

## Rhetorical Analysis of Female Characters in *Narendra Dai*

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### Abstract

### Research Article

BP Koirala, in addition to being the first democratically elected prime minister of Nepal, is one of the most renowned literatures. His novels and stories have been noted for his success in bringing alive the real life characters into the realm of fiction, and ascribing prominent roles to female characters. This paper will rhetorically analyze the female characters in one of his seminal novels, *Narendra Dai*. Influenced by Chekhov and Freud, Koirala crafts female characters who are governed by the elements of sensuality and emotional turmoil. His characters are equally rebellious in terms of listening to the calls of their hearts and deciding their course of action. Unlike most of the other contemporary novelists of his times who accord high prominence to male characters and places females as their sidekicks, Koirala has crafted very powerful female characters that exhibit the courage to challenge the norms of the society that is intensely governed by patriarchal norms and values. However, not all female characters of BP stand tall and powerful. There are some that simply conform to the hegemony of patriarchy and move along as mere assistants of the lead male characters.

**Keywords:** Perseverance, Sacrifice, Masculinity, Libido.

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## INTRODUCTION

B.P. Koirala is one of the most renowned litterateurs in the realm of Nepali literature. His works have profusely tried to dig into human psyche and unravel various traits of human nature at constant interaction, both with each other and external stimuli. B.P. Koirala has, in particular, succeeded in maintaining a reasonably safe distance between his political attainment and literary accomplishment. The more or less clear cut demarcation he has drawn between his topsy-turvy political career and luxuriant writing endeavors has him elevated to the position of one of the most talked about literary figures in Nepali literature. A veteran fighter of democracy and a champion of democratic socialism, Koirala, in other words, did not allow his political clout to cast its shadow on his literary projects [1].

Most of his works were the outcomes of his own on and off jail life that greatly curbed his personal and political liberty during a thirty yearlong one party Panchayat System. His physical confinement, however, served as no barrier to his creative engagement which he could fully enjoy even within the four walls of his prison. Rather it worked otherwise. And in his writings he had a complete liberty of exploring all quarters of human character extensively. He has used political

contexts and associated rhetoric in his works but it would be no overstatement to say that he has still succeeded in maintaining a fairly apolitical perspective when it comes to the treatment of his plot and characters. Koirala is said to have been strongly influenced by Sigmund Freud and Anton Chekhov among others and these are quite visibly and subtly reflected in his works.

However, in *Narendra Dai*, one of his most acclaimed works, written during his jail life in the Panchayat era, it is the portrayal of female characters that we will look at with more scrutiny. Even in other works of B.P. Koirala such as *Sumnima*, a novel dealing with the subject matter of a legendary *Kirant* woman character and *A Tale*, a short story, he has centered his plot around powerful women figures. Perhaps it would be no exaggeration to opine that B.P. Koirala is one of such rare species of writers in Nepali literature who have exhibited tremendous respect for women and have presented them in a revolutionary light and in many than stand taller than men [1].

In all his works, B.P. has portrayed women with dignity and lauded their assertiveness, honesty, perseverance and sacrifice. Although published in the year 1970, *Narendra Dai* is set in the times of the Rana

Regime, though without any direct mention of it. It is the date of the earthquake 1990 mentioned in the story that enables a reader to speculate the setting of the story to have tentatively spanned between 1970 B.S and 1990 B.S. *Narendra Dai* has ample woman characters and in fact, in terms of role coverage, it would not be unfair to state that women have occupied greater space than men in terms of maturity and pragmatism. Although the novel takes the name of a male character, Narendra, his existence hinges on Munria and Gauri, both female characters.

To begin with, let us look at B.P Koirala's novel *Narendra Dai* and be acquainted with the display of women characters. Written in the first person narrative from a male perspective, the narrator is accompanied by a girl-the narrator then was a small boy himself-who is very assertive and in fact acts as his guide. As a male himself, the narrator could have chosen a member of his own gender for the company whenever he went around, engaged in childish pranks. However, it is the company of a girl he seeks and enjoys. He is a true feminist. As Ashok Bhusal [2] in his "Emphasizing the Suppression of Feminist Voices" says, "We, as students of rhetoric, need to continue to look for [women characters] who have been largely marginalized or ignored" (p. 56). Bhusal further adds that "The effects of years of marginalization or suppression are being rectified as interest and scholarly studies are illuminating their impressive literary and rhetorical gifts" (p. 56). B. P Koirala presents female characters in an empowering way.

