

Female Body as a Site of Domination in Manisha Gauchan's *Valliko Daayari*

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Abstract

This article pursues to point out the factors that cause violence and domination against female characters perpetrated by males of the novel Valliko Daayari. In the novel Manisha Gauchan has explored the issues of women of Nepali society who tolerate the violence becoming the victim of oppressive patriarchal agents. The theoretical underpinnings of my research are feminist theories and Gender Studies. Theory of Gender Studies provides an important perspective of looking at literature. The goal of Gender Studies is to question the prescribed roles to males and females through various agencies in the veil of culture, religion, tradition and so on. It shows that gender stereotype is worthless; moreover, it claims that gender stereotype influences one's life negatively as it bestows a special power and privileges to men and treats women as subjugated and subservient. The study draws the conclusion that the female characters are victimized by the male characters in the novel as they lack support from their family and the society to raise their voice against males' exploitation and abuse.

Key Words: gender discrimination, marriage, patriarchal, violence, subjugation, oppression, agency, hegemony

1. Introduction

Feminists keep their spirit high in regard of the upliftment of legal and economic status in the society. Realizing the fact that gender stereotype bears a sole responsibility to create hindrances in the path of success of females, they

struggle hard to convince the people about the fact that one's capability does not associate with one's gender. They also believe that women become victim of violence just because of gender stereotype. Though global efforts aimed at curbing violence on women mainly through focusing on consequences, forms, causes and prevalence of domestic violence, consequential reduction in the rate of violence against women is yet to be achieved (Baghbidi 87). Major obstacles to this reduction are gender hierarchies and perpetuate gender inequalities. Baghbidi claims that, "domestic violence against women is worse and most common in most developing countries where primordial culture of patriarchal ideology holds sway" (ibid). Numbers of Nepali women are also the victim of domestic violence and people from different sectors are working on this issue. Feminist writers are among them who are addressing, portraying and presenting this issue through their works. Critic Sushant Gurung writes, feminist writers of Nepal address the issues of female. The problems of widow, domestic violence, polygamy, and the child marriage are the subjects of their writing (399). Some of them have portrayed the miserable condition of women at their home and society. They portray their female characters as a passive receiver of violence and operation done to them by the male members of their family and the society. Likewise, some of them have bestowed a voice of protest against the violence and suppression.

From the beginning of the movement of modernism in Nepali fiction, the novelists have portrayed the violence against women done particularly by men. In the novel *Muluk Baahira* [Outside the Nation] the novelist Laina Singh Bangdel has presented major female characters Myaauchi and Masini as victim since their husbands mistreat them, abuse them and even murder them. Critic Krishna Hari Baral and Netra Atom point out: the female characters of the novel *Muluk Bahira* are compelled to get punishment from their husband (178). Likewise, through her

novels, novelist Parijat has depicted the pain of female characters who get tortured by males. In *Sirisako Phool* [Blue Mimosa] the male character Suyogbir rapes and murders the daughter of the head hunter and cowherd Makharing, similarly, he sexually exploits Matinchi and when she begs him to marry her, he kicks in her bosom and runs away. Likewise, the female characters Susmita, sweetie, and Krishnamaya of the novel *Samaanaantar Aakaas* [Parallel Sky], are also abused and exploited by male characters. Critic Govinda Raj Bhattraai opines, in the novel *Samaanaantar Aakash* none of the husband is portrayed positively (55). These novels show that gender disparity and discrimination find ways to materialize in most places because the gender prejudices are deep rooted and imperceptible. The narratives of these novels reflect contemporary gender hierarchies that exist in our social surroundings and the problems caused by this in life of women.

Female become victim and the male victimizer because society has defined the female through the terms motherhood, docile, demure, and tolerant; and these terms practice to bind women to the limitation and conceal their gender multiplicity. As a result, both male and female perform in a presupposed gendered way. The novelist Manisha Gauchan has highlighted the similar sort of fact depicting the miserable condition of women and has shown the causes behind it, in her debut novel *Valliko Diary*. In the novel she has exposed the process of victimization of women. For male, the patriarchal teachings create a ground for their exploitation and abuse. So, husband abuses his wife in several ways like sexual harassment, violence and so on. Likewise, wives also tolerate this as they are ruled by the mentality of proving themselves as a good girl. Even Valli, the central character and the narrator of the novel is guided by the same mentality as she has projected the so called bad girl types of characters negatively and has shown how they get punished for their bad and immoral deeds. She has made the statement that women should firmly suppressed their sexual desire and they

should not involve in any kind of entertainment, rather they should confine themselves within the boundary of the house so that they can show their loyalty towards their husband. Valli does not challenge the traditional gender role because challenging the traditional pattern is never easy for a girl like her, acquainting with this fact; Gauchan has presented female body as a site of domination in the novel.

