

## Hindu Patriarchal Society and the Rise of Modern Female Characters: A Contextual Reading of Selected Modern Nepali Plays

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### Abstract

This paper explores the way the first-generation modern Nepali playwrights Balkrishna Sama (1903-1981), Bimnidhi Tiwari (1911-973) and Vijay Malla (1925-1999) responded to the existing values of the Hindu patriarchal society by creating female characters. It mainly focuses on Indira from *Mukunda Indira* (1939) by Sama, Sushila from *Sahanshila Sushila* (1940) by Tiwari and Urmila, and Pratima from *Jiundo Las* (1955) by Malla. With the insights taken from Western feminism, mainly the ideas of Judith Butler that gender is ‘scripted’, the paper interprets these female characters by contextualizing the plays in Nepal’s social history. It concludes that Urmila and Pratima represent the pain and suffocation of the first-generation educated female youths of the nation who were yet to recognize the harm its patriarchal values have done to its female members. Indira and Sushila are comparatively docile and do not feel the need to break the grand scripts. Malla by projecting the pain and frustration of female characters who live psychologically complex lives shares the message of the urgency of addressing women’s issues with his audiences.

**Keywords:** Nepali History, Patriarchy, Feminism, Modern Nepali Plays

## Introduction

*Mukunda Indira* (1939), *Sahanshila Sushila* (1940) and *Jiundo Las* (1955) by Balkrishna Sama (1903-1981), Bimnidhi Tiwari (1911-973) and Vijay Malla (1925-1999) respectively dramatize the existing Hindu patriarchal social values vis-a-vis exposing the suffering that the female characters go through. By projecting the pain and power as well as the vulnerability of the female characters, the playwrights contend that there is something wrong with the existing social values, and the recognition of the aspirations of females is a must to lead the nation to a terrain of progress in the new changing context. Together the plays cover the one-and-a-half decade-long historically important period. Between 1939, the year *Mukunda Indira* was staged, and 1955, when *Jiundo Las* was staged, Nepalis went through several historically and socially important experiences in their nation. First and foremost, they lived through the year 1939 when four educated Nepali youths were hung for their public rise against the Rana oligarchy. The educated people of the capital Valley went through a shock. Nepalis felt good changes taking place in the mid-1940s too as the Rana government led by Padmashamsher JBR Rana started to open schools in the mid-1940s. Girls were allowed to join the school for the first time. Political parties operating from India and also from Nepal had started mobilizing people and ideas instrumental for the political change of 1951.

Women's Organizations came into existence for the first time in the history of Nepal. Binda Pandey, a member of the Central Committee of Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist and Leninist) and also an academic regards the year 1947 as a very important one in the history of Nepal: "In May 1947, having shaped the democratic movement, many women joined the first-ever street demonstration for civil rights in the country. Dozens of women including Sahana Pradhan, Sadhana Pradhan, Snehalata Shrestha, and Kanaklata Bajracharya were arrested and kept in custody" (Pandey, 2002; Upadhyaya, 1997:127). Mention should be made here that the late Mangala Devi Singh, the wife of Ganeshman Singh, one of the most important leaders of modern Nepal had played a very significant role by forming a women's organization in the same year earlier. "Mangaladevi Singh formed the Nepal Women's Association in 1947 to present a political front for women's demands. With the backing of the Nepali Congress (NC) and Nepal Communist Party (NCP), the

Association called for equal opportunities for women in education and employment and equal inheritance rights”, says Pandey in an interview given for the *Nepali Times*. Most significantly, the revolution of 1950-1951 did herald a new political era that jerked the Nepali society off from a deep slumber of feudal social and political order, nurtured by the Rana oligarchy (1946-1950) mainly. The same year democracy was introduced, the girls' first college Padmakanya Campus was established in Kathmandu. Political leaders included education for women and other marginalized communities as a major agenda of their parties. The voice for women's rights started to become one of the major agendas of the era.

