

Dynamics of Social Aberrations in Yogmaya's Sarvartha Yogavani

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Abstract: Yogamaya Neupane is a progressive poet, a spiritual leader, a social reformer, a Nirguna Bhakti saint and a feminist revolutionary in Nepal. She wrote numerous lyrical verses referring to different social evils of her time. This article attempts to explore the dynamics of social aberrations inherent in her lyrical verses –SarvarthaYogavani. Neupane launches her crusade against different social evils like corruption, deception, racial injustice, caste discrimination, fraudulent activities, misuse of measurement etc. through her sacred verses. Her verses echo the voices of the voiceless people. She becomes the messiah of contemporary society. Through her verses, she attacks money lenders, corrupt Bhamins, Rana rulers, sellers of crops and Rudrakshya, job holders, judges etc. for their anomalies. She adopts the Bhakti path to launch her social protest against different social aberrations prevalent at that time. The very dynamics of social anomalies of contemporary society are reflected in Yogavani through which she attacks the different social agents against their injustice. The study employs Kabir's Theory of Nirguna bhakti as a theoretical tool to launch the social protest against injustice and anomalies. Nirguna Bhakti refers to devotion to the formless God- singular God inherent in all living species. It holds the view that since similar God exists in all human beings, discriminations among any human beings on the ground of social constructs like gender, caste or race etc. are baseless and pointless. Yogmaya following the same ground attacks other social evils like corruption, deception etc. prevalent in contemporary society. Through her lyrical verses, she raises the consciousness of people and evil agents for their change. No society can attain social change itself until and unless human minds are changed. Therefore, Yogmaya like Kabir Saint attempts to rock the human consciousness for social revolution. She follows the protocols of peace and non-violence to suit her purpose. She inspires her followers not to resort to violent activities that disrupt the peace and harmony of the society. She herself involves in uniting the people of all castes in one place, and has them recite *bhajans* together. The principles of social solidarity and fraternity are automatically established fostering the protest against different social evils prevalent in society.

Keywords: Dynamics, Aberrations, Discrimination, Nirguna, Satyagraha, Jal-Samadhi, Bhajanetc

1. Introduction

Yogmaya Neupane, a revolutionary woman from Nepal did not keep herself isolated from different social movements in the neighborhood and around the world during 1920s. She was influenced by *Satyagraha* of Mahatma Ghandi as he lodged his protest against British rulers and their hegemony in different ways like Quit India movement, Civil Disobedience movement and movement of wearing *Swadeshi* clothes by discarding British products. The social revolution in Russia, the religious reformative movements of *Arya Samaj* established by swami Dayananda Saraswati in India,

nirguna tradition of the saints like Kabir and Ravidas, and *Josmani santa* tradition of Nepali soil further inspired her to get involved in *nirguna bhakti* and protest against social ills of contemporary society.

The other factors which set Neupane's mind to protest include unjust and atrocious Rana regime, relentless behaviors rendered to her by her-in-laws, deception and moral degradation of various social agents like Brahmins, job holders, judges, money lenders and business persons. Fundamentally, socio- political, religious, economic ills and anomalies of higher class impelled her for the dissent. The reason behind the rebellious zeal developed in her mind was

the barbarous and superstitious social practices of her time, in which she became the victim.

Born in Bhojpur district, Nepaledanda, Simle (ward no. 7) Nepal in the year 1867A.D (1924B.S.) during the Rana Regime – the darkest period of Nepal [4], Yogmaya confronted many hurdles in her early life like childhood marriage as she was married at the age of 7 to Iswar Padhyeya Koirala from Dhollekhan, Bhojpur [15]. After two years, she left her home as she could not tolerate the behaviors rendered to her and reached her parents' home. At the age of 13, she left her home for Assam and got married to a Kandel [8]. After some years, she became a widow. After that she challenged her social status quo by getting married to a Dotel Brahmin. She bore him a daughter named Nainakala [4]. After some years, she again faced the tragic event i.e. the death of her husband again. Then, she renounced the family life and came back to her birthplace and began the life of austerity [14].

2. Yogmaya's *Satyagraha*

Yogmaya gave voice to the voiceless women, lower caste people, the exploited and the discriminated ones when the entire country cowered to Rana rules [Aziz 60]. Aziz argues that her words resound the sensitivity of all common folk. People have common needs, joys and suffering. The tears she speaks refer to the laments of men and women, bound against their will by society's caste rules. Aziz remarks that caste rules and laws destine some to be lower and poorer and to thereby suffer much deprivation:

In a society in which people are strictly and irrevocably distinguished at birth according to the caste membership of their parents, this invocation is sheer heresy. Her ideal of intermingling was possible only if caste differences were abandoned. Yogmaya called for her people to engage in unfettered reciprocity, through nurturing, marriage and all other social exchange. [2]

Yogmaya undertook a poignant protest against Rana ruler's brutal behaviors and activities as well as social evils through her *Sarvartha Yogvani* published from Assam posthumously.

