
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Oral Tradition to Feminist Adaptation: Rewriting *Yogmaya* in Nepali Literature

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| ABSTRACT

This paper examines Neelam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* (2018) as an act of feminist adaptation that reclaims silenced memory and reimagines the legacy of *Yogmaya Neupane* (1860–1941). Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and André Lefevere's concept of rewriting, alongside South Asian feminist perspectives from Spivak, Mohanty, and Rege, the study argues that *Yogmaya* transforms oral baani, petitions, and collective memory into feminist historiography. Rather than replicating biography, Niharika's novel adapts fragments into a narrative of resistance, negotiating between fidelity and invention. The analysis demonstrates how adaptation in South Asia functions as feminist praxis—rewriting silence into voice and situating Nepali women's struggles within global debates.

| KEYWORDS

Adaptation Studies; Feminist Reclamation; Nepali Literature; *Yogmaya Neupane*; South Asian Feminism; Gender and Resistance.

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1. Introduction

The paper engages directly with the theme "Challenges in Adaptation: Interplay of Tradition and Innovation," foregrounding the dynamic tension that defines adaptation studies today. The discipline has shifted beyond questions of fidelity to the "original" and now recognizes adaptation as a multi-layered cultural, ideological, and aesthetic practice. Adaptation is not simply a derivative gesture but a transformative act that allows past narratives to be reinterpreted in order to resonate with contemporary audiences. Linda Hutcheon emphasizes that adaptation is "an act of reinterpretation and re-creation" rather than a mechanical reproduction of a source (8). This definition insists that adaptation is simultaneously product and process—anchored in historical traditions yet constantly re-imagined in light of shifting political, cultural, and theoretical contexts of reception.

This reconceptualization is particularly resonant in South Asian literary and cultural traditions, where storytelling has historically been fluid, oral, and intermedial. Folk narratives, religious recitations, and women's songs have often intersected with written texts and performative practices, creating dynamic circuits of memory and meaning. Adaptation in such contexts cannot be confined to literary transposition—say, from novel to film—but often involves the reworking of cultural memory into new artistic forms that speak across temporal and generational divides. In South Asia, adaptation is frequently an act of recovery and reclamation, particularly of marginalized figures excluded from official historiography. In this sense, adaptation intersects deeply with feminist literary criticism, which similarly seeks to inscribe erased or silenced women into cultural narratives and collective memory.

It is within this intellectual and cultural climate that Neelam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* (2018) emerges as a compelling case study of adaptation as feminist praxis. The novel reconstructs the life of Yogmaya Neupane (1860–1941), an ascetic, poet, and radical reformer from Bhojpur in eastern Nepal. Yogmaya composed *baani*—oral verses in Bhojpuri and Nepali—that circulated within her community and carried her critique of caste hierarchy, patriarchal oppression, and political corruption. Yet her interventions were systematically marginalized by both patriarchal memory and state historiography under the autocratic Rana regime. Her petitions demanding justice for the poor, her leadership of women in collective dissent, and her climactic act of *jal samadhi* (self-immersion) into the Arun River with 68 people in total, that is, Yogmaya plus 67 of her followers in 1941, were either erased from official archives or dismissed as religious fanaticism.

Niharika's novel adapts these fragmented oral traditions, scattered references, and silences into a coherent feminist narrative. It does not attempt to function as a straightforward biography, nor does it claim archival authority. Instead, it adopts a mode of literary reimagining that balances fidelity to cultural memory with creative innovation, offering a feminist historiography attentive to both affect and politics. In this way, *Yogmaya* demonstrates how adaptation is not simply about authenticity or representation but also about political responsibility: the responsibility of rewriting silences, of giving voice to subaltern women, and of recovering memory as resistance.

Adaptation here thus becomes more than a literary exercise; it is an ethical and feminist intervention. By transforming fragments of oral tradition into an integrated narrative of agency and resistance, Niharika reclaims *Yogmaya*'s legacy for contemporary feminist struggles in Nepal and South Asia. The novel underscores how adaptation can translate suppressed memory into a living discourse that challenges patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and political exclusion. At the same time, it resists mythologization, insisting that *Yogmaya* is not a saintly figure frozen in history but a radical woman whose political and spiritual dissent continues to resonate.