I have come across academic papers that discuss and explain mainly the psychological, feminist, and social issues in the plays written by Vijay Malla. His *Jiundo Laas* has been hailed as a powerful feminist play that brought a new wave of creativity. Similarly, his *Bahulakajiko Sapana* is also praised for setting up the trend. Malla has been credited for bringing new modes of expression to Nepali literature, mainly in the field of dramaturgy. Lakshmi Lochan Vaidha, a female who has researched the dramatic forms of Nepali plays points out that Malla's plays are intellectually stimulating. She calls it the hallmark of Malla's plays. She further draws the attention that Malla wrote plays not to entertain the audience but to expose them to social problems. Malla's plays make the audience think about their society. His plays accommodate issues such as psychology, absurdism, existentialism revolutionary, and so on (90). Vaidha believes that such 'isms' or critical terms are very crucial to understand and interpret Malla's plays. Prachanda Malla, while writing the history of Nepali theatre in the 1970s regards Vijay Malla as an important one-act playwright. He praises Malla for writing plays of academic standard, something that Nepal could regard as its modern plays internationally (100). Prachanda Malla argues that Vijay Malla's plays have fine craftsmanship, and can be called standard. Another female academic Nandamaya Nakarmi regards *Jiundo Las* as the representative play of Malla. She writes that in the play Malla dramatizes the psychological condition of women characters living in a conservative society. Malla's women characters in the play live with suppressed desires and suffer. On top of that, the play also talks about the tension between tradition and modern issues (154). Nakarmi

draws the association between the conflict that the female characters in the play go with the society that is struggling to become modern.

Keshavprasad Upadhyaya, one of the most quoted critics of Nepali plays and theatre points out that Malla deals with the events of both convincing and normal as well as unconvincing and abnormal nature. He creates settings accordingly and paves the way for similar dramatics. He develops tension from the very beginning of the play, and such tension keeps on gripping the audience till the end (221). Upadhyaya highlights the fine craftsmanship of Malla as well. Krishna Prasad Acharya, an academic involved in writing textbooks on Nepali drama for university-level students argues that Malla develops characters and designs plots keeping the psychology of characters in mind. He is mainly influenced by Freudian psychology (434).

Acharya interprets Malla as a Freudian dramatist but does not provide many critical details about Freudian psychology as such that Malla is supposed to have been influenced by. Acharya with his colleague Ishwariprasad Gaire further writes that Malla's plays are mainly psychological, however, they equally focus on social problems. Malla's plays expose the conflict between modernity and tradition, between individuals and within an individual, and so on (197) whereas Sama's plays speak for patriotism and reformation in the society. Sama's plays also strongly support the Indic philosophies and social values (85). Gaire in another book written solely by him emphasizes Malla as a 'psychological dramatist' par excellence. He calls him chiefly a psychologist and also one of the best playwrights of the nation (178). Another academic Krishna Vilas Paudyal, someone involved in pedagogy at the university level points out that Malla had given a new dimension to the tradition set by Gopal Prasad Rimal. He adds Malla's plays are also progressive (298).

Pointing out the various themes and techniques Malla tried with his dramaturgy during his literary career, Keshavprasad Upadhyaya makes an important remark that Malla started with plays based on a clear storyline or narrative. Then he moved to write plays on psychological issues, and then he tried experimental plays (62). Explaining the thrust of Bhimnidhi Tiwari's plays, mainly one-act plays, Upadhyaya sums up that they dramatize the plights of individuals caught in the era of over-politicization and nepotism

rampant in the 1950s and later years (45). An American theatre critic, someone who has followed Nepali theatre since 1990, Carol Davis highlights the literary tropes Malla and his brother Govinda Bahadur are known for. She writes, “Both Gothale and Vijay Malla focus on the desire of the individual for self-expression, especially in the female characters. . . Vijay Malla focuses more on personal psychology” (44). Abhi Subedi, a Nepali playwright who acted in the play written by Vijay Malla and also personally knew him, points out a very revealing fact about Malla that he didn’t bother about whether his plays were psychological or surrealistic: “Vijay Malla glibly moved from realism to magic realism in his dramatic imaginary. His plays address the social problem but the individual always remains at the center of both the realistic and imaginary themes” (Subedi 132).