Both feminism and critical race theory might provide an excellent framework for analyzing female conditions in our society. There are some scholars who present critical race theory as a framework for critiquing traditional patriarchal society. For example, Ashok Bhusal in his "The Rhetoric of Racism and Anti-Miscegenation Laws in the United States" states that by "[completing] a deeper study of minorities and bring their stories, their voices, into academic scholarship," we can work toward uplifting the conditions of females in society [3].

The very beginning of the novel thus places women as male equals. One may call it a mere coincidence but Koirala must have deliberately orchestrated this plot thereby placing both the genders on a linear scale and flattening the vertical hierarchy between men and women.. Moreover, the fact that both the narrator and his female companion "ran and played around the fields and their borders in never ending quest of pleasure jewels" (Koirala, p.9-10) speaks of how there was little segregation on the grounds of gender, putting them both on the same foothold.

However, what started on the same level eventually inches towards a further elevated position of the women as Sannani takes the lead and initiates merry

making activities in childhood for she "picked some red berries from the intertwined vines and disappeared one of them in her eyes and I remained bewildered and watched in amusement as it all of a sudden fell from one corner of her eye" (Koirala, p. 10). Yet, another instance suggesting the heightened maturity of *Sannani* at quite a tender age is when she cautions the writer against "coming in contact with the itching vine" (Koirala, p. 10). A close relative of the writer, the girl, *Sannani* is clearly ahead of the writer in being able to amuse herself and others around her. Koirala could have swapped the roles between these two here as well but he preferred not to, perhaps, out of realization that girls do outsmart boys in many domains of human life and that it is just a matter of acknowledgement and awareness.

Another case to look at in the novel is the degree of ease that Sannani enjoys in the narrator's company. One may associate their closeness with childish innocence and that they both belonged to the same extended family but there are instances suggesting that the acts of the girl were quite mature and that she was aware of the gender difference she had with the narrator. But she still chose his company to move around and thoroughly enjoyed childish pranks with him. This may hint towards psychoanalysis of Freud that suggests the proximity between the members of opposite sex irrespective of their personal relations hinges on the elements of sex and there are dialogues suffused with sexual undertones such as "the glittering *kosa* is itchy in nature and that it has to be carefully avoided..." (Koirala, p. 10). Glittering *kosa* is tacitly used as a metaphor for male testicles.

Another example of women being more expansive about talks connected to sex could be the instance when the narrator and Sannani run into some other young girls of the village who were heading to the jungle to collect fodder for livestock. As the narrator shares with them his latest learning that "he too can disappear the red berry in his eyes" (Koirala, p. 3), they give it a twisted interpretation, and Rampiyari, one of the girls, retorted, "Hey young boy do not take up the habit of inserting the red berry in the eye from such a young age..." (Koirala, p. 10).

This remark evoked laughter in her peers and the narrator simply could not understand the underlying intent of the response. However, one of Rampiyari's friends snapped it was a flirtatious remark and reaffirmed the sexual current contained in the response. Similarly, females as a source of eroticism-regardless of their age- is presented on another occasion and shown it is not simply human males that succumb to the charms of women but even male animals are not spared. When, for example, when Sannani "placed her hands on the rear of the ox, it shivered and it looked as if a ripple went down its spine" (Koirala, p.11). The novel, like

most of Koirala's other works, is suffused with sexual ingredients.

However, it can also be argued that the ox might have merely been used as a symbol of masculinity that simply cannot but surrender to the feminine charm. This it could be an oblique personification of a dormant male libido which succumbs to a female charisma on some physical contact between the two. There are plenty of other instances that reinforce female initiative towards sexual undertones. *Sannani*, for example, is quite aware of her sexuality despite her age and quite unhesitatingly "lifted her skirt and pulled down her inner wear and showed ..." (Koirala, p. 22), and says to the narrator that, on that account, she is a "female." And this instance onwards the element of shyness is injected into the narrator's mind.

