



Female Agency in the Novel *Sold* (2006) by Patricia Maccormick

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Abstract

This is an analysis of the novel entitled *Sold* (2006) written by Patricia MacCormick. This analysis looks at the agency shown by female characters in the novel who suffered because of patriarchy in Nepal. This analysis uses the concept of agency seen from feminist perspective. The analysis focuses on the agency form shown by female characters. This analysis uses fictional devices such as setting, plot, character to discover the issue. The result of the study shows female character shown agency in the form of intrinsic agency, self-definition and self-direction.

Key Words: women, agency, patriarchy

A. INTRODUCTION

Regarding human rights, women in this era have the same authority and opportunity to do something like men do in any field of life. Unfortunately, this condition can not happen in some part of the world because patriarchal system still exists behind the culture and religion. As Kabir (2019) states there are two main interconnected factors which are preventing the development of women in many parts of Asia. The first is patriarchy, as a fundamental global issue, and the second is the political system, which is shaped by patriarchy.

In Asia, some religions and cultures see patriarchy as a normal condition. Kabir (2019) states patriarchy seems to be natural and to be part of religion especially Hindu. The social system is based on patriarchal Hindu philosophy that empowers men and subordinate women in many part of Asia for example India and Nepal (Luitel, 2000). In Nepal, the status of women lags far behind of the men. Mahat (2003) states the strong bias in favor of sons in the country means that daughters are discriminated against from birth and do not have equal opportunities to achieve development. The daughter has lower access to education, healthcare, and economic, social, and political opportunities.

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This condition does not make women to give up. Even though the patriarchal system restricts their opportunity and ability, they attempt to raise their goals. Women under patriarchal aware that their attitudes and images are constructed by the social norm. Besides, there is directed actions that women take to achieve their goals in the middle patriarchal culture. This self-direction seems to be the outcoming action of the self-definition. The women who directed themselves to the identification of particular goals and implementation of particular life plans are having self-direction (Abrams, 1990).

In this era, women try to against patriarchy in any field of life. Asian Development Bank (1999) reported that women's literacy in Nepal is increasing in the middle of the patriarchal culture. It means women in Nepal are trying to rich education even patriarchal culture strives them to be a household (Asian Development Bank, 1999). According to Women's Economic Empowerment (2011), the number of women-owned businesses in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America is growing rapidly, with that growth, come direct impacts on job creation and poverty reduction. It demonstrated that women are expanding their economic while patriarchal culture strives them become housewives.

The women prove that they are capable like the men. This is because they have agency in themselves. Female agency is important to discuss. It can be motivation for women over the world. In this research, agency is shown by female characters in the novel *Sold* (2006) by Patricia MacCormick.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted using the concept of agency seen from feminist perspective. The data was taken from the novel *Sold* (2006) by Patricia MacCormick in the form of quotation. This research is descriptive research. The data will be analyzed based on agency concepts seen from feminist perspective. In feminist literary theory, the women who aware of the patriarchal system and taking actions to achieve goals in the middle of the patriarchal system are having agency.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of three subheading which are social condition in Nepal, their social interaction and the form of the agency shown by female characters. In the section of social condition, there is discussion about how the women get suffered because of the patriarchal system in Nepal. Besides, the section of social interaction shows how the patriarchy influence the interaction between men and women in Nepal. However, the female characters in the novel shown the agency which will be discussed in the third section. This analysis also uses fictional devices such as setting, character, and conflict to reveal the meaning of the novel.

1. Patriarchy in Nepalese Society

In this section the researcher discuss about the social condition in Nepal which reflected patriarchy. Mahat (2003) said women have lower acces to

education, healthcare, and economic, social, and political opportunities in Nepal. This is because society believe that the women is not more capable than men. It can be seen in the quotation below:

“One more rainy season and our roof will be gone, says Ama. She is looking down the mountain at the rice terraces that descend, step by step, to the village below; at neighbor’s tin roofs winking cruelly back at her. A tin roof means that the family has a father who doesn’t gamble away the landlord’s money playing cards in the tea shop. A tin roof means the family has a son working at the brick kiln in the city. A tin roof means that when the rains come, the fire stays lit and the baby stay healthy”. (p1)

From the quotation above it can be seen that Nepalese society believes the economic is depend on the men in the family. They believe only men that are capable to be the breadwinner. According to CARE (2015), the Nepalese men are expected to the family income and support the family financially in any ways. In this novel Lakshmi’s family is the representative of the family who does not have the men that able to work. Their family are poor and suffer. If they have the men, all te problem will be solved. Having the men reflected prosperity. Because of this believes, the Nepalese women are constructed to be the weaknesses which depend themselves to the men.

