

Resistance Against Deprivation of Females in Niharika's *Cheerharan*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to explore resistance of chief female characters, Satyawatee, Gandharee, and Draupadi, in Nilam Karki Niharika's novel, *Cheerharan*, against the deprivation of economic, social, and cultural rights of women in the male-dominated Nepalese society. Satyawatee and Gandharee are victimized by patriarchy and portrayed as submissive. But Draupadi resists against the victimization of women in the novel. In an identical way, some women have internalized sexism in Nepalese society while others have objected to this. Draupadi, the chief character of *Cheerharan*, acts as an adamant feminist to revolt against the treatment of Nepali women as the inferior sex. The theoretical tools taken to explore the assumed truth are the feminists' ideologies developed by such radical feminists as Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf. The study demonstrates that *Cheerharan* is the depiction of the pathetic condition of the Nepalese women which has not changed significantly from the ancient time to the present time. The chief finding of the paper is that Satyawatee and Gandharee, like most of Nepali women, know the ill practices of men but can't resist against them because they take the socialization process for granted; while Draupadi, like a bold modern Nepali woman, reacts against the ill-practices of males towards females. It is assumed that the researchers intending to explore Nepali literature from the feminist perspective can take the paper as a reference.

Keywords: *Cheerharan*, Exploitation, Nepali Women, Patriarchy, Resistance.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The people of the Nepalese society, despite living in the modern era, have not been able to change the conservative mentality on gender and sex issues (Bista, 2019; Uprety, 2016). Nepalese women are still oppressed just because of their biological differences from men (Mishra, 2021). Govind Raj Bhattarai, Parijat, Nilam Karki Niharika, and many other writers of Nepal have advocated against sexual division between men and women in Nepalese society through their literature. Feminism, in the Nepalese context, is a movement that seeks freedom of women from patriarchal control demanding their equal rights of education and status with men and their decision in choosing their own careers and life patterns (Atam & Baral, 1999). Nilam Karki Niharika is an established novelist, poet, and story writer in Nepali literature (Subedi, 2007). Niharika's novel, *Cheerharan*, published in 2016, received the prestigious Padmashree Sahitya Award for the same work in 2016. The novel is based on an incident in the *Mahabharat*, the noted epic in Hindu mythology. It especially focuses on the disrobing of Draupadi at the grand meeting of the Kauravs and Pandavs (Magar, 2016). Among them, Draupadi, the wife of five Pandavs, is the protagonist. Yudhisthira, one of her husbands, loses her in gambling. Therefore, Draupadi is taken to the grand meeting hall, insulted bitterly, and disrobed by the winner, the Kaurabs. This incident is the turning point to cause the great war known as *Mahabharat*. In Nepali literature, *Dawandko Awasan*, *Yojangandha*, and *Radha* are novels based on the minor female characters of *Mahabharat* (Mahara, 2016). But *Cheerharan* is based on the major female character, Draupadi.

Cheerharan is narrated by multiple female as well as male characters. Among them, Satyawatee, Gandharee, and Draupadi are the principal female characters. Their stories reveal the growing consciousness of modern Nepali women about their rights. Satyawatee and Gandharee apprehend the domination of males over females. But Satyawatee does not try to object to the misdeeds of males. She only accepts and gives continuity to her own suffering. Similarly, Gandharee attempts to oppose the misdeed of her husband, brother, and sons but fails. Contrary to these female characters, Draupadi strongly opposes the misdeeds of the male-dominated society. The novel, *Cheerharan*, endeavors to compare the common problems of the women of Nepal with the women of the *Mahabharat* and find out the similarities and

differences in the way they are treated. In the process of analysis, this research tries to answer such research questions: Why can't Satyawatee, Gandharee, and Draupadi be rigid against patriarchy? Why does Draupadi react against sexism so strongly? Satyawatee and Gandharee are submissive characters whereas Draupadi is a revolutionary and bold character who is raising her voice against male domination. Draupadi narrates how she suffered being a woman. The rationale of the paper lies in tracing out the elements of feminism in the portrayal of Satyawatee, Gandharee, and Draupadi in *Cheerharan* and applying the particular to the general. Niharika has written this novel comparing the present situation of a woman with the ancient time of the *Mahabharat*.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper was based qualitative approach to research. The novel, *Cheerharan*, was a primary source. All the related and helpful critical reviews, opinions of writers, and experts about *Cheerharan* given by its researchers and readers had been taken as its secondary source.