Karen Rasler argues about protest action:

A protest action is defined as an event that involves 20 or more people who are advancing social, economic, or political claims..., a large portion of the protest actions occurred at mourning ceremonies religious gatherings, holidays, and processions. [12]

She condemned caste discrimination, corrupt Brahmins, money lenders and the rulers through the medium of religious hymns, poems and songs. Neupane established the first organization of Nepali women Nari Samiti (women's committee) [13]. The committee under the leadership of Neupane launched its activities against social ills and woes like child marriage, polygamy, injustice, corruption, blasphemes, gender and racial discrimination and so on. In very short time, more than 2000 people became her disciples who were committed to her mission. Within a few years of its activity, the committee submitted a 26- point petition

demands stating women's problems to Rana Prime Minister Chandra Samsher, who later abolished the tradition of Sati practice in which a woman who used to burn herself alive on the funeral pyre prepared for her dead husband.

In 1936, she had pilgrimage to the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, where Juddha Shamsheer came seeking blessing from her. She demanded truth, Dharma Rajya (good governance), alms with him. She also warned the rulers that apocalypse was near for them. Juddha Shamsheer assured her that the demands would be met. But the assurance was not transformed into action and Yogmaya along with 240 disciples made plans for mass immolation so as to rock the rulers conscience [15]. Before they could commit immolation, they were arrested and jailed in Dhankuta and Bhojpur. She became the first Nepali woman rebel imprisoned on the allegations of misleading people and thereby eroding the fabric of social order.

After four months of her imprisonment, she was released. She resumed her protest for social justice and good governance. Once being very upset by her holy activities the corrupted, the feudalists and the conspirators sent five naked yogis to slay her. But they got shocked with her immense power of magic and returned without doing any harm to her. Instead, they begged pardon with her admiring (commending) her word power. Because of her mesmerizing and magical power people used to surrender before her regarding her as the goddess of truth, humanity and harmony. Later, being harassed from the activities of Rana rulers who put deaf ear to her demands of good governance and social reformation, Yogmaya along with her 68 disciples took Jal-Samadhi plunging into the raging Arun river from a huge rock attached to it at Majuwabesi, Nepaledanda, Bhojpur, on July 5, 1941 (1998, Ashad 22nd). It was her trenchant protest against social evils prevalent in contemporary society [15].

3. Social Revolution in *Sarvartha Yogavani*

Yogmaya's sacred work "*Sarvartha Yogavani*" holds the mirror of contemporary society as it depicts different social evils like the oppression and suppression of woman including child marriage, polygamy, deceptions, black mailing, corruption, racial and gender segregation and discrimination, social injustice, untouchability and so on. Kabir also propagates unity in diversity among human races. He expresses his dislikes against any distinctions made among human beings since they possess the same blood:

Everyone takes birth out of the womb indeed,
Assumes many forms and performs various deeds.

Thence, you and I are of one blood,
One life-element animates us.

The whole world is born of a mother

What wisdom justifies distinctions then? (Bijak, Ramaini) [7].

Like Kabir, Ravidas revolts against the inhuman system of social exclusion and untouchability pervaded since long.

What makes him different is his method of revolt. He adopts *Bhakti* as a mode of expression of his social revolt. His *Bhakti* based method is not only unique but also a befitting reply to the subtle mechanizations deployed by the Brahminical class to keep the downtrodden out of the mainstream. In this connection, the adoption of *Bhakti* by Guru Ravidas as a method of social protest assumes special importance. His *Bhakti*-based method of social revolt is neither violent nor tied with the conventional forms of petitions. Regarding his protest, Ronik Ram asserts:

The revolt is novel and daring. His *bhakti*-based revolt is grounded upon the principle of compassion, for all reflect the egalitarian traits of his social philosophy and struggle. His absolute faith in formless God exhibits the apathy of the elites of his times towards the plights of the lower class for whose emancipation he seeks refuge in no one else but God. [*"Guru Ravidas, Bhakti..."*] [11]

