



## SUBSISTENCE VIA *JALA-SAMADHI* (SACRED SUICIDE): AN ENIGMATIC ACTIVISM OF YOGMAYA

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### ABSTRACT

Collective *jal-samadhi* (killing oneself by plunging in the river) is one of the rare evidences in the resistance history that Yogmaya led from the Eastern part of Nepal at the verge of Rana regime. This paper examines her three different aspects - her life story, her *Sarwartha Yogbani*, and her collective *jala-samadhi* - to argue Yogmaya as an enigmatic social activist. The main purpose is to foreground her life struggle with reference to her *Sarwartha Yogbani* from the perspective of subaltern studies. The notions of 'hegemony' and 'subaltern' as Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak point out when 'agency' of the oppressed is concerned have been applied as theoretical parameters to foreground her story. The finding of the study shows subsistence of her resistance via *jal-samadhi* that helps engage intellectuals in academic activism and critical discourse in the history form below perspective.

**Keywords:** collective *jala-samadhi*, history from below, social activism

### INTRODUCTION

This paper examines three different aspects of Yogmaya, that are her life story, her collection of oral verses *Sarwartha Yogbani* published posthumously and her collective *jal-samadhi*, which came into existence from the bottom after decades of her death. The power bloc and the elite historians did not document the resistance history of Yogmaya, which remained invisible for a long period of time. Yogmaya and her followers and their history of struggle remained unknown until researchers Barbara Nimri Aziz worked from the bottom and introduced resistance stories embedded around the life of Yogmaya.

Yogmaya was born in Bhojpur district, Nepaledanda, Simle in 1868 (Karki, 2070 BS), at the dark period when despotic Rana family ruled Nepal. She was married “at the age of seven” to a Brahmin (Koirala) boy from Dhollekhandi, Bhojpur (Sharma, 2020, p. 94). She could not acclimatize to the new atmosphere in Dhollekhandi. Her “first husband died after two years” (Neupane, 2070 BS, p. 7) and she ran away from her husband’s home and spent a night in a jungle. It was extremely a dissent action for a daughter-in-law to leave her husband’s house then without prior permission and preparation.

When Yogmaya left the husband’s house, she was stigmatized as an outcaste. She was not accepted comfortably in her maternal home, too. She could not stay peacefully in her parental home and eloped with another Brahmin (Kandel) boy from Asham at the age of 14 (Aziz, 2001, p. 51). Her second husband unfortunately passed away. At that time, widows were either sent *sati* (burn alive with husband’s funeral pyre) or left stigmatized in Hindu society. Yogmaya got married with another Brahmin (Dotel) man in Asham (Aziz, 2001).

Remarriage for a widow was unacceptable during Rana period and she got a realization of liberating herself from orthodox social values. She made a mind of leaving the hegemonic life of domesticity and politico-cultural norms. She was suffocating in the society where rigid censorship was in practice rampantly. She left the domestic life and “spent some years a nomad life visiting religious places” of Nepal such as Swargadari, Pyuthan, Pasupatinath, Barahachhetra (Sharma, 2020, p. 95) and finally returned back her birthplace with her daughter Nainakala in 1961 perusing an ascetic life and established an *ashram* (a *kuti*- a shed) in Majuwabesi, Bhojpur (Subedi 2054 BS). Her ascetic life soon influenced a lot of oppressed women and men. Her followers began to address her with a new name, Shakti Maya, acknowledging her devotion to resistance consciousness. Further, she was called by various names, such as Shakti Mata, Bhakti Mata, Thuli Hajur, Shree Bhakti, Thuli Bhakti, (Rai, 2017 BS). To her followers, Yogmaya would say, “I’m not a god but an outcaste and stigmatized individual of the society” (qtd. in Aziz, 2001, p. xxxvii).

Yogmaya realized a need of an organization and united women establishing the first women’s organization called *Nari Samiti* in 1918 (Sangraula, 2011; Shrestha, 2011). She turned into such “an activist as vanguard often stood in the batter filed uniting the subaltern women including

men to fight against despotic political ruler (Rana who used coercive force) and cultural ruler (Brahmans, who exercised the power through consent) at the dark Rana period in Nepal” (Shrestha, 2014, p. 151). She was charged with various derogatory terms. One of them was that she was a communist. The communist party was not in existence then. She was also charged a woman of misfortune, husband killer, prostitute, immoral woman, and so on. The regressive forces were scared because her activism was collective, which was versatile and powerful (Dahal, 2070 BS).

