

Don't blame women, blame misogyny

Here is a look at how books and literature from Swasthani to Mahabharata to Badhusikshya have portrayed women as being inferior to men and why we should unlearn the claims.





“Mamu, let’s read the *Swasthani* story. Isn’t this the time to read, please let me read,” I said to my mother. “I just don’t want to read it this time, if you really want to I won’t stop you,” she said. Conversation ended.

My mother has been a theist since her birth and she never says ‘no’ to such religious books. Well, this time I wanted to read it because I wanted to know how women are portrayed in the book, since people are talking about it. Youths have been complaining of how the book has subjugated women.

I remember listening to *Swasthani brata katha* since I was eight or nine. But due to some reasons we didn’t read the book last year. So, after my mother denied reading it this time as well, I decided to do some research on my own. Later that day my mother came to my room and showed me a video on Tik Tok. It was a video of a woman who was explaining how women were unfairly characterized in the book. My mother looked at me and said: “This is why I denied you earlier, I don’t want you to read the book where women are characterized that way.” I nodded.

Disparaging women

Swasthani mentions how a woman becomes a sinner. It also mentions various unpleasant words and offending statements to show women are inferior to men.

I wanted to know what my father thinks about the book. “It’s just a book, some books might contain good contents, some might not, so it is up to us what to grasp and what to avoid,” said my father. Some of my friends hadn’t heard the story at all. Others said they are aware about the content and they have mentioned it to their family members. “The book is for worshiping goddesses but still has the elements of subjugation of women which I have been criticizing with my family members and they have been agreeing with me,” said one of my friends.

Swasthani is just an example. Let’s talk about another well-known book of *Mahabharata*. We all have read or at least heard the story of *Mahabharata*. Just think of how many of us blame Draupadi as the main reason behind the war that happened in Kurukshetra, but we pay little attention to the fact that she was dragged by her hair

to an assembly full of men just to insult her. Her five husbands, the so-called great pandavas, did not utter a word in protest as she was being humiliated and shamed. Men, the so-called protectors, did not come to protect her.

Khaled Hosseini writes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* : “Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always.” It makes perfect sense to me. But it is not men who point the fingers at women. In our society, women also point their fingers at other women who suffer.

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the opportunity comes.*

Bhanubhakta Acharya, Nepal’s celebrated poet, has mentioned in his poem “Badhusikchya” (training for women) that a woman has to devote herself to her husband, do whatever he wants her to do, dress the way he wants and she should eat only after all the family members are done eating. The

poem further says that a woman should never laugh and that only promiscuous women laugh. He states that a woman’s faith is to rely on her father, husband and husband’s family members.

Mindset remains

Needless to say, *Swasthani* , *Mahabharata* and “Badhusikshya” were written a long time ago. But has the mindset to look into women changed? Society tends to view women from the same prism which was laid down by the kind of books and literature mentioned above.

A person wrote in his Facebook status: “A woman by nature has been given the gift of sexual enticement so they are objectified for men. If men had that gift they would be objectified too, so let’s all accept it, it’s natural.” This is how patriarchy is deeply rooted in our society even in today’s time. I once saw a video on You Tube where men were asked why women and girls were being raped. One of the men openly said “we are boys, if a girl wears tight jeans or any tight dress we can’t control ourselves.”

Once I went to a fair where there was a bike exchange offer and some car promotion where four or five women with shorts and crop tops were standing near the cars and bikes. I asked the event organizers why they had to be presented that way and they said it was a business strategy. Furthermore, they explained that since more men were their customers, they wanted to attract men by using women for product promotion. “It’s normal all around the world,” they said. Maybe this is the result of how boys are taught

not to cry since their childhood and girls are taught to compromise. Maybe this is the result of how a daughter is raised to find her superhero someday and a son is raised to be the one.

Just give a thought on how parents who claim to confront gender discrimination give their daughters pink dress and pink room since the day she is born and give their sons blue clothes and blue rooms. How they hand their daughters dolls and how they hand their sons superheroes. A daughter has to answer several questions before she goes out with her friends whereas sons are not asked even a single question. Sons can go out any time and return home any time while daughters are not allowed to leave home even for purposeful errands. If/when they are, they are expected to return home on time set by family members. Worse, daughters are still secluded during their periods. Thus the boys learn from their own families that they are superior to girls.

If you have ever filled out online driver license forms, you may have seen how father and husband are mentioned as witnesses, while mother or wife is not. We refer to our nation as a motherland but tend to insult, blame and defame women when the opportunity comes.

Mahatma Gandhi rightly said “a woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity.” We all need to change our mindset and make each other aware. Books like *Swasthani* and *Mahabharata* are the household reads in many Nepali families. Failing to read them critically might help the youths perpetuate the old beliefs that men are superior to women. As we read such books, we need to discuss the controversial points in them among the family members.

It is said we have to unlearn old beliefs and learn new ones. We indeed need to unlearn the old misogynistic approach and read our society and the world from the new liberated view.

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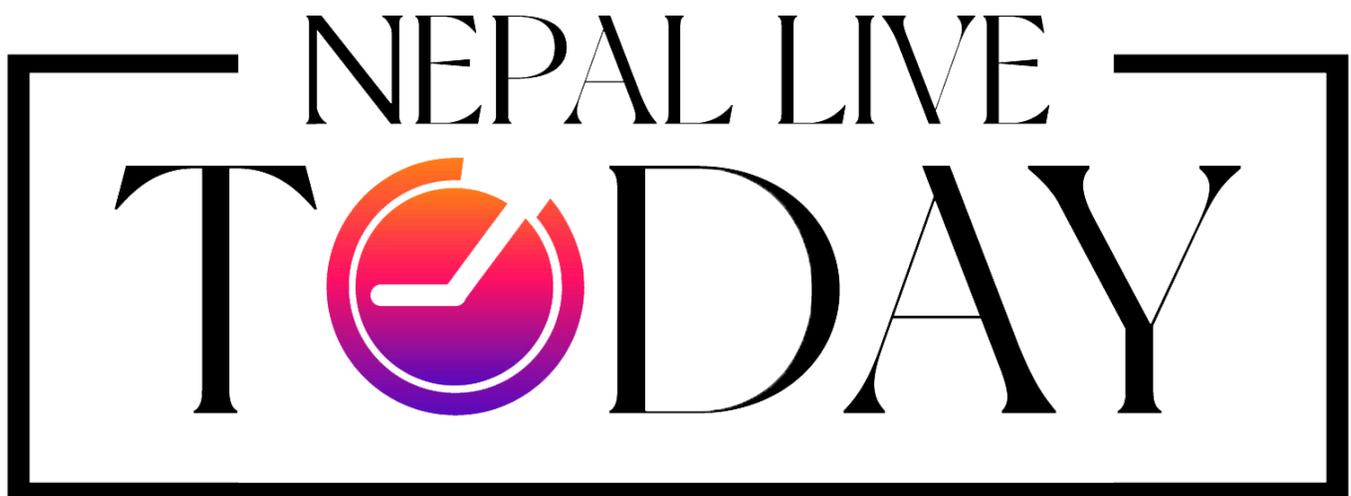
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