

Governmentality, Democracy, and Liberalism: Desire in Samrat Upadhyay's 'The Guru of Love'

PUSHPA ACHARYA*

Abstract. In Samrat Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love* (2003), the political and the personal intersect, with the novel as a genre exposing how they are interwoven. In the Nepali-American novelist Upadhyay's novel, democracy and liberalism operate through the management and redirection of desires, instead of constraining them. The novel itself, as a genre, becomes the canvas for orchestrating this transformative process, engaging both characters and readers. Set against the backdrop of Nepal in the global south, *The Guru of Love* challenges conventional notions, suggesting that democracy's efficacy does not hinge on industrialisation and education alone. Instead, democracy itself can serve as a potent political tool for nurturing a citizenry that favours such politics. As this novel shows, the key tenet of liberal and capitalist governance lies in the augmentation and regulation of the individual's desires. Upadhyay's novel is a testament to the celebration of individualism and shows the workings of capitalist and liberal deregulation as a mechanism for managing and channelling desires. It portrays how these political ideologies shape and mould the individual's personal aspirations and society's political paradigms.

Keywords: Anglophone; desire; democracy; governmentality; liberalism; Nepali American novel

Introduction

It's very easy for you to sit up there on that cushion and preach on the illusions that our desires create. But the truth is this, that most ordinary people like me want to learn how to live and fulfill our desires, not treat them as if they were stepchildren. (Upadhyay 2001: 182)

Liberal politics and capitalism in modern times encourage the principle of learning "how to live and fulfill" desire. At the heart of liberal democracy is the principle of rearranging and re-educating desire, with the market economy

* Pushpa Acharya, University of Toronto, Canada, pushpa.acharya@gmail.com

aiming at its deregulation. Unlike tyrannies and autocracies, democratic government and the liberal market aim to free, reassemble, administer, and govern desire with reduced coercion and less direct control. However, one must pose the question of whether they do so in the interests of all citizens and consumers or only some of them. Nepali American novelist Samrat Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love* (2003) narrates how democracy functions and how globalised Western economic rationality governs desire in a non-Western space like Nepal where the neoliberal economic shakeup started in the late 1980s. The nation transitioned from a closed society towards a free market economy in 1990 when the People's Movement, *Jana-Āndolan*, forced the king to end his autocratic Panchayat regime, founded after the coup of 1960, and restore multiparty parliamentary democracy. The novel, set in Kathmandu during the democratic uprising of 1990, exposes how desire unsettles both individual selves and political institutions. The narratives interweave *eros* with *polis*.

In Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love*, overpowering political, economic, and erotic desires burst open to threaten the political regime of tyrannical power and the family life of the protagonist, Ramchandra Acharya, who is a middle-class, high school mathematics teacher. Both Ramchandra and the Nepali state must try to understand such desires and then either control or find a way to manage them. Saying "no" to desires in order to control them is the method the autocratic Panchayat regime practices, which Ramchandra's father-in-law, Mr Pandey, supports. Liberal democracy manages desires as expressions of the individual self-interest of all citizens, at least theoretically. Ramchandra's wife, Goma, recognises his desires by saying "yes" to them as she asks Ramchandra to make the object of desire, his private student, Malati, a part of their household by inviting her to live with them. As the country transitions to democracy, the strange arrangement saves Ramchandra's family and leaves it intact, although his relationship with his children and wife does undergo a change.

However, it is a man's private desire that the novel interweaves with the nation's political desire. While Ramchandra continues his extra-marital relationship, he tries to stop his daughter from having an affair and suspects that his wife may have had an affair before their marriage. This difference – that the man can have an affair, but the wife cannot – is sexist and based on notions of female chastity and honour. Ramchandra's masculinity, defined by traditional patriarchal notions about relationships, comes under pressure because the economic capacity to build a house in the city defines the notion of manhood. Goma, who knows what she wants from the time she chose to marry him, has to find a way to govern her household. Her home presents a tension: it is a model of the state but it is also the space where the state cannot always reach. Upadhyay's novel *The Guru of Love* portrays something messier, more

qualified but also something that is only possible because of the validation of desire in the democratic ideal.