This case in point also makes a reader suspect whether Koirala's portrayal of women is merely designed with an intent of presenting women more as sex objects than anything, and this continues with the advance in the plot as the storyline in some way ties to sexuality. And from this juncture onwards, perhaps hit hard with the realization of gender difference, the narrator does not entertain the same level of comfort with *Sannani*.

However, *Sannani* is unaware of this shift in the narrator's perception and, for that very reason, her attitude towards him remains unaltered. There comes a time afterwards when *Sannani* is married off and her role greatly diminishes, in fact almost vanishes, in the story. Still, there are many other female characters of varied nature that ceaselessly keep pumping life into the plot. There is, however, little portrayal of "submissive stereotypical" image of women characters in the novel. For example, as *Narendra* is about to leave home on a certain occasion, he encounters the narrator's mother who he addresses as Aunt. In the course of the conversation, *Narendra* asks her why "no kids want to be closer to him" (Koirala, p.15) and to that she replies, "you couldn't be a domestic organism; you are just a member of the family and that a deserted wife would keep her husband away from the border of the inner family circle" (*Narendra Dai*, 16). This can be taken as an instance of heightened prominence placed upon women for this directly challenges the probable male authority in the house.

The temporal setting of the story, not to forget, is some one hundred years ago from now. Apparently this was the time when women were predictably far less privileged than men in all regards. Even today, women in the Eastern world lag far behind men in terms of rights and opportunities and one can imagine how pathetic the situation must have been in those times. Koirala, nonetheless, employs a delivery of a powerful dialogue through one of the female characters to

illustrate an "inherently" embodied strength a woman. This can also be taken as the realization on the part of the writer that women possess the power to both "include" and "exclude" men in the family mainstream and that men, no matter how immaculately dressed, however eloquent or intellectual, could be easily exiled if they disrespected women. This also can be associated with reverence which Koirala seems to have abundantly nursed towards women.

And again the instance in which *Narendra* was the one to punctuate an ongoing dialogue abruptly and walk away posits that men do not have an easy way with women. Although women may have been confined to household frontiers, Koirala also highlights the mediating quality possessed by women for according to the narrator, "mother tried her best to reconcile *Narendra* and *Gauri* and she even hoped that she would be successful in the mission..." (Koirala, p. 9). Although even the men folks in the house wanted to put an end to the troubled relationship between *Gauri* and *Narendra*, it is the women like *Narendra*'s mother that take the lead. There are other well-crafted female characters such as *Maharani* and *Juntunani*; they have diverse mindsets and seem to feel that it is *Gauri*'s fault primarily not to be able to please her husband. This goes in line with what Suresh Lohani [4] says in "Constructing nontraditional rhetoric: Critical study on Gloria Anzaldua and Suresh Canagarajah." He holds the view that "often leading voices from within the communities seem to tune well to the interests of the dominant cultures and in so doing diverse voices are strategically muted"( p.118). For example, *Juntunani* opines that "males have the right to expect from their wives, and if their expectations are not met, they will look for alternatives" (Koirala, p. 11). These women thus indirectly could be functioning more as the agents of patriarchy and less as women.

*Gauri* is another fascinating and one of the most prominent female characters in the novel. She wrestles with all odds and succeeds in "reclaiming" her husband in the end. She even wins respect from *Munria* who, on account of her relations with *Narendra*, should have still taken her a big threat for it was with *Gauri* that she still shared *Narendra*. The amount of respect that *Gauri* wins is so voluminous that *Munria* strongly suggests *Narendra* that he go back to her because only *Gauri* now could take care of him. This is a subtle acceptance on the part of *Munria* that *Gauri*'s unwavering devotion towards *Narendra* finally leaves her a sole possessor of her husband after she passed the test of time. *Munria* loses to *Gauri*. One attribute of *Gauri* that can be effusively praised is her perseverance coupled with a conviction that she is going to earn *Narendra*'s attention at any cost. This comes true as on returning to *Gauri* and finding that she slept in a different room, he says, "Why did you not sleep in the same room, *Gauri*?" (Koirala, p. 54). Initially *Gauri* had a fair complexion, paid attention to hygiene, and