This paper, therefore, argues that *Yogmaya* exemplifies adaptation as feminist reclamation. The novel demonstrates how oral traditions, fragmented memories, and silenced histories can be adapted into narratives that foreground women's agency, expose systemic oppression, and challenge the erasures of both official historiography and patriarchal cultural memory. By situating Niharika's work within global adaptation theory and South Asian feminist thought, this study contends that adaptation functions simultaneously as a creative process and a political intervention. The central thesis is that *Yogmaya* reconfigures silence into speech, tradition into resistance, and memory into historiography, illustrating how adaptation itself becomes a feminist strategy of survival, reclamation, and transformation.

2. Adaptation: From Product to Process

Adaptation studies, once dominated by debates over fidelity to source texts, have undergone a profound conceptual transformation in recent decades. Early scholarship often evaluated adaptations in terms of loss, dilution, or betrayal, implicitly privileging the "original" as the authentic text and relegating adaptations to derivative status. Thomas Leitch critiques this fidelity discourse as both pervasive and inadequate, noting that "fidelity has been the most frequently invoked yet least critically examined yardstick for adaptation" (14), a standard that reduces adaptation to a failed copy of an unattainable original. By tethering adaptations to sameness, fidelity discourse undermines their cultural and creative value, obscuring the ways in which they function as dynamic cultural products.

In contrast, Linda Hutcheon offers a reconceptualization that has become central to contemporary theory. For her, adaptation is "repetition without replication" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 7), simultaneously a product and a process. An adaptation may transpose a work into another medium or context, but it also constitutes an interpretive act in itself. The significance of adaptation lies not in its loyalty to details but in its ability to generate new meanings for new audiences. In the case of *Yogmaya*, fidelity is not measured by precise historical documentation but by preserving the resistant spirit of *Yogmaya*'s voice. By adapting oral fragments and silences into a feminist literary narrative, Neelam Karki Niharika produces a work that resonates with twenty-first-century feminist readers in Nepal and beyond.

André Lefevere extends this discussion by insisting that adaptation must be understood as rewriting, always shaped by ideology and power. "All acts of rewriting," he argues, whether translation, criticism, or historiography, are "governed by ideological and institutional forces" (9). Rewriting is never neutral; it reflects the cultural priorities of its historical moment. Seen in this light, *Yogmaya* is not merely a retelling of a silenced life but a deliberate feminist rewriting that contests the patriarchal erasures of history. By rewriting *Yogmaya* as a feminist icon, Niharika foregrounds the ideological stakes of adaptation—showing how cultural memory can be reshaped into a narrative of resistance.

Kamilla Elliott complicates this discourse by outlining six conceptual models of adaptation: psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational, and trumping (220). Each highlights different facets of how source and adaptation interact—from faithful embodiment to radical transformation. *Yogmaya* arguably functions both as a ventriloquist, in that it gives voice to a figure silenced by history, and as incarnational, embodying historical memory in literary form. These dual strategies illustrate that adaptation is not monolithic but polyphonic, operating through layered modes of engagement with sources.

Julie Sanders, in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, offers yet another distinction by separating adaptation—close engagements with a source text—from appropriation, which involves more radical re-situations of the original within new ideological frameworks (26). Niharika's *Yogmaya* occupies a liminal position between these categories. On one hand, it adapts oral traditions and scattered memory fragments; on the other, it appropriates them into a feminist historiography that reconfigures *Yogmaya* from a religious ascetic into a political dissenter. This dual movement demonstrates that adaptation, particularly in feminist contexts, must be read as both preservation and transformation.

When these insights are placed in conversation with South Asian feminist thought, the processual view of adaptation acquires sharper political significance. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (287), highlights the near impossibility of recovering marginalized voices without mediation. Every act of representation risks distortion even as it enables articulation. *Yogmaya* embodies this paradox: the novel mediates scattered fragments of memory but simultaneously creates conditions for the subaltern voice to emerge in literary form. Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques Western feminist universalism and urges attention to "context-specific cartographies of struggle" (40). For Mohanty, women's resistance must be understood in relation to particular cultural and historical conditions. *Yogmaya*'s defiance—through her ascetic practices, poetic *baani*, and eventual *jal samadhi*—must therefore be read as culturally specific feminist praxis, not as a universal model of emancipation.