In this context, the idea of governance in liberal democracies is relevant to understand the idea of the management of desire. Government manages property as John Locke writes “that the increase of Lands, and the right employing of them is the great Art of Government” (2016: 23). In this article, I argue and demonstrate that governance extends to the management not only of territory but also of individuals’ desires: liberal democracy frees desire and the market economy increases desire. Autocratic governance relies on the controlling and disciplining of desire, on generating and maintaining a hierarchical order, and on making people obey. Democracy offers a model of recognition of desire, which when it is in a relationship with capitalism generates a model for the (de)regulation and management of desire. A non-coercive nudge to manage desire is the motto of democracies around the world, including Nepal. Democracies around the world, when tied with market rationality, have given individuals freedom to channel their desire, but democracies may not always deliver justice to the marginalised, to the people of oppressed castes, indigenous groups, classes, or races. Democracy, if it tries to go beyond the rationality of the market economy, can mean a process of thinking through and acting together, of ‘educating, agitating, and organising’¹ that encourages people to govern themselves, an idea that needs an enunciation other than the one discussed here.

The liberal subject in the West

The relationship between the desiring subject and the sovereign and the government has transformed in the West in the last few centuries. Reading Thomas Hobbes and Rousseau on the one hand and Bentham, Cesare Beccaria, and Adam Smith on the other, Michel Foucault observes the relationship between the sovereign and desire (2007: 73). Tracing Foucault’s concept of desire in *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject*, Miguel de Beistegui defines it as “a key assemblage of knowledge and power through which we are constituted as subjects, and through which we learn to recognize and govern ourselves”, rather than “a monolithic and univocal phenomenon,

¹ Bhimrao Ambedkar, the chairman of the Indian constitution drafting committee of 1947 and a campaigner against discrimination against the untouchable castes, had formed an activist group, *Vahishkrta Hitakāriṇī Sabhā* (The Group for the Wellbeing of the Excluded) in 1924, and the motto of the group read: “Educate, Agitate, Organise” (Kadam 1991: 80–81).

but a multifaceted reality, organized according to different configurations or regimes, all of which have a specific history and singular traits” (2018: 8). By saying “yes” to personal desire, liberal democracy transforms it into the public interest under normative rule. One of the instruments of modern liberal governmentality is the management of individual desire and public interest in relationship with each other. In *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith writes that self-interest is not bad or morally wrong, and is in fact the driver of society, because it creates something of the highest value for the public, and in the market, balances itself with its own checks (1976: 477). This rationality of the market in liberal governmentality integrates desires.

The philosophy of economic liberalism assumes that financial interest is a more tamed passion than other passions, so the interest-governed world is more constant and predictable and easier to govern. Since capitalism has created wars between nations and classes, the Great Depression, mass unemployment, instability and injustice, the principle that “self-interest [is] a great way of escaping the impact of evil passions” requires, as Amartya Sen argues, a reconsideration (2013: xii). Albert Hirschman makes an argument that capitalism justified politics as it transformed meaner passions such as avarice, lust, and vainglory into tamer passions such as interest, self-interest, monetary interest, class interest, and national interest (2013: 32). The use of interests functions as the countervailing strategy of market capitalism and liberal politics, which aim to harness passions rather than suppress them, to regulate passions rather than control them. Democracy transforms the tyrant’s interest into the group interests of the citizens. Yet, there is a contradiction in democracy, which Giorgio Agamben points out: democracy refers to both political theology and public economy, “a way of constituting the body politic” and “a technique of governing” (2011: 1). Michel Foucault refers to the latter as governmentality.

As seen in these Western thinkers’ writing, liberal democracy presumes that desire constitutes the self, and the self develops the technologies to govern desire. Anglophone Nepali novels demonstrate the management of desire as a model of governance in Nepal. But one must note that it is not only desire, but also the English language that has been a means of governance in South Asia.