This study tries to show that Gauchan's main purpose is to explore the women's situation through the painful experience under gone by the female characters in patriarchal society. Exposing the miserable condition of female characters in the novel, critic Krishna Dharabasi asserts: most of the characters of the novel *Valliko Dayari* are female and they are abandoned by their family and the society for one or another reasons (ja). Since the critics highly praise Gauchan's effort for bringing the female issues and providing a ground for her central character to see, bear and then resist the exploitation of her husband in this novel, I have chosen this novel to analyze the causes and consequences of exploitation and domination against the female characters.

To analyze the causes and consequences of the exploitation of female characters in this text I apply Judith Butler's and other gender theorist's notion about gender role, and the notion of feminist theorist like Simon de Beauvoir, about femininity. Butler claims that gender identity is social political construction that achieves legitimacy and naturality through the repetition of the activity which is prescribed by the patriarchal society. Millet argues: "Women were subjected to an artificially constructed idea of the feminine. Women's operation was achieved by a combination of physical violence and cultural pressure" (quoted in Tolan 326). Thus, women are oppressed and exploited. Gauchan has portrayed the female characters using the same lence of femininism.

2. Regulation of Female Body through Gender Stereotype

Most of the female characters of the novel *Valliko Daayari* are regulated by their husbands. Though, the husbands are physically far from their wives, they keep their wives' life under control. Consequently, wives at homeland follow the instructions of their husbands given to them from a distant land. Valli's husband also does the same as Dharabasi points out: Valli's husbands marries her to use her as a servant who take care of his mother free of cost (chha). Being a loyal wife they even suppress their physical needs and desire. They are compelled to wait for their husbands, who are migrated to the foreign land, bearing the responsibilities transferred by their husbands on their shoulder. In the novel the husbands believe that as a male it is their right to give order to their wives; and wives, being a female, readily follow the commands of their husband. Gender theorists observe that males attempt to regulate the female because the society expects the same from them. Thompson and Kindlon claim: "in their drive to be real guys they partake in the culture of cruelty enforcing the male stereotype as anything tender, anything compassionate or too artistic is labeled gay" (quoted in Kantrowitz and Kalb 204). Males are under the pressure of the society, to show their superiority, which judges them whether they are fit to be labeled as a masculine male or not. Consequently, they even adopt the habit of cruelty and aggression towards their female family members at home. Christine Williams argues: "Men retain their superiority and are able to maintain their gender privilege by restricting a woman's entry, promotion, and experience" (quoted in Kimmel 222). Due to the social pressure of the maintenance of their superiority over the women, male characters of the novel impose feminity on women. Likewise, they aim to achieve their own freedom and independence at cost of the restrictions, discomfort and suffering of women.

The novel *Valliko Daayari* deals with the pain, suffering and struggle of the women whose husbands are at abroad. It depicts the difficulties faced by these women caused in the absence of their husband as they are sexually abused, and are fallen into several domestic problems. Valli, the narrator of the novel, presents her painful experiences in the form of a diary. In the diary she inks the saga of her life from the day of her marriage. She ironically takes that day as the happiest day of her life; for she thinks that her happiness will begin with the marriage to a wealthy person. In fact, she takes marriage as a stair to access the wealth and to reach to a luxurious life. She is guided by these sorts of belief and activity because she is a patriarchally programmed woman and cannot believe on her capability to fulfill her dreams and wishes. So, she decides to choose a rich person as her husband and to come out from her low economic background. Therefore, when she gets a marriage proposal from a wealthy man she hurriedly accepts it as she regards her husband as a rescuer who rescues her from the poverty and scarcity as Lois Tyson points out, female “wait patiently to be rescued by a man” (88). After marriage she seeks her happiness in the expensive clothes and glittering ornaments. She even readily let her husband leave for America as she decides to fill the vacuum of him with the valuable jewels sent by him from abroad.

