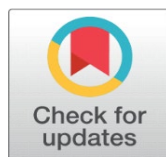
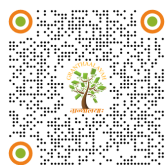


DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH NEPALI FICTION IN NEPALI SOCIETY

Binita Adhikari ¹✉

¹South Asian University, New Delhi, India



Received 02 November 2023
Accepted 01 December 2023
Published 19 December 2023

Corresponding Author

Binita Adhikari, biniadk31@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/granthaalayah.v11.i11.2023.5341](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v11.i11.2023.5341)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

This study tries to analyze Nepali fiction and its implication for raising feminist consciousness in the context of Nepal. I focused on 'consciousness' as a recognizable process on the path of awareness and self-consciousness of one's rights, passion, identity, autonomy, and self-control of lives against a male-dominated patriarchal society. Here, I have examined Nepali fiction named 'Anuradha' (1961). The female characters portrayed in this Novel are moving toward observable Feminism through their everyday interactions and situations, challenging the notion of masculinity, which is not monolithic or unidimensional. 'Anuradha' portrays a tragic love story between an introverted guy and a passionate woman named 'Anuradha,' who is a conscious and powerful personality revolt against inequalities and social injustices imposed upon females. The article helps to understand ideas of differences on Feminism and emancipation, which is very much indigenous and reflected psychologically in Nepali fiction, and not a Western borrowing.

Keywords: Nepali Society, Nepali Fiction, Western Borrowing

1. INTRODUCTION

When the world was said to have awakened in the 1920s, women were fighting for equal legal rights in the global north. Western secular thinking on 'feminist consciousness' was shaped by modernity and rationality, and women in the South were still referred to as 'cultural subjects' under colonial rule, whose voice, power, resistance, or agency were restricted. The women questions in the global south got curtailed when women were seen as 'inferior' beings/objects,' and only certain sections of men defined and decided their rights with the fixed boundaries, which is limiting within a masculinized patriarchal society. Within the paradox of modernity, this history and understanding marginalizes the everyday experiences of women

exercising a subtle form of resistance and power in the global south and provides a myopic understanding of everyday Feminism and emancipation.

'Consciousness' is a recognizable process on the path of awareness and self-consciousness of own rights, passion, identity, autonomy, and self-control of lives against a male-dominated patriarchal society. [Green \(1979\)](#) writes, 'Feminism is more than ideology and understands the consciousness as a distinct process where feminists are more likely to use a feminist vocabulary of motives, introduces the theme of sexism. In her article, [Sarah Jackson \(2011\)](#) shares, 'one can be forgiven if they think feminism does not exist in a developing country and feminism as a movement is only seated on global north.' Understanding feminism and emancipation from the lens of the West not only marginalizes everyday Feminism in the South but also does the epistemic violence to the study of Feminist International relations discipline. It colonized the situated knowledge and politicized critical thinking based on experience. Situated in the context of Nepali society, this paper analyzes Nepali fiction and its implication for raising feminist consciousness in Nepal. That is more reflected while cutting across women's experiences in their own languages, words, and gestures within their subjectivities. In an unequal and hierarchical society with various discriminatory structural and cultural practices like slavery, sati, chuapadi (the practice of women having to live in cow-shed during their menstrual period), dowry, and killings of women over it. Each "act of self-representation can evoke a consciousness of what being women mean" [Sen \(2016\)](#).

