

Gender Roles in the Nepali Film *Bulbul*: A Discourse Analysis

A Thesis

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Submitted by

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DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled " GENDER ROLES IN THE NEPALI FILM *BULBUL*: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS" submitted to the department of Sociology, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara is my original work. It has been prepared in the format as specified by the committee. The report has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree.

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RECOMMENDATION LETTER

This is to certify that Mr. Nawa Bijaya Prakash Shrestha has completed this dissertation entitled " GENDER ROLES IN THE NEPALI FILM *BULBUL: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS*" under my supervision and guidance. I therefore recommend and forward this thesis for final approval and acceptance by the thesis committee.

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ABSTRACT

Cinema is an art form that reflects society and encourages people to see the world in a different light. It is a kind of artistic expression of human society. It is also a mass media, such as providing information, education, entertainment, and cultural transmission. Films are well-liked, and their audio-visual nature gives the viewers a wide range of societal effect, including the development of social and gender standards. A lot of research has been done on movies, but this study has analyzed the gender representation in the film *Bulbul*, which was nominated for the 92nd Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film category. In the film, a woman plays the lead role, while a male plays the supporting one. Using discourse analysis, the focus of the research has been on the feminist features within the film that dictated how women are portrayed in these theatres in connection to modern Nepali culture. The representations of gender in movies influence our perceptions of what a man or a woman is and should be, assuming social constructivism. The findings of the study reveal that women in Nepali film are portrayed in stereotyped ways. Their feelings and ideals are rarely heard by the male characters in the films, which is an indelible feature of Nepali culture. Despite the fact that the protagonist in the film *Bulbul* is portrayed as a self-employed woman, her position is as stereotyped as the women in other films featuring female protagonists. Due to the lack of opposition to inequity and injustice, the male dominance is prominent in the film. To conclude, the film tells the story of a woman as it includes the female protagonist, whose positions is not equal, and is never given the same weight as its male counterparts. The findings show that the characters still adhere to patriarchal ideals, albeit some oppose them occasionally. The outcome, on the other hand, is rarely favorable.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The history of cinema in Nepal goes back to 1951 when the first ever made Nepali feature film titled *Satya Harishchandra* (The Holy Harishchandra) was produced from Kolkata, India and directed by D.B.Pariyar. *Aama* (mother) was the first Nepali film produced in Nepal in 1964 by the Information Department of the Government of Nepal, directed by Hira Singh Khatri. At the beginning of 1966, another Nepali film *Maitighar*(The Birth Home of a Girl) was produced for the first time under a private banner- Sumonanjali Films Pvt. Ltd, directed by B.S. Thapa, *Kumari* (The Living Goddess) in 1977, *Sindoor*(A Traditional Red Vermillion Powder Worn by Married Hindu Women) in 1980(Ajeet, 2007). Those films were based on the story of Nepali women and their position in the Nepali society which portrayed women as a lead character.

The Oscar Award has been the platform to showcase the socio-cultural and other aspects of a country through the film to the whole world. The Academy awards, often known as the Oscars, are a set of awards given out in the film industry for artistic and technical achievement. They are considered one of the most prestigious and significant prizes in the entertainment industry. The Academy Award for Best International Feature Film (formerly known as Best Foreign Language Film) is one of the Academy Awards given out yearly by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, California (AMPAS). It is given to a feature-length motion picture made outside of the United States having a dialogue track that is primarily non-English(Rao, 2021). Since 1999, Nepali films were considered eligible for submission for the ‘Oscar Academy Awards’ to contend for the category of “The Academy Award for Best International Feature Film”. *Himalaya* was the only movie nominated for contesting at the 72nd Academy Awards. Through this movie, the socio-cultural life of the people living in the Himalayas of Nepal was communicated among the global audiences. Since then, eleven more films have been submitted for the same category(IMDb, 2018).

The term ‘gender’ refers to the socially constructed traits of women, men, girls and boys. This constitutes the norms, behaviors, and roles that come with being a man, woman, girl, or a boy, as well as interpersonal interactions. As a social

construct, gender is a dynamic trait that varies from society to society and can change over time (WHO, n.d.). Media plays an important role in presenting the identities, social norms, values and culture in relation to gender. Its portrayal of men and women has been a research concern for many researchers worldwide for a long (Gurung, 2016). Gender inequality in media content exists through both the under-representation and mis-representation of women. Thus it can contribute to perpetuate the gender inequalities in the society (*Gender and Media – FPU Knowledge & Quality*, n.d.). It is also argued that media and films play an important role in challenging or reinforcing the patriarchal values that exist in our society. Thus, media contributes to normalization of certain values and norms; they establish what is normal for men and women in terms of their behavior, expression and actions in shaping the perception. Every form of media conveys different ideas about men and women, with many of them perpetuating unrealistic and stereotypical portrayals (Wood, 1994).

The Nepali society is embedded with patriarchal values where girls are discriminated against their sex and gender. Men dominate the public sphere and institutions and women are disproportionately underrepresented in the media, the cabinet and the civil service. Yet, the winds of change have blown across Nepal's gender landscape since 1996. This started with the feminization of the military, then of politics, and the impact is trickling down into other sectors, including the news media (Koirala, 2018). One of the key causes of gender imbalance in Nepal is the social notion that "males are stronger than females." This perception hinders social transformation and progress. This belief was shared by people of all ethnic backgrounds, indicating the need for more research into the corrective measures to address the societal reasons of gender imbalance (Pokharel, 2019). The cultural transformation is also one of the reasons for the gender inequality. The discriminatory behavior, which people exhibit could be the manifestation of internalized patriarchy too. This manifestation of internalized patriarchy is visible among the filmmakers all over the world through the films they produce. The objectification of women, reinforcing harmful gender norms have been found in the films all over the world; the closest inspiration that the Nepali film industry can take is from Bollywood. Though there have been attempts to educate and influence societies by embedding woman narratives and characterization in the films, most of the products still remain problematic.

In its role as a socio-cultural role player, Nepali film has contributed to the current discussion about women's rights in Nepal. The sheer influence of Bollywood and western films can be related to one of the main grounds of controversy around the representation of women in Nepali cinema. Nepali films have steadily promoted modernization, westernization, urbanization, and women's emancipation over the last two decades, particularly in terms of gender portrayal. The creation of this new representational space comes with its own set of difficulties. Many Nepali filmmakers have been accused of promoting the objectification of women in their films by using gratuitous sexualization.

This research intends to add to the existing body of knowledge by evaluating the representation of gender in relation to Nepali society in popular cinema that has been submitted to the Nepali film industry. By characterizing the characters in the film, the film, this research intends to qualitatively apply the theories of social constructivism, representation analysis, and content analysis to analyze the film *Bulbul*, notably looking at how men and women are depicted.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Various aspects of society are portrayed in the films from the perspective of an individual, a family, a community or a nation. The gender perspective is reflected in many Nepali films especially for a woman as an individual, a daughter, an independent woman, a housewife, a girlfriend, a mother and so on. But most of the films lack the women's self and hover around the rigid socio-cultural values, norms and taboos. Many adolescents or even adults find an idol of life from within the cinema. But when these films portray women as merely an object like item dancers, over sexualized beings, eye candies or the victims of violence, those notions will propagate from generations to generations.