Radical feminism is a theoretical discourse that advocates equal political, economic, and social rights for women based on beliefs in the equality of gender roles (Abrams, 2008; Tyson, 2006). Feminism is the place where subjectivity and politics come together in the most natural and organic way (Rich, 1995: p. 196). Moi (1985) clarified the term feminism saying "Men can be feminists, but they cannot be women, just as white can be anti-racist, but not black" (p. 122). Most feminists raise their voices against masculine hegemony. Wollstonecraft (1992) stated, "Women are subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them (p. 328). She raised the most influential voice for educational and social equality for women. Beauvoir (1983) disliked the way a female becomes an inferior woman in a patriarchal society. Woolf (1992), a well-known liberal feminist, spoke against the way women have been trapped within narrow domestic walls in a male-dominated world. Feminists assert that libraries can be locked but the freedom of women's minds cannot be locked (Ruth, 1990; Woolf, 1992). In Nepalese society, men, who assume themselves as chauvinists, consider wrongly that females need their protection (Mishra, 2021; Upreti, 2016). All the critics who speak against the deprivation of women from social, economic, and educational rights are radical feminists.

The feminist theoretical perspectives discussed above are the chief conceptual tools taken to observe the resistance of chief female characters in Karki's *Cheerharan*.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of writers and critics have proffered their reviews on the content, modification of the Mahabharat myth, theme, and characterization of Karki's novel, *Cheerharan*. It is equally significant to note what critics have said about masculinity and patriarchy in Nepal.

A host of critics has reviewed the retelling of an incident of *Mahabharat* in *Cheerharan*. Baniya (2016) pointed out that the writer, Karki, took five years to complete the novel whereas Vyasa had taken three years to finish the *Mahabharat*. Niharika took this time to convey the message that women are devoted to their husbands. Similarly, Bhusal (2016) regarded that the event of the disrobing of Draupadi in *Cheerharan* is a continuous process of human society. *Cheerharan* is the answer to the question of the society that the war of the *Mahabharat* took place because of the feeling of revenge and disrobing of Draupadi (Bhusal, 2016). Pokharel (2016) noticed the conspiracy of Sakuni, the weakness of Dhirtarastraya for the throne, the inertia of wise Bidur, and the suppression of minority females from the misdeed of Dushasan in *Cheerharan*. By changing the negative concept of Druapadi, Gandhari, and other females about wars, the novelist, Niharika is successful to show that wars take place because of the vested interest of males (Ghimire, 2016; Subedi, 2007). Niharika presents the ancient story of the *Mahabharat* let the reader know about the condition of women in the ancient period (Pokharel, 2016). The critics have focused on the cultural differences between male and female in the novel.

Another host of critics has marked symbols and current issues in the novel, *Cheerharan*. Magar (2016), for instance, took the novel, *Cheerharan*, as a symbol where Dhirtarastraya stands for the new Dhirtarasrrayas who are ruling the nation badly because they insist on sticking on the throne forever. This novel, *Cheerharan*, reminds us of the custom of marrying the children of own brother and sister in Hindu community. This trend is noticed in the novel when Arajun goes to Mamala Ghar. Dhaiba (2016) was critical to the way the novelist has herself become unable to give proper status to the female characters in her novel. This novel cannot break the traditional attitude and the novelist fails to establish any promise against the sati custom by letting Madri to go for Sati at the death of Pandu (Subedi, 2007). These critics find extra flavor in this novel than the other novels which are written by Indian writers because they make the reader feel reading just the *Mahabharat*.

Some reviewers have appreciated the creativity of Niharika in writing *Cheerharan*. According to Magar (2016), *Cheerharan* is creative as it explains how the Kauravs regret at the end of the novel. The novelist, Niharika, tries to establish the notion that females are also in the favor of peace and harmony (Dhaiba, 2016). Baniya (2016) regarded that *Cheerharan* seems to focus on the tragic stories of disrobing of disrobing of the time, throne, society as well as the humanity in the Nepalese society. The judgment of the critics signifies how this novel has obtained a special space in Nepali literature because it is written by a female about their own issues.