A patriarchally programmed woman, like Valli, believes that if the female is protected and provided by her male partner, she gets fully satisfied. She is thought to be content that her needs are provided for. De Beauvoir, however, refutes this belief. Introducing the concepts of ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’ she argues that, “the fulfillment of human potential must be judged, not in terms of happiness, but in terms of liberty” (321). She reinforces the necessity of liberty in women’s life and asserts, “Liberty is something more than maintaining one’s existence peacefully and comfortably; to be free, a person must transcend the

animal part of his or her life-the temporary and unthinking happiness that comes from being warm and well fed-and pursue the uniquely human desire to know more, do more, have more” (ibid). But Valli does not value the freedom; she rather gives priorities to the petty comforts. Her brother warns her against the irresponsibility towards her study as he believes that she needs to acquire education and should be independent in order to pursue the happiness in life. Observing her disinterest towards study and keen interest towards the luxurious life he asserts:

Khaana laaunama maatra man dinchhes, tyasaile her tainle pakkai dukha paauchhes.[You think only about food and clothing so your life definitely will fill with sorrows.] (23)

From her childhood Valli gives priorities only to the physical comforts because she does not have idea about the importance of freedom, independence and emancipation in her life, but after marriage she becomes almost alone at her home and realizes that she gets entrapped in the domesticity. So, in her diary she reveals her condition and the condition of the women like her who get exploited through marriage, but she cannot break the confinement drawn by the society. For de Beauvoir, “Marriage is an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement, which reinforces sexual inequality, and binds women to domesticity” (321). Valli starts feeling that she is excluded from the pursuit of happiness and freedom as her husband creates a boundary of domesticity for her as a result she remains as a mere care taker of her husband’s house and a nurse of her mother in law.

With the passage of time, Valli understands the limitation of her liberty; but still she is not able to bring a permanent solution for the social confinement that seizes her freedom and happiness. She rather searches a temporary solution. So, when, in the absence of her husband, she feels alone and insecure in order to escape from this situation she goes to her parents’ home. She wants to forget her

loneliness and pain, and want to get warm company of her parents. But her mother forces her to go back to her husband's house as she thinks that a married daughter cannot stay at her parents' home. Mary Daly rightly points out the condition of women: "her liberty is limited and defined, and granted her by someone else" (quoted in Waugh 322). Believing in Hindu teachings, her mother wants Valli to stay at her husband's home, take wifely responsibility and to serve her mother-in-law wholeheartedly. Mary Daly argues that, "religion, law, and science were all methods of patriarchal control working to define and limit women" (324 Waugh). Valli cannot even share her pain with her mother. Rather, she is compelled to live with her mother in law with whom she does not feel any kind of love bond. Judith Lorber points out, "Gender norms and expectations are enforced through informal sanctions of gender-inappropriate behavior by peers and by formal punishment or threat by those in authority (www.public.iastate.edu.com). Valli becomes a site of domination because she is entrapped in social norms. Due to the social obligation, both Valli and her mother get accustomed with the male domination and prefer to give continuity to this.

Though Valli tries to free herself from the confinement of domesticity, she fails because the patriarchal mind set does not allow her to break the confinement. Being fed up with her loneliness Valli decides to develop friendship with Ruma, who also is facing loneliness since her husband is in Japan for several years. At Ruma's home, Valli gets introduced with several women whose husbands are in abroad like Valli's and Ruma's. At their company, she notices that these women seek happiness in alcohol and gambling. Without evaluating the pros and cons, she involves in the activity like drinking and gambling. Though in the beginning she finds it very awkward, in order to forget her loneliness and pain she adopts the habit of drinking wine and playing cards. She describes her situation:

*Maile pahilo choti dekheki ra anubhav gareki yi aaimai
saathiharuko yo jamaat bhattibhitrako kunai purushako jamaata
bhanda pharak chhaina.* [There is no difference between these
women, whom I have seen and felt for the first time, and the group
of males found in tavern.] (53)

Here, Valli notices that the behavior of these women is very similar to the alcoholic men and she finds it very unusual and unacceptable because she is brought up in the society where male and female are expected to act differently, men are free to involve in the activity like gambling and drinking which are strictly prohibited for women. Consequently, even these activities and the company of these women cannot keep her happy. McCubbin and Dahl point out, “A sex role is a part that an individual plays as a social actor-the patterns of feeling and behavior deemed appropriate or inappropriate because of her or his gender”(189). Due to the lack of education and consciousness about her right, she cannot manage her loneliness and pain constructively. After some days a sense of guilt emerges upon her and she decides to abandon this life style and falls into the same confinement of domesticity.