Sharmila Rege adds another critical dimension through her "Dalit feminist standpoint," which insists on analyzing caste and gender together (39). While *Yogmaya* herself came from a Brahmin background, Rege's insight is instructive: any feminist adaptation of South Asian history must remain attentive to the overlapping exclusions of caste and patriarchy. *Yogmaya*'s activism, while radical in its resistance to patriarchy, also reveals the need to interrogate how privilege and marginality co-exist in feminist figures. Uma Chakravarti's theorization of "Brahmanical patriarchy" complements this view, situating gender subordination within the intertwined logics of caste and patriarchal control (34). These perspectives sharpen the stakes of adaptation, reminding us that rewriting *Yogmaya* requires grappling with both what is recovered and what remains absent.

Read through these frameworks, Niharika's novel emerges as not only a creative re-making, in Hutcheon's sense, but also a feminist rewriting in Lefevere's terms—transforming silences into voices of resistance. By adapting fragments of oral tradition into narrative form, the novel demonstrates how adaptation can translate local struggles into globally legible stories without erasing their specificity. Fidelity, in this sense, is not about repeating events but about preserving political urgency; innovation is not betrayal but the necessary reframing of silenced histories into narratives of empowerment.

Positioning *Yogmaya* within this combined framework illustrates how adaptation itself becomes feminist praxis. The novel rewrites fragmented memory into a coherent narrative, making space for a subaltern woman to “speak” across historical silences. It demonstrates that adaptation can be both aesthetic and political, both creative process and cultural intervention. By negotiating between tradition and innovation, between orality and textuality, Niharika’s work reveals that adaptation is not simply about representation but about reclamation.

In conclusion, adaptation must be read as a process that is simultaneously creative, ideological, and feminist. Theories by Hutcheon, Lefevere, Elliott, and Sanders, when placed alongside South Asian feminist insights from Spivak, Mohanty, Rege, and Chakravarti, illuminate how *Yogmaya* negotiates the interplay between tradition and innovation. It is precisely in this negotiation that adaptation transforms from an aesthetic technique into a feminist intervention—rewriting silence into speech, absence into presence, and memory into resistance.

3. *Yogmaya Neupane: Tradition, Memory, and Silence*

Yogmaya Neupane’s early life embodies the entanglement of patriarchal authority and silenced female agency. Married as a child and confined within structures of kinship and obligation, she articulates her grief in a lament: “My father gave me this tear... The square courtyard of my father’s house was full of tears” (77). The courtyard, traditionally imagined as a protective space of family honor, here becomes a prison saturated with sorrow. Chandra Talpade Mohanty conceptualizes such laments as “cartographies of struggle,” mapping women’s grief onto systemic structures of oppression (79). *Yogmaya*’s lament is not only autobiographical but diagnostic, exposing the affective economy of patriarchal power in which women’s suffering becomes normalized. Kumari Jayawardena similarly underscores how early marriages in South Asia consigned women to lives structured by patriarchal imperatives rather than individual choice (103). In Niharika’s novel, such sorrow is adapted into generational testimony, transforming a personal lament into a collective indictment. The conclusion is that oral laments, when reinscribed into literary form, preserve private pain as cultural critique, offering fertile ground for feminist adaptation.

Her renunciation of domestic life marks another pivotal rupture with patriarchal constraints. The novel recalls: “I took out my dhoti and choli hanging from the eaves... The courtyard was like a dark cave” (72). Clothing here becomes more than fabric; it symbolizes the prescribed gender roles that tether women to domesticity. The “dark cave” metaphor highlights the suffocation of a life circumscribed by custom. Robert Stam’s concept of dialogic intertextuality suggests that such images draw from cultural codes but generate new meanings in feminist contexts (64). Niharika dramatizes renunciation not simply as spiritual withdrawal but as a conscious rejection of patriarchal authority. Critics have interpreted this as a psychological awakening, a refusal of enclosure, and a step toward self-determination. The conclusion is that leaving home in *Yogmaya* becomes a feminist adaptation of asceticism, where silence is translated into agency and the body becomes the site of political refusal.