The Nari Samiti led by Yogmaya is significant in the history of Nepali social movement, which collectively promoted activism and submitted a 24-point petition of demands to the Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher including the point of demand to abolish *sati* (widow alive burning) tradition in 1920. Juddha Shamsher became the Prime Minister after the demise of Chandra Shamsher. Their 24-point petition was pending. She came to Kathmandu, again with her followers demanding dharma rajjya (a spiritually good governance) and warned the authority again with a 26-point petition that the oppressive rule would no longer persist (Timsina, 2070 BS). Instead of accepting their demands stated in the 26-point petition, Juddha Shamsher tried to suppress them; Yogmaya planned of mass immolation along with 240 followers on November 12, 1938. They were ready to jump into the burning fire of a *kotihom* (a religious Hindu function with bonfire) as a sign or mass sacrifice for the social transformation. Before mass immolation mission accomplished, “all the activists were arrested and sent to prisons in Bhojpur and Dhankuta. To arrest the activists, 500 Rana armies were mobilized” (Neupane, 2070 BS, p. 7). They were released only after a month (Karki, 2069 BS; Chapagain, 2061 BS).

Yogmaya including other women were released after three months and others some of them were kept imprisoned for three years. One of the imprisoned activists is reported died in the prison (Bhandari, 2057 BS, p. 110-12). They were hopeless in front of the rigid Rana administration. Yogmaya, as Aziz (2001) writes, “would practice longer forms of meditations in various aloof places, i.e. in a cave, in the river naked, on the riverbank without food” (p. 48). Being a *sanyasi* (sage) and persuading renunciation she had a realization of absurdity of physical life, which could therefore influence a lot of followers for mass immolation. They went on a hunger strike for 32 days by the Arun River just having water (Rai, 2070 BS). The Rana ruler did not listen to their voices. They thought self-killing better than

selling their ethics. For them the *mokshya* (salvation) was mass immolation, which the *Rig Veda* justifies as highly dignified death called *agni-samadhi* in Sanskrit. The outcome she produced was *Sarvartha Yogbani* (holistic voice) that was recited orally among the followers as the guiding principle or philosophy of their activism.

Yogmaya was producing oral verses via her longer forms of meditations, which were used to educate the followers and the people who would come to their contact. The verses were revolutionary and spiritual that would preach the followers the philosophy of *bhakti marga* and self-sacrifice- *mokshya* (salvation) through mass suicide. When all her efforts failed and her voice of resistance were never heard, on July 5, 1941 (22 Ashad 1998 BS) Yogmaya along with her 67 followers (in total 68 persons, including some women carrying child) committed mass jal-samadhi and disappeared forever- the destination of *nirguna bhakti*. It is said that Yogmaya at first jumped down the river putting a candled *diyo* (lamp) on the head and others followed her one after another reciting the slogans: “Let the unjust Rana regime be destroyed! May Dharma be established” in which there were 49 females and 19 males including few children. They had planned to gather by the river before 4:00 am. They waited for Dambar Bahadur and Pahalman Basnet for some time, but they did not appear. They jumped into the river at 4:00 am one after another so that nobody could obstruct them in their mission (Karki, 2070 BS). Some reports show that some of them were mothers, who were carrying babies, including an infant below one year of age. They also plunged into the river with the babies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Resistance and existence: A subaltern studies approach

Yogmaya (1867-1941) committed suicide leading mass jal-samadhi (killing oneself by plunging in the river) opposing the notion of existence as resistance. To make deep, meaningful and lasting change, the actors of activism should survive. The frontlines are their lives, as LaPointe (2018) argues, our existence is resistance. When we heal, choose sobriety, speak, and rise, we are resisting. To reclaim the rights and justice to all, the frontline actors have to live to sustain the resistance movement. To exist, one should speak the voice of resistance and act at the front. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern, more clearly, the gender subalterns have no voice in society. They have to secure autonomous foundation to speak. Antonio Gramsci's term, 'hegemony' of various forms is so pervasive that

it is almost impossible for the woman subalterns to exist, speak and act for the history formulation.