Another quotation also shows this social construction. It can be seen in this excerpt:

“Once you are married, she says ‘you must eat your meals only after your husband has had his fill. Then you may have what remains. If he burps at the end of the meal it is a sign that you have pleased him, in the hope that you will bear him a son. If you have a son, feed him at your breast until he is four. If you have a daughter, feed her at your breast for just a season, so that your blood will start again and you can try once more to bear a son” (p.15)

From the quotation above it can be implied that having a son is the priority. The discrimination also happen to the unborn babies. It is because the society believe in the future the son will take the financial responsibility which means the proseperity will come to the family. According to CARE (2015) sons are more likely to be educated as they are seen as the future family breadwinner while daughters leave home to live with their in-laws. It’s implied the society constructed women have no choice instead of preparing themselves to be a good wife and hope one day will get husbands to support them. To be a good wife women need to serve their husbands even though they are suffered.

In political the men seem to be powerful in the family. CARE (2015) said society believe Nepalese men are the dominant in the family. It can be seen from the following excerpt:

“Once you are married, she says ‘you must eat your meals only after your husband has had his fill. Then you may have what remains” (p.16)

From this quotation it can be implied the men are prioritized in the family. The men receive privilege because they are men. According to CARE (2015) patriarchy believes the men have privilege in the family. However, this privilege bring disadvantaged to the women. The society believes serving the husband and put the men as a first gender will bring a triumph.

In addition, the women often get much discrimination. They are blamed as weaknesses and missfortune. According to CARE (2015) women and girl in Nepal are disadvantaged by traditional practices such as stigmatization of widows, the segregation during menstruation, son-preference and others. In this novel, this cultural practices is shown. It can be seen from the quotation below:

I awoke today-before even the hen had begun to stir aware of a change in myself. For days i have sensed a ripening in my body, a tender, achy feeling unlike anything i’ve felt before. And even before i go to privy to check, i know that i have gotten my first blood. Ama is delighted by my news and sets about making the arrangements for my confinement. ‘You must stay out of sight for seven days,’ she says. ‘Even the sun cannot see you until you’ve been purified.’ Before the day can begin, Ama hurries me off to the goat shed, where i will spend the week shut away from the world. ‘Don’t come out for any reason,’ she says. ‘If you must use the privy, cover your face and head with your shawl. ‘At night,’ she says, when your stepfather has gone out and the baby has gone to sleep, i will return. And then i will tell you everything you need to know.’ ‘Before today.’ Ama says, ‘you could run as free as a leaf in the wind. ‘Now,’ she says, ‘you must carry yourself with modesty, bow your head in the presence of men, and cover yourself with your shawl.’ ‘Never look a man in the eye. Never look at growing pumpkins or cucumber when you are bleeding. Otherwise they will rot.

From this quotation it can be implied that the women are blamed even though they are in biological condition. The Nepal society believe the women who are in their period time need to be segregated. According to Robinson (2015) women during period time become untouchable. They must eat their meals separately, make no physical contact with other people or with water sources and must sleep with little or no bedding. In this novel, when the main character Lakshmi tell Ama that she got menstruation, her life is changed. She segregated to the worse place because the culture believe the menstruation is a misfortune. The Nepalese society blame women even though they do not do any mistake. Just because they are biologically women they carry more misery.