As cinema is a tool of mass media for both entertainment and learning, this research evidence for the viewers and stakeholders of cinema regarding the importance of accurate representation of women, their agency and capabilities rather than the stereotypical roles they have been playing as a part of society, then and now. This study provides an insight and an opportunity of reflection to the script writers, directors, producers and all other relevant stakeholders on their role in women representation in the cinema and integration of gender perspective in their work.

The need for this study came from the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of gender, particularly women, in Nepali films. The goal of this

study is to see how far reel women in Nepali cinema differ from real women in Nepali society.

1.3. Research question

- a) How are the issues of gender represented in the movie?
- b) How have the characters in the film adhered to the traditional gender roles assigned by the patriarchal structure?
- c) How are the women characters have been portrayed in the film?
- d) How do the characteristics of the characters confront conservative gender roles? If not, in what ways are they not doing so?

1.4. Objectives

1.4.1. General objective:

To explore the representations of Gender with respect to the Nepali society in *Bulbul* which was submitted to the 92nd Oscar Academy Awards for the Best Film in Foreign Language category from Nepal.

1.4.2. Specific objectives:

- a) To find out how the characters in the film have adhered to the traditional gender roles assigned by the patriarchal structure.
- b) To explore how the women characters have been portrayed in the film.
- c) To analyze whether the characters in the film have challenged the conventional gender roles or not.

1.5. Significance of the study

In the world cinema, the characters on screen in world cinema create a universe that allows viewers to immerse themselves in experiences that often linger with them long after the credits have rolled. As a professional in film direction with an undergraduate degree in film studies, in my opinion, study of the underlying meanings of films provides a profound and meaningful comprehension of society's inherent belief systems.

I grew up watching a variety of Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nepali films. I've come to respect the way many Nepali filmmakers are gradually transitioning from portraying women as mere carriers of Nepali ideologies to portraying them as individuals with agency and human rights as the construction of Nepali films has changed over the years in terms of character representation, settings, and visual strategies. Female characters are now frequently placed in novel circumstances and assigned new roles. As a result, Nepali filmmakers are breaking new ground by

moving away from traditional depictions of female characters as oppressed by patriarchal structures and confined by the conservative Nepali belief systems.

Gender and media experts have long been interested in examining how media portrays women and developing measures to combat gender stereotyping in media. It is critical to investigate the gender identities and social interactions depicted in the films. This study has provided understanding on stereotypical gender traits prevalent in modern society. Therefore, this study has chosen a film with a female protagonist and also one of the national award-winning films in Nepal. On the other hand, this movie is acclaimed by critics and also commercially successful. In addition, it reflects the social and psychological aspect of a struggling woman whose husband is a labor migrant, which is very relevant to the contemporary society of Nepal.

1.6. Limitation of the study

The scope of this study is to explore the gender perspective that has been integrated in the Nepali cinema and is nominated for an Academy Award. Only one film is selected because it was based on the contemporary Nepali society. As the films that go to the Oscars generally represent the social-cultural and political realities of the country, no other commercial film has been selected for the study.

The study also faces the research strategy limitation as it follows the discourse analysis that mostly depends on the researcher's readings and interpretation of media texts. Thus, the observer bias cannot be denied in this study. Many scenes, signs, visuals, and character attributes might have been missed while watching the films, simply because I did not find them problematic, due to my background, experiences and gender. The theoretical framework provided me with an analytical gaze, enabling me to analyze the film as a text. I have viewed the film through theoretical lenses rather than my personal views. Thus, I have tried to produce a neutral and well-informed analysis.

The number of films chosen for the study is another limitation of the study. Thus, the research cannot be generalized. Furthermore, it focuses merely on the films submitted for the Oscar award, whereas the Nepali film industry consists of miscellaneous genres, which do not necessarily portray women in the similar manner.

1.7. Organization of the study

The research is divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter is about the background information on the Nepali cinema and societal gap identification and justification for the need of the study. The second chapter deals with the different

theories and concepts in order to give reason for the relevance of the study. In this case theories concerning social constructivism, representation, semiotics, discourse and gender are used. The third chapter consists of methodological aspects of the research i.e., qualitative research method, using discourse analysis to support the choice of method for this study. A discourse analysis of the movie, *Bulbul* is conducted in order to answer our research questions. The fourth chapter consists of a brief conclusion drawn from the discussion of the results. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes with the recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical reviews

This study is conducted from the feminist perspective in terms of gender roles in the Nepali film *Bulbul*, using discourse analysis as its research method.

2.1.2. The feminist film theory

The feminist film theory is a theory that discusses women's participation and roles in practically every aspect of their communities and society. In general, it is concerned with film criticism arising from the second-wave feminism, which is based on sociological theories that focus on how the public examines the role of women in a particular film on television or cinema screens (Smelik, 2016).

Feminist studies in connection to media, or more especially cinema studies, provide a forum for exploring the influence that shifting feminist viewpoints have had on the depiction of female characters in films. As previously stated, there is a significant relationship between feminist cinema studies and media. In many ways, feminist cinema studies have aided the emancipation of women. Mulvey (1989), one of the well-known feminist film critics, claims that cinema depicts women as objects utilized for men's enjoyment. Women in the film industry played an exhibitionist role, since they were there to be seen by male filmmakers and male audiences, portraying them as aesthetically seductive but inert in conduct. Mulvey goes on to say that many of the gender issues in films stem from the fact that we live in a patriarchal culture. The fear is that a passive audience would be persuaded by such a portrayal of reality, in which males establish the bulk of the rules, defining social roles, customs, and norms to suit their hegemonic interests. As a result, individuals will attempt to portraying this reality, replicating these images and beliefs and in the social activities and so guaranteeing male domination over women's reproduction.

New knowledge is generated by employing films as theoretical instruments to rethink certain stereotypes and systems. Simultaneously, cultures are able to critically examine themselves through diverse portrayals in films. Technical aspects of the films also permit beliefs to be disseminated to audiences all over the world. Imaginary worlds are created by cinematic representations. Perceptions, on the other hand, are what this fictitious universe gives its significance. Instead of seeing women as things, we may see them as people. It is imperative to accept that film depictions of women

are fictional and should not be interpreted as actual dominance, with power concentrated in the hands of those with the most political, economic, and social resources.

2.2. Empirical reviews

Several studies have been conducted about the representation of gender roles in the Hollywood and Bollywood films. These studies have been summarized in the following sub-headings.