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Niharika also dramatizes *Yogmaya*’s transformation by blending the domestic with the political:

“*Yogmaya* portrays the ongoing transformation in favor of Nepali women—those once confined to darkness and treated as objects. The narrative reflects a shifting reality where change is beginning to take root for women’s dignity and agency. This scene captures that turning point. Around 1982, a fisherman boy came to summon her. Though busy planting, she was offered fresh corn by a devotee. As she roasted it,

word arrived that the chiefs on horseback were approaching. Understanding the urgency, she set aside her food, wrapped Dukhuna in a blanket, and hurried toward the mountain, where leaders such as Narendra Bahadur Basnet, Ganj Bahadur, Tek Bahadur, and Ratna Bahadur had already gathered. The refrain spread among the people: "The maids enjoyed the country, the king earned religion! The king made religion, and he scattered a lot of money!" (192)

This episode illustrates how ordinary acts like roasting corn become entangled with extraordinary moments of political urgency. The transition from hearth to mountain, from food preparation to collective mobilization, dramatizes how women's domestic lives are inseparable from broader struggles against state and patriarchal power. Julie Sanders's distinction between adaptation and appropriation is especially useful here: while Niharika adapts oral fragments of memory, she also appropriates them into a feminist historiography that redefines domestic detail as political symbolism (26). In this sense, the corn-roasting scene exemplifies how everyday gestures, often ignored by official history, are reimagined as moments of transformation.

Equally significant are Yogmaya's petitions to the Rana rulers, which position her as a political actor silenced by official history. The novel recalls her demand: "Give justice to the poor, stop the tyranny of landlords and priests... this is not dharma but corruption" (201). These petitions document her capacity to critique the collusion between religious authority and state power. André Lefevere's theory of rewriting explains how such appeals are erased when they threaten dominant ideologies (9). Critics such as Ambika Rimal (2012) have reduced Yogmaya to a saintly reformer, muting the radical edge of her demands. Niharika resists this domestication by amplifying her petitions as central to the narrative, thereby transforming fragmented documents into feminist testimony. The conclusion is that adaptation reconstructs suppressed political dissent and reclaims silenced voices for cultural memory.

Her leadership among women highlights the intersection of oral tradition, community, and feminist memory. The novel observes: "Women from distant villages gathered to hear Yogmaya's words, carrying her verses back to their homes" (214). Oral circulation functioned as an alternative archive, bypassing official structures and enabling women to sustain a collective consciousness of dissent. Gayatri Spivak's question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—underscores the difficulty of recovering voices denied institutional recognition (287). Yet Yogmaya's *baani* did "speak," carried by women across villages in ways that resisted state silencing. Nepali feminist historiography has often remembered women's struggles only through the mediation of male reformers, rendering women's leadership invisible. Niharika counters this trend, portraying Yogmaya as a catalyst whose oral verses became portable archives of resistance. The conclusion is that women's collectivity itself becomes an adaptive form of memory, where song and speech carry feminist critique across geographies.

Yogmaya's confrontation with *sati* further exposes the brutality of patriarchal custom and the violence of historical silence. The novel recounts: "They grabbed her with strong hands, tore her clothes and threw her on the pyre" (157). The visceral imagery refuses to sanitize the violence often muted in official records. Spivak interprets *sati* as a ritual in which women's voices are obliterated and their deaths staged as a patriarchal spectacle (287). Uma Chakravarti reminds us that even after legal prohibition, cultural coercion sustained its symbolic persistence (43). By staging this scene, Niharika dramatizes the continuity of patriarchal violence, refusing to allow the horror of *sati* to vanish into abstraction. The conclusion is that adaptation here functions as counter-memory, bringing suppressed violence to visibility and exposing the erasures that followed.

Finally, the novel foregrounds Yogmaya's systematic erasure from official historiography. The narrator observes: "Official documents, male-dominated religious texts, and political records ignore her contributions" (21). Lefevere's insight that institutions control cultural memory through rewriting (9) is starkly visible in this exclusion. Ambika Rimal's representation of Yogmaya as a spiritual recluse exemplifies how historiography domesticates radical women into harmless figures. By contrast, Niharika situates her as a revolutionary who unsettled both the state and patriarchy. Oral testimonies, though fragmented, are reimagined as raw material for adaptation. Far from being deficiencies, these fragments invite feminist rewriting. The conclusion is that Niharika's novel transforms silence into

speech, restoring erased histories to collective consciousness and positioning adaptation as an instrument of feminist historiography.

4. Niharika's *Yogmaya* as Feminist Adaptation

Nilam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* (2018) illustrates how adaptation can function as feminist reclamation by transforming fragments of oral *baani*, scattered petitions, and women's collective memories into a narrative that secures *Yogmaya*'s resistant voice for contemporary readers. Adaptation here is not passive reproduction but active re-imagining, where tradition and innovation intersect to foreground silenced histories and reinscribe them as feminist testimony. In this sense, Niharika's novel demonstrates how adaptation, when framed through feminist praxis, reworks silence into speech and absence into presence.