Noting some weaknesses of the novel, Pokharel (2016) argued that the novelist was not able to focus on the subject matter and happened to make it verbose by using some words from Sanskrit and Hindi. Another critic, Mahara (2017) claimed that *Cheerharan* was a new *Mahabharat* as it aimed at filling the gap left by Vyasa in the *Mahabharat*. In *Cheerharan*, it is clear that Draupadi wants to ask Arjun if she is not the water that anyone can drink when she is divided among the five Pandav brothers. The novelist has made all the sinners confess their crimes and regret their crimes. In the novel, the writer has made a sage to say the bitter reality that the role of woman is more than the male to give continuity to the process of nature saying that the seeds of grain become valueless without an earth (Ghimire, 2016). Pokharel (2016) judged that at the end of *Cheerharan*, Karan confesses his crime saying that females must think they can protect themselves so that they don't have to experience problems like Draupadi who only thought that her five husbands would protect her in the critical hour. Mahara (2017) thought that the setting of the underworld was meant to create a new world where there was equality between males and females.

Masculinity is a deep-rooted phenomenon in Nepal and this has been the motive for exploiting innocent women for centuries (Atam & Baral, 1999; Bista, 2019). Some critics claim that the epic, *Mahabharat* is the never-ending source of writing literature for the men of letters (Baniya, 2016). They also say that the *Mahabharat* is the source of each stream such as politics, moral lessons, philosophy, and policy.

Thus, it is evident from the above reviews that *Cheerharan* touches on the issue of the suffering of Draupadi and other women. Critics have attempted to justify that Draupadi and Krishna are not the root cause of the war of the *Mahabharat*. However, the critics have missed noting *Cheerharan* as the voice of Nepali women against their economic, socio-cultural deprivation, and representation. Here, lies the research gap. Therefore, the study aims at addressing the issue and fill the gap.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nilam Karki Niharika has attempted to raise the voice against the ill practices of the male-dominated society in the novel, *Cheerharan*. The paper analyzes the attitudes of the female characters, Satyawatee and Gandharee, towards the ontological construction of gender in the Nepalese society, and the actions and reactions of the leading character, Draupadi, against sexism. Nepali society is also one of the male-dominated societies where females have been exploited and dominated in ancient times (Mishra, 2021; Upreti, 2016). Nepali writers like Jamak Ghimire, Pragati Rai, Archana Thapa, and so forth, have been actively using their pens for the sake of women's rights and gender equality in Nepal (Bista, 2019; Subedi, 2007). The novelist, Niharika presents the leading character, Draupadi, as a bold personality speaking for the sake of female rights.

A. Double Standard Mind-Set of Women in *Cheerharan*

Because masculinities lie at the center of Nepalese culture, the feminine genders of the country suffer from gender discrimination. Karki's novel, *Cheerharan* displays the bitter truth of the Nepalese society that women suffer from male domination because of their double standards. Nepalese women know that their husbands or male family members impose unnecessary authority on them despite their direct or indirect protest against such practices (Atam & Baral, 1999). However, the irony is that they have been socialized to take patriarchy for granted. Even they are found involved in practices of sexism. Satyawatee is one of the female characters in *Cheerharan* who suffers from gender discrimination because of her double standard lifestyle groomed living in a male-dominated society. She has got many names like Matsyagandha, Yojanagandha, and Satyawatee at different stages of her life. She is the daughter of king Uparichar and Adrika (Mahara, 2016). Her biological father, the Chedi king, Uparichara Vasu, does not accept her because she is a female. Her father abandons her because she is born as a daughter and has a dark complexion. But her father nurtures his son though he has a dark complexion. Her father is a representative of the male-dominated society.

A sailor couple adopts Satyawatee as their own daughter, who is, later on, married to the king, Santanu at the outset of the fiction. The biological parents of Satyawatee had hurled at the bank of a river believing that female are always weak. The male-dominated society believes that females are weak both physically and mentally (Abrams, 2008; Tyson, 2006). Niharika refutes the traditional attitude of the patriarchal society and sketches Satyawatee as a female who can handle everything like men if they get the opportunity. Satyawatee claims that she has become the winner among the males in the competition of sailing the boat.

She gets full support from her foster father, Dasharaj to flourish her personality as a brave and intellectual lady. Dasharaj, is credited for respecting the female sex. Satyawatee states:

Once there was a boating competition. I had taken the boat across by overtaking all. I could protect even from a dreadful river. The perspective of the youth had changed after the victory of male competition. The people were very sensitive to talking about sex discrimination. (*Cheerharan*, p. 12)

Satyawatee claims that though sailing is taken as a men's task, she too is equally skillful. Moi (1985) stated, "While it is true that many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men, it is true that some have managed to counter male power" (p. 119). Satyawatee proves that women can do outdoor work as skillfully as men if they get proper training.