Fiction is one of the performative sites that depict observable Feminism and can help bring the feminist conversation into continuous dialogue and dissidents with the West. In this paper, I have examined a novel, 'Anuradha' (1961). This fiction is focused on identities along gender and sexual lines and pays attention to both femininity and masculinity. It visualizes the nuance of the hidden history of evoking the feminist consciousness through fictional writing and introduces the idea of differences in Feminism in the South. Moreover, it provides alternative sites for unraveling Feminism and emancipation and comprehending the idea of resistance in plural form. It investigates the 'international' and tries to center ideas of margins relegated as domestic, trivial, local, and private on everyday sites and often invisible. Mainly, two concepts, 'feminist consciousness and emancipation' and 'idea of differences,' are explored in this paper. The first section provides an overview of the theoretical framework, the second is the background on the development of feminist consciousness in Nepali society, the third is a discussion on the Anuradha case, and the final section is on the conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used for this research is Postcolonial Feminism. It highlights the concept of the 'idea of differences' and differences not just in the west and non-west but within the locality and positionality. Postcolonial Feminism emerged as a reaction to liberal Feminism. It does not subscribe to an ideology that patriarchy is the only source of oppression but rather 'examines how social inequalities are located and constructed by a political, historical, cultural, and economic context' ([Mohanty et al. \(1991\)](#), [Quayson \(2000\)](#); [Al-wazedi \(2020\)](#). [Al-wazedi \(2020\)](#) states, 'Postcolonial feminism addresses the inequalities related to the hegemonic power relations through examining the relationship between the colonizer and colonized and reviving the indigenous gender history.' Postcolonial Feminism provides the conceptual framework 'to see multiple sites of oppression and to reject the multiple universalisms around the gendered experiences of men

and women Parashar (2016). It explores the intersections of patriarchy and political factors (colonialism, imperialism). Parashar (2016) argues, 'endangered with colonial past feminists in the global south, which not only critiqued the state for its violence but asked more for accountability.' More importantly, it problematizes this universalism knowledge production in feminist history and sees it as constructed violence that mutes gendered differences and stories based on geography and temporal scale.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN NEPALI SOCIETY

Adhikary (2018) writes, 'Nepali society does not have a long history of feminist consciousness in their rights.' However, I argue there was a substantial Nepali literature section that showcased the social consciousness against the patriarchal monarchy, Ranas rule (a form of colonization before democracy), filled with social injustices and inequalities portraying the courageous rebellion of female characters who do not remain bound to societal given rules for women from the early period. It is one aspect of continuously raising and fueling the feminist consciousness in Nepal that was not considered significant. Meanwhile, Acknowledging the actual cases of development of feminist consciousness in Nepali society, which looks as the symbolic actions like 'sending women's cloth to then Rana prime minister Chandra Sumsher to improve women's by first women organization in 1974 B.S (1917 A.D), Yogmaya neupane's denial to the tyranny of death punishment leading march to plunge in Arun river along with 54 activists indicating severe resistance towards Rana atrocity' (Adhikary, 2018), 'in 1935 opening of girl's school by Chandra Kanta Devi Malla amid the situation of having education facilities only available for the elite and the ruling class, to the contribution of women as working crew in Tribhuvan highway for the first mortar able highway in Nepal in 1956' (The Feminist Memory Project, 2022) and many more show the awakening of feminist consciousness. Nepali society, more importantly, women play a significant role directly and indirectly in raising their voices through different institutions, homes, society, organizations, and publishings of literature, newspapers, drama, acts, and songs on radio and television. Women's voting rights started only in 2008 B.S. (1951 A.D.), and women were given space in the social, economic, and political platform, which was the achievement of feminist consciousness in Nepal.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH ITS USE IN NEPALI FICTION.

Nepali literary section, here fiction is one of the sources of the development of feminist consciousness in Nepal. They deliberately portray female characters who are rebellious individuals with high- self-esteem, do not remain bound within social restrictions, raise their voices, shatter gender stereotypes, and try to bring social consciousness against all odds, inequalities, and injustice. This fiction tries to spread messages on women's oppression by the masculinized society and liberate women ideologically from social misconduct, traditional roles, and rules imposed on them from multiple-layer oppression on three, from the basis of colonized region, patriarchal state, and masculinized society. Furthermore, this practice is unique from the Western understanding of emancipation and empowerment.