The mass *jal-samadhi* of Yogmaya generates multiple questions about the existence and resistance of the subaltern. Gramsci (1973) presents a very serious situation of the subaltern groups of people to express their autonomous voice of resistance, who used the term 'subaltern' in corporation with other terms like 'hegemony', 'domination' and 'subordination'. For him, non-hegemonic groups are the 'subalterns', who are always subordinate to the ruling class. Spivak proposed "a more nuanced, flexible, post-Marxist definition of the subaltern, informed by deconstruction, which takes women's lives and histories into account" (Morton, 2007, p. 48).

Combining Marxism, feminism and deconstruction, Spivak (1988) further elaborates - the oppression imposed by differences in power, gender and access to knowledge, and brings an issue of whether subalterns can speak. There are a number of factors that prevent the gender subaltern from speaking and acting, and even surviving. More interestingly, there comes another question of whether the subalterns can be heard. The elites of privileged class society speak for the subalterns but they can never speak truly for them. In pretention of representing the subalterns truly, the elites rather misrepresent them. Spivak terms this kind of act as "epistemic violence," a form of violence inflected through thought, speech, and writing, rather than actual physical harm (Riach, 2017, p. 11). So, subalterns have no history. Females are comparatively more vulnerable subalterns than males as Spivak argues. In her words, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...the subaltern cannot speak" (p. 28). Spivak believes that subaltern women are always spoken *for* by those who are in power and rarely have space to speak in order to represent themselves. So, obviously, even when they do speak, they are not in the position to be heard. The speeches, sighs and cries of the female subalterns do not reach the level that carries some sense and meaning.

Keeping the above-mentioned issues into consideration, this research primarily reviews the life struggle of Yogmaya, who pioneered a versatile but enigmatic activism in Nepal, and analyzes it from the notion of Gramsci's 'hegemony' and Spivak's 'gender subaltern'. After focusing Yogmaya's life, her struggle and her spiritual activism (what hindrances she faced and how she coped with them) this paper argues that Yogmaya as an

activist, organizer and leader with reference to her works is significant in academic activism in the current context. Her self-sacrifice or jal-samadhi though looks ambivalent form of resistance but it helps to generate the discourse of the representation of the subaltern existence in academia. Her oral verses substantiate to bridge academia with her life story and social activism.

### **Yogmaya's *Sarvartha Yogbani*: An Echo Beyond the Canon**

Parijat first heard about Yogmaya and her work *Sarvartha Yogbani* first via a foreign researcher named Barbara Nimri Aziz in the mid-1990s. Parijat was shocked realizing that she had not known anything at all about this first revolutionary woman activist Yogmaya. Parijat has expressed her feeling about the biased intellectuals and writers of Nepal, who tried to hide this pioneer resistance history of Nepal. She has charged that the traditional writers of Nepal have emphasized erotic literary practices like *Suktisindhu* (an anthology of erotic poems) rather than resistance theme. She explored about Yogmaya's *Sarvartha Yogbani*, which was secretly banned. Parijat came to know that a family had preserved 1-2 copies of it, when one man came to stay a night with a sack filled with *Sarvartha Yogbani* print copies. Next morning he burnt all the copies before leaving the house, but the house owner could save a copy and got available now (Parijat, 2057 BS).

At the end of Rana regime, Yogmaya's *Sarvartha Yogbani* was published posthumously from Asham (Timsina, 2070 BS: p. 170). She was illiterate but she could deliver her oral verses eloquently. After her death, her verses were recalled and recited by her daughter and one of her followers Prem Narayan jotted them down on the paper (Bhandari, 115). After it was published from Kalinpong, India, *Sarvartha Yogavani* were burnt by Rana administrators, however, some copies were saved and preserved. They were reprinted after political atmosphere became more liberal. The politico-cultural atmosphere under rigid Rana regime (1846-1950) was suffocating.