regularly performed pujas. Gauri was an avid devotee of Lord Krishnan, a God in Hindu mythology notoriously known for his romantic affairs with thousands of Gopinis. This devotion is tacitly expressed in a letter written by Gauri to Narendra where she addresses Krishna: "Hey Krishna, now-a-days I have been so busy that that I have not been able to offer my prayers and devotions to you, please forgive me" (*Narendra Dai*, p. 55). She simply fails to enchant the male in Narendra; her looks betray her. The libido in Narendra remains unsatisfied as Gauri's physique does not seem to kindle his temptations as "Narendra's hands explored Gauri's body, he said with a tint of disappointment, 'you are small'" (Koirala, p. 35). It thus can be implied in a way that females enjoy the best male response when they are able to arouse sensual feelings in their partners. This is again eroticism at work and B.P seems to have associated sex with love as in one of his famous novels, *Babu Aama ra Chhora*, there is a line with the same suggestion: "Sex is love...." [5].

The element of sex, thus, in whatever way is present plays a pivotal role in bringing the male and female in close proximity with each other. And this intimacy looks indispensable for a stable conjugal life. However, Gauri does succeed in enticing the narrator, a young boy, towards her through her tacit or oblique sexually inclined non verbals for she oftentimes holds the narrator tight in her arms and kisses him. On one level this could be interpreted as a natural love which Gauri nursed towards a young member in her family. But on the other level, this can even be taken as a manifestation of motherly instincts embedded in Gauri that could not blossom due to Narendra's apathy.

However, a step further and slightly debatable, it can actually be ventilation of Gauri's libido that remained unaddressed owing to Narendra's apathy. The time and setting chosen by Gauri for the performance of that intimate act gives ample room for the reader to be skeptical about her intentions. Nevertheless, Gauri seems to be abundantly tactful about her closeness with the narrator. This is reinforced by the response evoked by the narrator on a ground that "he would feel uncomfortable upon being kissed by Gauri" (Koirala, p. 40). It may be because he had a hunch in some corner that it was not like a type of customary love exhibited by an elderly member in a family towards a younger one. This justifies the audience's suspicion that "*sex deprived*" Gauri might have imperceptibly used the narrator as a tool to quench her sexual thirst.

After *Sannani* vanishes from the main screen of the novel, *Munria* shoulders its major weight and propels it forward. Although it may initially look as if the clout of *Munria* heavily hinges on the support she receives from Narendra, her feminine alluring instincts alone would not be able to do justice to her role. It is to begin with, her physical charms that pull Narendra

towards her. A representative of an extremely backward community, Munria is not even draped adequately and that her "*youthful features*" are amply revealed for "the body was merely draped with dirty saree, and all 'lust lumps' of flesh, both at the chest and beneath the hip swayed..." (Koirala, p. 26). Her sensuality apart, Munria eventually displays an acme of sacrifice and combats all adversities to possibilize a union with the man of her heart. It takes a lot of courage to literally forsake old and ailing father and the person she is literally bonded to as a wife. And with no tint of regret, she wholeheartedly loses herself in the selfless realm of love. Frustrated with Gauri, Narendra at the peak of his youth is in the lookout for the warmth of a female company and this void in his life is aptly filled by Munria.

Initially to pour his wrath over his father, addressing him, Narendra exclaims, "If you think you have done me a favor by marrying me, I will leave her to you" (Koirala, p. 24). Narendra thus detached himself completely from his wife who he married as per his father's wish as stated in the letter written by Gauri to Narendra where she mentions, "I was victimized in the dispute between you and your father" (Koirala, p. 36). A deeper study, however, could expose the other facet of the story; it can be heavily doubted whether Narendra used the quarrel with his father as a pretext to distance himself from his wife who simply failed to ignite his bodily passion. It can be apparently induced that for Koirala women in the first place should be able to quench the male thirst and only that ability on her part helps make one an accomplished woman. This is voiced by Juntunani who makes a comparison between Gauri and Munria and remarks, "Gauri is bright with big eyes but her features do not support her figure and due to her failed physique, Munria could take over Gauri and win Narendra's heart" (Koirala, p. 15).

In sharp contrast to Gauri, *Munria* is sensual and succeeds in tempting Narendra towards her and this is again reinforced through Juntunani's words: "What will Narendra find in Gauri? She has no 'chest', and there is Munria who carries them 'full sized'" (Koirala, p. 11). Yet, that only seems to be the starting point, for the it is the platonic and physical love then onwards that flow parallel each other.

