

Book Review

The Wayward Daughter

Author: Shraddha Ghale

Reviewer: Uday Adhikari

Shraddha Ghale, a new entry into Nepali English Literature has come up with a novel titled *The Wayward Daughter*.

It is Tamule family saga. Gajey is an assistance manager at the electricity corporation. He believes in hardworking. His belief in Hindu deity and Hinduism surprises his wife Premkala alarmingly. She fails to understand how an ethnic man from Lugla surrenders himself to the power of numerous Gods and Goddesses. Tamule ji is self-made man. He, times and again, offers the teaching of hardworking and honesty but his life philosophy often falls on the deaf ears. He doesn't find any taker of his self-made philosophy even within his own family.

Tamule ji follows the pace of time well. He labours unendingly to make unfavourable situation favourable. His eyes are on Premkala, a widow landlady's daughter; and he never misses any moment to be close to her. His chance comes with certain risk when Premkala's brother Rajan asks him his room for one night as his lover, a Chettri girl Shanti, has to be hidden from her family as she knows her parent will never let her marry a matwali and Tamule ji's favour bears fruit and his presence amid landlady's family is accepted.

Tamule ji joins NGO for better future. Before leaving the job at electricity corporation, he contemplated deeply about new job. New job brought a kind of prosperity, a very few people blessed with. Tamule ji's name is taken with great respect back home. He is among the very few people from Lugla, far eastern part of Nepal who made their ways in Kathmandu. He is benevolent and ready to help his people. His kinder heart sometime becomes the apple of discord between husband and wife, as Premkala has to manage the family with city's pace.

Tamule ji seems to be satisfied man with his achievement. A house in capital, a lucrative job at NGO, a lover turned wife Premkala, and two daughters studying at very reputed English boarding school where who is whose children read. A successful journey from Lugla to Kathmandu demands a well-planned research.

Beside a very successful story of Gajey, the novel can be read as a true love story. Love stories sound sweet when we read but it brings a crisis into traditional families like ours in Nepal. Gajey's love for Premkala sours his relationship with his father forever. His father was

on the opinion that Premkala's caste couldn't match his. Gajey's forgiven, as he was doing his best to provide some privilege to his family back home.

Premkala's brother fell for Chettri girl that didn't amuse Boju, Premkala's mother who felt her son was stolen from her by this cunning Chettri girl. Both mother in law and daughter in law came open into the conflict and mother in law came to Premkala's house permanently.

Sumnima, an elder daughter of Gajey, and Premkala started dating with Sagar Karky, a radio junky and her love story till the end of the novel is in limbo. And one thing is very surprising why all the love stories happen to be intercaste love stories.

It is sociological story, too. The questions of caste, class are well thought of: how small children Sumnima or Luca became anti-Indian because of shortage of kerosene oil as they heard it was India that blockaded everything. Their hatred for the people from Terai was biased. Political events are used like pickle in a meal. Longing for higher rank or caste runs like obsession in Gajey's family. The writer describes Gajey's father "All his life he has struggled to attain the Brahmin's Godliness. He belongs to the generation of Tamules who embraced the ways of high caste Hindus who ruled over their lives in their myriad avatars. Tamuleji's father had surrendered himself with zeal of convert."

And surprisingly Gajey has inherited father's zeal intact. Gajey is simple or kind man who worships prosperity. He finds prosperity in project sector. Here the writer comments: "Tamuleji started seeing through the eyes of foreigner and regretted being a person from begging country."

The tussle between *boju* (mother in law) and Shanti (daughter in law) is the product of prejudices; they have had for each other.

The novel covers many aspects of the social life. Probably Lahure or Army is the only lucrative term that brings all ethnic people at one place. It is the only success mantra among them. Marrying Lahure is the prime goal. The following sentence reveals the fact: "How Parvati, so plain and past her prime, had caught such a handsome Lahure Fish."

It is a problematic novel too. The author raises questions about caste, identity of female and system. Premkala tries to make herself a grown up woman by wearing sari rather than jeans. We clearly find a very strong suppressive feminist voice in her. The following lines reveal her inner self:

She is dumb as quiet and small whereas any one with thing hanging between their legs was "sir" and "hajur"... Another incident that reminds of her stand "Premkala would ride to Kirtipur on a bus packed with men hugging a bag to her chest, wary of the hands and crotches around her."

Sumnima, Premkala's daughter encounters with Balaram sir who alone speaks same feelings. Being women in men's world is not easy. She raises the issue strongly. Sumnima, being a modern girl, still respects tradition with devotion. She says strong 'no' to sex before marriage and her strong 'No' she fears, is bound to break the relationship and it does.

The description of a faraway village and capital city Kathmandu grips readers' mind; but at the same time, too much detailing stops reader's imagination and hampers novel's spirit too. Intermingling Nepali words doesn't break the flow that is her strength. By producing such vibrant piece of social reality, Shradha Ghale has joined main-stream of Nepali English Writing.

The novel ends without warning. It means there will be sequel in offing. Like other readers, I too long Sumnima's crush with real boy with somehow big nose.