2.2.1. Gender studies on contemporary cinema

There has been a lot of research done on the issues of women in the industry, and it is well recognized that women are underrepresented in various forms of media (Collins, 2011). According to research published in 2015 by San Diego State University's Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, only 12% of Hollywood films presented women as the protagonist. It means that over seventy percent of the characters with dialogues were men and women were afforded such roles are merely thirty percent. According to the survey, there has been no progress in terms of gender balance, and the industry remains gender biased. A work-related function was also identified by 61 percent of men and 34 percent of women in the same poll. Only 31% of men were described as having a personal life objective, such as becoming a parent, spouse, or wife, while 58 percent of women were defined as having a personal life role(Lauzen, 2016). This suggests that men were more likely to be seen in professional settings, whilst women were more likely to be seen in household settings. The survey indicates that "gender stereotypes are still prevalent in Hollywood's highest-grossing films."

The findings of "it's a man's (celluloid) world" indicated a link between the number of females behind the camera and the number of females on the screen. According to the survey, male protagonists appear in 87 percent of films directed by and written by men, 9 percent of films have male/female ensembles, and only 4% of films feature female protagonists. When a female director/writer is engaged, however, 39 percent of the films feature female protagonists, 35 percent have male protagonists, and 26 percent have male/female ensembles(Lauzen, 2016). The protagonists and sexes are more evenly distributed in films in which women were active in the production process. It may be concluded that including women in the filmmaking process is critical for increasing female representation on screen and achieving gender balance.

The stereotyped depictions of women in the media have been discovered by a comprehensive North American study. In the American media, women appear less frequently, are more likely to be shown as sexual objects, and are typically depicted in family contexts (Lauzen, 2005). Female characters were more likely to occupy interpersonal positions centered on family, friends, and romance, while male characters were more likely to occupy work-related ones, according to the researchers. Collins (2011) demonstrated that women have been under-represented in film and television, with their fictional characters rarely reflecting their real-life roles and achievements (Collins, 2011). Gender discrimination seems to exist in American, European, and Asian societies (Kapoor et al., 2017).

Gendered depictions were found to be similar in the Indian media, according to a large study. A study of sexual assault in Indian cinema found that traditional roles (61.3 percent) were more likely to be depicted in the films analyzed than non-traditional (9.7%) or hybrid roles (29 %). Although feminists are equated with goddesses in the Indian setting, feminist connotations in popular culture are extremely limited, and being a woman is misrepresented as problematic and difficult. Women rarely have leading roles in films, and when they do, they are rarely depicted at their workplace (Kapoor et al., 2017).

Women have traditionally been presented in Bollywood as one-dimensional beings who are either lovely or bad, white or black. There are no gray areas in this situation. This duality was reinforced in popular films that distinguished between the heroine and the vamp, the wife and the other woman; films were also influenced by religion and mythology, in which female characters were portrayed as the ideal of virtue and morals, capable of doing no wrong. Hindi film effectively entrenched patriarchal norms via concepts of loyalty and obedience to the spouse. The majority of the films are dominated by men, with women playing supporting roles to the heroes. She has no autonomous life, and her journey is explored in connection to the male character throughout the film. Women are retained as the male protagonist's love companion. Another tendency worth examining in the portrayal of female characters is the use of a clear dichotomy. The lady might be submissive, domestic, honorable, noble, and ideal, or she can be rebellious, reckless, and irresponsible. In Hindi movies, the man is shown as the savior, while the woman is portrayed as the victim. On the plus side, there are a number of filmmakers who have defied conventional cinema's preconceptions by incorporating topics from the perspective of women.

Women were portrayed differently in each period of Hindi film, although they were essentially constrained by the Indian society's conventional patriarchal framework. In Hindi movies, the common lady is hardly seen. Sexuality, adultery, surrogacy, divorce, and live-in relationships have all been explored in recent films which are considered taboos in the society(Tere, 2012).

2.2.2. Gender reflection in Nepali cinema

A news article in Khabar Hub App in July 2019 in sexism, gender bias and eroticism in media and cinema the author identified that the Nepali films are frequently accused of perpetuating and reinforcing the traditional male-female gap to the point of fostering misogyny in everyday life. Male characters are depicted as domineering, self-reliant, and aggressive. They are supposed to always defend women and rescue them from terrible life situations because they are incapable of doing so on their own. In Nepali films, female characters are depicted as innocent and victims of various life events, waiting for male rescuers. Stereotypical roles in Nepali cinema continue to exist and have influenced all aspects of life, including human sexuality and eroticism. Objectification of a woman's identity and sexuality on screen through dance and song sequences, as well as language from films like "Girls are like chewing gum- pleasant at first, uninteresting by the end" from film (KC, 2016,00:25:18), "Your breasts are like footballs' in the film (Diwakar,2019, 1:02:18), *Captain* and "Surviving on wife's income is sad" in the film (Gurung, 2019, 00:03:32) both openly emphasize gender stereotypes and sexist remarks that are firmly embedded in Nepali society. In a patriarchal society, such portrayals of women in mainstream cinema are intended to provide a joyful visual experience for men (Pathak, n.d.).

A study on "Representation of Women and Girls in Nepal's Cinema" by Plan International Nepal has revealed that the traditionalist role of women in Nepali films be responsible for harmful stereotypes that prevent girls and young women from gratifying their true potential. The research was conducted among 47 films, television, online materials and visual advertisements emphasizing on film' content, filmmakers, and Nepali cinema's audiences. The same study revealed that women and girls are hardly ever presented as leaders, and even when they are in leadership positions, they are far more likely than men to be sexually objectified. The social roles projected were girlfriend/wives, mothers and they relied on men to make their legitimacy was undermined through a prominent male presence in the film(Maskey et al., 2020).

Another study done by Dikshya Karki in her ‘Women as angry, muted subjects in Nepali Films, navigating 'Rurban' Space’ among the various commercial Nepali cinema revealed that women's place in the narrative is contingent to the male character's success. Similarly, the same study revealed that the women's character such as angry wife, or the bar dancer is in line with the socio-political transformation of Nepali society. The emotions of women are subjected to be dismissed by comical while lacked the resolution of the anger. The same study revealed that the commodification of the female bodies and spaces like the dance bar are borrowed from the Bollywood and displays the male gaze. Such, roles as angry, powerless, muted subjects and glamorized spectacles of women have devalued the aspirations and hopes of Nepali women in their public spheres as well(Karki, 2019).

A study done in three popular Nepali films revealed women were represented as objects of desire, second sex and belonging to private space. The stories of women are never their own, but always about the men for whom they try to please and get her at the end. Women are presented as the housewife or the caretaker of the man and presented as the secondary characters with marriage as their ultimate career(Adhikari, 2018).

