

Confinement, Transgression, Liberation: Dynamics of Gender Roles in Contemporary
Nepali Novels and Films

A Dissertation

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By

Asmita Bista

T.U. Registration No.: 23336-90

PhD Registration No.: 41/2017

Tribhuvan University


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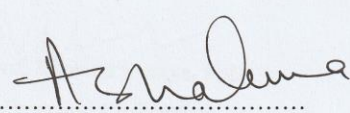
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Letter of Recommendation

We certify that the dissertation entitled “Confinement, Transgression, Liberation: Dynamics of Gender Roles in Contemporary Nepali Novels and Films” is Prepared by Asmita Bista under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examinations by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Dissertation Committee


.....
Prof. Dhruva Karki, PhD
Supervisor


.....
Prof. Anand Sharma, PhD
Co-Supervisor

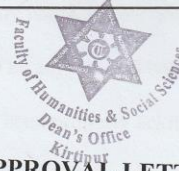
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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Office of the Dean
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Ref. No.



APPROVAL LETTER

This dissertation entitled **Confinement, Transgression, Liberation: Dynamics of Gender Roles in Contemporary Nepali Novels and Films** was submitted by **Ms. Asmita Bista** for final examination to the Research *Committee of the Faculty of* Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English**. I, hereby, certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality and has therefore accepted for the degree.

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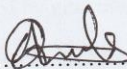
Prof. Kushum Shakya, PhD
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it contains no materials previously published in my name. I have not used its materials for the award of any kind and any other degree. The authors and sources of information that are used to support my argument have been properly acknowledged.

Asmita Bista

Signature:.....

15 September 2022

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Abstract

Asymmetrical power relations between the female and the male recurrently invoke issues in contemporary Nepali novels and films. Portraying gender issues, such as domestic violence, sexual domination, and the gender-based unequal power relations, contemporary Nepali novels – *Facing my Phantoms* (2010), *Toda* [*Thank You*] (2013), and *Cheerharan* [*Disrobe*] (2016) – and films – *Ma Hoina Ma* [*I am Not Who I am*] (2016), *Soongava* (*Orchid*) (2012), and *Pashupati Prasad* (2016) – expose the problems caused by the imposition of stereotyped gender roles to the people. These literary narratives reveal that prevalent social norms of Nepali society regulate individual's activities and mindset by imposing certain gender roles to them that resulted in unequal power relations between the female and the male. Similarly, the selected texts expose that obligation of normative gender roles and identities have affected individuals, the females, the males, and LGBTQ community in Nepali society by controlling their rights and freedom. Consequently, the characters of these novels and films dismantle and deviate from the stereotyped gender roles when they get exposure to the changed environment that instigate them to break the gender confinement.

This research claims that imposition of conventional gender roles is the main reason behind the unequal power relations among men, women, and LGBTQ in Nepali society. This claim has been substantiated through the theoretical concepts and perspectives of constructivist gender theorists, including Judith Butler, R.W. Connell, and Michael Kimmel. These theorists define 'gender' as a product of a culmination of repeated actions that an individual performs following the socially written script. In Butler's understanding of gender, the 'performances of gender' are enforced through social script. Likewise, Connell claims that gender is constructed through social

norms, religious and cultural practices and laws. In Kimmel's perspectives, gender difference is the chief outcome of gender inequality, because it is through the idea of difference that inequality is legitimated. These theorists argue that normative frame of gender force the characters to repeat the socially prescribed gender roles, making them feel legitimized and saving them from the punishment. In fact, these theorists illustrate that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that is instituted and controlled through established social structure and political mechanism resulted in unequal power relations between the male and the female. Likewise, the above theorists suggest that gender identity is neither fixed nor stable. Moreover, as a socially constructed phenomenon gender varies over time and place.