In the company of these women Valli comes to know about the painful life of Asmita and Ruma who are the victims of violence done by their husbands. Violence against women occurs due to stereotyped ideology of masculinity that allows and expects boys and men to take risk, attack, be physically assertive and play outdoors physical sports (Kofman 6). Asmita’s husband dominates, and exploits her. Depicting Asmita’s condition she has shown how a husband abuses his wife making her body a site of domination. He beats her, rebukes her and insults her. Not only that, he keeps extra marital affairs with several women. He is an alcoholic. She hates him but is unable to protest. She admits:

*Sangai sutna pani ghin laagchha tara u bhane jahilyai jabarjasti...
bhaneko namaanda duniyaaki swaasni bhanchha malai.* [I hate to
sleep with him but he always force me to have sex...when I deny
he calls me whore.] (54)

When she cannot bear the torture of her husband she commits suicide. She cannot take action against her husband for giving her physical and mental torture because she is from the society where women are taught to worship their husband as a god. Evaluating the reason of such conditions of women, Butler writes: “Gender is the fabrication of compulsory frames and its social appearance is incessantly polished by the various forces (44). Ruma is another victim whose body becomes a site of domination by her lover, Deepak. She seeks love and support from him but he exploits her physically, makes her pregnant, steals her cash and jewelry and runs away. As Jennifer L. Martin believes “Negative stereotypes based upon gender can also lead to diminished expectations, which can affect people on an individual level: where people expect little for themselves and live up to that expectation (28). Being a member of gender stereotyped society, Ruma believes that she can get help and support only from a male partner. She doubts on her capability of managing her life tactfully and seeks a shoulder of another man, Deepak, in her husband’s absence, for support. This foolish decision ruins her life because she cannot face the stigma on her character caused by Deepak and disappears from the locality leaving her kids almost alone.

Valli’s patriarchally programmed body and identity gets influenced by culture, religion and other so many factors. She acts following the social expectations about masculine and feminine nature which prescribe different role for male and female like men should be brave, strong, ambitious, and aggressive, while keeping their feelings under control: women should be gentle, nurturant, passive, dependent and expressive of their feelings (Tyson 88). Valli gradually is

trapped into the confinement designed by her husband which resulted on her state of ignorance about her husband. She does not have idea about his job, salary and other important matters like how long he stays in the US, when he comes back and so on. When her friend Kalpu asks Valli about the date of her husband's return from the US she shows ignorance about the matter in the following words:

Ma jawaaphahin bhaen. Kahile pharkane ho u, kunai tithimiti nabhae pachhi ke nai bhanu. Patak patak u pharkane din sanga dhaantieki chhu. [I became speechless . What should I say, when I have no idea about the date of his arrival. I have been cheated several times about his date of arrival.] (64)

She wants to know in detail about the matters related about her husband, but her husband does not let her know. By this act he exercises his power over Valli which she cannot resist. Valli's condition and behavior confirm the assigned gender role. She confirms the belief that sex roles are based on social norms-the agreed-upon standards of acceptable behavior within a society. Those norms influence her concept of freedom and push her into helplessness as she cannot take any concrete action against her husband's rude and irresponsible behavior.

Valli's mother in law represents the women constrained in traditional gender role. She firmly sticks in the place provided to her by the patriarchal Hindu society. That is why; she seeks her happiness in the presence of her son as she believes that a woman should stay under the control of her son in her old age for a woman is destined to live under the control of male. So, she wants to be regulated by the male members of the family. Though Valli provides love and care to her as a daughter, her thirst for son's love and company keeps on increasing because like every parent of our society, she has a deep desire to be taken care of by her son in the old age. She feels secure only in the company of

her son and longs for the same. Valli describes the condition of her mother in law in following lines:

Chhorako anupasthitima aamako dhiryataa tuteko chha. Jasle garda uhaana jhan kamjor ra sithil hunu bhaeko chha. Khuwaaunu dekhi disaa pisaapa sameta garaaunu parne bhaeko chha. Uhaanko moto sarir herdaa herdai haad ra chhaalaamaa parinat bhaeko chha.[Mother in law has become impatience. Because of that she has become weaker and fragile. She has been fully depended on others for feeding and fulfilling other physical needs. She has become skinny.] (38-39)

But when her son does not come back she loses her mind and ultimately, she dies. She becomes the victim of gender stereotype as “Gender stereotypes are one-sided and exaggerated images of men and women which are deployed repeatedly in everyday life” (www.encyclopedia.com). Following the gender normativity, she let her body to be used as a site of domination by a male, though that male is her son. Likewise, she unable to think that she should not rely on anybody, particularly to her cruel son, to bring happiness in her life; but she cannot do so as she practices and learns to depend fully on the male to bring every kind of positive changes in her life.