The Nepali movie *ChhakaPanja* (2016)was accused the filmmaker for objectifying the women by the use of technology. In this study the researcher revealed that many of the times the women's appearance has been either blurred or overly emphasized through the sexist angle to please the male gaze and ultimately defame the female characters(Bhattarai, 2019). A similar study on the movie *Prasad* (2018), revealed the gendered stereotypes through the actions and thoughts of the characters in the movie. The women are portrayed as loyal, dutiful, unassertive and dependent wife after marriage while the male character is shown exhibiting his masculine traits throughout the movie by interfering the choices of his wife and trying to control over her body(Bista, 2021).

2.3. Conceptual framework

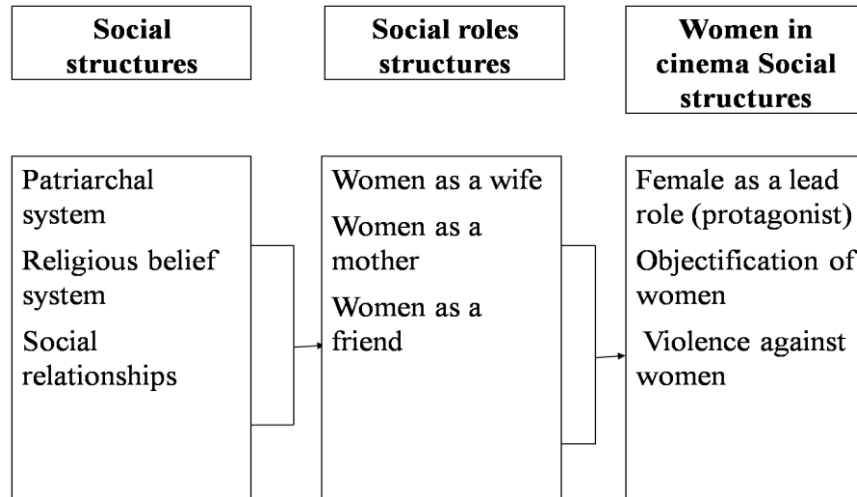
From the literature reviews above, I have developed the following conceptual framework for further shaping my research. The gender representation in film would mostly be analyzed from the perspective of feminist perspective, using the qualitative research method such as discourse analysis.

Primarily the discourse on the content that has been discussed in this research is the women representation as a lead role, objectification of women and violence

against women in cinema while such roles have been influenced by the social structures of the society. The relationships between these variables are as shown in the figure below.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodological preferences have been presented to answer the problem formulation. The chapter outlines the data collection methods and techniques and the method of analysis have been discussed in details. In addition, the limitations of the study are also illuminated in the chapter.

3.1. Research design

This research will mainly be concerned with the social realities and reel representation of the gender, especially the representation of women in the Nepali cinema. Hence, the study has adopted the qualitative research method, using a descriptive and analytical study design within the framework of discourse analysis. Qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate an issue or phenomenon from the viewpoints of those who are affected. It provides a comprehensive picture of a certain study topic. It has used the content analysis as the method of inquiry as part of discourse analysis. A content analysis views narratives of film as 'texts' and is one of the primary research methods for studying portrayals of women violence, and racism in television programming as well as in films (Macnamara, 2005). To be more specific, the study follows the research strategy of qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis examines, not simply the text, but also "the relationship between the text and its likely audience" (Macnamara, 2005). This research strategy provided the study with tools to examine and decode visuals, lyrics of songs, and the portrayal of the female characters.

This study qualitatively investigates how men and women are represented in the movie *Bulbul*. I analyze how gender roles are represented in the films in order to see how men and women are represented and whether they are represented as typically feminine or masculine.

3.2. Sampling method

The study is limited to only one film that has been recently submitted to the Oscar Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language category from Nepal in 2019. The movie was released in 2019, which was written and directed by Binod Poudel. The sampling is purposive. The participants of purposive sampling are grouped according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question.

3.3. Data collection

Qualitative data has been collected for this study. The data generated from the detailed content analysis is primarily based upon the objectives of the study.

Observation is used as the strategy for data collection. Note taking is done upon viewing the film. The film was viewed many times by the researcher.

3.4. Data management and analysis

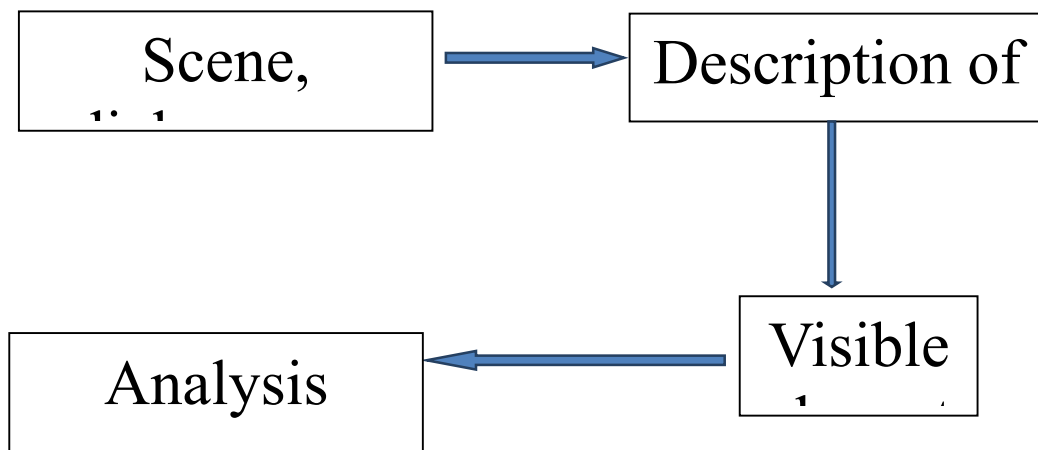
This investigation is carried out using discourse analysis, which requires analyzing the text in light of its social context. This was accomplished by watching the films and copying significant portions and parts of the speech that clearly demonstrate the usage of gender discourse. The analytical framework was used as a tool for the analysis.

In this discourse analysis, I begin by examining the overall representation of male and female characters, which is to say, what characteristics most of the characters share based on my observations. Furthermore, it's fascinating to examine how various men and women are depicted in accordance to their various characteristics. As a result, I look at different characters in pairs/couples to examine how male and female characters are represented physically through their actions and audibly through the speech.

To analyze the film as a text, the following framework for coding was used:

Figure 2

Analysis framework



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Brief overview of the film *Bulbul*

Bulbul is a social movie about the daily life of a female auto rickshaw driver (Ranakala) who lives in a dark and damp ground floor apartment in Kathmandu with her father-in-law who is partially paralyzed. Her husband goes to the Gulf for employment six years ago. Since her husband stops sending money four years ago and only calls her on occasion, she struggles both financially and emotionally. She also cares for a paralyzed father-in-law and a seven-year-old daughter. Her only hope and goal in life is for her daughter to study so that she will not have to suffer the same fate as herself; hence she admits her in a boarding school. The main male character in the film is Chopendra, a man who seems to be affectionate to Ranakala and follows her around everywhere. Another female character in the film is Bhima, the wife of a mechanic and also a rickshaw driver. Both female characters are shown to be independent women earning wages and are loud voices and opinionated but are bound to traditional societal beliefs and cannot escape from their marriage bond.