The collective desire for freedom

In Upadhyay’s *The Guru of Love*, Kathmandu is a city of exploding desires that rupture the existing order of everyday life. The political desire for democracy,

which the supporters of the autocratic regime call anarchy, spills into the streets when people organise mass protests:

The city continued to explode into riots. Angry citizens taking to the streets were tear-gassed or fired on by the police. Men and women died. A student's death in Jhapa, a district bordering India to the east, infuriated college students across the country, and the campuses in Kathmandu became battlegrounds for the police and the students. Nor did Ramchandra's school remain untouched. (Upadhyay 2003: 240)

The streets of Kathmandu and other cities in Nepal are the political stage for expressing the people's desire for freedom. The novel documents the increasing democratic marches as a site of the ideological struggle between autocracy and democracy. The novel further records the events and political environment of late 1989 and 1990: The Indian economic blockade against Nepal, the relationship between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Nepal's King Birendra souring over the "purchase of military hardware from China, not to mention the way Nepal now required Indian workers to obtain permits", and the mistreatment of the people from Nepal's plains, the Madhes, in Kathmandu (Upadhyay 2003: 19). The banned Nepali Congress Party and an alliance of several communist parties in 1990 chose February 18 to start a joint mass movement against the Panchayat autocracy as it was the day when the Rana regime had fallen in 1950, the time when Nepal had a decade of democratic experiment.

As the people come out in anger, defying authority, their subdued desire for democracy and their search for human dignity find a political form. Images from international democratic movements capture the imagination of the public:

As the residents of Kathmandu became more vocal in their criticism of the ruling one-party Panchayat establishment, the sense of defiance, long subdued, finally began to permeate the streets and alleys, where people openly discussed how Nepal needed radical reforms, like the ones that had brought down the Berlin Wall. The image of the lone Chinese man facing tanks in Tiananmen Square, shown on television and in newspapers, had excited people's imagination. (Upadhyay 2003:19–20)

The narrative of the novel develops along with the increasing crescendo of the people's marches in the streets against autocracy. The major characters of the novel deal with their personal relationships in the shadow of national politics. Set against larger public events, their stories are yet intensely private.

For Ramchandra, the democratic movement is a moment of rebellion in his life as he thinks about his relationship with his father-in-law: “Ramchandra walked into the house, wondering whether the country was indeed plunging into a revolution, or whether it would whimper and die down when faced with the government’s wrath. What did Mr Pandey make of this latest development? He must be fuming, Ramchandra thought with some relish” (Upadhyay 2003: 195). Ramchandra finds himself rebelling against his father-in-law all the time, although he is not always ready to confront him directly: “What most annoyed Ramchandra was Mr Pandey’s unwavering praise of the Ranas, tyrants who had amassed an obscene amount of wealth in their ridiculous English-style palaces while the rest of their countrymen wore tattered clothes. It was one of these Rana palaces that Mr Pandey had inherited from his grandfather” (Upadhyay 2003: 38). The house Mr Pandey has inherited is in the affluent area in the city and represents the pride of the elite, displayed in its facade or in its alliterative name, Pandey Palace.

The conflict between Ramchandra and his father-in-law, Mr Pandey, reflects the struggle between two political ideologies. For Mr Pandey, the people demanding democracy are fools and the ruling elites know best for the country. A beneficiary of the king’s autocratic regime, Mr Pandey practices this ideology in his private life. He does not respect opinions that are different: “He [Ramchandra] didn’t want to get into a political discussion with his father-in-law, who was not interested in anyone else’s opinions, let alone those of his failure of a son-in-law” (Upadhyay 2003: 38). He is a traditional member of the elite, living in the capital city of Nepal and enjoying prestige and power. He represents the supporters of the ideology of the autocratic regime. Ramchandra questions his father-in-law: “How can it be the best system if so many people are unhappy?” (Upadhyay 2003: 45). Ramchandra argues that people know what they want: “I don’t think they are fools, ... There’s much wrong with the Panchayat system.’ He was pleased by his boldness” (Upadhyay 2003: 45). Ramchandra’s boldness comes after seeing the masses that are protesting in the streets against the Panchayat system. This mass movement changes the power relationship between Ramchandra and Mr Pandey.