When her mother in law becomes mad, Valli’s life becomes more miserable, and day by day she entraps in the domesticity. The society imposes her the role of a caretaker of her mother in- law. She accepts that role because she is taught to be a responsible and duty bound daughter- in -law so that she can get applauds from the society for her selfless service to her in- laws. Butler points out “Gender is socially approved and politically regulated rather than dictated by some kind of internal nature” (Jagger 27). While taking the responsibility of her insane mother in law she faces innumerable difficulties, she even feels that her

house has turned into a cage for her; however, she cannot break the cage because being a female she learns to be tolerant. She silently bears the problems for several months and she realizes that she should know more about her husband. So, she decides to gather information about him in detail, and leaves for America but her condition remains the same even after she reaches America and meets her husband. Her difficulties begin with the day of her arrival into that country. She becomes helpless as the agent cheats her. Though he assures her that she will be received in America, no one comes to receive her. She depicts her condition in the following way:

Ubhindaa ubhindaa khuttaa galisakeko chha. Ek haatale byaag samaateki chhu ra arko haatale gharighari aansu puchhdaichhu. Yo naulo thaunma sahaarabihin bhaera aatieki chhu. Mera aankha kasaiko saatha bhetne aashaamaa tolairaheko chha. [I stands so long and get tired. I am holding my bag in one hand and wiping tears with another hand. I am getting nervous and feeling helpless in this new place. My eyes are stunning in the hope of getting someone else company.] (99)

Though Valli tries to be bold taking the decision to make queries about her husband, she still seems weak as she cannot face the difficulties that appear in the new journey of her life. Rather, she expects support from others. Then, Sarjan, another male character offers her help and rescues her from that difficult situation. He provides her food and shelter. After some months she falls in love with Sarjan. She wants to fulfill her sexual needs through him; but she suppress her desire as she does not dare to cross the line set by the society which instruct woman to suppress her desire so that she can remain loyal towards her husband.

Valli accepts the rein of male and the rules made by male in her life whether she is in Nepal or in America because as Butler claims: she “become

sexed through a continual process of acting and re-enacting certain gendered roles”(quoted in Payne and Barbera 270). She develops the habit to bear the pain caused by her husband for her mother convinces her to stay in her husband’s house accepting it as her real place to live in. Moreover, she persuades Valli not to visit her parents’ house frequently because being a good daughter in law she should priorities the comfort and happiness of her husband and in- laws. She learns from her mother to be dominated by her husband as Butler opines: “this repetition occurs within a hegemonic system that shapes the very possibilities of the roles we can enact” (ibid). So, though she is extremely angry and dissatisfied with her husband’s behavior towards her when she meets him in America, she very easily forgives him because he persuades her for sex. He tempts her with an offer of motherhood. Valli depicts how she becomes a weakling when she thinks about her dream to be a mother:

*Aamaa banne raharle malai jhan kamajor paaryo. Eutaa
santaanako kalpanale usangako risalai nibhaauna thaalen.*[The
desire of become a mother make me weaker. When I imagine
becoming a mother, I suppress my anger towards him.](127)

But when she comes to know about her husband’s profession she understands the meaninglessness of their relationship and decides to break the relationship with him. She realizes that marriage has become a barrier to her happiness and freedom. She understands the value of freedom and self respect. Likewise she comes to know that she has to tear the shield created by the society to rule the female like her.

In the novel Gauchan punishes the female character associated with sexuality and lust. Ruma runs away from her home in misery and torment as she involve in extra marital affair. On this ground the author applies a conservative resolution to her seemingly progressive novel as the transgressive female is

eventually penalized for her actions, and the patriarchal moral code is reasserted and actually strengthened. Valli also suffers a lot as she chooses her husband challenging the social norms that do not let a girl to choose husband. Instead she should accept the person chosen by their family. Otherwise, the family does not accept the marriage because it's a general belief that love marriage cannot be successful. A girl exercises the right to choose a life partner in love marriage so, the patriarchal society of Nepal discourage love marriage citing the failures through various medium and literature is among them. Showing the failure of Valli's marriage Gauchen has supported the same belief. Though the ending of the novel is progressive as the central character Valli takes a progressive step towards the future, the overall story of the novel is proved to be an agent of political expression.

3. Conclusion

Most of the female characters of the novel *Valliko Daayari* are the victim of male domination and domestic violence. The husbands and lover of these female characters cheat them, betray them, beat them and harass them physically and mentally. They bear the torture and suffering without protest because they are patriarchally programmed women who are taught to worship their husband as a god. Similarly, the habit of tolerance towards the abuse and violence develop on them through the regular practice that they learn from the society and from their own family members. They are bound to the prescribed gender role and learn to act accordingly since their mother prepares them to be tolerant. Valli's mother teaches her to be devoted towards her in laws sacrificing her personal happiness and freedom. Likewise, Asmita's husband gives her torture every moment. These female characters tolerate the torture as they believe that it is a part of their life and they are destined to it.

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