In the male-led Nepalese society, the so-called scholars also use their power to the innocent and helpless women for the fulfillment of males' physical desires. In the male-orientated society, males take females as sexual objects, as sources of satisfying their physical desire (Bryson, 1986; Delphy, 1984). In *Cheerharan*, Karki, the novelist, has exemplified mal-practice of males used to fulfill their physical desires. When Satyawatee sails the boat, one supreme sage, Parastu tries to accomplish his physical desire with her. As Satyawatee rejects him, he scolds: "Foolish girl. Is there ever a comparison between male and maleness? The limitation of age only works in the case of women. Male surpass time. They can become a father as long as they want" (*Cheerharan*, p. 42). It justifies how men treat women as sexual objects. Wollstonecraft (1992) did not like the way women were instructed to look for the gratification of men's passion. Parastu claims that though he is old, his sexual desire is still strong. Karki, the novelist, is disappointed to note that females are not safe even in the hand of sages too. Parastu scolds Satyawatee and tries to make her to submit to his desire.

The sages become savage and do not care about the sentiments of the female in making physical relation with them. In a patriarchal society, women experience the biasness of being women (Morrell & Swart; 2005; Beauvoir, 1983). Satyawatee exposes the difficulties of being a female. When her mother instructs her to compromise, and surrender to husbands, she questions: "Why do females only have to compromise? Why do females have to make their husband winner by losing themselves? Why does a mother wish her daughters to walk on the path where her mother is walking?" (*Cheerharan*, p. 75). Like a conscious feminist, Satyawatee questions why only females have to compromise and accept losing them to make their husbands a winner.

When the king of Hastinapur decides to marry Satyawatee, she asks whether Dasharaj accepts him as his son-in-law or not. No one is supposed to question a decision made by a male in a male-dominated society (Bryson, 1986; Sawyer, 2004). The king asks, "Why not ready? Who does not become happy to get a chance to make the king of Hastinapur son-in-law? The next thing is that who has the courage to reject the order of the king" (*Cheerharan*, p. 67). The king displays his chauvinistic manner. Satyawatee realizes that the king can marry and possess her because he is the king. This signifies how even the royal members have been displaying chauvinist character in Nepalese society. Like Satyawatee, many Nepali women know their submissive character in a male-orientated society. They cannot break the norms and values of the patriarchal society.

Gandharee is another female character in Karki's *Cheerharan* who possesses the character of double standard and adheres to masculine norms. Gandharee is the daughter of Gandhar and married to Dhritrastra. Gandharee becomes the mother of Kauravs. Gandhari has taken an oath to close the eyes with the handkerchief forever. It is because she wants to experience like her husband is feeling so that their relationship will strengthen. Gandharee internalizes her subjugated role of being a woman when she shows her loyalty towards her husband. In a male-dominated society, women suffer because they internalize their subjugated roles (Brickwell, 2005; Shrivastwa, 2022). When her slave asks about this, she responds, "It is my decision to feel the pain of the husband. I can no longer be equal to the husband who is blind inborn until the world is dark to me. I cannot understand him" (*Cheerharan*, p. 169). This proclamation of Gandharee proves how she has taken the socialization of patriarchy for granted. Nepali women, like Gandharee, take pride in adhering to the snobbish norms of masculinity.

In this novel, *Cheerharan*, when Dhritrastra comes to know that Pandu becomes father before him, he expresses his sorrow to Gandharee in these words: "Pandu received the son. At last, Pandu got the eldest son. You are pregnant. Time has already crossed but you can't give birth to a son. Delivery does not occur until the days are over" (p. 195). He says that the time period of giving birth of his wife is over but she could not give birth. Dhritrastra, as Magar (2016) surveyed, denounces Gandharee's womb. The dogmatic males consider the female only as the means of producing a son and giving continuity to dynasty (Brickwell, 2005). Dhritrastra represents Nepali male who force women to have a son to continue their dynasty. But Nepali women like Gandharee do not protest when their husbands insult them for son.