A house named desire

The democratic aspirations in politics manifest the economic ambitions of the Nepalis. On April 8, 1990, when the king ended the one-party Panchayat system and declared a multiparty democratic system, Ramchandra’s son Rakesh asks him, “What does it mean for us, Ba? /.../ Can we have a house of our own now?” (Upadhyay 2003: 281–282). Although Ramchandra answers

his son that democracy gives freedom but not a house, he remains upbeat and hopeful that political freedom will create economic “opportunities” as “[things] are changing in this country” (Upadhyay 2003: 283–284). Indeed, in the novel’s short epilogue, which describes the lives of the characters ten years later, Ramchandra owns a house built with his savings and Goma’s money inherited from her parents. Goma also runs a small business sewing and tailoring, a dream she has harboured for years.

A house represents the realm of the private as opposed to the public. The sense of ownership and belonging reinforce the sense of the individual as distinct from the citizen. But at the same time, a house makes a home, which is an image of a nation. The private home is where the state cannot reach, instead, the home in itself is a version of the state. Therefore, the next sections will discuss how the two models of governing the home (*oikos*) – one of repression and control, the other of recognition and management – also offer a model of governing the state (*polis*).

Ramchandra’s family harbours dream of owning a house for many years, best illustrated by a drawing that Ramchandra’s daughter Sanu made when she was younger. Her painting has two houses: the mansion of her grandparents and a small house with broken windows for her family. The first one is labelled Pandey Palace in capital letters with the drawings of her grandparents standing beside it: “Their faces were clearly unhappy; drooping curves were drawn as their lips. Above Grandfather’s head she’d written, ‘The Guru of Money’” (Upadhyay 2003: 200–201). The second one, labelled “The Acharya Hut”, has four members of her own family with smiling faces, and above Ramchandra’s head, she has written “The Guru of Love” (Upadhyay 2003: 201). Her painting connects desire for money with desire for love. As the painting denotes, a house is both a material thing and a mental concept. It reveals one’s desire, indicates class and belonging, and forms a sense of self and pride.

While riding a three-wheeler tempo in the city, Ramchandra, like many other residents of Kathmandu, derides migrants from the other parts of the country, the crowds of workers, and the squatters, whose “too many hands prodded, probed, and fed on the innards of Kathmandu. Soon only its carcass would remain” (Upadhyay 2003: 18). They are the people who do not own land or houses in the city, so do not belong there. However, Ramchandra belongs to one of those groups. He remembers that his widowed mother had brought him to Kathmandu from a village in central Nepal when he was still young: “But – Ramchandra was bitter when he thought of it – the city was not his. He didn’t own a house; he didn’t even own a piece of land” (*ibid.*). There is no difference between him, a private boarding school teacher, and the tempo driver, “who probably had to rush passengers to various destinations all day and then go to

the small room in a squalid part of the city where his wife and kids waited for him” (ibid.). Buying a piece of land and building a house will make him feel that he belongs there in the city and will give him a sense of self, which is a realization that makes him sympathise with the people living in their rented rooms and apartments.

Goma’s parents often pressure Ramchandra, saying that he should build a house in the city as soon as possible: “‘You must build a house, Ramchandra babu,’ they said to him at family gatherings. ‘Without a house of one’s own in this city, it doesn’t matter what you do’” (Upadhyay 2003: 40). The house is the burden of desire that all middle-class residents in Kathmandu carry, while the elites and aristocrats live in the imaginary nostalgia for the old power and prestige represented by their house. John Gray calls the upper-caste Chhetri houses on the periphery of Kathmandu the “archetechnē”, that is, the houses are also “technē” in the Heideggerian sense that they reveal as well as conceal embodied practices (2011: 104). While Gray looks at the notions like purity and impurity and the cosmological world view, the house in *The Guru of Love* reveals and conceals the consumer desires of urban middle-class subjects.

