle of wind
On the trees that only stand on shadows
As memories on the treeless back yards
Time here is silhouette... (60)

To illuminate the silhouetted images of the past and thereby relate them to the audience's reality, the poet describes Nyatapol, the multi-tiered pagoda built in 1702 and still standing in the heart of Bhaktapur. The images carved in wood and stones around Bhaktapur's Durbar Square speaks silently of the histories they represent. Such carvings are found through out Nepalese historic cities where the ancient art has been left intact or, all too rarely, restored. To walk through any part of Bhaktapur is to walk through a time wrap and back again. The Dark Lake to which the poet draws our attention may very well be the lake that once covered what is now the Kathmandu valley in which lies the city of Bhaktapur.

A predominant image that scampers is Bhrikuit's descendants. The image that scampers in this vaguely historical period is that of a young Newar woman who laments an unwanted marriage that will send her away from home, just as Bhrikuti was sent.

Maiju (the bride) says:-

We will seek the answer to this all
In the river
Across the river
In the cosmos of stones and wood
Tears are not failings
We will conquer with them one day

We will meet one day
These artists who have carved out
These skies of love
On this dear earth... (64)

...River Bagmati
You're the dream
That flows like my dislocation
You cannot be a river
If you cannot find a space down stream
I'll carve out my space too
In the perpetual flow of dreams
Bagmati, oh, pristine river,
You are the stage
Where I shall play my own drama! (80)

Bagmati river is frequently associated with that of Majiu in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*. Subedi says that the Bagmati river of yesteryear was pristine but now is very much polluted. This has also a symbolic meaning. Subedi's Majiis are descendents of Bhrikuti who was forced to marry with a Tibetan king in order to save the sovereignty of the country. Although Bhrikuti might have endured innumerable pains in a totally unfamiliar place, the motive of forcing Bhrikuti to marry with a Tibetan king was for the interest of the whole country. The selling of Bhrikuti was without any ill motives and personal gains, so Subedi compares pristine Bagmati river with Bhrikuti. Today's selling of Nepalese baby girls to the foreigners is not without any ill

intention, so Abhi Subedi compares polluted Bagmati river with the selling of unwanted Nepalese girls. The polluted Bagmati river further more symbolically represents today's people, and their activities. Nowadays, Maijus (Nepalese girls) are forced to marry or sold for personal gains. Maijus are sold and separated from their parents. Likewise, a girl who is in a deep love with someone else, but not in the preferred list of her parents, is not allowed to marry. Her shattered dreams are compared with polluted Bagmati river and peach blossoms.

Peach blossoms look beautiful and everybody is tempted by its beauty. When the peach blossoms fade away, nobody cares about it. The fading away of peach blossoms symbolizes Nepalese women's dreams, which also fade away without being materialized.

Chapter 4

Surrender to Fate

Nepalese society still believes in fatalism. Most of the Nepalese believe that the god of providence comes to the house of a new born baby on the sixth day to write the fate of the child on his/her forehead. Thereafter, one's life is guided by this destiny, and it is not possible to alter one's fate. Fatalism affects problem solving and goal achieving behavior. Many Nepalese women believe that if the course of events is already determined, then it makes little sense to attempt to influence the outcome. Personal efforts might have some consequence only if it has some resonance or supernatural level. The sense of responsibility is affected by fatalism. Under fatalism, responsibility is continually displaced to the outside, especially to the supernatural power. Most of the Nepalese believe that there is a constant external force for the individual, as the external is the locus of power, of pleasure, prosperity, and punishment. The individual simply does not have control. Nepalese people think that if someone is in less privileged position, this is a matter of one's fate. One's social circumstance is believed to be a matter of fate.

Most Nepalese of the present generation believe that one's circumstances have been determined by a supreme deity. They believe that their lives have been fated. It is believed that one becomes happy and successful because of his good deeds of previous life. This is called *karma*. The role of one's own personal actions influencing *karma* is neglected and, instead *karma* is thought to be predestined which cannot be altered in anyway.

In Nepalese society, people have a habit of cursing themselves, using the edge of their flattened hand to hit their forehead, to express frustration over failures, sufferings and miseries. Nepalese people believe that one can have only what is written by the god of providence. There is a constant external focus for the individual. If things are fated then it becomes difficult to attribute success or failure to individual action. If one's life circumstances are fated, then personal success is based on what is clearly individual effort and capability. Expectations run counter to these social expectations. Success due to personal competence is essentially threatening to the social order, which is cemented by rigidities ensured not only threats of external sanctions but by the lack of personal motivation for change. This lack of personal motivation for change is, in turn ensured by the perception that personal effort has little effect.

The Hindu religious codes state that women should be under the strict control and supervision of their fathers until marriage, under the control of the husband after marriage, and that of a son after the death of a husband. Supported by the principles of such disciplinary theories, the Nepalese males justify themselves in limiting the freedom of women. Religion has always been a central feature of Nepalese. The most important effect of the religion has been the absolute belief in fatalism. Most of the Nepalese people still believe that one has no personal control over one's life circumstances, which are determined through a divine or powerful external agency. This deep belief in fatalism has had a devastating effect on the Nepalese women.

Abhi Subedi, in his play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*, writes that Nepalese women still believe in fatalism and surrender to their fate. Society and religion are the forms of patriarchy, which blind Nepalese women to the restrictions of their gender identities. Women who surrender

to their fate and preserve the status quo are considered embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, and humility in *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*.