Similarly, Subedi points out “Sama took the exotics of history which combined with his powerful acting and the evocative language was very titillating and nostalgic for a history that did not have a direct referent for the Nepali diaspora who nevertheless needed that for creating the imaginary nations” (123). I have also come across books and articles which focus on the biographical aspects of Malla. But I think that contextualizing the plays into the legal, political, and social history of Nepal from the late 1930s to mid-1950s enables one to trace down the particular lines of modernity that Malla and others were trying to address, the particular social issues they were trying to share with his audiences, as well as the social forces responsible for germinating the psychology of their female characters. The paper interprets the narratives that the female characters live with to locate the journey that patriarchal Nepali society was making through the years between 1939--1955.

The first two plays were meant for the audience of 1939 and 1940 respectively, for that matter the early forties. They address the pain and suffering of good wives of a respectable Hindu family. Indira and Sushila, uneducated but trained in household chores wait for their husband to ‘return’ home, for that matter, in order of morally sound life. On the other hand, Urmila, an educated married woman staying at her parental home loses her mind and dies while waiting for her husband to return home. Similarly, Pratima, an educated widow, staying at her parental home too lives a vulnerable life. Suffocated, she feels that she is not being understood. Why do

the educated women characters look more vulnerable than their predecessor characters? What could be the message Malla seems to be sharing with his audiences? This research paper aims to explore these very questions.

The paper takes the critical concepts developed and explained by Judith Butler as its methodological tools. Written during the years when Nepal was going through historically significant changes, these plays reflect the changing attitude of female characters towards their husband or patriarchal society. All the female characters are Hindu married women, however their stand on life and society does change. To highlight such changes and continuation, the paper also briefly historicizes the three plays giving greater emphasis to the third one, and also read the third play in terms of the departure or 'new lines' it draws from the traditions set by the first two plays.

### **'New lines' Drawn**

Politically speaking, the years between 1939 and 1955 were the period when Nepalis went through the first major historically important changes. They experienced the germination and growth of democratic political practices, as it was introduced in the history of the nation. Girls were allowed to join school, and within a couple of years, their number had started increasing. Padmakanya Campus established in 1951 was the first campus meant for girls and is taken as a milestone in the history of girl's education in Nepal. Significantly, educated Nepali parents wanted their children to get exposed to Western education: "The new Education Minister Nripa Jang Rana was astounded by this public demand for English education. He noted that "there is only demand for English education in Nepal today and asked 'why is it so? (NS 2008 v.s.a.: 200, see also NS 2011 v. s: 19)" writes Lokranjan Parajuli, someone who has conducted extensive research on the shifts taking place in the sector of education during the 1940s-1950s.

The attraction towards newly opened schools that focused on providing modern Western education was so powerful that it surprised even the Education Minister. Another scholar working on the same domain, Pramod Bhatta marks the year 1951 as the division line between the past and the present of modern education in Nepal: "In 1951, there were 8,505 students in primary education and 1,680 students in secondary school" (3). Bhatta

compares this data with the one from 2008 to highlight the significant progress Nepal has achieved in the domain. The rise of educated females paved the way for changes in the patriarchal social systems. Such females now needed new lifestyles and wanted to get recognized with new identities. Since society was still conservative and the changes were taking at a slow pace, it was natural that the educated females found themselves caught in a state of conflict. It is in this context, that Urmila and Pratima become the characters of the existing times. They find it very difficult to maintain peace of mind with the existing patriarchal social values. Malla seems to be sharing the message that the scripts of gender norms have become outdated. With such 'sick' characters, Malla is sharing the message that society is the main cause of their mental state. For this, society needs to be diagnosed and purged from the spirits of the dead society.

Urmila and Pratima though educated can't maintain their peace of mind. The different attitudes and opinions these characters possess can best be realized as 'lines' drawn by the dramatist. Malla's Urmila and Pratima too are married women the way Indira and Sushila are. Urmila's husband too is away from home, and she has been waiting for her husband to return. She reminds one of the karma that Indira and Sushila are caught in. But unlike them, Urmila loses the peace of her mind and dies at the end. Working in the almost same line of the story, Malla gives it a more intellectual turn. He draws a 'new line' as Raymond Williams, the twentieth-century British theatre critic and cultural theorist refers to the relationship between a new mode of expression and the existing tradition: "the cultural tradition can be seen as a continual selection and reselection of ancestors. Particular lines will be drawn, often for as long as a century, and then suddenly with some new state in growth these will be canceled or weakened and new lines drawn" (69). Though there is a gap of fifteen years between the time *Mukunda Indira* and *Sahanshila Sushila* on the one hand and *Jiundo Las* on the other, certain departures in dramatics are visible due to the major political and social changes that happened in the years in between.