The Rana authority was exercising totalitarianism, feudalism and Brahmanism collectively fostering the system of untouchability (caste-based discrimination), child marriage, widow burning alive and other forms of discrimination (domination and subordination) in terms of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, region, language, religion and position. The monopoly of Brahmin priests was sanctioned by the state as well as by religious texts such as *Vedas* and *Puranas*. The Brahmins would solely played role of traditional intellectuals supporting the ruling class. The only modern school (Darbar

High School) introduced by Junga Bahadur Rana was under the grip of few ruling families. Yogmaya and her history of resistance was unknown to the public until her *Sarvartha Yogavani* was republished, which gradually drew attention of the scholars and activists from the fields of feminism, Marxism, and post-colonial/cultural and subaltern studies.

*Sarvartha Yogavani* echoes the voices of humanity at large as a social reformer” (Neupane, 2016, p. 8) which attracted intellectuals from various disciplines. The final destination of her mission was, as Aziz (2001) writes, nirvana via *nirguna bhakti* as she would say, “I am not only aiming at that tyrant/My goal is point zero” (p. 141). Her life, works and activism often aimed to deconstruct the rigidities and orthodoxies of the society. Various forms of *karma kandas* (oppressive religious functions and rituals), scripts like *Garurparana* (the preaching practiced when someone dies in Hindu culture) were directly attacked by Yogmaya and her followers. They wanted to eradicate all forms of bribery, cheating, deception, epistemic violence caused by religious horrors, exploitation of priests, discrimination in terms of differences among the people that were intolerable to them (Timsina 2070 BS). They also advocated the animal rights and nature conservation.

Progressive writers from the communist backgrounds accepted Yogmaya and her works as a revolutionary platform for promoting progressive consciousness. Ninu Chapagain (2061 B.S.) and Sudha Tripathi (2057 BS), for an instance, elaborate *Sarvartha Yogbani* from the Marxist and feminist perspectives. They represent Yogmaya as a revolutionary figure. Tripathi believes “her [Yogmaya’s] *jal-samathi* a resistance against Rana regime, feudalism and Brahmanism” (p. 124). Some of the writers even call her a Marxist activist overlooking her religious life. People like Swami Prapannacharya (2057 BS) wishes that “Yogmaya has to exist again- she should be reborn, because she is equal to *Mahatmas* Sasidhar, Gyandildas and Balaguru Sadananda” (p. 182).

Yogmaya’s *Sarvartha Yogbani* sustained outside the canon because it appeals for deconstructing feudalism and Brahmanism of Nepali society. It was the resistance consciousness of the time; huge masses of subalterns were oppressed by the Hindu caste hierarchical hegemony then. Yogmaya as a “revolutionary female figure of Nepal” (Bhandari, 2070, p. 1) not only united people to challenge the despotic rulers through the campaigning of social reformations and the extension of revolutionary subaltern consciousness, her verses also directly speak prevailing elitist structures.

माहा राज् छन् दर्वारमा हेर्न आउदैनन्,	The King does come down
दुःखि जन्ले नित्रा निसाफ् सिधा पाउदैनन् ।	The poor do not get justice
जागिरदार लोभि छन् नित्रा हेर्दैनन्,	The civil servants are greedy
मर्नु पर्ने शरिर हो बिचार गर्दैनन् ॥	They forget they are dying soon (my trans. Sharbartha Yogavani, i)

The extract speaks so-called great monarch lives in the palace whereas the poor people insistently suffer in injustice below. The administrators/the agents of the king are very greedy. They do not think over the sufferings of the subalterns. They ignore the fact that everybody has to die. They are blind with temptation and involve in corruption. The subalterns suffer, but the king, who lives in the sophisticated palace, does not know pathetic condition of the ruled. It is a direct protest against the ugliness of the Rana regime. Yogmaya's lyrical verses embody universal appeal and put light on the dissemination of her realization of knowledge to the public achieved through her meditation (Bhurtel, 2057 BS). Aziz (2020) interviewing the followers of Yogmaya including Manamaya writes:

Yogmaya had a two-pronged agenda, not just one, explained Manamaya. Her first target was our Brahmanic system, propagated by Brahmin priests, that give privileges to a few and makes rules that enslave the rest, and women of all castes. Her second object was our ruler, the Prime Minister, who along with his generals allowed corruption and inequality to prevail. Our master, Shakti Yogmaya, showed us how these two evils are intertwined, and she feared neither. (p. 33)