In education, society believe the men are higher meanwhile the women are far behind the men. According to Mahat (2003) Nepalese women get lower access to education things. This is because the society constructed women to be responsible as housework while the men constructed as a leader. Societies see men as an intelligence. can be seen from the quotation below:

“In the rainy months, the women patch the crumbling mud walls of their huts and keep the fire going so that yesterday’s gruel can be stretched to make tomorrow’s dinner. They watch the river turn into thundering beast. They pick leeches from their children’s feet and give them tea to wardoff the loose-bowel disease. This is the season when they bury children who cannot be carried to the doctor on the other side of that river. In the cool months, they prepare special food for the festivals. They make rice beer for the men and listen to them argue politics.” (p.16)

From the quoaation above it can be implied there is culture practices which put the men to think critically while the women do the housework responsibility. According to Pokharel (2008) Nepalese women are less available for extra meeting which the information is shared because of the household responsibilities. In this novel, there is a ritual which shows this gap.

2.Social Interaction

In this section the researcher discusses how the patriarchy influence the way people interact in Nepal. According to Robbinson (2015) interaction is what people do when they come together. In Nepal, society sees men as a superior and women as the inferior. This believes determine their interaction. It can be seen from the following quotation:

My stepfather’s arm is a withered and useless thing. Broken in his childhood when there was no money for a doctor, his poor mangled limb pains him during the rainy months and gives him great shame. Most of the men in his age leave home for months at a time, taking jobs at factories or on work crews far away. but no one he says will hire a one-armed man. and so he oils his hair, puts on his vest and a wristwatch that stop telling time long ago, and goes up the hill each day to play cards, talk politics and drink tea with the old men. Ama says we are lucky we have a man at all. she says I am to honor and praise him, respect and thank him for taking us in after my father died. And so I act the part of a dutiful daughter. I bring his tea in the morning and rub his feet at night. I pretend I do not hear him joining in the laughter when the men at the tea shop joke about the difference between fathering a son and marrying off the daughter. a son will always be a son, they say. But a girl is like a goat. Good as long as she gives you milk

and butter, but not worth crying over when it's time to make a stew.(p.8)

From this quotation it can be seen the irony in the interaction Lakshmi and stepfather. Stepfather embarrassed Lakshmi even though he is incompetent. In the contra Lakshmi do not complain about this because patriarchy put the men as a superior. Lakshmi try to pretend that their relationship is good. In line with CARE (2015), Men have privilege in the family. Because of his pride, he pretend to be the one that is needed in the family and do whatever he wants.

Another statement that shows that culture influence the interaction can be seen in the following quotation:

'The next morning, i rise before the sun has climbed over the mountain and walk down to the village spring, my feet making tiny dust storms with each step. When i get home, i notice that my stepfather's cot is empty- he's behind the hut, i expect, in the privy. Before he can return to start calling out orders, i sneak over to my garden plot, with the first the day's water for my thirsty cucumbers. I lift the leaf where Muthi likes to hide. But all i see is a stem, looking surprised, lonely. Ananta the snake and even big fat Yeti are also missing, as are all the others. I understand slowly, then all at once, that my stepfather has taken my cucumbers to Bajai Sita, the old trader woman, and sold them. I understand, too, why his cot is empty. Most likely, he has spent the night gambling-and losing-at the tea shop. I know this is so when Ama comes out of the hut and does not meet my eye. She takes the urn from my hands, pours the water over the few rice plants that remain. We strap the jugs to our backs, head down toward the spring, and do not speak of what is missing.(p.25)

The quotation above shown Ama and Lakshmi as a representative of women in family in Nepalese society. According to Pokharel (2006) Nepalese women are not allowed to talk freely. The women can not speak up even though the men hurt them. Lakshmi raise her cucumber as her child but her stepfather take it without any permission. However, Ama does not take any action of it. Lakshmi and Ama seem themselves as an inferior which they accept what the men decision.

3. Form of Agency

In this section the researcher discusses about how women are struggling in the patriarchal society. In this section, there is form of agency shown by the female characters which are intrinsic agency, self-definition and self-direction. There are some female characters in the novel shown agency which are Lakshmi, Gita, Puspha and Monica. They break the stereotype which only the men that can do certain tasks.