Munria's character, however, cannot be understood in the absence of Narendra. Narendra is quite an influential figure in the village and commands strong attention from his family members and fear from the younger ones. The narrator recalls how "Narendra had won over the hearts of men and women" (Koirala, p. 2) and further goes, "We kids were nervous, scared and awkward in front of Narendra Dai" (Koirala, p. 2) but it is Munria who is capable of taming him. During the secretive meetings they frequent-though these are like open secrets- Munria addresses him as her equal as on receiving a gift from him she says to him with ease,

"Your soap stinks like a mouse" (Koirala, p. 29) and Narendra does not object to her approach and enjoys flirting with her. The confidence she exudes is a clear example of female assertiveness. This again hints at the real power that women enjoy over men who are most often deemed to be harsh and self-aggrandized. Men might have gruff exterior and could appear domineering but it is the softness of women that ultimately triumphs over their heart. By allowing Munria enough space to loiter around Narendra's life, Koirala has tactfully facilitated a ground for women empowerment.

However, there is also an instance when men folks do strongly express their resentment against women. A case in a point is when the male members in the house sit together to discuss how Gauri and Narendra could be reconciled. In this connection with due disregard to Gauri's prominence in the house *Kaka* states quite abruptly: "There is no need of divorce...so just dismiss it. If the husband does not like his wife he can simply bring home another one...we do have the practice of polygamy in Nepal..." (Koirala, p. 12). Even the other male members seemed to have the differences of opinions regarding how the problem could be solved. However, most seem to agree indirectly that the issue ought to be solved in such a way that Narendra, not Gauri, should have an upper hand in the matter. However, the narrator's father seems to have shown a soft spot for Gauri as he remarked with irritation, "Bhai the question here is about how to reconcile Gauri and Narendra and you go on talking about books and laws...moreover, it is not even possible for Narendra to marry Munria because she is already married" (Koirala, p. 12). So despite acknowledging the role of women in the house, it can again be inferred that when it comes to making crucial decisions, women are bypassed and men solely take the charge. And predictably such decisions taken will favor the male members and women are more likely to be victimized as their sufferings will be largely disregarded.

The men do succeed in bridging the gap between Narendra and Gauri to some extent after holding a series of dialogues with Narendra and Gauri. Nonetheless, what is to be noted here is that the compromise was reached only after Narendra consented to allow Gauri some degree of liberty and said that he would not avoid family occasions simply because of Gauri's presence in the same. Gauri nonetheless has no say on the matter or even if she has it, it is more or less predictable: she will comply with Narendra's desires.

Although, this is not any real achievement for Gauri it can still be said that Gauri's space in the household was slightly expanded after this incident. And obviously Gauri looked happier. Though, this instance still hints at imbalance of power between the males and the females as males enjoy the status of privileged members with females as their sub-ordinates.

The power of Gauri, however, begins to consolidate, almost imperceptibly, from this juncture and Narendra's power gradually decreases. Marxism blended with feminism also has its subtle way in portrayal of women in *Narendra Dai*. There are women figures such as *Bahuni*, a domestic help, who seem fairly marginalized from the mainstream society. Apparently the narrator's family seems to be a well to do one since they have people to help around the house. There are plenty of members who can work and perhaps manage the domestic chores on their own but despite that there is a woman to help and when need be more girls are called. Now this could have been a male figure but a female was chosen to fit the stereotypical role assigned to women.

However, the treatment of the *bahuni*, domestic help, does not seem to be fair on her. For example, on one occasion she is caught eavesdropping the conversation of the family members and is instantly reprimanded and ordered to resume her chores. This as such may not hold much significance but reading against the grain it is inferred that not only is she victimized on account of being a female but is also looked down upon in some way owing to her, perhaps, poor economic status and her compulsion to work for the family. Her especial interest in eavesdropping, especially the ones connected to marriage and sex, the talks of the household members is also suggestive of her hidden sexual desire which probably she ventilates through stealing all chances to listen to talks on sexual issues. She also exhibits her body, perhaps, even without being aware of it. Juntunani took notice of it and snapped at her "why she kept dangling 'them' and that she could wear a blouse while cooking food" (*Narendra Dai*, 10).

