

A peer-reviewed open-access journal indexed in NepJol

ISSN 2990-7640 (online); ISSN 2542-2596 (print)

Published by Molung Foundation, Kathmandu, Nepal

Article History: Received on December 30, 2021; Accepted on June 5, 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/mef.v13i01.56092>

**A Story of an Untamed Woman Hero: A Book Review of Parijaat's *Shirish
Ko Phool***

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Shrish ko Phool (Parijat, 1964) is a famous novel written by one of the most prestigious progressive writers, Parijaat. It is a story told from the perspective of a male narrator Suyogbir, a former soldier. The story opens with Suyogbir's narration of meeting with Shivaraj at a bar and how their friendship grew as a family friend. The narration becomes interesting when Suyogbir describes how he falls in love with Bari (Shivaraj's sister). Even if there are other characters, Suyogbir and Sakambari (who are called Bari) are the two main characters in this novel.

Suyogbir represents male psychology and the impact of war. His personality shows how a person lives with traces of the war and how the cruelty of war shapes their personality. Even after coming back to everyday life, Suyogbir has a dominating tendency that of a soldier. He thinks he should get victory over the things he wants. He has committed violence against women during the war, taking advantage of their emotions to fulfill his bodily desires. In the storyline, he narrates how he played with Matinachi's emotion in Burma just to quench his thirst, how he tempted a buffalo herder woman in Makhrig, and how he murdered a tribal girl and had sexual contact with her dead body. Contrasting with his feeling toward Bari, he thinks he has never loved any woman.

Suyogbir's character is shown just opposite to Shivaraj's character. Shivaraj is friendly and loves his sisters from his heart. Even though Bari makes him feel awkward with her sudden boldness in front of Suyogbir, his love for her does not change. He rather thinks that if something happens to Bari, he will commit suicide. Even if his sisters are of marriageable age, there is not any reference in the story where he is forceful toward them about their marriage. He even manages cigarettes for Bari when she demands. It shows he is a perfect brother and a man who is not influenced by the impact of war. He does not have any bitter memories like that of Suyogbir to feel guilty, although he also shares the characteristics of a free male in Nepalese society who freely wanders in the

bars in the evenings, gets drunk, and comes home late at night. But he respects Bari and is often scared of her scolding when he comes home late at night.

Unlike Shivaraj, Suyogbir, on the other hand, gazes at female bodies sensually and imagines their body sizes and ages. When Shivaraj invites him to his home, he shamelessly and lustfully stares at his friend's sisters. He even thinks of Mujura as a sensual and perfect wife-like character but finds Bari awkward and injuriously bold to his ego. At the beginning of the story, Bari becomes the most uninteresting and distressing woman character to Suyogbir as Bari never entertains his thoughts and opinions. How Suyogbir abhors Bari is cleared by a reference when Shivaraj accidentally drops Bari's photograph at Suyog's place, and after realizing it is Bari's photograph Suyogbir returns it to Shivaraj without even looking at it. However, as the story develops, gradually, he falls in love with Bari, but she never entertains his feeling.

Suyogbir often gives hints to Bari about his desire for conjugal life, but Bari reminds him that she has no such desire. This hurts Suyogbir's feelings, and he thinks that she has an "anti-humanistic component in her blood" (Parijat, 1964). In one incident, Suyogbir feels shocked and questions the existence of flowers when Bari says that she enjoys seeing a particular flower killing insects. To this, Bari replies, "One should bloom for oneself, flourish for oneself, and when one is compelled to wither one day, why should one have to entertain an insect? Why take a wound from an insect when one can wither alone, fall alone (Parijat, 1964)?" The more Bari mercilessly smashes Suyogbir's ego, the more Suyogbir feels trapped in her love, like the insect inside the poisonous flower. This one-sided affection makes him stranded and too cowardly to express what he feels to Bari. In this confusion, one day, he abruptly violates Bari, but Bari mysteriously dies without reacting to his act, and Suyogbir lives with guilt.

Even if this novel is marked as a pessimistic novel by many critics due to the death of Bari, Bari represents the poisonous orchid flower in my view. Bari's death traps Suyogbir forever and punishes him with unending guilt throughout his life. To focus on her death will be an injustice to her unusual, daunting, and rebellious character. Bari's part in the narration is the strongest and the most fascinating part that often makes other characters blunt. The way Bari lives her life is quoted as rebellious and challenging to traditional expectations regarding women (Wikipedia, 2020). Her character is too stubborn, cocky, and confident for Kathmandu's women in the 60s. She smokes cigarettes, does not adhere to the beauty norms, and confronts the men, unlike other women of her time. Suyogbir thinks she looks awkward in her thin body and 'unusually raised breasts' (Parijat, 1964), her height is average, she has deep black eyes with spectacles of Rolled Gold, her short, trimmed hair looks like that of old Hebrew military', and she speaks like a 'gunshot' (Parijat, 1964). The description from Suyogbir suggests she is too plain and undecorated, unlike other women of her age, but she is a woman with an 'abundant daring attitude' (Parijat, 1964) and a mysterious, unreadable face.