3.1 Intrinsic Agency

Agency is the form that shows by female characters in this novel. It refers to how the decisions female characters in this novel take to improve their life. According to Meyers (1989) agency has intrinsic value which is the ability to make decision without any distraction. In this novel, the main character has intrinsic agency. It can be seen from the quotation below:

“...Let me go to the city,’ i say. I can work for a rich family like Gita does, and send my wages home to you.”(p.1)

From this quotation, it can be seen that Lakshmi choose to take the financial capability because their family condition is worse. She wants the prosperity to her family and choose to be the breadwinner. Lakshmi’s choice based on herself and without the distraction from other. This is because she realize not only the men can be a breadwinner. Lakshmi has the power in herself which influence her to take the decision.

Another quotation that show Lakshmi has the power in her-self is:

“When we stop to rest, Aunty pulls a packet of betel-leaf tobacco from her waistcloth. She stuffs a wad of it between her gum and teeth, rocks back on her heels, and sucks. ‘Aunty,’ i say finally, ‘tell me about the city.’ She spits, and a stream of red betel juice lands on the ground between us. ‘you will have to see it for yourself.’ ‘Is it true that all the roofs are covered in the gold?’. ‘Where did you hear that?’ she says. ‘In school.’ I want Aunty to know that I am not a backward girl. I am educated.” (p.74)

From this quotation it can be implied that Lakshmi want to show her capability. Lakshmi want to prove that she is different. she wants break the stigma that women frequently a backward.

Another character also shown the intrinsic agency. The character is Monica the girl in the *Happiness House*. Monica take the decision to leave the *Happiness House*. It can be seen in the following quotation

‘Hah!’ she laughs mirthlessly, tossing her hair over her shoulder with a shake of her head. ‘I’ve earned nearly enough to pay my debt,’ she says. ‘In another month, I’ll be on my way home,’ I try to take in this idea – that Monica will soon be free – when a man comes into the room. He has city shoes on his feet and a gold chain around his neck. In an instant, Monica is at his side, winding her arms around him, like a snake.(p.185)

From this quotation it can be seen Monica decide to leave *Happiness House*. According to Meyer (1989) agency often seen from the way someone take decision without distraction by the social construction. In this novel Monica is the favorit girl in the *Happiness House*. She earn much money but she is not influenced by that.

3.2 Self-Definition

According to Abrams (1999), a woman that has agency is aware of social construction based on gender. This awareness is called self-definition. In this novel female characters have self-definition. It can be seen from this quotation:

“If your husband asks you to wash his feet, you must do as he says, then put a bit of the water in your mouth ask ama ‘why’. I say, ‘must women suffer so?’‘ this has always been our fate,’ she says. ‘Simply to endure,’ she says is to triumph.”(p.17)

From that quotation, it can be seen that Lakshmi realizes the culture doesn't make sense. She is wondered why the suffer is only come to one gender. Lakshmi's awareness of gender discrimination in their fate it's called self-definition. Meanwhile, other women still believe that is the part of their fate and doing that is a way to get triumph.

In the *Happiness House*, female character like Shanna who lives in the *Happiness House* also realizes society's dark side. It can be seen from the quotation:

“I turn my back to her and look out the window. Two schoolgirls in crisp blue uniforms skip by on the street below, holding hands. ‘I've been out there.’ Shanna says. ‘And I can tell you that it's not so bad here.’ I am wary, knowing now how these city people cannot be believed. ‘It's true,’ she says. ‘Out there, you're no better than a dog.’(p.97)

From this quotation it can be seen Shanna interrupt Lakshmi when Lakshmi miss her school. According to Abrams (1999) a woman that has agency is aware of social construction based on gender. In this novel, Shanna realizes whatever their hardship in the *Happiness House* at least in this place they are treated no worse.