Apparently, the Brahmins were attached to the Rana ruler and Royal palace of Nepal. They could live like lords. They were turning to corrupt practices by selling their creed. They were deep-rooted in greed and personal gain by acting as religious agents. It would be a great audacity to speak against the rigid Brahmanism then. Intellectuals were operated into the hegemonic rule of the Ranas. From 1768 (date of what the historians call the complete unification of the country by Prithivi Narayan Shah when he conquered the Kathmandu Valley) to 2008, Nepal was ruled by the hereditary Shah monarchs interrupted in the middle for 104 years by the rule of the Prime Ministers of the Rana family who reduced them to a position of mere symbolic presence of kingship in Nepal.

Rana regime was imposed after the *kotparva* (a massacre of opponents) led by Jungabhadur Rana. Inaugurated by Jang Bahadur Rana in 1846, the Rana rule continued with the system of the senior most



brothers' rule. Juddha Shamsher Rana was in power when Yogmaya was active, but her campaign began during the rule of his predecessor Bhim Shamsher. Her campaign of awakening the subalterns particularly women was active from 1930s to 1940s, by resisting the Rana regime with 24-point and 26-point petitions.

Yogmaya, who was an illiterate female sage, transformed herself into a socio-cultural reformist after going through the bitter experiences of widowhood. As a sage she has not only spent her life in the religious chanting and reciting hymns, but she also contributed much for the socio-politico-cultural awakening. She stood against all forms of social evils for the justice to the subalterns. She revolted against the prevalent superstitions and ugliness, and corruptions practiced in the name of religion. During that course of activities, she created remarkable verses against the dominant ideologies, which are subaltern consciousness-friendly:

ब्राम्हण् भई सर्व चिज्को विक्रि गरेको, मालिक् भई दुःखिहरूको वृत्ति हरेको । अहिले गच्छौ भलादमिहो आफ्ना खुशैले, भित्रु जरा हालि सक्यो लोभि घुसैले ॥	O, Brahmin you're selling everything You masters cheating the poor Seeking own luxuries Roots are within you of greed. (My trans. Sharbartha Yogavani 88)
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Yogmaya employed formless religious ideals as the tradition of Joshmani School of Thought. She challenged the prevailing Brahmanic patriarchy and the dominant elitist structures. From the distant village in the eastern Nepal, Yogmaya and her followers affirmed the voice against the Rana rulers. Their voices of resistance threatened both the male-dominated Brahmanic institutions and the oligarchic Rana authority. Nepal was plunged into corruption under the despotic regime backed by Brahmanism. There was no justice for the poor, women and the so-called lower caste (dalit) people. The despotic rulers were getting successful in implementing 'break and rule' principle assisted by Brahmanism. Her orally expressed texts tell her followers that they should strongly stand and speak for the justice.

Frustrated, Yogmaya committed suicide in 1941 by throwing herself into the current of Arun River, and her disciples a total number of 68 took the same path of self-annihilation by following her. Though she committed suicide along with her 67 followers, her role of extending the subaltern consciousness is noteworthy. Jal-samadhi (in Sanskrit, means achieving an eternal meditative state by drowning into the water) the mass suicide was a

big issue. The despotic Rana regime was threatened by the anti-corruption campaign of Yogmaya and her followers. The mass suicide was taken as a sign of misfortune, a sin. This event could bring a significant resistance consciousness among if exposed. But “the tragedy”, as Barbara Nimri Aziz depicts “remains a stain on the government that the authorities covered up the episode and banned all mention of her and therein lies the story” (p. 34), that captures the socio-political and cultural history of the then Nepal and her oral texts posthumously collected and published represent revolutionary subaltern consciousness. The rulers were dependent on the priests for religious ceremonies.