5. ANURADHA (1961)

Anuradha is a fictional Nepali psychological novel written by Bijaya Malla. It was published in 1961 by Sajha Publication. Anuradha is a tragic love story of a woman named 'Anuradha' who is depicted as an 'insane' woman, and a man named 'Komalman', who is viewed as an emotional, indecisive, caring person notwithstanding the masculinist attitude given in society. The storyline starts with the narration of the story by Komalman, a rich and introverted guy who stumbles with an unconscious girl named 'Anuradha' on a train and takes her home for a treat, where she narrates her life and why she is in such a stage. As Malla writes, Anuradha, when Komal finds her on the train, she is in the worst condition, salivating and near to dying. After getting conscious, she said politely that she was on medication for the illness. Still, within a few seconds, she starts to shout, laugh loudly, throw things near her, show very abnormal behavior that is difficult to handle, and then goes to a state of unconsciousness repeatedly.

While the male character Komalman is a landlord and did his M.A. in Patna, unlike others, he is kind and caring and gives debt forgiveness to people, having no lust for money. Everybody sees him as a weak, non-masculine person. After his mother died, it sort of got away from females, but after seeing Anuradha, he fell in love. A few days after her stay in his house, Komal discovers she is a married woman. Anuradha recalls her life with Komal and shared that she was the youngest daughter of a wealthy businessman who had traded from Kolkata (India) to Lhasa (Tibet); she had a beautiful, free life and was bright, courageous, and loved by everyone. Having high self-esteem and being an independent, highly educated girl with a degree from Lucknow (India), she could not accept that her mother and sisters fixed her marriage without asking her and having no consultation. She feels so betrayed that her freedom of choice was robbed, and her voices and desires were rapped without her consent. On the wedding day, She vigorously snaps the wedding garland, torn in pieces, in front of everyone and rejects marriage. This way, in her gestures and capabilities, she challenges the social system and the dignity of virtues, which try to rob and seize the "right of female existence" [Adhikary \(2018\)](#). Later, the groom and her family spread the rumor that both are already married. Still, it was against her will and respect, and she continuously wanted to take 'revenge' despite everyday threats from the groom to claim her in any situation. Besides, her mother and sister used to mock her psychologically and disrespect her for such an 'act, which was seen as a crime in that social order. In the process, she becomes so disturbed that she starts to show 'everyday resistance' against injustice and inequalities through actions like sometimes firing mosquito nets, throwing things at peoples who comes to talk to her about her home, attacking the so-called groom in his house, denies him all time, but stayed in his home and acted to love his brother, afterward reach to the stage she completely lost her and become psychologically ill.

In this fiction, Anuradha continuously sought revenge all her life, revenge not against persons but against the 'injustices' that happened to her in a patriarchal society, which makes social rules and determines the rights for them. In challenging the social order where patriarchy internalizes the gender norms to privilege masculinity and showcasing everyday resistance in her actions, she exercises autonomy and power. By depicting such a female character in his writing during the semi-colonial monarchy, Malla became aware of and brought consciousness to detrimental societal dogma and constricted freedom. He wants females to be conscious about their existence, identity, autonomy, passion, and questions about the patriarchal gender roles that are bias and derogatory for women in Nepali

society. By depicting the male characters as having feminine characters, this fiction 'Anuradha' tries to problematize the universal monolithic construction of gender as a uniform category and challenges gender binaries that see males having emotional sides as feminine or non-masculine. Likewise, it unravels the nature of the state, which itself becomes retrogressive for the emancipation and freedom of women and relegates social practice as part of patriarchy.

Even though the book is based on a female-led character, Anuradha, she is not allowed the same space to be heard; she is invisible yet easy to spot on every page. The character of 'Anuradha' is so evocative and powerful that she continuously challenges the 'given' privilege of society for females to get married, settle their life, bound within stereotypical selfless service of a family instead of standing for her own identity, determined to believe system that she learns from her education system to have a voice, choice. By letting her so-called husband not touch her even in his house in any case, she challenges gender inequality and confronts men who expect women to give themselves and bind within social rules. She took ownership of her body "in a society that seeks to control and confine sexuality rigidly" [Sen \(2016\)](#). Anuradha is not being able to be a "good daughter" of her mother and society within the patriarchal system due to her personal choice, which projects her way of trying to exercise power and freedom through her voice, everyday actions, and resistance.