A “beautiful Chinese-brick house” owned by Goma’s sister, Nalini, and her husband, Harish, who is a richer businessman, stands as a particular type of idealised house which the city dwellers, including Ramchandra’s family, admire and would like to possess (Upadhyay 2003: 33). Ramchandra, who has some structural privileges as a university-educated middle-class upper-caste man living in the capital city, aspires to work at a better-paying private English boarding school, buy a piece of land, build a modern house, own a television set and a vehicle, and send his son to St Xavier School, one of the English-medium schools where the urban elite send their children. Along with the dream of a house, the middle-class desires include the idea of gaining education and going abroad: one of Ramchandra’s tuition students, Kamal, who is a bureaucrat’s son, thinks of going abroad after finishing high school. Malati, who is an unmarried mother of a small baby, thinks of improving her life with education: “That’s why I want to pass the S.L.C., so that I can go to college, get a good job, move to a place of my own” (Upadhyay 2003: 142). She has dreams of middle-class living, and education can help her achieve them.

However, a desire for a house also generates anxiety for the middle class. As Andrew Nelson points out, the ownership of a house produces “social capital”, a sense of honour or prestige, *ijjat*, yet, ironically, once one builds a modern house in the peripheral lands of the core city, social capital comes under threat because a house needs constant maintenance, which generates further “anxiety, debt, and isolation” (2017: 59). Writing about *The Guru of Love*, Nelson points out that “[like] a fashion-conscious youth in [Mark] Liechty’s ethnography,

many of Upadhyay's characters express and live tales related to the perceived moral threats of Kathmandu's changing physical and social landscape" (2012: 19). Mark Liechty, writing about the middle class in Kathmandu in the 1990s, has noted the role of the economic desire of "an emerging middle class [that] attempts to selectively weld a local past to a global future" (2002: 246). The two economic narratives that define the Nepali middle class are the narratives of progress or development, and of consumerism. Such narratives make middle-class youths "locate modernity in distant times (the future) and spaces (the 'developed world')," a situation which generates "spatial and temporal contradictions of 'Third World' modernity" (Liechty 2002: 246). It is in this contradiction that the characters of *The Guru of Love* find their subjectivity constructed. Their selves are formed by the new normalisation of economic desires, which include studying in private English boarding schools, going abroad to America or Europe, or buying land in Kathmandu and building a house.

At the same time, owning a house brings safety as well as a release from shame and humiliation. When Ramchandra visits Malati's place, he remembers how his mother and he as a young boy lived in several rented rooms, which also made his mother a victim of sexual harassment.

Her [Malati's] closet had reminded Ramchandra of the myriad of tiny cramped rooms, sometimes no bigger than bathrooms, where he and his mother had lived, sometimes in a relative's home, other times in a rented house in a neighborhood full of drunks and prostitutes and open drains smelling of urine and feces. In one room, the landlord had pressed himself upon his mother, and she had not screamed for the neighbors because she knew they'd think she'd invited it on herself. Ramchandra was twelve then; he'd climbed on the landlord's back, pummeling him, as tears ran down his cheeks. (Upadhyay 2003: 25)

With the pain of the people without a house and the harassment that he witnessed, Ramchandra's desire for a house, therefore, means something more than mere consumer desire. A house is a place of safety, specially associated with a woman's safe space.

Ramchandra's story and contradictions represent the journey of many other Nepalis to the city. The desire for a house often entails a person moving from a village to Kathmandu, studying or taking part in economic activity, trying to save money while living in a rented apartment, and harbouring a deep desire to be a person with wealth manifested by the ownership of property. Building a house in Kathmandu is a matter of self-interest. It is process of self-formation that characterises Nepali modernity in the age of consumerism.

Kāma: Erotic desire as repressive and productive

In Nepali, the word *kāma* refers to sexual passion, *eros*, in particular, and desire in general as self-interest. Upadhyay's novel weaves *kāma*, erotic desire, with economic desire, social pressures, and patriarchal ideology. While the narrative brings together both sexual desire and desire as self-interest into a singular expression, this reading makes a distinction between them. Desire represented by *kāma* is very different from consumer desire. *The Guru of Love* portrays the relationships between a wife, a husband, and his lover. From this perspective, desire is to constantly lack something; the city, full of desires, is full of these absences. Stories and desires are like halls of mirrors where one image is reflected in another and where one image imitates another. Since desire does not contain its own fulfilment, but what Lacan calls a lack, it is always replaced by another as if it were a chain of signifiers without a final signified. The desired object is always a supplement. Desire is allogical since it is a chain in which one replaces the other. However, I argue that the novel weaves a narrative of produced desires: there are many new desires, *kāma* in a generic sense, produced by the market, liberalisation, and democracy. Desire in this context is also economic self-interest.