Marxism also operates at the level of other girls such as *Falguni*, Munria and friends. Born into relatively poorer families in the Terai, these girls have to work for other richer and more influential people in their vicinity. This is evidently a result of class difference and that positions them at the bottom of class ladder. For instance, these girls come and work at the narrator's house whenever there are certain family functions and extra help is needed. This also can be understood in terms of marginalization that Suresh Lohani [7] in "LGBTI in NEPAL, Pakistan, and India: Law, Religion, and Individuals." talks about. He explicates about how LGBTQ are marginalized in South Asian countries and placed inferior to the ones who conform to heteronormativity. The treatment that these female characters from the fringe receive in *Narendra Dai* is analogous to the low-grade treatment of the LGBTQ community in countries such as India, Pakistan and Nepal.

Therefore, on the one hand, it can be seen that Koirala has sincerely tried to exhibit due respect to the females and portrayed them in a positive light, whereas,

on the other hand, he has also realistically depicted the socio-cultural scenario of a village on the *Koshi* river about a hundred years ago. Even Munria's marriage at a very young age points towards helplessness of the female sex in those times and how they did not have any say on matters which significantly concerned their entirety of life. Munria is bound to pass her youthful days and wait for a person who would later come and take her as his wife. Now the process of waiting at one's youth could be really painful and the feelings of romance that blossom at the time of puberty may further add to the anxiety.

However, owing to socio-cultural contexts, that would be a common practice of those times. Suresh Lohani [8] in *Scholar's Social Studies and Creative Arts* states how "culture is a way of life. People living in a society practice a lifestyle which is directly or indirectly influenced by their culture" (p.39). Lohani's view makes it clear as to why the women characters are often treated the way they are. Given the harsh social conditions for women then, however, one can take Munria as a really empowered lady for she dares to defy socio-cultural conventions and give herself up in Narendra's love. She could have been strongly condemned by the society-and indeed she was- but she refuses to kneel down before societal obstructions and chooses the warmth of Narendra's company over bitter criticism and accepts the position of an outcast. Now it can be argued again that she might have mustered enough courage to do so upon being backed by Narendra, however, if as a woman she were fragile, she would still retreat from the journey of love that she embarked on with Narendra.

*Narendra and Munria* go on expediting the pace of their love by venturing out into nooks and crannies where their privacy would be least probed and the petals of their love would bloom. And with the advance in the plot, Munria without pausing to think of her ailing father agrees to "elope" with Narendra and decides uncompromisingly not to harmonize her life with Surendra's. Even in the alien locations of Banares, they share most intimate moments and remain committed to each other in a passionately binding affair. Their love story races unabated even when Narendra is hit with tuberculosis. This shows how when it comes to the issue of love women surpass men. There is a certain parallel that can be drawn between Narendra and Munria in this regard since both of them quit their formally married partners to be together.

Despite that, however, Munria's sacrifice still stands taller since unlike Narendra, she had not abandoned her partner with whom she stayed under the same roof. She had never enjoyed the warmth of her partner and, therefore, was still "single" despite the marriage. So Munria's steps can be perceived as more morally sound when compared to Narendra's. At least she did not desert her co-habiting partner, whereas

Narendra showed complete disregard to his formally married wife under the pretext of a row with his father.

So, perhaps, indirectly Koirala hints at the balance of love and morality in which women can fare better than men. In this connection, Koirala also tries to posit inter-caste marriage normally as he has done in *Teen Ghumti* for against her mother's warning that Pitambar was a *Bramhin* from the mountains, she replies, "I cannot be happy with anyone else" (Koirala, p. 3) and eventually goes on to marry him and interesting to note here is the initiation taken by Indramaya herself. Even in *Narendra Dai*, Narendra and Munria would not have been together if it were not for Munria's daring act. And there in Banerases things take a complicated turn and Narendra is plagued with T.B. He is no longer in a position to support Munria and she is in a way left to her own; or rather, now she even has to bear the "burden" of Narendra. She, however, serves him her level best without having any grudges against him. But as Narendra's condition begins to worsen, she urges Narendra to return to the village for there he has Gauri to nurse him. This can again be taken as another episode of her selfless love towards Narendra. She would constantly poke Narendra on going back to Gauri and back to his village and shows her preparedness to languish in the alien settings of Banarases, only for the sake of her loved one. Narendra is quite reluctant on leaving her alone at the beginning but later it seems his love for his own life takes precedence over his love for Munria "and one morning, as soon as he woke up, he said to Munria, 'I will return to my village'" (Koirala, p. 43) and does so although initially Narendra is bent on not leaving Munria alone. When Munria expresses her desire to accompany him on the return journey to the village, Narendra turns deaf ears to her plea. This can be taken as a lapse in his character for he could not retain enough courage to take back to his village the woman for whom he abandoned all his near ones and discarded the worldly obligations at some point in the past.