As we see and read in history books that Nepalese ancient daughter Bhrikuti never protested and questioned the validity of her marriage with the man she did not even see and was not able to understand his language. Abhi Subedi writes “Time freezes in finger” (59)

The condition of Nepalese women has not been changed and it has remained stagnant since historical times. The world has changed for the betterment of both men and women in other countries, especially in the western countries, but Nepalese women’s world has frozen with cold and could not move forward with the advent of science and technology, and modernization. The historical daughter Bhrikuti believed in her *karma* and agreed to marry a totally stranger alien. Subedi says that Maiju, the protagonist of the play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is an archetype of Bhrikuti, who also never protests against her forced marriage. Maiju also believes in fatalism and surrenders to her fate. While the play is going on, the girls and their lovers, the artists appear on the stage. They perform the *Mahakal tantric* dance. The lover of a girl performs the dance of *Bhairaba*, and the girl that of *Kali*, the goddess of power. All dancers emulate the classical dance of *Mahakal*. The girls’ performance of the dance of *Kali* means the girls also want to be as powerful as *Kali* and destroy their enemies. They want power not by working towards this, but by merely appeasing the goddess of power, *Kali*. It proves that Nepalese women are still superstitious and believe in fatalism.

A girl and her lover are seen dancing lovingly on the stage, but suddenly a couple of strong men come out and capture the lover artist of the girl. The girl keeps protesting with all her energy, and follows the captors when they take her lover. This shows that males do not permit the females to act according to their wish. This clearly depicts male chauvinism. The males

themselves believe in fatalism, and want to remind females that they are fated to be inferior to males. But it is not to state that all Nepalese women are entirely submissive. Some women are beginning to realize the implications of these harsh impositions. Some Nepalese women are aware that women must lead the way to their own freedom with courage and determination. To prove this point, Subedi shows a brave girl who vehemently protests and fights with the male kidnappers while being separated with her artist lover. Despite believing in her *karma* (fate) Nepalese women occasionally discuss the pain and sufferings endured by them which are directly or indirectly inflicted by male chauvinism. Of this Maiju speaks to the girls:

Maiju :

How many girls did leave this place?

How many are leaving now?

Is there never a bond of love

With this land here?

Girls :

[Together]

Yes, there's a great bond

But you shouldn't disappear like moon

Like shadows from nooks

And corners of courtyard and lawns (63)

Maiju :

Where did you leave your world?

Where did you put your dreams

Carved on stones and wood to rest? (64)

Many girls left this country and many are likely to leave, but it does not mean that they are not patriotic towards their motherland. Certainly, there is a great bond. The circumstances, which they believe are beyond their control, force them to leave the place of their birth. They believe that it is fated and nobody can avoid or alter it.

Subedi frequently associates Nepalese women with that of Bagmati river which flows from the heart of Kathmandu city. He says that Bagmati river flows meekly and goes far off places just like Nepalese women. Bagmati river cannot remain in Nepal, but has to go leaving Nepal. The circumstances which force Bagmati river to leave cannot be avoided, and in another words, it is fated. Many people pollute the Bagmati river and the river thinks that she is helpless in this regard. In the same way, Nepalese women also think whatever happens to them, (whether good or bad) they must accept it, because the present sufferings are the consequences of the deeds of the previous life. They do not seek its remedies but surrender to their fate.

Abhi Subedi does not believe in fatalism. His play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* wants to change the role of Nepalese women. A poet character says optimistically:

And, oh yes, the time

She'll have to create for herself

She'll make her space

In the sky and earth (P 71)

A great pagoda

Bridge between earth and heaven

Where mind will hover

Like clouds

Where she'll create mandalas
To keep the time she will span
And the places she bridges
As fountain heads of all these minds
Including ours today (71)

The play also urges the Nepalese women not to believe in their fates. They are not fated to be doomed. Women's role in the family is inevitable, and without them a family or society can never be imagined. As the two wheels of a cart, men and women have equal rights and obligations. The playwright is confident that women of Nepal will rise up against the male domination, and will live independently.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Dreams of Peach Blossoms: A Feminist Play

Abhi Subedi is a feminist writer and the trace of feminism is found in his writings. *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is also a feminist play. In the play, Subedi has been able to portray family structures in the Nepalese society with heavy domination of patriarchy. The play narrates Nepalese women's dreams and desires as well as frustrations and despairs.

According to the play, believing in fatalism is the root cause of women's sufferings in Nepalese society. Nepal's historical daughter Bhrikuti never protested and questioned the validity of her marriage. Bhrikuti believed in her *Karma* and agreed to marry an alien. Maiju, an archetype of Bhrikuti, also never protests against her marriage. She believes in fatalism and surrenders to her fate. The males also believe in fatalism, and time and again remind Nepalese women that they are fated to be inferiors.

The play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* is the story of Nepalese women which portrays the plight of women in the male dominated society. Like a devoted servant, Nepalese women are expected to work for the comforts of males. The Nepalese society exaggerates and valorizes the work of women if the works serve the interest of males. The Nepalese society, till today, valorizes the marriage and works of Bhrikuti but ignores the pain and sufferings endured by Bhrikuti in a strange foreign land.

The play has taken a holistic approach to view the issues pertaining to women. It opines that it is not only the male chauvinism that has caused the havoc but also female reluctance against male domination. He says that females are only biologically different from males; otherwise, there is no difference between them. Females are not inferiors to males. The play

argues that the roles of Nepalese women must be redefined. He asks Nepalese women to denounce some biased discourses. He says that now is the time for Nepalese women to rise up and revolt against male chauvinism. The play incites Nepalese women to unite and fight against male domination in order to realise the dreams of every woman. The play opines that if Nepalese women do not dare to fight against male domination, and dispel the beliefs of the outdated discourses of the society, their dreams will go down into the drain just like that of peach blossoms.