Both characters are shown having dialogues about their plight but both fail to evolve and are unable to accept the possibility of separating from their husbands. Ranakala in one scene is shown being forcefully kissed by the mechanic but all she is able to do about the situation is say “*Thuikka Murdar*” (cursing in Nepali)(Poudel, 2019,00:23:25). The mechanic beats his wife for watching porn but goes around forcing himself on other women. The landlady orders Ranakala to vacate the property within a month for bringing strange men to her house. Both women show a sense of growth in confidence in themselves. This is seen when Bhima slaps her husband, the mechanic and Ranakala comes to terms with her fate and accepts the proposal of Chopendra. She even tells the father-in-law that she is separating from her husband and will place him in the care of an old age home. She finally agrees to sexually engage with Chopendra but soon she is left helpless when she calls to Chopendra who does not go through and she sees a lock in his residence. She waits for him and visits his residence a couple of times to no avail. After all, it turns out all Chopendra wanted was to use Ranakala for his sexual gratification. She gets a call from someone and she asks “when”. The movie ends in a cliffhanger with Ranakala and her daughter at the airport.

4.2. Representation of social roles of women

The lead character in this movie is played by Swastima Khadka, portrayed as Ranakala, an auto rickshaw driver, who also takes care of her paralyzed father-in-law. She is portrayed as an independent woman in an urban area whose husband is overseas for six years and calls her occasionally. As a wife she has been shown as a woman deprived of love and togetherness with husband. Her reply in the phone calls with her husband asking him to come back soon and she wants nothing more than his presence through the dialogue "*malai aru kehi चाहिँदैन, तपाईं वये पुग्छ*" (Trans. Is mine: I do not need anything except your presence)" (Poudel, 2019, 00:30:21) shows that she is a wife that the Nepali society expects to be. She is also portrayed as a Nepali mother who hopes that her child would learn sufficient English one day so that the child would not go through the same ordeal that she experienced. As she is a working mother, she has kept her daughter in a boarding school and she goes to meet sometimes. As the child asks for her father every time, the bonding between the daughter and mother does not seem very strong. She is also a daughter-in-law who is taking care of her paralyzed father-in-law whom she takes as a burden for her. As a very good friend she is shown to be sharing her personal matters with her friend Bhima as played by Laxmi Bardewa. They are even shown to take a small liberty to watch porn together to know what is going on with each other's personal life as well.

4.3. Role of men in the film

There are primarily four men in the film i.e., Ranakala's husband (who does not have physical presence but his presence can be felt in the film), Chopendra (Ranakala's extramarital romantic interest), Ranakala's father-in-law and the husband of Bhima who is also a mechanic.

Ranakala's husband has been portrayed as a non-loving husband who barely calls her and does not seem financially supporting her, too. He seems to be showing a false hope of returning back to Ranakala. The father-in-law of Ranakala does not have any dialogue in the film but he seems to act like a barrier for Ranakala to explore her love interest in other men. Bhima's husband has been portrayed as a pervert who constantly sexually harasses other women either physically or via phone. (Poudel, 2019, 1:20:35). He can also be seen beating his wife after finding a porn video in her phone, but he himself seems to be extracting sexual contents in his phone. The main male character Chopendra seems like a nice man at the beginning who expresses his

love to Ranakala and also supports her in her profession. But at the end when Ranakala decides to leave everything and move in with him, he suddenly disappears betraying the trust of Ranakala.

Figure 3

Bhima's husband sexually harassing a woman



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:09:39]. Awaken Production.

Hence, all the men in the film have been portrayed in a stereotypical manner as perpetrators, adhering to the patriarchal values of masculinity i.e., controlling women's bodies, gate keeping women's sexuality, harassing them, and so on.

4.4. Normalization of violence against women

The film has normalized violence against women through more than three scenes where women are physically and sexually harassed. Little or no resistance from women and no any significant action against the perpetrator may give message to the audience that violence against women is a normal act which does not need much attention.

Figure 4

Bhima being physically abused by her husband for having erotic video on her phone.



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:30:58]. Awaken Production.

Figure 5

The mechanic sexually harassing Ranakala in her rickshaw



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:23:23]. Awaken Production.

Similarly in a scene, Chopendra initiates the sexual activity without full consent of Ranakala where she feels awkward, subordinate and confused about how to react but Chopendra is shown taking forward the process of the sexual intercourse without being considerate of whether she was comfortable or not (Poudel, 2019, 00:46:08).

Figure 6

Chopendra initiating sexual intercourse with Ranakala without her consent while she feeling uncomfortable.



Note .Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). Bulbul [Film,00:46:08]. Awaken Production.

4.5. Women adhering to the stereotypical gender roles

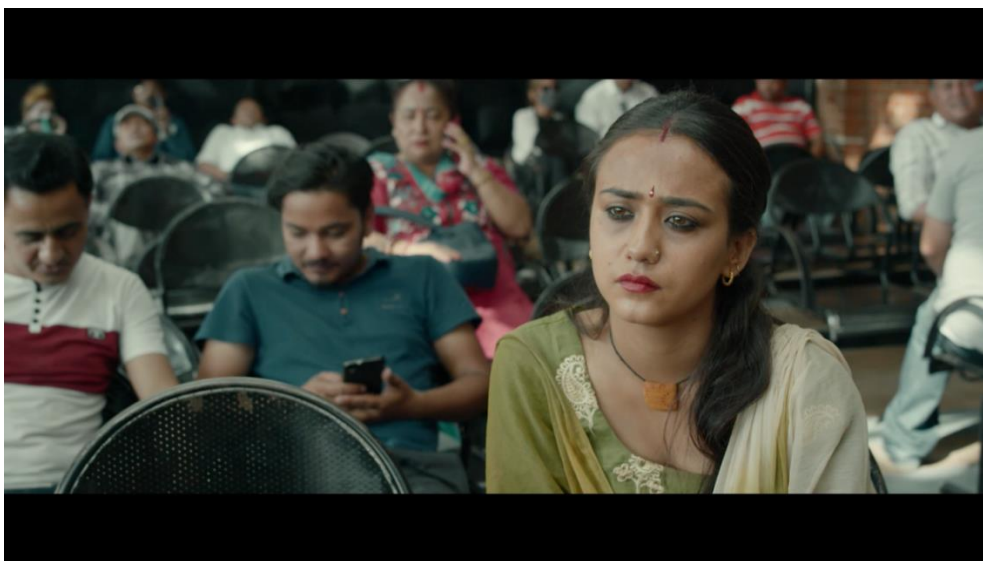
Though the portrayal of women in the film is bold when compared to other mainstream Nepali films, the film has also successfully portrayed women adhering to the stereotypical gender roles.

