Social Structure and patriarchal status during Swosthani Vratkatha Period

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ABSTRACT

Swosthani Vratkatha is a devotional text dedicated to the local goddess Swosthani. Its story reflects the agro-based sociocultural structure in the medieval period of Nepal. This paper attempts to analyze the social structure at the period, in terms of the production system, marriage, family, and status of the female. This article is based on Qualitative research which used Secondary data with text review and historical content analysis. Though patriarchal norms and values guided family and marriage systems as the unit of social structure at that period, women had a significant role in protecting the parental property and resources, in supporting the gods in the war, to manage the home and family life. These facts differ from than patriarchal theoretical explanation.

KEYWORDS: Family, Marriage, Patriarchy, Social Structure, Swosthani Vratkatha,

Introduction

Swosthani Vratkatha is the blended story of Skanda Puran and Folkstory of the medieval period of Nepal. It seems like the series of stories narrated by lord Kumar to Agastya Muni. Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati have two sons named Kumar and Ganesh. The story mostly concentrates around Lord Shiva. It is also a form of prayer to Lord Shiva and his various forms. Goddess Swosthani is believed to be a four-handed goddess with Chakra, Trishul, sword, and lotus in each of her hands. She resides in the centre of Asta Matrika or eight goddesses of power. The Asta Matrika are Mahakali, Vaishnavi, Brahmi Maheswori, Barahi, Indrayani, and Chamunda. According to Hutt (1999), the Swosthani Vratkatha is a crucial text for anyone who wishes to understand the ideals and constraints that have traditionally governed the lives of women (mainly, but not exclusively Brahman and Chettriya women) in Nepal. According to Dave (2018), Swosthani Vratkatha depicts the goddess tradition, ritual studies, and the sociocultural dynamics of a staunchly Hindu Nepali Society. While Brikenhitz thoroughly explains and contextualizes her arguments, this work is best suited for those familiar with the goddess traditions of the Bhakti movement and their manifestations across the Hindu diaspora.

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According to Brikenhitz(2019), The Swosthani devotional tradition is a cultural phenomenon of considerable social and religious significance in Nepal. It holds a privileged position in Nepali culture – as a Brahmanical tradition, a written tradition, and a tradition with such an extensive reach into so many Nepali homes, hearts, and imaginations. Nevertheless, it is a relatively young tradition, considering the antiquity for so many of Hinduism's traditions. The Swosthani Vratkatha, commonly shortened to Swosthani Katha, is one of Nepal's most well-known and often read\heard storytelling traditions. It is a devotional text dedicated to the local goddess Swosthani which Hindus in Nepal recite annually in the hope of earning religious merit and the goddess's favour. As the opening vignette, describes, it is not a national holiday or public festival, nor a text taught in school, but a household affair for which family members and friends of all ages and genders gather to listen to the text's familiar tales. Over my fifteen years of researching the Swosthani tradition, I have heard time and time again that copies of the Swosthani Vratkatha can be found "in every Hindu household in Nepal" and I have primarily found this to be true. This is especially so in the villages in and around the Kathmandu valley, which reflects the geo-cultural origins of the Swosthani tradition among the Newars (Brikenholtz, 2019). Benet (1983) said that women are dominated by patriarchal Hindu rituals, religious texts such as RishiPanchami, Swosthani Vratkatha. These kinds of narratives are significant factors of gender discrimination in Hindu society and culture. In terms of this context, this article is going to attempt to find out the sociocultural structure of the period of Swosthani Vratkatha period.

OBJECTIVE AND METHOD
The main objective of this paper is to analyze the social structure of the period of Swosthani Vratkatha in terms of the production system, marriage, family, and status of the female. For the sake of explaining the social structure of the Swosthani period, majorly, secondary data are used under the qualitative method in this paper. I have taken help from the textual review as well as the historical content analysis methods for this work. The contents of Swosthani Vratkatha are quoted and interpreted based on Sapkota, Bhusal, and Bijukchhe(2072).

Theoretical Insight
Patriarchy refers to the male-dominated concept; it is a principle of subordinating women. Walbi(1990) mentions patriarchy as the rule of the father, i.e. is called a male-dominated family. Furthermore, it is a social and ideological construct that considers men as superior to women. Patriarchy is based on a system of power relations. She argues that in a patriarchal social structure, men oppress, exploit, and subjugate women. This view is focused on men's oppression of women only. However, it ignored the mutual relationship and cooperation between male and female to run the social structure. It is also silent to the ensuring of the women's participation and empowerment in the patriarchal sociocultural structure. It imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society. Patriarchal societies propagate the ideology of motherhood which restricts women's mobility and burdens them with the responsibilities to nurture and rear children.