One of the novel's most striking strategies is its adaptation of *Yogmaya*'s *baani* into literary dialogue. The text notes: "Her words were not for the gods alone; they struck the ears of landlords, priests, and rulers" (233). Linda Hutcheon reminds us that adaptation is "repetition without replication," a creative act that renews meaning in new contexts (7). By re-embedding oral verse within prose narrative, Niharika demonstrates how oral fragments can be preserved through transformation rather than replication. Shrestha (2021) argues that *Yogmaya*'s poetic voice resonates with South Asian women mystics such as Mirabai and Lal Ded, who used devotional verse as vehicles of defiance against patriarchal authority. Niharika affirms this continuity but moves further, adapting *Yogmaya*'s verses into a sustained political critique of state and caste oppression. The conclusion is that oral poetry, once ephemeral and local, becomes, in adaptation, a feminist historiography of resistance.

Equally transformative is the novel's reframing of asceticism. Traditionally regarded as religious withdrawal, asceticism is here reinterpreted as feminist refusal. In one scene, *Yogmaya* declares: "I left behind the ornaments of a wife; now I wear the freedom of one who bows to none" (245). This striking statement dramatizes renunciation not as resignation but as refusal of patriarchal subjugation. Robert Stam's dialogic model of adaptation explains how inherited cultural codes, such as ascetic withdrawal, can be re-signified in new ideological contexts (64). Karki (2022) observes that this transformation recalls *Bhakti* saints who redefined devotion as resistance, particularly for women negotiating restrictive traditions. Niharika politicizes asceticism, aligning it with resistance rather than submission, and in doing so demonstrates that adaptation can redefine cultural practices into feminist strategies. The conclusion is that *Yogmaya*'s renunciation, reimagined through adaptation, becomes both a spiritual liberation and a political act.

The novel also foregrounds *Yogmaya*'s leadership of women, portraying her as the nucleus of collective resistance. The narrator recalls: "From Bhojpur to Dhankuta, women walked miles to hear *Yogmaya* speak, carrying her verses back as seeds for their villages" (267). Julie Sanders distinguishes between adaptation, which implies close engagement with sources, and appropriation, which entails ideological reframing (26). Niharika does both: she adapts oral memory into literary form while appropriating it into a feminist historiography that emphasizes women's collective agency. Critics of Nepali literary history have often noted that women's activism has been remembered primarily through male reformers, leaving female leadership obscured. Niharika counters this tendency, adapting ephemeral oral gatherings into enduring written memory. The conclusion is that adaptation here transforms women's collectivity into portable archives of feminist resistance.

The dramatization of *Yogmaya*'s petitions to the state illustrates adaptation as rewriting of political dissent. One petition proclaims: "Your laws feed the landlords and starve the poor; your dharma is corruption, not justice" (201). André Lefevere emphasizes that rewriting is never neutral but always shaped by ideological priorities (Lefevere 9). Rai (2023) contends that such feminist appropriations of history function as correctives to patriarchal silences. By amplifying *Yogmaya*'s petitions, archival fragments often dismissed or erased, and Niharika adapts forgotten documents into feminist testimony. The conclusion is that adaptation ensures that dissent once omitted from the official record now circulates as collective memory and political critique.

The climactic protest, the jal samadhi of 1941, is perhaps the novel's most radical adaptation. Rather than narrating it as despair, Niharika reframes the event as revolutionary defiance. The novel describes: "The river took them, but their silence thundered louder than the king's army" (312). This scene resonates with Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, where the protagonist's stripped body becomes a site of defiance rather than shame. Both texts adapt cultural memory into feminist testimony by transforming victimhood into resistance. Rai (2023) suggests that such portrayals reclaim women's bodies as sites of autonomy in contexts where patriarchal law sought to control them. Niharika aligns with this perspective, reframing *Yogmaya's* collective death not as erasure but as political speech. The conclusion is that adaptation converts historical silence into a radical archive, redefining martyrdom as feminist praxis.