Sama's Indira is a woman known for her chastity. She waits for her husband who has gone to Calcutta for studies, and is now lost in the world of metropolis. But love for him is true and remains the same. She cannot think of

eloping with another person or falling in love with another guy. Her in-laws are worried about her, a married woman who has reached the age of maturity. They are not happy with her son, and have a great concern for their daughter-in-law. On the contrary, Indira does not complain against Mukunda. She is ready to sacrifice her life for his sake. Disguised as a local lady-killer, Mukunda tries to derail Indira from her moral stand on sex. He invents bad stories about Mukunda in Calcutta, but such stories do not anger Indira. She remains adamant about her love for her husband. She is ready to forgive him despite his debauchery. She cannot think of taking revenge upon him, neither can she betray him. She holds on to the script that a married Hindu woman is a devotee and the husband is her lord. Any dispute between wife and husband should be taken as the result of the karma committed in earlier life, and also a subject of correction for the next life. Once married, the couple is married for seven consequent years. Such is the grand narrative Indira seems to be living with when she replies:

I loved him. I add more to that love now. A mother pardons her son despite all the naughtiness of her child. Queen pardons the defaulters. I too can be stonehearted and live this life as if it were the karma of the actions I committed in my past lives. I will surely get him in my next life. The remaining life I can spend as a penance. This sack of flesh and these hands and legs come for no service now. I might dry myself like the glass and can offer my life the way grains are offered to fire during the fire sermon. (Third Act, Scene IV: 62-63)

Indira does not regard her passion as a significant thing. She does not have a desire for any personal recognition. Instead of asserting her identity as the rightful wife, she regards herself as a mother of the naughty child. She does not take life as a subject of here and now; she is carried away by the myths of the past and future lives. Indira is the product of favorite grand narratives of the Hindu patriarchal society about the wife-husband bond. To live a life of her own choice is something “difficult to imagine”, and also something that “remains radically unthinkable”. As Judith Butler further writes such women live with the “absent of certain desires, the repetitive compulsion of others . . . panic, obsession pull and the nexus of sexuality and pain” (1993: 94). Indira surrenders to the situation. Instead of becoming and behaving like the character



of the late 1930s, a time when Nepali society was preparing for the changes of historically significant stature, she sounds heading towards the cave of ages-old myths and stories about life and family.

Similarly, Sushila possesses a tremendous enduring quality. She bears all kinds of torture and humiliation from her husband. She too does not complain against him. On the contrary, she blames her fate. When her husband, Juwai drags her down the road and kicks her out of the home, Sushila does not defy. Rather she begs for mercy and pleads for some room at the corner of the house. Even a marginal space within the home, she says, is enough for her safety and happiness. Ideologically speaking, she too surrenders to the grand narrative of the Hindu patriarchal society that whatever the husband says or does, the wife has to bear it. Sushila can't think of staying without her husband, and doing so would put her into further trouble, something 'unimaginable', as Butler puts it above. The space inside her husband's home, his name, his caste, and family title are the things she needs to stick to for an economically and socially hassle-free life. This is the law of the nation, and codes and conducts of behaviors expected from a married woman socially and culturally:

Sushila: (Weeping and begging with namaskar-posture) My lord! Please hear me! ... You may give me broth for food. Keep in the dungeon. I bear it. Give me your photo, I will worship it. But do not kick me out! Even the broth you give me will taste like elixir for me. Even the dungeon of this house is a diamond palace to me. The mere sound of your footsteps will keep me happy. My life! I can't leave without you. No, I can't. (Act III: Scene II 40).

Sushila is looking for a room that is 'not of her own' but that keeps her connected to the identity of her husband. Staying away from her husband's home for a night is enough to invite disgrace in her own life. She knows that the society out there is worse than her husband.