A bicycle that Ramchandra's son Rakesh wants as a gift for the major Nepali festival Dashain, is an object of consumer desire. Ramchandra, who is not sure whether he can afford it, substitutes an offer to tell a story for Rakesh's demand for a bicycle. His act and the story both reveal the nature of desire: the object can be replaced but the desire is never fulfilled. In Ramchandra's story, a girl named Malati – the same as his student – grows up without her father, who has gone abroad for work, so she has a longing for him as she hopes he will come back with jewellery for her. Instead, the richest merchant of the village wants to marry her and brings jewellery, which makes her mother happy. But Malati is not happy because the “merchant [is] her father's age” and his eyes glint when he looks at her (Upadhyay 2003: 14–15). Ramchandra leaves the story incomplete but returns to it almost 190 pages later in the novel, with a twist in the story: on the day of the wedding, a young man on a horse arrives and stops the marriage, claiming that he is the girl's father. When she addresses the young man as father, he replies, “I was just trying to show some authority. I am a prince from far away. I have come to marry you” (Upadhyay 2003: 201–202). When Ramchandra's daughter groans that the story “sounds unbelievable”, Ramchandra tells her: “Stories are supposed to be unbelievable” (Upadhyay 2003: 202). As in his unbelievable story, Ramchandra's life unfolds driven by a longing for a house and a family, a longing already structured by his class, society, and politics. Then he craves Malati, who has a baby from her former lover, a taxi driver, and who is invited to live with Ramchandra and with his

family. But it ends with a twist when the taxi driver returns to marry her and take care of the baby.

For Ramchandra, desires, emotions, and the inability to discover their roots create anxiety, so he often walks in the streets with “his mind numb with anxiety” (Upadhyay 2003: 61). While Ramchandra experiences political and economic anxieties, he also feels anxiety because of his erotic desires. Ramchandra, from the beginning of his marriage, wonders whether his wife has had an affair or sex before she married him. Ramchandra’s anxieties emerge from the patriarchal view on relationships, from the class difference between him and his wife’s family, and from his own middle-class aspirations. When Mr and Mrs Pandey, members of the aristocratic elite of Kathmandu, send a proposal to marry their daughter to a poor student who is trying to finish his studies and make a living by teaching private tuition classes, Ramchandra and his mother, like many men and families in Nepal and in South Asia, wonder whether the bride has had past affairs: “Ramchandra knew Goma had been a virgin the first time they made love, but he had wondered whether her parents were avoiding some sort of scandal by marrying her off to a poor student” (Upadhyay 2003: 41). While Ramchandra does not find anything in Goma’s past, he remains suspicious. Despite living together for many years, he cannot figure out why Goma married him. Ramchandra is a victim of patriarchal ideology and misses the obvious explanation that Goma loves him and therefore marries him.

Ramchandra’s desire for Malati emerges from that powerlessness and anxiety. He feels powerless as he does not have a house or land in Kathmandu. That transforms when he is with Malati, and he feels powerful: “the presence of her body so close to his, and their being alone in these pristine surroundings, free to do with each other what they wanted, also aroused in him a sensation of soaring, of power” (Upadhyay 2003: 194). The obligation he has towards Malati is voluntary and based on Ramchandra’s erotic desire. For Ramchandra it is a relationship of preference driven by instinctual forces, unlike his relationship with Goma, which is bound by class, social norms, patriarchy, a sense of duty, and love. Ramchandra becomes trapped in social, psychological, and economic pressures that define his self. When family feels like an obligation, a romantic lover gives Ramchandra a sense of transgression, excitement, and freedom.