Through the medium of hymns, religious songs and lyrical poems, Yogmaya in the same vein attacks corrupt Brahmins, money lenders, sellers of Rudrakshya, iron rules of Rana Regime, common folks who are obsessed in hoarding wealth through foul means. Her *Yogavani* aims at making social reformation at large. She makes sarcastic remarks upon the Brahmins who hold themselves superior to other castes and plunder the poor and the helpless. Barbara Nimri Aziz says: "Her first target was Brahmanic system propagated by Brahmin priest that gives privileges to few and makes rules that enslave the rest and women of all castes" [2]. She lodges her protest against Brahmins and Rana rulers against their graft:

a fXd0feO {;j { lrhsf] ljqmL u/sf].	Nowadays Brahmins
dflnseO { b'MvLx?sf] a	live as they wish
[ltxf/]sf]..	Being lords, they
clxn] u5f] {+ enfbdLxf]	plunder the poor
cf^gfv'zLn]	How corrupted, they sell
leqL h/f xfln;Sof] nf]le 3';On]..	their trust
- @@ of]ujfgL_	How deep, the roots of
	your greed. [Aziz, B.N.]

Through the poetic version, she details out the hypocrisy and shortcomings of Brahmins who make rules and exploit the poor and the marginalized groups in society. On the other hand, she makes satire upon the brutal reign of Rana rulers who exploit the people and get indulged in corruption. Rampant corruption in Rana regime becomes another subject matter of her lyrical poem. She further flashes out against the corrupted rulers:

cTosfndf Tof] 3';n] km6fpnf	Fat bellies burst our
wfFhf.	
j8f] si6 ldnLhfnf Tof] 3';	And those bribes ooze
lg:sLhfFbf..	out
clxn] dfqkr]sf] 5 e/] kRg] 5}g.	To poison you
;DemL /fv;Tojrg e'm7f] x'g] 5}g..	So savor your riches
-@# of]ujfgL_	while you come.
	[Aziz,B.N.]

Yogmaya warns the so-called rulers not to slip deeper and deeper into the grip of corruption poisoning their ethics and prestige. She attacks leaders and administrative personals. What she did is to attack the Rana rulers who wallow in the whirlpool of corruption. The social development of the country gets quite retarded because of corrupt rulers [10]. She further hurls her sarcastic remarks against Brahmin's deceitful activities and behaviors:

a DxlrGg] a fDx0f egLpQd	Brahmins how voracious,
u/fP.	making their own rule
a fDx0fx?n];To 5f]8\bf b]j	Telling lies, they cheat
8/fP..	common people
j}Zo;fx" cl3 5Fbf;:tf] u/fof].	Had better stand on moral
	ground
a fDx0fx? Jofkf/L 5g\ efpF	Being meek, helpful, kind
x/fof].. ---\$ of]ujfgL_	and sound [My trans.]

Yogmaya's lyrical verses have the implications of her call for self-reformation of Brahmins who perform immoral, unethical and fraudulent activities in the name of Hindu culture and traditions. Her major focus centers upon the self-discipline of Brahmins and priests. Her religious idioms are quite appropriate to her time and culture [2]. The next consecrated endeavor Yogmaya undertakes is to eliminate caste system, untouchability, racial and gender discrimination. Despite the fact that she belongs to the clan of Brahmins, she vehemently denounces caste systems ever persisted in her society. She poses her excruciating assault upon the caste system:

cl3 d]/f] hftlyof]	Before I owned a caste
a fDx0f s"n]df	Belonging to Brahmin clan
clxn] d]/f hft 5}g	Now look, I have no caste
/fV5' r'n]df -of]ujfgL_	Ho, I chucked it there in the
	hearth. [Aziz-60]

Mahatma Gandhi demonstrates the way to common people to struggle without violence. He breaks the system of indentured Indian labor in South Africa. He fights color and racial discrimination everywhere. He lays the foundations for a national language which brings men close together regardless of creed, caste or race. He supports the sick and the helpless through kindness and self-sacrifice. Against age old prejudice, he raises a crusade for the human rights of numerous untouchables opposing the bigotry and dogmatism and the hateful orthodoxy of the caste system. Gandhi repudiates caste system:

I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor, do I believe in inequalities between human being. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence, it is a mental state. We need to think of, and to assert, equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equalities in the midst of this apparent external to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against god and man. Thus caste, in so far as it

connotes distinctions in status, is an evil. [6]