Herbert Spencer argued that the processing of sociocultural evolution, permanent settlement, private property, ritual-based marriage, and family systems are developed in the stage of the agricultural society. The human being is also tied-up in animal husbandry, crops based production, patriarchal family, polygyny system and in an agricultural society. Social structure is the relationship between human consciousness and objects (Ritzer,1996).
Life and the universe is an endless series of conflict, speed, innovation, the fall of the old and the origin of the new. Due to the conflict, the social structure is developing from a low level to a high level (Coser, 1996). According to Marx, the process of development is caused by the struggle between the old and the new, the victory or rise of the new, and the defeat of the old. The changes are based on a permanent historical process of building sociocultural structures (Henslin, 1997). This article attempt to reflect the analogy of the sociocultural facts in terms of the production system of social structure and patriarchal theoretical explanation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Economic Structure

Swosthani Vrata Katha reflects the pastoral and agricultural production systems. Practices of private ownership, income, and distribution of resources were established at that time.

In chapter four, page number 64 of Swosthani Vratkatha, Sati Devi mentions "It is my fortune, I have no other options, he is my husband, and I should perform my duty." Mentioned facts indicate that women believed in fortune and religious norms at that period. This fact reflects the characteristics of agricultural and feudalistic society.

In chapter three, page number 54 of Swosthani Vratakatha, Dakashya Prajapati expresses "I have no son. Who will protect the property?" In this expression, Dakashya Prajapati seems worried about the protection of resources without a son. According to this fact, we can easily assume the practices of private property.

Similarly, according to chapter four, page number 68 of Swosthani Vratkatha, Sati Devi covered the ground with cow dung at the behest of Mahadev. This means cow dung was used for purification in religious activities. This reference also indicates the symbol of animal husbandry at that period.

The facts mentioned above confirm that the production system is based on the feudal animal husbandry-agricultural production system. On the other hand, Jessica (2018) mentioned the fact that Swosthani Vratakatha is 441 years old text. This indicates the old regime of Nepali society and the Kathmandu Valley before the unification of Nepal. In the history of Nepal, the medieval (Malla period) regime was based on agriculture and animal husbandry (Sharma, 2058).

Swosthani Vratakatha reflects the agro-economic structure. It symbolically presents the situations where people went away from the house and country to manage the livelihood of their family. In chapter eighteen, page number 228 of Swosthani Vratakatha, Nagini mention "We do not have our kids and husband, the serpents (husband of Nagini) have gone out the state".

Similarly, on page 270 of the 22nd chapter of Swosthani Vratakatha, Goma Brahmani says'.... Your father’s name is Shiva Sharma. Your father went abroad to beg after I conceived, but he has not arrived until today. Where does he live? There is no address to the place ...".

These passages show the facts, the husbands of the Naginis went out to earn income and the father of Nawaraj, Shiva Sharma also went out to beg. The fact justified that men went away to earn income at that time.
Sociocultural Diversity
We can find several contexts of sociocultural diversity in the period of Swosthani’s story. Under the twentieth chapter, page number 250, Sharma Brahman mentions... "O, Mother! There are also old people in the world. There are children too. There are good and evil. Some have no children. Some men are older than women. Some have no wives, some have no men, and some are rich. Some are poor. The life cycle of human beings is as the potter’s spinning wheel. In this prose, Shivasharma Brahman expresses the stratified variety and changing reality of human society. These facts present the diversification of society in the period of Swosthani Vratkatha.

Patriarchal Family arrangement
Swosthani Vratkatha reflects the facts of the patrilocal family system. The marriage events of Mahadev, Sati Devi, Nawaraj, Chandrawati indicate the practices of patrilocal system of marriage. Represent of male, Mahadev and Nawaraj brought their wife to their home. Similarly, the representation of females, Sati Devi, and Chandrawati left their birth home and went to the husband’s home after marriage.

Similarly, there seems to be a patrilineal family system at that time. The events, Vow of the son, offerings to husband, if not husband, secondly to the son, if not son, thirdly to a cultural son, etc. reflects the example of the patrilineal family system.

Ritual based Marriage Traditions
The central theme of Swosthani Vratkatha is concerned about the events of marriage. Examining the contents of the Swasthani Vratkatha seems that there was variety in the marriage forms, practices, and traditions.

Love marriage
In the twelfth chapter, page number 158 of Swosthani Vratakatha, Parvati says "I have been worshipping Shri Mahadev since childhood. If my father Himalaya gave my Kanyadan to anyone except for Mahadev, I would commit suicide and die". In this prose, the female character Parvati has been worshipping the Mahadev since her childhood to get Mahadev as her husband. If her father did not let her marry Mahadev or worshipped God would not marry her, she would commit suicide. This fact confirms the prevalence of love marriage in that period.