Moreover, I argue that literary fiction like Anuradha not only accounts for feminist consciousness in society but also helps to map Feminist history from a grassroots level. It provides contextual ideas of 'the differences in Feminism and women's emancipation in a semi-colonial country like Nepal, which shapes the historicity of the region. Unlike the global north and Anglo-American liberal understanding of feminist history, where the first wave of Feminism was seen for suffrage rights, the idea of emancipation in the south is contrasting. Legal equality could not bring social equality in the South, which is evident from the writing of Malla in 1961. However, the first democracy was set up in the country in 1951. The concept of Emancipation in Anuradha is not imported from Western ideas on modernity; the ideas of emancipation here are double-folded, one from the traditional social order and inhibitory cultural system, importantly controlling sexuality, and another is from battle, struggles with her mental trauma that is created out of such a masculinized society which expects her to behave in a certain way and surrender herself. It problematizes the notion of women defined as a 'stable, coherent, peaceful category' as she was aggressive, standing for herself, loud, and had a voice against injustices and betrayals that happened to her. Her resistance is indigenous, and her desire for freedom is psychological, which becomes a source of social and radical influence in the private/ public sphere to the formation of feminist consciousness and reflects the idea of differences other than western Feminism and liberty.

6. CONCLUSION

'Anuradha' is one of many literary creations in the context of Nepal, which provides evidence that feminist consciousness in the Global South is not borrowing from Western thinking. The 'idea of differences' in Feminism and emancipation is indigenous, and its own construct is reflected in writings based on Nepal's socioeconomic and political context. From the first female minister winning the election in early 1958 from the women's committee, Nepal being a signatory to international laws like 'The Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1991, drafting provisions under Article 38 of the

2015 constitution of Nepal which guarantees the fundamental rights to women' to political, economic, and social reforms in the contemporary scenario of having 33 percents seats for women in legislation to even case of representing the different gender and communities while conducting the election of the president and vice-president' [Jha \(2022\)](#) to ensuring the gender quota itself reflects the fruitful results of feminist consciousness in Nepal. More importantly, 'having 91.7% of the legal framework that promotes, monitor the gender equality under SDG indicator with a sole focus on violence against women' [Jha \(2022\)](#) in the contemporary scenario. Moreover, these novels voice the historically muted everyday stories of ordinary women's lives. [Owens, P. et al. \(2022\)](#) believe that "its primary task of I.R.'s disciplinary and intellectual historians to account for gendered history and women's foundational role." 'Anuradha' tries to locate, recover, and reconnect the missing conscious and unconscious stories and mechanisms of agency and resistance that are excluded in histories and try to contribute to the mapping of feminist history from the global South.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- [Adhikary, D.R. \(2018\)](#). 'Feminism & Nepali Literary Arena,' 4th January.
- [Al-wazedi, U. \(2020\)](#). 'Postcolonial Feminism.' In: [Naples eds. Companion to Feminist Studies](#), Wiley Online Library. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- [Green, P. \(1979\)](#). 'The Feminist Consciousness,' *The Sociological Quarterly*, 20(3), 359-374.
- [Jackson, S. \(2011\)](#). 'Feminism in the Global South has not Come from the North,' *The Guardian*, 20th October.
- [Jha, J. \(2022\)](#). 'Respect International Laws to Respect Women,' *Nepal Live Today*, 7th March.
- [Malla, B. \(1961\)](#). 'Anuradha,' Sajha Publication, ISBN: 978-9937-32-205-8, 1-148.
- [Owens, P. et al. \(2022\)](#). 'Theorizing the History of Women's International Thinking at the "End of International Theory,"' *International Theory*, 14(3), 388-393. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971922000070>
- [Parashar, S. \(2016\)](#). 'Feminism and Postcolonialism: (En) Gendering Encounters,' *Postcolonial Studies*, 19(4), 371-377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2016.1317388>
- [Sen, P. \(2016\)](#). 'Words and Warriors,' *Himal Southasian*, 23rd September.
- [The Kathmandu Post \(2019\)](#). 'The Feminist Memory Project,' *Nepal Picture Library*, 18th February.