Discipline and control

The Guru of Love portrays two methods that humans use to handle desire: control through disciplining and management through recognition.² Various forms of social, cultural, economic, and psychological mechanisms discipline the self of an individual to create the subjectivities that can function under a particular system. As society generates the technologies of control, it assigns specific subject positions to individuals. The control of desire is the method of an autocracy such as Panchayat rule, whereas recognising, identifying, and letting desires play out are ways of managing them in a liberal society.

The controlling of desire also manifests itself as the practices of celibacy that Ramchandra's neighbour, Mr Sharma, advocates, or as Ramchandra's effort to discipline his teenage daughter's romantic desires. The idea of controlling desire intrinsically anticipates that desire can go out of control. Mr Sharma, a widower who rents an apartment in the same building, believes that celibacy, willpower, and self-control make him free from his sexual urges: "It's all a matter of willpower. Self-control. It's a question of bringing your mind to focus on something and exerting all your energy to bear upon it.' He went on to recite some lines from the Vedas to illustrate his point, and Ramchandra's mind wandered toward Malati" (Upadhyay 2003: 54). Later in the novel, Mr Sharma tries to touch and kiss a young girl who comes to the house's courtyard to fetch water. Mr Sharma's story of repression and control leads to an uncontrollable act of violence. Control in this case is both hypocrisy and a source of violence. One must read Mr Sharma's sexual control and its outburst as a symbolic enactment of the controlled politics of the Panchayat regime, manufactured by marrying the rhetoric of the traditional Hindu religious concepts of the state with the mechanisms of modern autocratic or dictatorial states.

Family generates a form of control. Ramchandra gets angry when he discovers that one of his male private students and his daughter Sanu are meeting, flirting, and writing love letters:

"If no one controls her, what will happen if something goes wrong with her and the boy?" Ramchandra said to Goma. "You don't trust your daughter?" "It's not a question of trust. It's her age. I've seen how she looks at him. Can you guarantee that she'll control herself?" "Guarantee," Goma said. "I couldn't guarantee that you'd control yourself, and you're an adult." (Upadhyay 2003: 262)

² The idea of control and recognition appears in Michel Foucault's four volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. He writes about them in Christian contexts.

Goma points out the relationship between desire and control. Ramchandra, however, wants to discipline his daughter's desire, while he himself cannot control his own.

The city is another site of desire that can be controlled or managed. The city and its streets are under a curfew as the regime tries to control the political protests, since the idea of the Panchayat regime is based on the notion of controlling political activity. Since the autocratic state sees freedom as anarchic, anti-traditional, and dangerous, it limits desires, citizens, their mobility, and the spaces they move around in. The principal of Ramchandra's school, Bandana Miss, who wants a tight control and disciplining of the students, sees the people's demand for democracy as anarchy. Bandana Miss, like Ramchandra's father-in-law, supports the king's rule and argues that the people in a country like Nepal need controlled freedom and controlled elections. That is, she supports the idea that people vote for the National Panchayat Party, the one party under the King's dictatorship, and see the king as the enlightened figure who knows how to rule while the *demos* do not. In other words, the king who wields traditional religious authority should rule.

Bandana Miss sends her son to the US but argues that the same type of democratic system based on free choice is not suitable for the common Nepalis: "We need control,' Bandana Miss said. 'Otherwise we'll end up like America, where people shoot each other on the streets' /.../ 'Sending your son to America for education is one thing. Agreeing with its philosophy is another'" (Upadhyay 2003: 241). She represents the ideas that the ruling elites held in Nepal. On the one hand, she makes it a matter of prestige that her son would live in the US, gain an education, and gain material prosperity. At the same time, democracy means anarchy for her because Nepal as a Hindu land will be polluted by the opening up of politics.