4.5.1. Women as gullible characters

Though the portrayal of the protagonist is bold at some points, Ranakala also seems to feel empty without her husband in her life. She has also been tricked by two men in the film i.e., one by her husband who shows her hopes of returning but never returns and another is by Chopendra who expresses love and commitment to her but disappears all of a sudden. Hence, some aspects of the film have reinforced the stereotypical role of women as gullible character who are unaware of the intentions of people. The end of the film has portrayed her as a hopeless woman tricked by two men.

Figure 7

Ranakala waits at the airport hopelessly after getting betrayed by her boyfriend Chopendra



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:50:56]. Awaken Production.

4.5.2. Marriage as an institution to control freedom of women

There is a scene where Bhima is physically abused by her husband when her husband finds a porn video on her phone (fig. 4). This indicates that the person who provides life advice to the protagonist herself is not free in her own life. Though Bhima seems to be slapping her husband in a scene, the violence on her by her husband is far more severe than the slap. She fails to escape the abusive relationship with her husband as every other Nepali woman with the fear of being shamed and stigmatized by the society.

Figure 8

Bhima telling Ranakala that it is good to not have husband around as Bhima had to suffer from domestic violence from her husband



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:18:51]. Awaken Production.

Ranakala on the other hand suppresses her sexual desires and sexual attraction towards other men, as married women are expected to remain unaffected by these human emotions and needs. Her status as a married woman has also bound her to care for her father-in-law and hope for love and support from her never returning husband.

4.5.3. Women as the enemy of women

Another woman in the film, the landlord lady seems to be inconsiderate about the difficult circumstances of the main character i.e., Ranakala and asks Ranakala to leave the place following her husband's order. The landlord lady goes further to question the character of Ranakala for bringing men in the house. (Poudel, 2019, 01:30:45). This reinforces the patriarchal blame that 'women are women's biggest enemy' and also reestablishes the idea that women do not have control over the decisions related to their house and property.

Figure 9

The landlord lady of the house where Ranakala is leaving asks her to leave the place questioning her character



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:30:45]. Awaken Production.

4.5.4. Women as the ultimate caregivers

The main character Ranakala has also been portrayed as the sacrificing, selfless care giver who takes care of her paralyzed father-in-law every day, looks after her daughter and works hard so that she can be able to give best to her daughter and her family. She seems carrying all the burden of the family such as providing emotional support to her daughter, care for her ill father-in-law and also earn money for the family while her husband stays abroad with no information about his whereabouts.

Figure 10

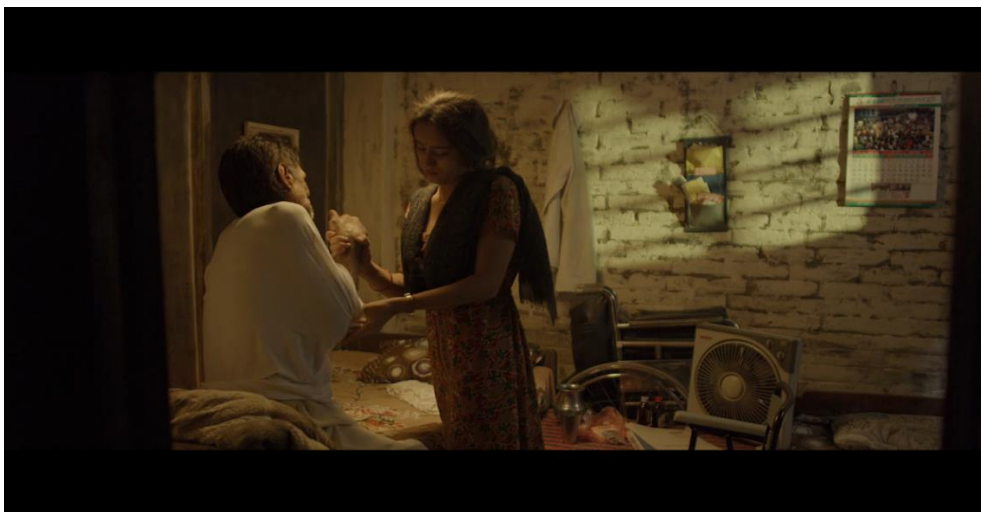
Ranakala emotionally supporting her daughter



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:01:08]. Awaken Production.

Figure 11

Ranakala changing the cloths of her father- in- law



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:39:04]. Awaken Production.

Figure 12

Ranakala emotionally supporting her daughter



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:07:18]. Awaken Production.

4.6. Attempts to challenge the harmful gender norms

Though the portrayal of women characters is more inclined towards the stereotypical gender roles, the filmmakers have certainly made some attempts to challenge some of the harmful gender roles of women which has made this film stand out among the contemporary mainstream Nepali films. Some of the attempts towards challenging gender norms are as follows:

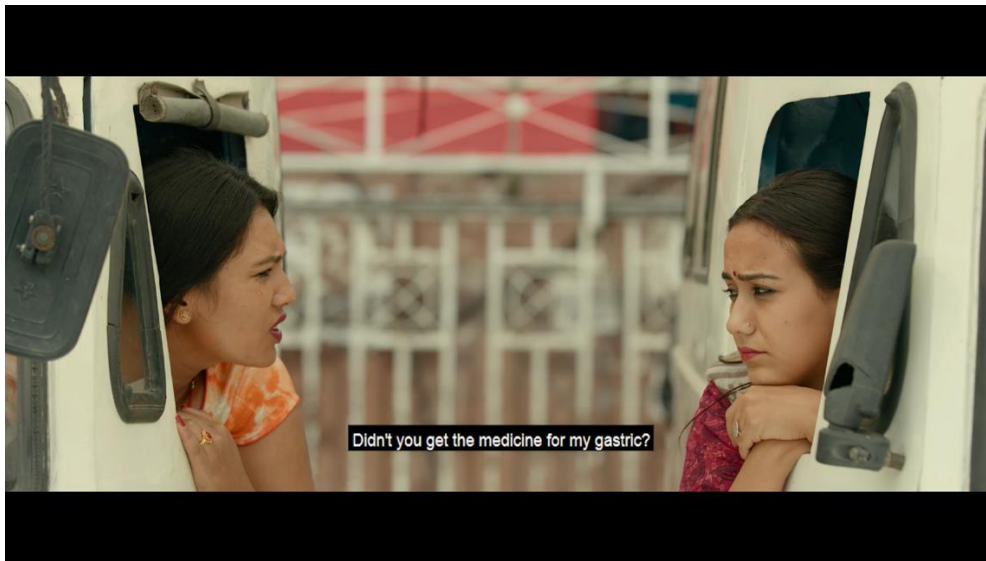
4.6.1. Women supporting each other

The film has portrayed a lovely friendship between two women who are always there to provide life advises, emotionally support each other, care for each other and accompany one another during the hard times.