3.3 Self-Direction

Difference from self-definition, self-direction is the ability to act on goals (Abrams, 1999). In this novel, some female characters can achieve their goals even though they are suffered as a second gender in the society. In this novel, the main character has self-direction. The main character is sold by her stepfather to the *Happiness House*. She is trapped and dissapointed. However, in the *Happiness House* she pay her debt and want to go home as soon as possible. Even though she is trapped she still want to improve herself. It can be seen from this quotation

“In the afternoons, when he is out playing tag with his school chums or running his errand business, i steal from the David Beckam boy. I do not take his money, though. I steal something better. While the other girls are downstairs watching the TV, I take his brightly coloured storybook and make it mine. I do not understand the words inside, and the pictures are queer and otherworldly. But at least for a few minutes, i pretend i am in school with Gita and my soft,

moonfaced teacher, and i am the number one girl in class again”(p.157)

From this quotation it can be seen that Lakshmi want to improve her knowledge. Her condition in the *Happiness House* does not make her stop to study. According to Abrams (1999) agency as self-direction is the ability to achieve the goals and acheive it by the particular lifeplans. In this quotation Lakshmi’s goal is to study like her old life. She takes the threatening way which steal a book from Puspa’s son.

Another quotation which proves Lakshmi has self-direction is

My notebook is nearly full. There are the old equations that my mountain teacher gave me. There are the old equations that my mountain teacher gave me. There are the odd new words I copied on my journey with Uncle Husband. There are pages of calculations, showing my debt to Mumtaz and my earnings so far. And now there are pages fulls of the Hindi and English words Harish taught me. Beautiful words, like: candy, bread, cricket, pen, crayon, dress, bracelet, radio, chicken, cow, cartoon, and remote control. Shanna comes in and sees me writing in my notebook. ‘don’t let Mumtaz or Shilpa see you with that,’ she says. ‘if they find out you can read and write, they will think you are planning to escape.’ I nod. And then they will put you back in the locked room.’(p.173)

From this quotation it can be seen that Lakshmi is different. She has the spirit however the condition is. She observes the new things. She is careful in order to avoid Mumtaz trapped. She is a smart girl even though in Nepal the women get lower acces to education. She proves that the education can be improve individually without going to school. At the end, the output of what she study make her free from the *Happiness House*.

Not only Lakshmi’s, her friend Gita is also shows self-direction. It can be seen from the following excerpt

“We drew squares in the dusty path between our huts and played the hopping-on-leg game. We brushed each other’s hair a hundred strokes and dreamed of names for our sons and daughters. We pinched our noses shut whenever the headman’s wife passed by, recalling the time she broke wind strutting past us at the village spring. We rubbed the rough-edged notch in the school bench for good luck before a recitation. We threw mud at each other during the long afternoons stooped over in the paddies, and wept with a laughter when one of Gita’s mud pies hit her haughty older sister in the back of the head. And in autumn, when the goatherds came down from the Himalayan meadows, we hid in the elephant grass to catch sight of Krishna, the boy with

sleepy cat eyes. Now that Gita is gone, to work as a maid for a wealthy woman in the city, her family has a tiny glass sun that hangs from a wire in the middle of their ceiling, a new set of pots for Gita's mother, a pair of spectacles for her father, a brocaded wedding dress for her older sister, and school fees for her little brother. Inside Gita's family's hut, it is daytime at night. But for me, it feels like night-time even in the brightest sun without my friend." (p.40)

This quotation shows that Gita takes financial capability in the family. She is not a man but she is the breadwinner. According to Abrams (1999) agency as self-direction is the ability to achieve the goals and achieve it by the particular lifeplans. In this novel, Gita can achieve her dream. Gita bring the family prosperity. She can fulfill her family needs which is patriarchal believe it belongs to men. Even though the patriarchal make the women responsible for the house chores but it doesn't mean the women are not capable to earn money.

Gita is not the only one to be the breadwinner. In the *Happiness House*, some women are the breadwinner. They take "breadwinner" roles in the family which patriarchal believe it should be the men. It can be seen from the following quotation:

"The coughing woman, Pushpa, came to work for Mumtaz when her husband died. She is pretty – with dusky skin and almond eyes - but she is so thin her collarbones poke out of her dress like twigs of a neem tree. As Shanna is speaking, Pushpa is seized with about of coughing that racks her entire body. When the coughing subsides, she spits into a handkerchief, sighs heavily, then curls up on her bed with her face toward the wall. The little girl, Jeena, tugs on Pushpa's braid and cries 'Mama, Mama. but Pushpa doesn't answer.'"(p.142)

From this quotation, it can be seen that Pushpa survives for her family. She is responsible for the two roles which are a father role and a mother role. According to Abrams (1999) self-direction is the ability to act on goals. Her goal is to raise her children well. So she take the children to the *Happiness House* and takes care of them even though she is suffered. Become a single parent in a patriarchal society is not easy. According to Case (2015) widow has commonly been rejected in Indian and Nepal society. Puspha choose to go to the *Happiness House* because the only place that accepts the widow is the *Happiness House*. However, in the *Happiness House*, she still tries to achieve a better life. She sends her son to school at the end her son helps Lakshmi to free herself from the *Happines House*.