Bari's character is like that of a black sheep among the rest of the women. Unlike conventional women who wish and wait for a nice life partner, she thinks that "one can live alone" (Parijat, 1964). Bari is too independent and self-contained to desire a conjugal life. She is vocal about her opinions loudly, so the elders even suggest she be soft and polite, but she ignores those suggestions with her 'dry laughter' (Parijat, 1964). She enjoys watching flowers killing insects. Explaining this, she tells Suyogbir, "The insect suffocates and dies inside; it is so fun. Right now, there is no insect; otherwise, you would have seen it" (Parijat, 1964). Through her personality, Bari both hurts and haunts Suyogbir. She also incites the readers, and like a specter, she keeps hunting them even after the end of the novel.

The book is titled *Sirish ko Phool* (Parijat, 1964), which means Mimosa Sirisa flowers, which according to the book, withers just by the first touch of insects. The characteristics of this flower metaphorically represent Bari, who dies when Suyogbir kisses her without her consent. However, in contrast to this, I argue that Bari is rather a poisonous orchid flower that lives on trapping insects for food. Though Bari dies at the end before Suyogbir confronts her, the novel is not clear that her death is the impact of Suyogbir's act. There is no clarification from Bari's side regarding her sickness and death; thus, it can be unjust to such a Bold character to infer that she died because of Suyogbir's act simply because his act precedes her death. Nevertheless, like Bari's life, her death becomes a haunting mystery for the novel's characters and readers. Her specter, though, like Marx's specter (Derrida, 2012), keeps haunting Suyogbir and the readers alike even after the end of the story.

The writer has excellently characterized Bari as a unique woman character that does not fit into the conventional ideology of women. The novel is set in 1960s Kathmandu when the women's situation was lower, and the society was more conservative regarding gender issues. In that context, Bari stands aloof as a girl who seems revolutionary even in the present context. She is independent and clear in her philosophy regarding life. She is the head of her family as she handles her brother Shivaraj and often becomes strict with him if he comes home late and drinks too much. Moreover, she is not scared of death and wishes for 'timely death' instead of long life (Parijat, 1964). She is an atheist but still goes to temples to please her mother, and when someone reminds her that smoking might cause cancer, she says, "Cancer is welcome" (Parijat, 1964). She becomes more and more mysterious throughout the narratives, and at the end of the novel, she takes her mystery with her. In this regard, Bari is an extraordinary performer who deconstructs the ideology regarding women through her activities. Her face, too, is mysterious, which doesn't change, or she is quite able to cover her emotions,

and nobody can trace her feelings by looking at her face. In all conversations and even in shocking revelations, her face remains the same. Her eyes are compared to the “cat’s eyes” (Parijat, 1964), her long slender body is like that of a “snake” (Parijat, 1964), and she is unsmiling in normal situations, but her face sometimes brightens when she is passing harsh comments. All these characteristics make Bari an unusual, empowering, and impressive character. For the male ego, she might be a cold woman, but she stands as a strong woman throughout the novel and lives her life on her terms. Commenting about Bari, Suyogbir comments, “I always found her dry and selfish. She was fully grown at her age, but she never showed this in her behaviors, as if she did not have consciousness regarding her age. She is always at home and never seems to be interested in outside fun. She smokes consistently and thinks that cigarettes are the only luxury she has got” (Parijat, 1964)

Here, since Bari is vocal and often passes satiric remarks to Suyogbir, he thinks that she is selfish. His male ego is hurt due to her for the first time, as Bari is the only girl who does not give him value. He finds her face plain and “neutral” without traces of emotions which he regards as mysterious, and thinks “maybe she too has hidden mystery inside her” (Parijat, 1964). As the narrator finds Bari just opposite to his expectations and different than other women, he finds her challenging and equally attractive.

Through her character, Bari deconstructs the patriarchal idea of women by performing contradictory roles against the patriarchal norms. She is loud, direct, and bold in her expressions. She hurts the male ego of Suyogbir, taunting him about his soldier life as ‘sinful’; she also hurts him by saying that “flowers and soldiers” are contradictory and often calls him by names like “old man” and “alcoholic.” Every meeting with Bari becomes like facing a war with Suyogbir, and he confesses that “he didn’t have the guts to go to that house for the third

time” (Parijat, 19864). Suyogbir tests her by complimenting them and asking questions, but he finds her invincible every time. Once he asks what she will do if somebody tells her not to smoke, she answers, “I will then smoke ten cigarettes at a time” (Parijat, 1964).

On the basis of the above characteristics, it can be concluded that the novel heroically presents Sakambari as a strong female character who resists the patriarchal norms and is able to transform the cold-hearted soldier into a lover. And it would be discriminating just to see pessimism in the novel underestimating such a daring characteristic of Bari. The novel is equally successful in portraying how living a major portion of life in war makes a person cold and unsympathetic. Even though Suyogbir confesses in the novel that he is in love with Bari, his love is also like a war because rather than winning Bari’s heart, he forcefully violates the boundary that Bari had set between them. Like a soldier, he expected that Bari would surrender in front of him after his abrupt attack on her body without her consent, however, surrendering was against Bari’s character, and she gave the most ruthless punishment to Suyogbir- her unresponsiveness. Therefore, Bari, even after her death, preserves her dignity and chooses to remain untamed by her culprit’s intentions and activities. Like Phoenix, she rises above her death and lives more severely in Suyougbir’s mind.