Similarly, Bhima has been portrayed as a loving friend of the protagonist. Though her marital life is not going well she is shown to take full enjoyment in life. She advises her friend to go on a date with her boyfriend to get to know him and if it goes right then marry him, if not then move on.

Figure 13

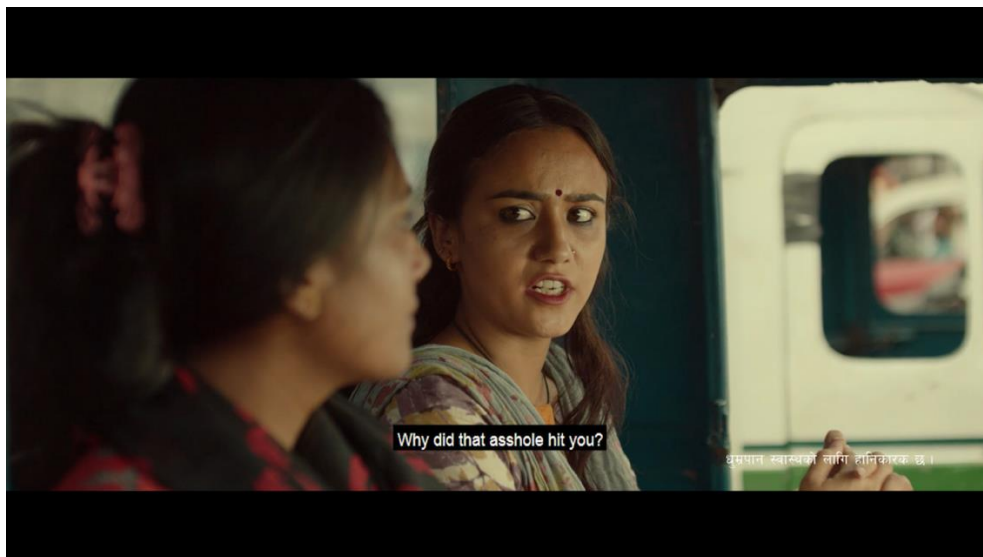
A scene portraying the practice of care among Ranakala and Bhima



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:11:11]. Awaken Production

Figure 14

Ranakala getting angry over the fact that Bhima was beaten by her husband



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:36:16]. Awaken Production.

Figure 15

Bhima giving relationship advice to Ranakala



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:18:31]. Awaken Production.

5.6.2. Women's mobility beyond household chores

As independent women, Ranakala and her friend Bhima are shown as auto rickshaw drivers, earning their living, taking care of home and children. Driving is generally considered as a masculine job and also a powerful symbol of freedom and mobility. The women characters seem roaming around the city in the rickshaw freely. The two main women characters of the film portrayed as rickshaw drivers itself challenges the stereotypical gender norms that limits women's mobility within the household chores.

Figure 16

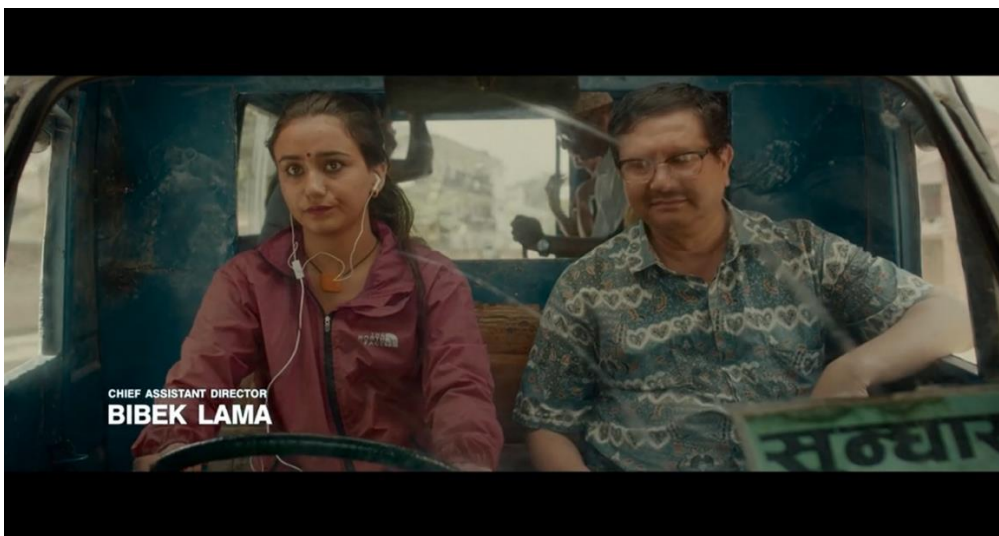
Ranakala fixing the tire of her autorikshaw



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:44:43]. Awaken Production.

Figure 17

Ranakala driving with a male passenger next to her



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,00:05:27]. Awaken Production.

Figure 18

From left to right: Ranakala, her boyfriend, daughter and father-in-law celebrating the birthday of Ranakala's daughter at their apartment



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:24:33]. Awaken Production.

4.6.3. Women exercising their agency

The main female character makes decisions for herself, her child and her father-in-law independently without her husband's involvement. In addition, scolding the person who calls her often with an unknown number, and Bhima slapping her husband shows her resistance against the abusive behavior, which most Nepali women are expected to suffer in silence. She is also portrayed as a woman challenging the norms of marriage through an extramarital affair as she is shown having a desire to restart her life with her boyfriend leaving behind her husband and father-in-law. She even goes forward to tell her father-in-law that she is leaving his son and also invites her boyfriend at their apartment to celebrate her daughter's birthday.

Figure 19

Ranakala confesses her father-in-law that she is leaving her husband



Note. Paudel, B. (Director). (2019). *Bulbul* [Film,01:32:14]. Awaken Production.

4.7. Discussion

The film depicts the patriarchal structure of Nepali society where men are always superior to women and are the gatekeepers of women's sexuality. This film further communicates deals with the complex issues of Nepali society, which is brought out by the problem of labor migrants who leave their families behind. The situation of a working woman from a poor class struggling to make their ends meet has been well portrayed in the film. It also shows the struggle of working women in the profession that has long been considered as a domain of rustic males, and most of all, the movie excels in portraying the longing of a woman for love and affection which is a natural human desire. This movie has also shown how women especially whose husband is away are targeted for the violence and harassment and their plight as a single woman. The male actors in the film are shown to be taking chances to fulfill sexual desire from the women counterparts and are portrayed as the men well mingled in the patriarchal structure of the society adhering to the values of toxic-masculinity. Similarly, another social reality of extra marital affairs which is not digested in Nepali society and the culture of questioning the morality and character of a woman for having a male friend is also well depicted in the movie. In fact, this is the representative story of the working-class women. These days in Kathmandu, women are struggling to live within this maze of complex structure characterized with gender norms, patriarchy, class inequality, violence, migration and joblessness.