Comparative contexts further enrich this reading. Like Lal Ded in Kashmir or Mirabai in Rajasthan, *Yogmaya* used spiritual verse to critique patriarchal authority. Unlike them, however, her dissent directly confronted state power, making her both a mystic and a political dissenter. In global feminist adaptation, figures such as Phoolan Devi in India or Taslima Nasrin in Bangladesh have similarly been rewritten in literature and film as cultural symbols of defiance. Niharika's *Yogmaya* participates in this transnational practice of adaptation, transforming local memory into a feminist narrative that resonates across borders. The conclusion is that adaptation is not only a cultural translation but also a form of feminist solidarity, where women's struggles speak to one another across time and geography.

Ultimately, Niharika's *Yogmaya* exemplifies adaptation as both process and praxis. It is faithful not to archival precision but to the spirit of dissent. Its creative innovations ensure that *Yogmaya's* voice, once silenced by historiography, now continues to speak to present struggles. By weaving oral tradition, collective memory, and feminist critique into narrative, the novel reclaims a marginalized figure and repositions her as a cultural ancestor of Nepali feminist resistance. The conclusion is that adaptation here is feminist historiography, transforming fragments of memory into enduring testimony of empowerment.

5. Challenges in Adapting *Yogmaya*

Adapting the fragmented memory of *Yogmaya Neupane* into a coherent feminist narrative inevitably raises methodological, political, and ethical challenges. The process confronts questions of fidelity versus invention, reverence versus resistance, and archival silence versus oral testimony. These challenges are not incidental; they lie at the heart of adaptation studies, where the tension between tradition and innovation demands constant negotiation.

One striking challenge concerns the persistence of sati despite its legal ban. Niharika dramatizes the issue through the observation: "Even after the rulers forbade it, the fires still burned; the law was silent when families forced girls into the flames" (162–165). Julie Sanders distinguishes between adaptation and appropriation, noting that the latter reframes history through ideological critique (26). Mishra (2020) cautions, however, that fictionalized depictions of rituals like sati risk sensationalizing trauma, reducing historical suffering to spectacle. Yet Niharika's narrative strategy is neither exploitative nor ornamental. By emphasizing the continuity between state prohibition and cultural coercion, she affirms that adaptation must sometimes invent details to expose truths concealed by archival silence. The conclusion here is that fidelity should not be defined by factual replication but by political honesty to women's lived experiences, ensuring that adaptation articulates the systemic persistence of oppression.

A second challenge emerges from the tension between hagiography and resistance. The novel remarks: "Disciples called her a living goddess, yet she refused their worship, demanding instead that they fight corruption and injustice" (276). Kamilla Elliott's "incarnational model" of adaptation describes how historical figures are re-embodied in new cultural forms (220). Yet this process risks sanctifying subaltern women, inadvertently stripping them of their radical political edge. Several Nepali critics have warned that depicting *Yogmaya* as a saint risks transforming her into a divine abstraction, thereby neutralizing her dissent. Niharika navigates this tension by acknowledging reverence while foregrounding *Yogmaya's* rejection of divinity in favor of ethical and political action.

The conclusion is that feminist adaptation must resist deifying women in order to preserve their agency and radical critique within history.

The problem of oral versus archival authority adds another layer of complexity. The narrator candidly observes: "Her memory lingers not in state records but in the whispers of women and the songs of villages" (489). André Lefevere reminds us that rewriting is governed by ideological institutions that determine what enters the canon (9). Ambika Rimal (2012), for instance, has shown how Yogmaya was remembered as an ascetic mystic rather than as a political dissenter, erasing her most radical interventions. Niharika deliberately counters this tendency by privileging oral testimony over official documentation, treating women's collective memory as a counter-archive. The conclusion is that adaptation here functions as resistance to institutional erasure, asserting that women's voices, however fragmented, offer more authenticity than state-sanctioned silence.

The petitions Yogmaya addressed to the state also highlight the risks of fictionalizing history. At one point, she is made to declare: "The king's throne is drenched in the tears of widows and peasants" (203). Robert Stam's concept of dialogism suggests that adaptation is always a negotiation between historical fragments and new political meanings (64). Rai (2023) argues that feminist rewriting of archival fragments can risk invention, yet such invention is necessary to restore urgency and make women's struggles legible in contemporary contexts. Niharika echoes this approach, dramatizing petitions not as literal records but as ethical testimony. The conclusion is that adaptation invents dialogue in order to represent what history muted, turning invention itself into an ethical necessity.