Marital Harmony
The contents of various chapters of Swosthani Vratkatha reflects the events of marital harmony between the husband and wife. In chapter twenty-ninth, page number 318-319 of Swosthani Vratkatha, Nagini mentions "O Lord! Where did you go? Leaving me alone for so many years. I had your vision today. I found four wonderful pieces of bread, but I cannot them alone without you. I am looking forward to you. Please come and eat pieces of bread."

Similarly, in the mentioned chapter and page, Nag mentions ".... O woman! I have got four loaves of bread just like you found. I have brought with me how can I eat without feeding you? So he gave two of the four loaves to Nagini".

The prose mentioned above has presented the respect and goodwill between husband and wife in the form of Nag and Nagini. Both Nag and Nagini do not eat bread without each other. They share the bread with each other.
Marriage with *kanyadan* (bridesmaids)

From a sociological point of view, marriage is considered a micro sociocultural institution (Farley, 199). There are various ritualistic processes within the marriage system. Except for the *kanyadan*, other ritual processes of marriage are not found in the content of Swosthani Vratkatha.

In the twelfth chapter, page number 161 of *Swosthani Vratkatha*, Himalaya Parvat says "...Parvati where did you go? I am disgraced here, Vishnu and other gods have returned without giving Kanyadaan."

Mentioned above prose shows the facts of *Kanyadan*. *Kanyadan* is the primary ritual process of the Vedic marriage system of Aryans. It was the symbol of ritual purity in Vedic Aryan society (Thapar, 2008). It was diffused from the Vedic period to the *Swosthani Vratkatha* period.

Arranged Marriage

We can find the various context of arranged marriage in *Swosthani Vratkatha*. Already discussed in the context of *Kanyadan*, it was also a part of the ritual of arrange marriage. In the twentieth chapter, page number 246 of Swosthani Vratkatha, there is a dialogue between Shivsharma and Shivbhatta Brahman "Shivsharma says Oh, Brahman! Why have you been watching me for so long? Shiva Bhatta replied that I am a Brahmin, named Shiva Bhatta. I have a daughter in my home. I am searching for a Brahmin to give *Kanyadan*. Have you any kind of information about the proper bridegroom?"

Mentioned above dialogue shows the responsibility of the father to marry the daughter. This fact indicates the prevalence of arrange marriage system at the *Swosthani Vratkatha* period.

The need of *Gotra* in Marriage Ritual

*Swosthani Vratkatha* refers to the need to know the Gotra of the bride and groom in order to perform the marriage ceremony. In the twenty-third chapter, page number 174 of *Swosthani Vratkatha*, Himalaya mentions "... O Jagadishwar, I am going to perform the *Kanyadan* of daughter to marry you at this Shubalgaan, what is your *Gotra*? I cannot do anything without pronouncing the *Gotra*.” This context indicates the importance of Gotra in marriage rituals. Marriage within the same *Gotra* is restricted in the Hindu Culture (Majumdar, 2008). They believed, *Gotra* is the symbol of a consanguineous relationship.

Mismatched Marriage

Goma is married as a child to a disabled man ten times her age. This kind of event is indicated in the twenty-fourth chapter of *Swosthani Vratkatha*. In the page number 285 of that chapter, Goma Brahmani expressed her grief at marrying an old man (seventy years) at an early age (seven years), and that she had to be without her husband at her young age due to having an elderly husband.

Briconholtz (2018) states that the period of *Swosthani Vratkatha* is related to the medieval period of Nepalese society. Sharma (2058) mentioned that early marriage and child marriage was the sociocultural characteristic of medieval Nepalese society.

Woman Makeup

We can find several events of the marriage in the Swosthani story. There seem so many makeup practices of the bride with new ornaments, clothes, etc.
In the twenty-third chapter, page number 174 of Swosthani Vratkatha following is mentioned, "Menuka brought her daughter Parvati adorned with perfume, diamonds, pearls, rubies, and jewels." According to this prose, the daughter of Menuka is decorated by several ornaments and perfume as the bride. This content indicates the makeup tradition of the bride in a marriage ceremony.

**Continuation of Creation**

Aryan culture always seems worried about the continuation of creation. These norms also influence the period of Swosthani Vratkatha. There are various contexts concerning about offspring in the Swosthani Vratkatha. In the eighteenth chapter, page number 228 of Swosthani Vratkatha, Nagini’s mention "O God! We are also sad; We have no children, we are also sinners, we have no husband too." This phrase refers to the fact that the female characters, the Naginis, became sinners due to lack of husband and offspring.