This is, perhaps, an example of how Narendra failed to pass the test of time and relegated his position when compared to Munria. Whereas when we look at Munria, we find that she grows more mature and hardens enough to address the need of the situation. This state of transformation of hers can be credited to Narendra to an extent for it was his company that opened up avenues to her to explore unfamiliar locations of the world and she gained confidence after initially being bolstered by Narendra.

As Munria engages in conversations with the narrator, the audience is exposed to the intellectual transformation that has come to Munria and which has helped her come to terms with her worldly sorrows without any regret. In fact, even after being left to her own by Narendra, she holds no grudges against him and regardless of the excruciating burdens of life she now

has to shoulder, she still cherishes all the moments of her togetherness with Narendra. Munria could have been insistent on returning to the village with Narendra but she refrains from so doing in order to save the shame of her loved one. She rather chose to perish in the foreign setting of Benares resisting and surrendering to prying male gazes, all for the sake of love.

And it would also perhaps be pertinent to state that tacitly, in sharp contrast to Narendra, Munria opted “death” over “life”, figuratively speaking. But life does seem to have taught Munria an important lesson: Whatever happens in life, we have no choice but to move on and that with the flight of time, life will take its own course. After her desire to seek shelter with the narrator is met with a negative response, Munria keeps reiterating that she now “has to do something for her survival...” (Koirala, p. 51). This can be taken as a real empowerment experience of Munria and could even be inferred that women empowerment hinges on some form of male subjugation whether the cause be cultural, physical or temporal.

And in the end, Munria does evolve into a different persona altogether as she starts a new life with a Jauharia, a goldsmith. In so doing she renounces her old identity altogether and erases all reminiscences of the past and is reborn as anew is the goldsmith’s wife. Therefore, Munria performs a well-rounded woman character that is naïve, flirtatious, mature, considerate, and evolving and adapting. Spatio-temporal contexts played a crucial role in this process of her character development. And perhaps more importantly, it is her love for Narendra that makes her face various ordeals of life and in a way emerge as a winner. However, it would be unjust to say that she did not have to pay any price to trigger this paradigm change in her life.

Although not directly mentioned in the novel, it can be inferred that she might have compromised on every step of her life upon being deserted by Narendra, before commencing a new beginning. And the narrator feels that, despite what she “achieved” in the end, her face still lacked “the glow that radiated in her face in the past. There might be abundant luxury at home but she looked as if she had been famished for days...” (Koirala, p. 64). May be amidst the newness of her life the narrator was still seeking some traces of Narendra in her face. All in all, one need not hesitate to say that Munria is probably the most fascinating character B.P has crafted in *Narendra Dai*.

Another central character that would leave Narendra Dai incomplete would definitely be Gauri. Gauri is one such “clean” character that does not exhibit external mutiny though she burns in her heart. Gauri is an epitome of platonic love. All she desires is her husband’s love and is ready to go to any length of compromise to win it. And indeed she does win him back in the end, if not more, his physical entity. Her

perseverance pays off. Or at least, she thinks so. Actually when Narendra comes back towards her in the end it is not really out of regret he had been so apathetic to her true love. But the reality was that plagued with T.B Narendra had converted into a lame duck. And she now was his last resort. This can be taken as another episode that exposes Narendra’s selfish attitude. However, Gauri takes it as a privilege and feels honored that her love has finally flown back to her. Now it is quite hard to speculate if Gauri was physically satisfied by Narendra since he was so badly ill. But perhaps, that Gauri’s love now had elevated to a spiritual level, it looked as if physical proximity did not make any difference to her. She served Narendra day in and day out and Even Narendra’s health condition initially seemed to improve under her care. The letters she wrote to the narrator expressed her profound happiness on being able to serve her husband and she mentioned every detail about their togetherness. The letters read more like the ones written by teenage lovers drenched with unwavering passion for each other.