Satyawatee is guided by patriarchal mind set. By presenting her double role, the writer shows the contradictions in the character of a female character in our society. The women are treated as the inferior sex by their patriarchal mind-set, and because they behave in such a way that displays how they have internalized sexism (Ruth, 1990; Sawyer, 2004). Satyawatee orders Bhism to bring the princesses for her

son disregarding the intention of the princesses. After the death of her son, Satyawatee orders her daughters in law to have physical relation with Vyasa so that the throne would not remain vacant. Though Satyawatee herself is a female, she misuses the power and oppresses the right of the females. She does this only to give continuity to the male-dominated society.

On the one hand, a woman is misbehaved because she is female. On the other hand, she misbehaves the females. Throughout the novel, one can trace that Satyawatee is the representative of patriarchal Nepalese society that does not easily go against the norms and values established by the male chauvinists.

B. Draupadi's Resistance against Sexism

Draupadi appears as a feminist because she doesn't like the way females are not given the rights to choose their husbands in traditional Nepalese society. Beauvoir (1983) remarked, "One is not born, but rather one becomes a woman" (p. 266). Draupadi does not prefer to take the position of a weak woman in the novel. She was born from the religious fire prepared by the king, Drupad, to obtain a son (Dhaiba, 2016). Draupadi's birth wasn't desired. The very wish of the king to have a son and his religious invocation for it demonstrates the patriarchal mindset of the Nepalese society. Each society needs women but most parents do not want or demand a daughter. Draupadi's father keeps a condition of choosing the husband for Draupadi in her marriage ceremony. Draupadi muses: "I was sitting on the top seat being decorated in the dress of a bride. A great award awarded to a great personality, Draupadi" (*Cheerharan*, p. 266). Girls are prepared like puppets to be manipulated by men in the patriarchal Nepalese society. When Draupadi reacts against such cults, her brother retorts, "Our father is not the first father who put a condition for the marriage of his daughter" (*Cheerharan*, p. 269). The males justify that this sort of cult has been practiced for centuries. They never attempt to understand the suffering and pains of females.

Draupadi keeps on reacting against constraints imposed on her by the patriarchy. Morrell and Swart (2005) were critical to patriarchy because it subordinated the female to the male to constrain women. When nobody could fulfill the condition and qualify for being the husband of Draupadi, as Baniya (2016) notes, Draupadi's father makes the condition a bit more flexible so that anyone could participate in the trial. Draupadi reacts at this: "If the object is not be sold, the price will be decreased and kept for sale in the market" (*Cheerharan*, p. 279). This statement highlights the bitter truth that the male-dominated society does not see any difference between female and goods. Draupadi also realizes that the patriarchal society has made women worthless.

Draupadi is divided among five husbands like a commodity. She has a strong desire to marry Arjun but she is compelled to suppress her intention. Many radical feminists are critical to the male-dominated society where women are treated as cheap product and commodity (Butler, 1990; Morrell & Swart, 2005). Draupadi says, "Am not I the burning example of the exploited woman from the entrance of the husband's house" (*Cheerharan*, p. 296)? Draupadi's voice is the voice of conscious modern Nepali women who resist against the commodification of women.

Having come to Indraprasth, Narad makes a rule for her five husbands for Draupadi without informing her. Patriarchal society does not provide any space for the women in making her choice and decision about her marriage and lifestyle after marriage (Sawyer, 2004). Again Draupadi reacts against this: "Is it necessary to ask my view if I am the one to be divided for the tonight? Narad may consider the advantage for the Pandavs and Indraprasth, but injustice happened to a woman" (*Cheerharan*, p. 314). This remark of Draupadi clarifies that the male-dominated Nepalese society thinks of the merit of the male only without being conscious of its negative impact on the woman. In patriarchal society, women become powerless not because they are weak biologically, but because of the social construction of gender (Morrell & Swart, 2005). In an incident, Yudhisthir, one of Draupadi's husbands, bets her as an object in the gambling and loses her. Even the didactic Yudhisthir, also known as the symbol of religion, treats a woman as an object. It implies religion also discriminates against the woman.

In the past, Nepali writers depicted female characters as submissive adhering to the unfair norms of gender (Upreti, 2016). But today many Nepali writers have begun to present female characters as a bold, self-reliant, and having their own decision-making power. Niharika is one of such writers who have presented Draupadi as an adamant woman in *Cheerharan*. After Draupadi was lost in the gambling, the Kaurabs, including Dushasana disrobe and insult her. Draupadi protests against the misdeed in these words:

Sinner Dushasan, your hand is not only attempting to disrobe Draupadi's body, it is the disrobing of the womanhood. Disrobing is rape. I am raped. I, Yagyaseni Draupadi, take an oath in front of these eye-witnesses of the sin that Draupadi will not comb the hair until she washes her with the blood of Dushasan. Until then the hair will be open. (*Cheerharan*, pp. 370-371)

Through the strong determination of Draupadi, the novelist succeeds in alerting all women to raise their voice against the injustice.