**Husband-Wife Dialogue**

Various chapters of Swosthani Vratkatha are decorated by the events of conjugal love between husband and wife. As stated on page 209 of the sixteenth chapter, "Jalandhar, who lived in a town called Antapur, joked and laughed with his wife, Vrinda. Seeing the laughing situation of Husband, Vrinda asked Jalandhar he was laughing happily. Jalandhar answered that my wife Vrinda is most beautiful than others in the world". This conversation reflects the lovely interaction between Jalandhar and Vrinda as the husband and wife.

**Husband as the God**

The contents of the chapters of Swosthani Vratakatha reflects the male-centric society with several examples. Under the twenty-first chapter, the page number of 259, Goma mentions concerning Purana and Smriti "The husband is like God for the wife. The woman would have squint if she looked at her husband, angrily. A woman disobeying her husband will be sinful, like a bitch, hateful...". In this version, the husband is as respected as God. Moreover, the wife is characterized as the person who should be obedient. It reflects the male-centric events and examples.

**Examining the Character of the Woman:**

As you read through the chapters of the Swastiani story, you can find the different contexts of the purity test for the woman.

In the twenty-third chapter, page number 172 of Swosthani Vratkatha, Mahadev says, "O Pawarti, I am not the Indra, I have come to test your character. I became thrilled to see my original form..."

This prose indicates the Vrat event of Parwati to gain Mahadev as the husband. Mahadev tried to test the purity of Parwati at that moment. This fact reflects the testing tradition of female purity and husband devotion in the period of Swosthani Vratkatha.

**Worshipped Women**

The narratives of Swosthani story seem to reflect a patriarchal family structure. Within the patriarchal sociocultural structure, we can find different levels of roles, responsibilities, and status of the female which are briefly mentioned below:
Daughter for property protection
Contents of chapters of Swosthani Vratkatha indicate the female responsibility to protect the property and resource although it is the product of the patriarchal sociocultural system. In the third chapter of Swosthani Vratkatha, Dakshaprajapati says, "O Vishnu! I do not have a son; my daughter must protect the resources and property. I will not give it, but you defeat me in the contract. You can take Kanyadan at the proper time." In this prose, due to the need for protection of parental resources, Daksha Prajapati denied daughter marriage. This fact shows the example of the right of a daughter to protect the parental property.

Homeless without a wife
In the contents of several chapters of Swosthani Vratkatha, it seems the significant role of women is for the upliftment and prosperity of the home. In the thirty-first chapters of Swosthani Vratkatha, Goma Maharani mentions, "O daughter in law! Listen to both Chandravati and Lavanyavati, without the sun, days are not bright and without the moon, nights are not beautiful, so every man does not have a good life without of wife in the house. This passage emphasizes the need for a better role of the wife for the betterment of the home at that time. It has highlighted female existence and needs.

Feature of female
Swosthani Vratkatha has discussed the good and bad qualities of different forms of female characters in different chapters. On page 249-250 of the twentieth chapter of the Swosthani Vratkatha, the daughter is described as bright as the shining sun, her face as the full moon, the hand, and leg as the trunk, the hip as the lion... In this passage, the qualities and character of a woman are symbolically compared to the sun, moon, lion, duck, etc.

Powerful Goddess
We can see the several contexts of the dominant role of female characters in the chapters of Swosthani Vratkatha. God requests goddesses for support in the war. According to the contents of the seventh chapter of Swosthani Vratkatha, the army of God Shiva was supported by Goddess Mahakali to defeated demon Tarakasur.

Lord Vishnu Captured by Vrinda:
The contents of the various chapters of the Swasthani Vratkatha indicate the effort of God to deceive the female character Vrinda; God disguised himself as a man. In the seventeenth chapter, Page number 214 of Swosthani Vratkatha following is mentioned, "When Vrinda thought, she realized that Vishnu had come as the disguised form of Jalandhar to deceive. Now I have to do some tricks and start gesturing to Vishnu and saying - O Swami, do you believe me when I say something? Disguised form of Jalandhar, Vishnu promised to obey. Moreover, Vrinda locked Vishnu in a room and went to another house". According to this passage, the female character, Vrinda has succeeded to deceive male character Vishnu.

CONCLUSION
Swosthani Vratkatha has a kind of story which reflected the pastoral and agricultural production systems of the medieval period of Nepal. Practices of private ownership, income, and distribution of resources were established at that agro-based sociocultural structure. These facts show the analogy to the evolutionary insight of Herbert Spencer. Patriarchal norms and values guided family and marriage systems as the unit of social structure at that period. However, women had a significant role in protecting the parental property and resources, in supporting the gods in the war, to manage...
the home and family life, at that patriarchal social structure. These facts differ from than patriarchal theoretical explanation which is explained by Walbi (1990).

REFERENCES