Thus, Gauri’s selfless love towards Narendra can be aptly contrasted with Narendra’s selfish retreat in the abode of his abandoned wife. This again is one strong part of the novel that shows how devoted and loyal women remain to their men folks. Additionally, Gauri bore no traces of resentment against Munria, and in fact showed enough “generosity” to accommodate her in her household and forgive her despite Munria being the cause of her separation with Narendra.

Therefore, although Gauri and Munria may appear to be poles apart in terms of physical, social and economic aspects, what they share in common is the sacrifice they make for the sake of their loved one whereas the male characters seem quite reluctant at empathizing with the plight of the women. A case in a point is, even the narrator was hesitant about providing shelter to Munria when she asked for it when in fact that could have been “not so difficult a deal” for him. Indirectly, it can be argued that the narrator might have been reluctant in heeding to Munria’s desire owing to socio-cultural constraints which he might have been scared to defy.

Nonetheless, the narrator patiently listens to Munria’s story and consoles her; his perception towards Munria also changes. No longer, for example does the narrator detest Munria the way he used to in his boyhood and that he even finds her beautiful as the narrator now feels “Munria is not even that black” (Koirala, p. 42) and thinks “why blame such a helpless lady?” (Koirala, p.42). This could be attributed to that narrator’s march towards youth from childhood. We may even doubt the intentions of the narrator when he finds some kind of pleasure in Munria’s company. Was the narrator expecting any kind of sexual favor from Munria? This can be felt as the narrator recalls “and imperceptibly, we began tying up in a warm relation”

(Koirala, p. 42) and that "I would go to her no sooner school was over" (Koirala, p. 42).

However, when it comes to Gauri, the narrator is caring enough and takes it as his responsibility to help her in her times of need as hinted by his prompt response to the doctor's advice. There is an unexplained attachment which the writer experiences towards Gauri. Always immaculately presented Gauri lacks the physical charm which Narendra seeks in her. Despite the age and youth women embody varied bodily shape and structure and as an eminent Feminist critique Susan Bordo puts it "*not all bodies are alike*". However, Narendra seems oblivious of this. The importance of looks has been of utmost importance in other novels of Koirala as well. One example can be taken from *Modi Aain* where in the first encounter with the man she later marries, she is mesmerized by the grandeur of the man and the man himself on seeing *Modi Aain* profusely praises her beauty and says, "Who are you? A fairy or an angel? You are definitely human for humans cannot be this beautiful!" (Koirala, p. 25). This also showcases how women characters are so strongly shaped by the element of beauty. Gauri is probably aware of this expectation of her husband. But there is little she can do about it and she perhaps tries to compensate this void in her by seeking solace in religious devotion. The other lady members of the house do not really have much space in the novel but wherever they are present, they have exhibited mixed traits and not really locked themselves up in stereotypical compartments.

Genre theory provides a framework for analyzing novels. It is important that teachers ask their students about the genre conventions Koirala follows and how he also becomes creative in writing his novel. Ashok Bhusal, [9] a genre scholar, states that "instructors have to encourage students to find out the audience and write their assignments according to audience expectations" (p. 15) so they can also produce effective novels.

It can thus be argued that Koirala has provided more clout to women characters in his novel as compared to other novels written in his time. He has also exhibited manifold traits of women and not confined them to one stereotypical docile image that

relates to passivity, and submission. His female characters can be placed at all points of spectrum: they are revolutionary, daring, flirtatious, and yet submissive and timid. His characters seem to have been colored with Marxist and Freudian perspectives as they openly engage in struggles within family, both in terms of power and sensuality. However, it would still be no fabrication to state that male characters by and large overshadow the females in that they are key decision makers and enjoy the liberty to orient their lives the way they want to, and women in this regard have little choice but to take refuge in the shelter of patriarchy.

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