At that time Nepal was ruled by a rigid and religion-based regime. Speaking about Yogmaya, critic, writer and advocate of peasants’ rights, Harka Gurung states: “Rebellion had to come from within the Hindu community... Brahmanism itself gave rise to anti-Brahmanism. Yogmaya was born Brahmin...” (qtd. in Aziz, p. 49). The threat of Yogmaya was really revolutionary and the voice of the subaltern groups was muted. Yogmaya dared to speak the truth even on the face of those in power. The voice of Yogmaya is authentic as she spoke from the far-flung location exclusively detached from the power centre. She was born a Brahmin but she boldly stood against the rigid Brahmanism which was long been working in tandem with the oligarchic rulers and the feudalistic cultural organization. Apparently, such figures as Yogmaya could not be part of the mainstream historiography of the country. Under the oligarchic rule, Yogmaya as a woman of exceptional ability who, in the words of Tirtha Prasad Mishra, “directly challenged the Rana regime and the Brahmanically-determined power structure prevailing in Nepal. The extraordinary movement and the personage of this rebel woman were almost entirely erased from the history of Nepal” (qtd. in Aziz, p. i), her anti-elitist expressions of everlasting value:

अन्त्य कालमा त्यो घुसले फटाउनला घाँदा,  
बडो कष्ट मिलि जाला त्यो घुस निस्की जाँदा ।  
अहिले मात्र पचेको छ भरे पच्ने छैन,  
सम्झि राख सत्य बचन भुटो हुने छैन ॥

At the end you can't digest  
You feel painful when it is exposed  
Now it is invisible but not forever  
Remember, this truth cannot be false  
(My trans. qtd. in *Silent Song*, cover page)

Yogmaya attacks corrupt Brahmins and Rana Regime through her oral verses (Neupane, 2016). During that time, the verse of Yogmaya and her followers recited were not heard in the lack of agency. The voices of resistance could not be extended to the broader mass. Spivak argues that representing those voices of the gender subaltern is often risky and at the

same time the subalterns have meager ability to make their voice heard under the pervasive dominance of the powerful in the society. They often take the subalterns as homogenous group rather than distinct autonomous individuals. It's another form of epistemic violence rather than political and military domination. The questions of representing others or self-representation both are problematic.

At that time, representing Yogmaya, her life struggles and her works by others were beyond imagination of true representation because the intellectuals belonged to elite circles. They spoke a lot via their spiritual hymns, but the contents were revolutionary. The power bloc was successful to leave their voices aside for decades. The powerful groups rather would help to reproduce the feudal and colonial oppressive ideology. As Spivak claims, while talking about the gap between speaking and listening or writing, "When you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves with listening, in the case of the subaltern response that does not exist with meaning" (Spivak, 1992, p. 46). The struggle of Yogmaya, her works and contribution remained unheard and unread for a long time because as Spivak views, the speech of her verse and activism could not be successful. The hegemony in the notion of Gramsci is very pervasive. They could not transmit their meaning because the gender subaltern had not achieved the space until the political upheavals and research came to be open. Her self-ambulation issues were gradually exposed into fragmented forms. The question of authentic representation or possibility of misrepresentation is there.

### **Jal-samadhi of Yogmaya: An Enigmatic Essence**

Yogmaya's collective self-sacrifice is an enigmatic but versatile topic for critical discourse concerned to subaltern resistance. From the perspective of gender subaltern, one can raise various questions related to resistance and existence with reference to the *jal-samadhi* of Yogmaya. Being a Hindu widow, Yogmaya had to follow rigid rules and regulation. But she stood as an iconoclast, who dared to speak for politico-cultural rights to the oppressed people. She dared to speak against the cultural hegemony and its serious impact on the subalterns, the widow women in particular. She did not get scared of the situation when the despotic ruler directly censored her activities and her works were banned.

Yogmaya founded women group in 1918 to raise voice against oppression towards women. She collectively led movement for politico-

cultural transformation, even demanding ban of *sati* ritual. Though people eulogies, Yogmaya's actions as a replica of her contemporary society calling her protest autonomous (Parijat, 2057 BS), but her actions like preparation of *angi-samadhi* (suicide jumping on the bonfire) and *jal-samadhi* look enigmatic. Her plan of mass suicide of 240 people via *agni-samadhi* failed after they were arrested and imprisoned, however, Yogmaya and her 67 followers accomplished it by jumping into the Arun River. Her mission of *satya dharmako vchichha* (gift of true religion) ended with the mass suicide of 68 people. Can we call it a non-violent way of resistance? Should the gender subaltern speak via these sorts of self-sacrifice? Could we justify this sort of self-destructive resistance?