In addition, Monica is also a single parent. She left her home to earn money for her family. It can be seen from the quotation:

But Monica is also given to strange fits of kindness.
Once when the dirty-hands doctor pushed himself up

against me in a back hall, Monica pried him off me and told him he would have to pay like everyone else. And the other day, she gave Anita a bottle of nail polish, saying she wouldn't need it when she goes home next month. And so when i see her watching TV alone, i slip into the room and sit silently nearby, wondering which Monica she is today. She regards me, then lights a cigarette. 'You know how to write, don't you?'. I do. At home, such a skill is something to boast about, but as Shahanna has told me, here is dangerous thing to admit. 'my little girl can write,' she says. 'i am paying her school fees'. 'so it's a true rumour of Monica's child. 'i paid for her medicine.' Monica says, thrusting her pointy chin in the air. 'and for an operation for my father. And for a pair of spectacles for my sister'. i raise my chin, too. 'i am buying a new roof for my family,' i say. Monica exhales. 'they will thank us,' she says. 'they thank us and honour us when we go home.' I dare not picture this, a date so far away that it is like a dream. 'my sister wrote and said my little girl hate porridge,' Monica says.

From this quotation it can be seen that Monica has self-direction. According to Abrams (1999) agency as self-direction is the ability to achieve the goals and achieve it by the particular lifeplans. In this novel Monica has a goal to raise her family. She is responsible for her family. She leave her home and her lovely daughter to be the breadwinner. She bring prosperity for her family when patriarchal believes it belong to the men.

Another quotation that shows Monica has self-direction is

"I can teach you some tricks,' she says to me. 'tricks to make the customers pay more.' I am afraid of thirsty-vine woman. I look at my hands folded in my lap, and say nothing. 'you think you are better than me? She says. 'Too good to learn my tricks?' i am too afraid to even shake no. 'Hah!' she laughs mirthlessly, tossing her hair over her shoulder with a shake of her head. 'i've earned nearly enough to pay down my debt,' she says. 'in another month, i'll be on my way home.' I try to take in this idea – that Monica will soon be free – when a man comes into the room. He has city shoes on his feet and gold chain around his neck in an instant, Monica is at his side, winding her arms around him, like a snake

From this quotation it can be seen Monica goals is pay debt and come home. According to Abrams (1999) agency as self-direction is the ability to achieve the goals and acheive it by the particular lifeplans. In order to achieve her goals Monica is doing practice the tricks to earn much money. Becoming the favorit girls in *Happiness House* do not make Monica want to stay longer in the *Happiness House*. She want to leave *Happiness House* as soon as possible.

D. CONCLUSION

The female characters in the novel *Sold (2006)* show agency. This research considers on the how the female characters shown agency from the novel *Sold (2006)* by Patricia McCormick. This analysis uses the concept of agency seen from feminist perspective. The agency in this analysis refers to the way women survive in the patriachal society. This analysis also observe how the society construct gender discrimination in which the setting of the novel.

The setting in this novel which is in Nepal sees patriarchy is a part of their beliefs. In Nepal, society sees the discrimination as a normal condition. In this novel the female characters are suffered. However, it does not obstruct them. This analysis shows the women have the power to prove themselves as a capable human being like the men. Trough this, they shown some form of agency which are intrinsic agency, self-definition and self-direction.

Thus, the analysis proves the assumption of the women which constructed by patriarchy is incorrect. The women can be higher in politics, economics and education as long as they try to resist the society construction on gender. The literary elements such as character, setting, and plot are used to reveal the meaning of this novel.

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