Draupadi warns the king that she would revolt for the right rather than asking for it: "Now right and justice are taken not by asking but by revolting or snatching" (*Cheerharan*, p. 375). Draupadi acts like a feminist because she makes the king and husbands realize the importance of the female. Women can obtain

their rights by fighting against the ill practice committed to them by the chauvinists (Beauvoir, 1983; Rich, 1995). Draupadi resists against the treatment of women as objects. This is manifest in these lines of Draupadi: "His majesty, the prestige of the woman cannot be purchased with your authority and wealth" (Cheerharan, p. 375). Draupadi is an icon of a determined, militant feminist in Nepalese society. After being disrobed, she claims she would take her right herself by fighting.

Draupadi and Kunti, the mother of the Pandavs, speak for their identity and space. Woolf (1992) a leading feminist, advised all women to fight for their identity and space, for their own room in the society. When the Pandavs lose Draupadi in the bet, even Kunti reminds them that woman is not an object to be gambled. Kunti says: "You should note that a woman is not any object. Your wife is not the object to be betted in the gambling. No one should commit the mistake of thinking a woman or a wife as an object. Such a mistake cannot be imagined from such scholars" (Cheerharan, p. 384). Kunti reacts against the maltreatment of her sons towards Draupadi.

Draupadi is affectionate and supportive to the other wives of five Pandavs. She has maintained a good relationship with them. She meets the wives of Bhim and Arjun and behaves with them respectfully (Mahara, 2017). Kunti states that Draupadi is the name of unity among the family members. Females are naturally intelligent, creative and bold. With the help of these qualities, they are able to create and keep the family environment peaceful and run smoothly (Shrivastwa, 2022). This quality is marked in the character of Draupadi. Arjun admires Draupadi for her skill: "Grateful Panchali, you are keeping the five Pandavs in unity. You understand the psyche of all. Woman, you are a mother, you are also a daughter, and you are also a wife. You are success in all forms" (Cheerharan p. 430). He Draupadi thanks for keeping all the brothers in unity. Arjun appreciates her ability to understand the feelings of all. Even Krishna asserts her power and advises Draupadi to fight against injustice. Krishna says, "Yagyaseni, you yourself are almighty. Women are unknown to their power. Demonstrate your power! You become weaker if I am near you. You will become dependent. Revolt!" (Cheerharan, p. 370). Krishna asks her to show her power because it is her court and she is the judge of this court.

It is always true that all men of the Nepalese patriarchal society favor their chauvinist predecessors (Upreti, 2016). There are some gentlemen in such societies who object to sexism. Krishna, in *Cheerharan*, reminds Draupadi that rights, in the patriarchal society, can be achieved by fighting or struggling or snatching. The female do wrong when they feel discriminated against or suppressed. This feminist perspective of Krishna can be perceived in these lines: "No one provides your space, be ready to achieve yourself! Your duty is to look for your right" (Cheerharan, p. 396). Krishna reminds Draupadi to revolt against injustice. Krishna does not like the way women live in utter insecurity in their own houses. He advises Draupadi to be conscious: "You are the proof of the possibility that a woman is not safe even inside the house and from the relatives. It is therefore woman should always be conscious; it is the voice for the woman to be alert for self-defence" (Cheerharan, p. 398). He makes Draupadi alert because women are not safe inside the house and from their own relatives.

Patriarchal society instructs us to make the women dependent on the men. Tyson (2006) writes, "Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional, weak, nurturing, submissive" (p. 85). Draupadi, in *Cheerharan*, does not like the way women are socialized to be inferior and submissive. Draupadi asks, "My brother was skilled at using weapons, why am not I? Why am I dependent? I thought it was the good to live in the shelter of security of the husbands" (Cheerharan, p. 418). Draupadi could have protected herself if she had been trained to use weapons like her brother. This shows how a person's skill and ability are determined by his gender.