The most difficult challenge lies in representing Yogmaya's *jal samadhi*. Niharika frames it as "a storm of silence that drowned the arrogance of rulers" (318). Linda Hutcheon's view of adaptation as both product and process reminds us that reimagining such acts involves profound interpretive responsibility (8). Critics have debated whether representing collective suicide as resistance risks romanticizing death or reinforcing women's victimization. Yet, by emphasizing Yogmaya's agency, Niharika reframes the act as radical autonomy rather than despair. Rai (2023) situates this within a broader feminist tradition exemplified by Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, where women's bodies become sites of resistance rather than objects of violation. The conclusion is that narrativizing martyrdom demands balance: avoiding hagiographic glorification while affirming the political agency embedded in sacrifice.

Finally, adaptation must confront the political risk of mythologization. By dramatizing Yogmaya's life in novel form, Niharika exposes herself to the critique that she has constructed a legend rather than history. Lefevere's reminder that all rewriting is ideologically inflected clarifies this risk (9). Yet Niharika's ideological project is transparent: to restore a silenced woman to cultural and political memory through feminist historiography. The conclusion is that adaptation is never neutral; it must always negotiate between invention and fidelity, reverence and critique, tradition and innovation. Its greatest challenge is to transform absence into presence without reducing complexity into myth.

6. Conclusion

Neelam Karki Niharika's *Yogmaya* demonstrates how adaptation functions not merely as an aesthetic practice but as a feminist praxis that navigates the difficult terrain between tradition and innovation. By transforming fragmented *baani*, suppressed petitions, and women's collective memory into a sustained literary narrative, the novel exemplifies adaptation as an active process that simultaneously preserves cultural traditions and innovates through feminist historiography. In this sense, the work aligns directly with the theme "Challenges in Adaptation: Interplay of Tradition and Innovation," for it dramatizes how adaptation operates as a site where inherited memory meets contemporary re-imagination.

Tradition, in *Yogmaya*, is embodied in oral verse, ascetic spirituality, and women's gatherings practices that circulated at the margins of dominant history but preserved alternative cultural memory. Innovation emerges in Niharika's decision to fictionalize and dramatize these fragments into a feminist narrative of resistance. The novel does not simply replicate Yogmaya's biography, nor does it reduce her to the saintly archetype often imposed on women reformers. Instead, it reinterprets her life as a narrative of political agency and feminist defiance,

transforming silence into a voice that reverberates across temporal and cultural boundaries. Adaptation, in this context, becomes reclamation, an act of rewriting history so that marginalized women's voices re-enter collective consciousness.

The challenges inherent in this adaptation, navigating fidelity versus invention, resisting hagiography, privileging oral memory over archival silence underscore the political stakes of rewriting. As André Lefevere argues, all acts of rewriting are ideological, and Niharika's intervention is unapologetically feminist in its agenda. By reclaiming Yogmaya as both ascetic visionary and political dissenter, the novel resists patriarchal domestication and situates her within a continuum of South Asian feminist struggle.

Placed in a broader comparative frame, Yogmaya resonates with feminist adaptations that recover silenced figures, such as Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi or the retellings of mystics like Mirabai and Lal Ded. Like these works, Niharika's novel adapts tradition not for preservation alone but for transformation, using innovation as a mode of survival, solidarity, and feminist reclamation. For Nepali literature, Yogmaya is a landmark that redefines adaptation as a tool of feminist historiography. For international adaptation studies, it provides a South Asian case study that illustrates how adaptation can serve simultaneously as cultural translation and political intervention.

The conclusion is clear: adaptation, when understood as both process and feminist praxis, is never neutral. It is an act of resistance that bridges tradition and innovation, rewriting silence into testimony and absence into presence. In reimagining Yogmaya's life, Niharika ensures that her silence is not forgotten but re-heard, not erased but re-inscribed, offering both Nepali and global readers a model of adaptation as transformation where literature becomes a space for feminist memory, critique, and empowerment.

This study contributes to three intersecting fields. First, it expands adaptation studies by illustrating how adaptation in South Asia extends beyond intermedial transfers to include the transformation of oral tradition and cultural memory into feminist historiography. Second, it advances South Asian feminist criticism by demonstrating how adaptation can recover silenced figures like Yogmaya and reinterpret them as political agents, thereby resisting patriarchal and historiographical erasures. Finally, it enriches Nepali literary scholarship by positioning Yogmaya within both national and transnational frameworks, showing that Nepali literature participates in global feminist debates while retaining cultural specificity. Taken together, these interventions show that adaptation is not merely aesthetic but also political: a method of rewriting silence into voice and absence into presence.

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