It is because of her strong protest against caste system Yogmaya garners the supports of thousands of people especially from Dalit communities. Yogmaya sitting with the people of dalit community shares food and drink unhesitatingly, which culminates the wrath of few elitist upper castes who go against her sacred mission. Since the hearth symbolizes exclusiveness, one can find no place more outrageous than the hearth to toss caste into. This simple quatrain advocates nothing less than shrugging off one's Brahmin caste, which implies doing away with all caste [2]. Her poetic / lyrical version shows the caste discrimination she confronts herself:

c7f/ k'/f0f gf}	Jofs/0f.	Eighteen Purans, nine Vyakarnas
olx;r]t hLjsf]j}	rfs/..	He who knows is well served
a]fDx0fsf] 5f]/f] j]b k9\5.		Sons of Brahmins read the Vedas
dyfEg]nfO{ e]b u5{..		For us ragged ones, they are of
-@@&, of]ujfgL_		no benefit. [Aziz]

Gandhi and Martin Luther King meet together at many points. King manipulates activities like civil disobedience and other non-violent means to suit the goal as Gandhi undertakes for the same. King attempts to end racial segregation and discrimination through civil disobedience and non-violent means. He advances the civil rights movement in the United States and around the world using non-violent methods following the teachings of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In 1955, a black woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested because she did not give up her seat to a white person on a bus. This incident made many blacks angry. They made a trenchant protest by boycotting the city buses. King led the protest of boycott. In the 1960s, King and his organization started more protest march in Washington D.C. Hundreds of thousands of Americans, black and white took part. At the Lincoln Memorial, he held his most famous speech: "*I Have a Dream*." More than 200,000 blacks and whites gathered before Lincoln Memorial to hear the speeches and protest against racial injustice. King makes a plea for racial justice and freedom against segregation and discrimination:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia; the sons of former slaves owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. [9]

For a large segment of Negro community, the social use of protest is viewed as the ultimate device for social change. Protest, at best, is an interpretation of the historical struggle going on around us which not only points out the rank inequalities in the distribution of democratic liberties, but the reaffirmation of a group to advance Abhijit Das states that social protest also involves a dissent against old fashioned socio-cultural norms and social discriminations on the basis of caste, sex, religion and class:

The intolerance of all forms of the other is increasingly

manifesting itself in attacks on vulnerable groups, and the vast majority giving tacit support through a deafening silence. The unfortunate scenario, which has emerged of late, is that so many different actors within society have internalized the rhetoric of 'our cultural heritage' that it is no longer described as obscurantist. This ideology is not just status quo, but intends to perpetuate and strengthen all forms of class, caste, religion, gender and sexuality-based discriminations. Class-based discriminations have long been the issue for political struggle and caste politics is the new Phenomenon in polity. Unfortunately, all those working on gender-based or sexuality-based discriminations are main extremely vulnerable, those working on the second group of issues even more so. [5]

Social protest is all too simple a formula for the intricate complex problems of Negro community in their struggle for equal citizenship and material well-being. Furthermore, in some instances, social protest is not only calculated to produce immediate change, but is often nothing more than a safety valve for pent up frustration and resentment against institutions and social malpractices. Niyi Akingbe views that protest generates awareness among the people:

Because the main aim of protest literature is that of increasing the awareness of the audience, many works within this sub-category use techniques of demystification that are designed to unsettle long-held assumptions and attitudes in the audience. As identified by the Russian formalist critic Victor Shklovsky, such techniques are grounded upon the capacity of art to delimit reality by disrupting the automatism of perception in several ways. Some protest writers use the technique of 'seeing things out of their normal context; others deploy unexpected symbols and imagery, and the use of archaisms or dialect forms in the language of poetry. [1]

Yogmaya also Points out the fraudulent activities of senior officers and administrators through her lyrical verse:

wd{;DemL]jrf/ u/L OG;fkm	Though right was on our
u/]g.	side
k};feP ax/]nfO{ b08 k/]g..	That bully escapes the law
s'n t xfd[f] a]fDx0f xf] 5}gf}	Brahmins, we are so
s'n}df.	unholy
hft\{f;To 5}g xfd[f] /fvr'n}df..	Let's leave our caste in the
-!@, of]ujfgL_	kitchen. [Aziz]

Yogmaya's lyrical verses depict the fraudulent activities of higher officials and politicians who being tempted with money, never grant justice to people. Instead, they exploit, suppress people and become affluent through unfair means:

hflu/bf/ nf]eL 5g\ Gof	How greedy they are
x]b}{gg\.	discarding justice
dg'[kg]{ z/L/ xf] l]rf/	How proud, forgetting
ub}{gg\.	their mortality
b'MvL hg xf] xftf]8L;To	Oh we poor, we plead for
k'sf/.	truth
csf]{ xfd[f];xfotf 5}g lji0f	Helpless, we pray to
u'xf/.. -!%@, of]ujfgL_	Vishnu. [My trans.]