One thing noticeable trait about Indira and Sushila is that they remain calm and keep the peace of their mind intact. Their psychosocial state can best be realized as "punitively regulated cultural fictions that are alternatively embodied and disguised under duress" (1998: 522) as Butler refers to the hegemony women are made to live in the society. In them, we find the law of

the nation and the grand narratives that support the superiority of males. They behave so because they are in the Hindu society; they carry the patriarchy. With such characters on lead, both plays project an image of a society that expects manners from married women no matter how harsh their husbands would be upon them. Indirectly, Sama and Tiwari seem to be sharing the message that there is a certain problem with the existing norms and values about husbandry in their society. Husbands like Mukunda and Jwai possess the authority to leave their wives, and also the right to check their loyalty. They also hold the decision power to accept or reject their wives. Both Mukunda and Jwai Saheb do not confess their guilt and do not ask for forgiveness at the end of the play. My reading is that Sama and Tiwari by projecting such male and female characters are indirectly saying to the audiences that patriarchal values of the society have become the issue of problem at home and beyond. Indirectly, the plays are displaying the ‘scripts’, and saying that they needed to be edited, and co-written. Indira and Sushila represent the tyranny of circumstances that the Nepali women had to live in the patriarchal Hindu society nurtured by the Muluki Ain and was about to go through major reformations only some twenty-five years later in 1963.

### **Muluki Ain and the Scripts**

Promulgated by the government led by Jung Bahadur Rana (1847-1877), one of the most powerful autocrats in the history of modern Nepal, the Muluki Ain or the ‘Law of the Nation’ defines women, especially the married ones as dependent subjects on their husband’s identity. Since the Law was the first major attempt made by the regime to bring uniformity in the social practices throughout the nation, one can realize the impact it must have had on the structuration of gender at a wider and deeper level. New rules were hegemonized, and it paved the way for social practices accordingly. The Ain does not define the women as the right inheritor of the properties of her parents:

If [someone] declares that he intends to separate from a ritually married wife of his—one who has not committed adultery—and [then indeed] separates from her by performing [the customary practice of] cutting a sliver of [bamboo into two pieces] (sanko kāṭnu), and if she comes and

complains, inquiries shall be made and she shall, following the Ain, be given her share [of the husband's property]. Ten percent of [the value] of the share given [to her] shall be collected [as a fee]. (224)

The authority given to the male and the service charge that the state could draw for providing a divorcee a property needs a little attention. In such a society ruled under the Mululi Ain, a husband held the right to check the fidelity of his wife, he didn't need to pay any tax to the government for divorcing her. On the other hand, the wife needed to pay a certain percentage of the properties she would acquire from her husband to the state. A woman is defined as someone who could keep on marrying and acquiring properties as if she is prone to run a business with marriage and divorce games. Husbands like Mukunda and Jwai held the right to dismiss their wives as it was fun and a mere game like the one evoked by 'Sinko bhachne' as mentioned in the passage quoted above. They held a superior rank. Similarly, Ain further mentions that if a woman stays at her parental house or somewhere else, for that matter, because of some disputes with her in-laws, the husband has every right to disown her (224). In a society where such is the rule, one can understand the state of mind that women like Pratima and Urmila are bound to live with. Legally, for that matter, socially as well, both the sisters have a disadvantageous position. Neither are they the rightful heir to the properties of their parents nor are they now subject to own the properties from their in-laws. Urmila and Pratima though educated, do suffer. This makes one realize a social fact that education alone is not sufficient for a person to live a free life, much depends on laws and state apparatus. Regarding widows' property rights, the Ain categorically mentions that property rights to them can't be "permitted to sell or [otherwise] dispose of her share of houses, paddy land, human chattel or [other] land until she reaches the age of 45" (227-228). Neither the laws favor Urmila nor the course of action in her life. This is one of the reasons why she gets hysterical. Psychologically speaking, she doesn't know about the reasons for the suffering. A husband is a life partner, a sex partner, and a source of dependency economically as well as socially. Pratima gets neither of such services nor help. Above all, in the nation where she lives, there is a law that accepts sons as the real inheritors of parental properties. Butler exposes that such legal laws blind the subjects in such a way that they are not allowed to

think about the life before the law came into existence: “In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of “a subject before the law” to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law’s regulatory hegemony” (1999: 05). Urmila’s hysteric state of mind is the result caused by not only her repressed desires but also the values her society feeds daily. The script of patriarchy of the Hindu order is so deeply rooted in their body that these characters live it as the skin of their body and the cell of their mind as it were.