As Gramsci argues, the *mokshya* (liberation) of the oppressed is often surrounded by hopelessness. Yogmaya and her followers were tired and hopeless after running decades long collective movement against injustice and social evils. Ultimately, they chose the ways of *agni-samadhi* and *jal-samadhi*, which looked extreme in the current time. Though Yogmaya in particular came to be visible despite the authority wanted to make her resistance history invisible as far as possible. To quote Aziz,

If we believe Yogmaya prevailed, it may be only through her martyrdom... the authorities had to erase this shameful episode by imposing a total legal ban on her and her moment, destroying or suppressing any related documents, terrifying survivors, and applying other intimidating tactics. No one spoke publicly about her passing for years.... But Yogmaya was not forgotten...the issue slowly began to be publicly discussed and celebrated. It was impossible to ignore forever. (p. 25)

At present, Yogmaya has become a brand to researchers, activists and development workers. Organizations of various forms have been established under her name. Even, a university has been proposed in her name, Yogmaya University. The Government of Democratic Republic Nepal has issued a postal stamp in recognition of her history and her contribution. But, the question is whether the essence of resistance of Yogmaya to subaltern consciousness sustains or not. This is a pertinent issue. Rather than eulogizing Yogmaya and her activism via blanket approach, critical analysis of her strength and limitation is necessary to the subalterns, who are seeking for autonomous agency to exist and speak.

Subaltern epistemic perspectives are knowledge coming from below that produces a critical perspective of hegemonic knowledge in the power relation involved (Grosfoguel, 2007: 5). Gramsci saw hegemony of

the elite classes upon the subaltern classes but subaltern historians denied it and saw the subalterns located as an independent agent as a woman from Arab, Barbara Nimri Aziz came to Nepal with research skills and unearthed the history of Yogmaya as a rebel woman of Nepal. In her view, history plays games with its human actors because she has seen enough years pass to observe how an event (jal-samadhi) can be enthralling, profound and impacting on the people and places of its time. She has contributed to unveil the incident that had been “buried from view, from memory, and from the record altogether” (p. 85) and as she insists, “It’s up to us to ensure the erasure is not permanent” (p. 85). Aziz was true that we must excavate any traces, however faint and recover and reinstate them that is never too late to sing these women’s praises, to share their heroism and their message, and to follow their example” (ibid, p. 86). Padma Tara Tuladhar, therefore, calls Yogmaya “a *sahasi*- a daring woman” (qtd. in Aziz, 2020, p. 3).

No doubt Yogmaya was one of the most resolute and profound advocates of Nepal for justice during despotic Rana period. Articulating her principle of *dharma raj* during the dominance of priestly authority continued her movement to awaken hope to the subalterns from the grassroots. But the mass agni-samadhi or jal-samdhi, in which their mothers also took innocent infants, looks self-destructive agency. Resistance without existence, after the death or mass suicide, can be a good plot in fictional worlds. In the real world, existence as far as possible itself is resistance.

## CONCLUSION

Yogmaya belonged to the so-called high caste Brahmin family, but she was a severely victimized subaltern woman from Brahmanism. However, she transformed her docile subaltern position into a revolutionary Nepali woman activist as Parijat argues and her existence came to be visible forcefully outside the canon. Being a versatile figure, there are multitudes of perspectives to approach her life struggle, her works and her activism. Rather than eulogizing her from ‘Bhakti hajur’ to ‘Mukti hajur’ sorts of terms, her contribution to resistance consciousness has to be explored and sustained from the history from below perspective. In the name of mokshya (enlightenment and liberation), the mass self-sacrifice of the subalterns cannot be celebrated as non-violent way of resistance. No nomads, sages, or enlightened individuals have the right to mass self-killing in the name of spiritual salvation- mokshya, either they believe on *saguna* or *nirguna bhakti* cults. In the contemporary constitutions, everywhere in the world,

individual or mass self-killing is a criminal act. Eulogizing via blanket approach itself is an elitist approach. However, looking her act from the notion of hegemony, subaltern and agency as Gramsci and Spivak argue, her historiography of jal-samadhi justifies that Yogmaya had limitation but she was really a sahasi (bold) activist- an influencing organizer and permanent persuader. Her life story and struggle that end with collective jal-samadhi can not only a space for unconditional academic activism but also a source of academic discourse from below.

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