Holding the universal perspective of mortality and fleeting human life, Yogmaya reprimands senior officials and politicians for their injustice to common people. Pleading for truth, she surrenders to lord Vishnu for the recovery of truth, justice, harmony and homogeneity. It has note of satire against political and social status of contemporary society. Brahmins and political leaders and the money lenders who lend money to the poor on high interest rate are subject to her criticism. Money lenders deceive common folk through foul means taking advantage of their illiteracy and ignorance. She attempts to figure out the disparity between haves and have not. The feudal class becomes prosperous due to the exploitation of the poor:

bf}nltofx'geof]	You became rich,
Tolxlgwf{af6}.	plundering the poor
cf;fdLn] shf{ ltof}{ td;'s 5	This man has paid the debt
7f8}..	but the loan bill not torn
5f]/f] lyof]afnsafa' d/]5.	Child was the son, father
	was dead
nf]le;fx' dfUguof] ltg' { k/]5..	Greedy lender went again
-@&, of]ujfgL_	to demand the loan. [My
	trans.]

Yogmaya establishes the cheating on the part of money lenders and higher class. She makes severe attacks against cheaters and their accomplices for their trickery and swindling. She criticizes the rich for deceiving the laymen on the monetary transaction as it is against divine virtues. Most of Yogmaya's poetic versions are replete with religious teachings, moral educations and due suggestions to common people. Even in the darkest period of Rana regime in Nepal, (1903 to 2007) she did not lag behind to castigate Rana rulers for their tyrannical governance. She daringly puts 26- petition demand to Juddha Smasher for establishing Dharma Rajya (Rule by justice or good governance) [3] and eliminating social ailments. Despite the fact that she gets assured to ameliorate the social condition, it does not come into action. She mocks at the rulers:

wGo /fh ltg;/sf/.	Your Excellency, you are so
;nflD lbG5' af/Daf/..	great.
dfs'/f] skf;sf] sdfO gnfpfg].	Again and again I salute you
wfu} wfufn] / plx 3/ eg]{..	Like a spider who neither
work -@##, of]ujfgL_	ploughs nor sows
	Makes only threading in the
	same place. [My trans.]

Yogmaya boldly rejects the offer made by the queen and advocates her message of truth and harmony. She does not surrender before Rana prime minister at the cost of truth and realism. Yagmaya's plan to commit immolation (mass suicide in blazing fire) is also a trenchant assault upon Rana Regime. Being befuddled and dismayed by rulers' apathy to social revolution, she and other 67 disciples took Jal Samadhi in 1998 BS (1941 A. D, Jumping into the Arun river) to bring shame to the government. Her death itself posed a great threat to the existence of Rana regime. The fire of revolution

and people's movement must have escalated from the end of her life. The seed of revolution gets implanted leading to the termination of Rana regime.

4. Conclusion

Yogmaya's Crusade against social ills and woes become the central core of her lyrical verses. Though she adopts Bhakti Marga, she employs it for social revolutions. She makes her attacks upon Brahmins, judges, Rana rulers, merchants and government officials for their injustice and aberrations. She raises her voices to the voiceless for the sake of social reformation. She surrenders to the formless God and makes a plea with Him to listen to her voices and reform the evils ridden society.

Neupane adopts renunciation [detachment from mundane life] as a part of *nirguna bhakti* and makes her protest against worldly path in order to reach the abode of divinity. She employs *nirguna bhakti* as a protest against the entanglements with *Maya* [love of mundane world as illusion] which is pushing man towards its dark dungeon. Standing on the deck of *nirguna bhakti*, she shuns lust for money, power, sensual pleasure, ego, greed, jealousy and hatred so as to attain peace and bliss in life. The study demonstrates how a fusion between social protest and *nirguna bhakti* occurs in SarvarthaYogbani.

Neupane conveys the protocols of peace and non-violence, and the message of universal solidarity and unity underlying at the heart of *nirguna bhakti*. She adopts *nirguna upasana* [worship to formless God] observing diehard austerity. Her *Jal-Samadhi* [diving into water to end life] along with her sixty seven disciples can be taken as the ultimate destination of *nirguna bhakti*- the union with god and her extreme protest against social evils prevalent in her contemporary society. Therefore, this study tires to acknowledge the fusion between social protest and *nirguna bhakti* in *Sarvartha Yogavani*.

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