A married Hindu woman is expected to wear Tika, *Sindoor*(Red vermilion powder) and other accessories in Nepalese society. The film has religious influence of Hinduism in which two-women characters have been dressed and styled as the married Hindu women. Similarly, the main female character and her family has been portrayed as the followers of Hinduism and has also shown a Hindu woman visiting a temple, worshipping lord Ganesh and a picture of Shiva in her room. There is always a sheer distinction between the home and public sphere for the women in Nepalese society. This film has recognized the notion of distinction between home and public sphere. Modernism, on the other hand, implies a rupture of Nepalese identity as well as adherence to Nepali customs. Though the film "Bulbul" depicted modern life, it did not eliminate the concept of traditional society. It hasn't completely abandoned the Nepali family's fundamental quality of following traditional life patterns. The film has exploited female characters' dress codes and expressions as cultural expressions of tradition, womanhood, and nationality.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary

Although the film *Bulbul* has made attempts to portray independent Nepali women beyond their traditional role as a housewife, it has also followed the traditional pattern where women characters have to succumb to the patriarchal values of the Nepali society. The stereotypical understanding of women as a gullible character and a victim in male-dominated society and men as disloyal and emotionless beings has been reinforced through the film. Apart from this, the violence against women has also been portrayed in an insensitive manner normalizing this heinous crime. Similarly, this film has re-victimized the women characters and the resistance of women against the patriarchy. The success stories have been ignored, which could have been a revolutionary idea to portray in a Nepali film in the market populated with films with problematic representations of gender issues and women.

The structure of the Nepali society has also been well portrayed by introducing the aspects of migration and the struggles that comes with this, institution of marriage as an influencing factor in women's sexuality, gender norms imposed on men and women, class struggle, role of religion in reinforcing patriarchal values, and so on. Despite the portrayal of the Nepali society from the multiple dimensions, it seems that the film has somehow lagged behind to evoke the idea to resist the harmful structure which has been hindering the process of women emancipation.

It should also be well noted that the film is progressive in nature as compared to other mainstream Nepali films which has still given secondary roles to women and have portrayed the gender issues in an insensitive and regressive ways. The film has somehow acknowledged the women's strong desire to be free and has portrayed them taking stand for themselves and their dignity. The support system which women make for themselves and their agency has been portrayed at some points which can be perceived as a powerful gesture in a Nepali film. The film could have become a landmark event if it had instigated a revolutionary idea to bring about social transformation among the audience.

5.2. Findings

The focus of this study was on exploring the representation of gender roles in the film *Bulbul*. This study was conducted within the framework of sociological

studies using discourse analysis as a research method in relation to gender lens for descriptive and analytical analysis. In this film, the impact of both the patriarchal belief system and social situations has been well portrayed. This research explored that Nepali cinema has become a socio-cultural role player for the Nepali audiences and international community.

Through the representation of female protagonist Ranakala, the film depicted the woman's strong desire to emancipate from the patriarchal reality of the society. Even though the two main female characters have made small gestures to resist the oppressive structure, neither one of them explicitly petitions an undaunted fidelity to the traditional customs and institution of marriage. Both the women are projected as women, in which our society expects them to be; gullible and unable to escape the abusive marital relationship. Thus, it can be said that the Nepali films have not been successfully escape out of the vicious cycle of portraying women as the weaker characters in the society.

Similarly, the film has reinforced the stereotypical gender roles of women assigned by the patriarchal society and has reestablished women as victims. The violence against women has been normalized in the film and little action against such crime has encouraged impunity against violence against women. The film has made little effort to escape from the blame in which the Nepali cinema as an entity carries of being regressive towards the issue of gender.

Given the significant ties that exist between Nepali society and Nepali cinema, it is reasonable to conclude that Nepali cinema contributes to the current discussion over women's rights in Nepal. Because it is based in Nepali culture, Nepali film has progressively gained acceptance as a medium. Cultural politics have shifted as a result of the modernization process, with women's representation changing dramatically. As a result, female characters have been given a lot of freedom in terms of clothing, socialization patterns, and even living independently. These shifting depictions give material that encourages audiences to reconsider patriarchal norms. Women's images have certainly evolved in the sense that they are more depicted as persons with choices rather than as slaves.

Through the actions of Ranakala and Bhima, it has been highlighted how the roles of women can have apposite influence in different situations. Both of the characters have been provided with the roles as rickshaw driver, which is traditionally considered a "man's job". Similarly, there are scenes where women have exercised

their agency and stood for their rights which are a positive gesture towards progressiveness. Thus, it can be said that Nepali films despite the problematic representation of women in films are making efforts to show the women characters in a non-traditional way.

The lovely friendship between two women characters in the film and the support system established between them represents powerful solidarity and organizing among women to care for each other amidst the difficult situations created by the oppressive structure. This represents and evokes hope among the people that it is possible to challenge the structure through small gestures.

If we look at the history of women's plight around the world, we can see that many women have gone a long way from being oppressed by social structures like patriarchy, male dominance, and inequality. Nepali films are significant instruments for reflecting on cultures, cultural traditions, and a variety of other issues that affect actual people, and they may also play an important part in sowing the seeds of change. As a result, Nepali cinema should be considered an integral part of Nepalese culture.

5.3. Conclusion

To conclude, the film has a significant aspect of Nepali society. The findings of the study show that the women in Nepali cinema are represented by their stereotypical roles in the society. Their sentiments and values are least heard by the male character in the films which are still the characteristics of Nepali society. Though the protagonist in the film is shown as an independent self-employed woman, her stereotypical role is still prevailed. Furthermore, she is shown overloaded with responsibilities as a mother, caregiver and the breadwinner. Despite the little resistance by the female characters in the film, their resistance goes in vain at the end when they are portrayed as helpless victims.

Thus, the film, has presented women's story and women as lead characters, their roles are not fortified with equal rights and their voices have always gone without impact, though women have earned their place as breadwinners. The patriarchal norms and values still have an influence in the Nepali cinema and the representation of women as well. Though the film has made attempts to show the women characters in a non-traditional way, the film missed to conclude it as the same.

5.4. Recommendations for further research

There is no doubt that the cinema influences the societies and equally contributes in changing the mindsets. However, very few researches have been conducted on this regard. Thus, it is important to conduct studies on the Nepali cinema from multiple dimensions considering that the cinema plays an important role in shaping the Nepali society as a whole in their evolving process.

Similarly, women of diversity should be encouraged to get involved in the process of film making which enriches the content of the films and helps in bringing more diverse aspects of women and gender as a whole.

In addition, the effects of Nepali cinema among the adolescents, young people and general people in understanding their society and how the films influence their own values and behaviors can also be studied to go deeper into examining several other Nepali films beyond their roles as a source of entertainment.

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