In the male-dominated society, woman's safety and independence always stands as a question (Beauvoir, 1983). This reality is exposed when Draupadi iterates, "That is the subject of tension. Where can a woman be safe? Neither inside the house nor outside the house. Neither in cottage nor in palace" (Cheerharan, p. 420). This demonstrates the sorrow of women living in a male-led society. Some modern Nepali women have been demonstrating strong courage against the maltreatment of men (Bista, 2019; Pokharel, 2016). When Draupadi is attempted to rape by Kichak even in Guptabas, she is not scared at the difficulties and obstacles. She proclaims, "Now, I will myself give justice to me. Army chief Kichak will have to pay a great price on that day" (Cheerharan, p. 448). But the injustices imposed on her make her more adamant. She warns Kichak not to torture her. Else, he will have to pay a great price. This signifies that even a tender woman like Draupadi dares to protest against the injustice.

Niharika captures the realistic picture of the woman in the Nepalese society in *Cheerharan*. Despite the changes in policies in the world, the situation of women is still worse than that of men in Nepal (Bista, 2019). Women are oppressed in many ways in modern society. Draupadi is segregated and insulted in her life time and again. She sometimes thinks of committing suicide. Draupadi says to Bhim, "It would be good to commit suicide rather than being living a dead life after being raped" (Cheerharan, p. 455). This alludes to the tragic situation brought about to women in the patriarchal society. In this extract, she reminds one of her husbands, Bhim how much she is suffered. She is compelled to commit suicide rather than bear injustice time and again.

Niharika depicts the central character, Draupadi, as a representative of the Nepali woman who experiences problems and sex discrimination living in a male-dominated society. She has to marry a person who meets the conditions set by her father. She also has to be a common wife for all five husbands under the order of her mother-in-law. She asks Arjun not to take her as water in a glass that anyone can drink, yet she has to negotiate. Draupadi objects to the rule made by her five husbands because the rule is made without consulting her. After her husband Yudhishthira loses her in the royal gambling, she is disrobed by Dushasan in a grand meeting under the command of Duryodhan. She condemns her five husbands including all for being silent eyewitnesses. When she is taken to the assembly dragging by her hair, she objects to the misdeed of Dhushasan. Draupadi takes an oath to keep her hair uncombed until she washes with the blood of Dhushasan. Her oath proves that she is a determined one. She is insulted by Jaydharat in the time of Banabas. Similarly, Kichak attempts to rape her but he fails. She never loses her courage in any critical hour and endeavors to protect herself from the hands of demons. Draupadi is perplexed at the truth that females are nowhere safe, not even within the surrounding of their homes. She demands that the sinners must get punished for such misdeeds. Draupadi is the source of courage for all Nepali females against patriarchal domination.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, Karki's novel, *Cheerharan*, is an authentic portrayal of the pathetic conditions of Nepalese women living in the conservative patriarchal society. Many Nepali women, like Satyawatee and Gandharee in *Cheerharan*, are subjugated for simply being females. Satyawatee experiences male domination from the beginning of her life because her biological father discards her. The irony is that Dasaraj, who adopts her, does not discriminate against her for being a female. Rather he guides her to learn hunting, sailing and other outdoor works that are supposed to be belonging to males. But Satyawatee follows the traditional attitude of the patriarchal society and submits to the demands of the sage in making physical relationship with her. Satyawatee's case clarifies that male orientated society considers female as an object. Gandharee is another female character who is forced to marry Dhirtarastra. She sacrifices her life for her husband by blindfolding her eyes. But her husband does not understand her sacrifice. It shows how male dominated society takes females' sacrifice for granted. She knows the misdeeds of her husband, sons and brother. But she takes no severe action against the misdeeds of men and fails to break the negative trend of the male dominated society. In this way, there are some Nepali women like Satyawatee and Gandharee who do not object the maltreatment of men upon them. They bear the injustice in the name of duties and responsibilities. Draupadi is the true representative of modern Nepali women. Although Draupadi is a bold woman, she is often discriminated against because of the boundary set by the patriarchal society. She is insulted and disrobed by the Kauravs in the presence of her five husbands. Karn insults Draupadi as a prostitute because she has five husbands. Similarly, Kichak attempts to rape her in the forest-life but she revolts against it. Draupadi determines to raise the voice against the misdeeds of the males of the dominated society. Draupadi is the mouthpiece of the novelist. Perhaps the novelist, intends to give a message that all women are potential in the Nepalese and men ought not to maltreat women as inferior sex.

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