The first two plays share the message with the audience about the urgency of bringing reformation like male youths of the elite class whereas the third play seems to share a need for reformation that the society needed to go through to let its youths live a happy life. Urmila and Pratima belong to the post-democratic Nepali society. Since they are educated and intellectual, they aren’t as naïve as their predecessor protagonists. Urmila loses her peace of mind for following the scripts of the patriarchal Hindu order of the time. This highlights a point that women can no longer bear the load of the values prescribed by the grand narratives of society. Unlike Indira and Sushila, the two sisters Pratima and Urmila live intellectually stimulating life. Pratima is a widow and is staying at her parental home. She is aware that everyone is watching her. She thinks that people around her including her sister-in-law think that her mind can go uncontrolled at any moment, she could become emotionally violent, and can have a relationship with the person she plans. Such is the assumption about a widow in the Hindu patriarchal society. A married woman staying in her parental home is a stigma, a subject of social comment. Pratima though a skeptic about the social system, too can’t free herself and decides to start a new life. She thinks that anyone she loves deeply is bound to die. She loved her parents, and they died when she was still a baby. She loved her husband, but he too died. She loves Musu, a dog, her favorite pet and it also dies later in the play. Caught in the script of the ages-old Hindu patriarchal order, she comes to believe that she is the cause of their death. On the contrary, as an educated woman, she maintains a diary and keeps on reading books is very vocal, and also possesses the intellectuality to discuss the issue that the book is about. But she cannot dare to leave the family and start a new life. She is neither conservative nor is she a rebel. Caught in this limbo,

she lives through a disturbing state of mind. In a sense, she lives with a certain fractured personality. She calls herself not a widow but someone who is still married to a corpse. She says:

(About to laugh) I am a wife of a corpse; you don't know that. Isn't that what a widow is often taken for? (Laughs) I tried to share this opinion with people, but they were shocked. How can a corpse have a wife? They argued. I told that 'Yes, it does have'. Look at me, I wake up with the corpse. I meditate with it. That corpse of my husband is still alive. Much livelier than any living person. I keep my chastity alive for the corpse. If I don't do that I will not be called a widow... (Act I, 05)

Pratima isn't happy that she is being recognized in the way she does not want to get recognized. Her intellectual self expects people to recognize her as an educated, emancipated woman who is ready to live a life of intellectual order. But submerged into the middle-class patriarchal Hindu values, she is bound to follow the script, the codes, and conducts written for a widow. Pratima neither can accept it nor can she break it. She knows that she needs to 'co-write' such scripts. She keeps having her brother's friends, who are academics and artists, her brother too is an educated man and is involved in social reformation activity. She is no less intelligent than others, but being a mere widow in her resume comes to cloud her mind.

Like Indira and Sushila, Urmila is waiting for her long-gone husband to return home. She is so much into 'thinking' that she loses her patience. One moment she thinks her husband is dead, and next time she believes that he is still alive and can arrive anytime soon. On top of that, she has to hide her desires. She is bound to remain passive and surrender to the 'scripts'. But as an educated girl, she finds the situation unbearable. This drives her into hysteria. Sigmund Freud, the famous psychologist, believes that living with suppressed 'strong desires' causes disorder in the peace of mind. Freud hypothesizes that when a patient does not know the cause of his or her suffering, he or she is bound to go schizophrenic state of mind. State of mind such as hysteria is caused "by the excitation which arises when we cannot recollect a name or cannot solve a riddle, and so on. If someone tells us the name or gives us the answer to the riddle the chain of associations is ended, and the excitation

vanishes, just as it does on the ending of a reflex chain” (119-120). In the play, Pratima and Urmila are the only two female characters to be seen on the stage. Surrounded by smart and intelligent youths, friends of their brother, they become vocal on the one hand and are expected to hide their strong ‘desires’ on the other. Pratima, a widow, and Urmila, a married woman, become the victims of carrying ‘strong desires’ and keep on living as if they are fine with their lives. There are some strong demands that society has put upon them. Compared to Pratima, Urmila’s case is more serious as she goes schizophrenic. Pratima uses her interpretative power to keep herself sane, whereas Urmila can’t. Highlighting the genesis of hysteria Freud states that “the mechanism which produces hysteria represents on the one hand an act of moral cowardice and on the other a defensive measure which is at the disposal of the ego” (71). A married woman in a patriarchal Hindu society is supposed to stay with her husband. Together the couple is expected to look after their parental properties. They are expected to handle their ‘strong desires’ in a careful manner, parent their children, and prove their success at social and cultural levels. Urmila unlike her sister doesn’t complain about anything. She also does not know that she is living with strong sexual desire. As she happens to share it:

Pratima, I was asleep. Just now. Then somehow I don’t why my eyelids opened just like that. I thought I was awake and feeling that your bhinaju (my husband) peeped into the room from the window. He got down and slowly walked towards me. I don’t know what happened next, so I saw a house lizard coming toward me. My body was stunned. That lizard took its tongue out and climbed to my bed. It climbed over my fingers and then to the body. It came to my neck. Then a hoard of house lizards got into all parts of my body. They started slithering down everywhere. I went crazy and started crying. I got suffocated. Then I got up. I got terror-stricken. I can’t sleep in that room. I don’t know why I dream such a terrible dream these days. Shankarji, I am not going to live anymore. I am sure to die. (Act II 23)

Urmila is unaware that the house lizard, she imagines, is a substitute for the strong desire that she is deeply chasing after in her mind. As a married woman, her desire for sex is legitimate but in the absence of her husband, she can’t even mention it. Rather she has to use the images of substitution for it.

Accompanied by young and intelligent male friends of her brother, Urmila's desires become stronger, and she doesn't recognize her thirst and desire.

Urmila is divided into two opposite states of mind. One moment she thinks that her husband is dead, and he is not going to come home. The next moment she is sure he can arrive anytime soon and her life will become romantic again. There are moments when she wishes death for him. She wishes life for him no sooner after she has wished him a death. She goes sad one moment and romantic next. Her mind makes a sweep as it were. Such a state of mind in her makes her life more vulnerable. A patient with schizophrenia, under medication, her behavior goes from bad to worse. She is caught in the next delusion.

The most striking feature of Pratima is her interpretative power. She recognizes that the script that the society has carried is the origin source of the tyranny of the situation that she is caught in. In that sense, she is an enlightened woman. Though she does not leave home at the end of the play, nor does she die as her elder sister does at the end, Pratima knows the fault lines of the grand narratives that the patriarchal Hindu society has lived with. Sushila and Indira can't think of another role except the role of a submissive woman. Urmila and Pratima too can't think of an alternative. Life for Indira and Sushila is 'unlivable' but they accept it as 'livable', whereas Pratima regards the 'unlivable' life as unlivable. She does not know what happens next but keeps interpreting the scripts imposed upon her. Butler argues that a woman need not bother about the future because someone worried about future loses control over life: "We are all unknowing and exposed to what may happen, and our not knowing is a sign that we do not, cannot, control all the conditions that constitute our lives" (2015: 21). Pratima's capability to tear the 'scripts' verbally, and exposing her suffering as social construct not her choice reveals that a generation of Nepali women with new insights was already appearing down the road.

## **Conclusion**

I like to conclude this paper with the remark that modern plays in Nepal need to be understood in terms of two main trends: reformation in existing patriarchal structures is the call that the plays of Sama and Tiwari discussed

above make. A married couple renews their bond again in both plays. The husband character goes or violates the rules and returns home or corrects himself in both plays, and the wife character wins the game because of her enduring nature and chastity. Another trend is represented by Malla's play. Urmila and Pratima find the patriarchal values too much burdensome. Urmila dies at the end, losing the peace of the mind. A victim of psychosis, her death is the cause of existing patriarchal Hindu norms and values. On the other hand, Pratima develops certain critical thinking abilities. She exposes the loopholes of patriarchal values of the Hindu society she belongs to. Watching, for that matter, reading these characters together provides a changing picture of Nepali Hindu's patriarchal values. Importantly, they reflect the changes Nepali women had been going through during transitory politics and society. By projecting the vulnerable picture of the educated female characters, Malla is sharing a message that society had problems not with the youths but with their ages-old values institutionalized through various forms of state apparatus. Importantly, the characters in Malla live with conflicts. With unresolved conflicts, the female characters of Malla become comparatively more modern than their predecessors, Indira and Sushila.

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