Recognition and management

Ramchandra lives with the desires that pervade society. But the problem he has is associated with his sense of self-respect and self-esteem, and the solution that Goma offers is that of self-interest and self-care. What Goma suggests and the path the country takes with the practice of democracy are open experiments. Goma offers a solution: let the emotions play out on their own, while the nation is ready to practice a liberal democracy. Goma wants Ramchandra to understand his desire, and she does so by inviting Malati to live with the family. Goma offers an idea of self-regulation of desire by letting it play out. The primary problem she deals with in the beginning and that Ramchandra fails to understand is what his desire is: "Ramchandra was filled with a longing that he

couldn't describe, nor did he feel the need to" (Upadhyay 2003: 276). Goma suggests that to treat the desire, one needs to understand what the desire is. She suggests that both Malati and Ramchandra would benefit from the strange arrangement as Malati would have some place to stay and possibly complete her study and Ramchandra would understand himself and his craving better: "And you need help of another kind. You need to find out what it is you crave. So this is the only way" (Upadhyay 2003: 166). When Ramchandra and Malati are together they feel that they realise a sense of being together, being someone. "What do you feel about me?' he asked softly. She took his hand in hers. 'When I'm with you, I feel that I am really someone.' 'You are really someone, even without me'" (Upadhyay 2003: 141). For Malati it is perhaps the recognition of the self, but it is more so for Ramchandra. Ramchandra goes through a process in which the desire for Malati is not forbidden but is regulated and managed. That helps the intensity of the desire to subside and become manageable: "There was a sense of relief, as though an elephant has stopped pressing on his chest, but he was anxious, and his throat was parched by some craving he couldn't identify. It wasn't associated with Malati; he didn't ache for her body as he used to" (Upadhyay 2003: 234). This process, which Goma suggests, is a method of recognition and management of desire.

Self-regulation and self-government are essential for democracy and capitalism. Upadhyay's novel suggests that to recognise a desire, to let it play out, and to discover a method for its self-governance is a liberal way of dealing with it. Desires go through regulation, management, and governance. The management of sexual and erotic desire, of the bodily desire for food, are economic-political practices. Liberal politics focuses on finding techniques for managing and regulating them rather than controlling them. Carnal desires need to be recognised and governed. The other dimension of liberal politics is self-care. But self-care begins only with the recognition of the self and its interests as friends. As Jacques Derrida indicates in *The Politics of Friendship*, friendship functions as a political mechanism that gives humans their sense of self-respect and self-esteem (2005: 197–198). Through the interpersonal relationship friends recognise each other's needs and selves. Since one cannot get rid of desires, one can manage them, which is also in the idea of the origin of the state that Hobbes proposes. People come together to form the state in order to manage passions and self-interests which can harm each other. By educating and cultivating desire, the state manages society. Law, constitution, and democratic practices are the mechanisms that can achieve the goal of cultivating, promoting, and educating self-love and self-interest, which in turn generate self-respect and self-esteem.

It is in this sense that Goma knows what her object of desire is and what she wants from the beginning. When Ramchandra, as a graduate student, gave private tuition to Goma's sister, Nalini, Goma saw him, liked him, and wanted to marry him, although her parents had opposed her idea. Towards the end of the novel Goma tells Ramchandra that she has chosen to marry him because she loves him. She stays with him because of her love and because she knows what she wants, not because he is the best man among men:

Ramchandra sat still, hardly breathing. Then he slid off the chair and knelt in front of Goma. He held her hand, and a great sob escaped from him. She reached out and tousled his hair, then drew him close to her breast. "I am nothing compared to you, Goma," he said. "Shhhh." "I don't deserve you." "I've never idealized you. I just knew what I wanted." "And I betrayed you." She held him, and he remained kneeling before her, his face buried in her chest. A breeze circled around them. (Upadhyay 2003: 280)

This is a radical moment in the novel – it is a woman who has realised the self-interest in the marriage. She continues the relationship not because of coercion, social bondage, or helplessness but because of the precise recognition of wanting someone or something. She is ready to help him by inviting Malati to live with them. When Goma says, "I've never idealized you. I just knew what I wanted", she redefines the marital relationship. She is associated with him out of her freedom to act on desire, not out of any idealisation, tradition, or compulsion.

Like the principle behind Goma's management of desire and like the self-regulating market defined by the *laissez-faire* economy, governmental practices create nudges and norms that regulate everyday conduct and values. Under this idea of management, rationality governs private life, market capitalism, and the state. In the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, the global proliferation of the non-governmental organisations developed with a similar rationale of empowerment, development, and management.

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