Based on these theorists' ideas, this study concludes that in the selected texts, gender roles and identities of every individual, the female, the LGBTQ people, and the male are constructed through regular performances. Those roles are imposed through religious scriptures, aphorisms, and socially produced script. Apart from that, their gender is regulated through punishments. Consequently, the imposition of traditional gender roles and identities cause anguishes and difficulties not only to the LGBTQ people and the female but also to the male. However, due to the fluid nature of gender, the characters recurrently transgress the normative gender roles and identities. Apart from that, when they get education, they get exposure to the advanced places and become economically independent, they liberate themselves from the socially imposed gender roles, which results in condemnation, social boycott, abuse, insult, and physical assault. After closely examining their condition, the researcher concludes that conventional gender roles resulted in inequality, injustice, exploitation, and violence. In the same way, the study concludes that the selected texts surface the existing social issues such as child marriage, polygamy,

unemployment, violence, and sexual abuse. Thus, it will help the readers understand the minorities' concerns and their sufferings as well. At the same time, the work hopes to motivate people to question the stereotyped gender norms.

Chapter One

Portrayal of Gender Issues in Nepali Novels and Films

In Nepal, equal treatment of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) people, the female, and the male in laws and policies have barely made substantial contribution to establish gender discrimination free society. Unequal power relations between the LGBTQ people, the male, and the female have adversely affected their access to resources, such as natural and material. Fictional representations of individual, both women and men embody the patriarchy-operated Nepalese society with sheer gender-based discrimination. The current research is designed to explore grave consequences of gendered-social identities in Nepali novels and films.

Gender Representations in Nepali Novels

From the beginning, Nepali novels have been portraying the lifestyle and thought of people. By depicting people's daily activities, Nepali novels become a source of knowledge that imparts the idea about existing culture, economic condition and social practices of the society. In Henry James' perception: "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attend to represent life" (qtd in Sparrshott 3). Affirming James' idea, Nepali novels reflect the political and social events and incidents of the country itself. Consequently, novels enjoy high readerships. Hence, unraveling the daily activities of people, since the primary phase, novel establishes itself as a popular genre among the Nepali readers.

In the primary phase (1827-1945), Nepali novels expose various dimensions of the relationship between man and society. During this period, novels appear as a medium to cover up wide-range of activities involved by males. Observing the male at the top of familial and social hierarchy, in this phase, Nepali authors write male-

centric novels. In the major events of the country, mostly, males are involved. Therefore, the novels of this phase focus on the male characters only. Rajendra Subedi claims that the novels of this period inform the common people about the major events of the country such as unification of the nation by the king Prithvi Narayana Shah. Besides this, in his view, through the novels such as *Birataparva*, *Dashakumara Charita* and *Batra Sugaako Kathaa*, the authors try to convey the moral lessons to the reader and depict bravery and courage of the male protagonist (*Upanyaasa* 35). Hence, in Subedi's perception, the authors of this phase write male-centric novels.

Similarly, authors use gender as a major theme in the Middle Age/Phase (1946-1990), too. In the Middle Age/Phase (1946-1990), under the instruction of the Rana rulers, Nepali novelists create detective, magical-realism and fantasy fiction. Krishnahari Baral and Netra Atom observe that while seizing the power from the Shah kings, the Rana rulers fear that the novels as social documents may reflect the social and political unrest of the nation. Therefore, with the purpose of deviating the people's attention from the on-going political changes of the country, they force the authors to limit their literary narratives to the certain themes (72). Baral and Atom highlight that, the themes of novels of this period focus on religion, duty and romance. However, even in these novels such as *Biracharitra*, *Birsikkaa*, and *Chandrakaantaa* the plot revolves around the struggle of male characters. Baral and Atom view that, *Biracharitra* unravels the struggle of a chivalric hero Agnidatta and his brave followers.

Nepali novelists explore gender issues from the Primary Phase and this trend continues in the Middle Age, too. Nevertheless, in the Modern Phase (1991 to the Present Date), influenced by the global change and socio-political changes in the

country, Nepali novelists explore gender issues more densely (Subedi, *Upanyaasa* 39). In Subedi's observation, the political movements brought revolutionary changes in the thought of the people regarding egalitarian, equal, and unbiased society; consequently, the Nepali authors start to advocate for gender-just society in their literary narratives. Likewise, Krishna Chandra Singh Pradhan observes that the novelists of the Modern Phase depict the realistic condition of the characters in their novels. While doing so, they reflect the gender biased practices and thought of the society (Pradhan 55). In Pradhan's perception, some of these novelists provide traditional gender roles to their characters, whereas some of them present their characters in anti-traditional gender roles.

With the purpose of disseminating the idea of gender just society, in the Modern Phase, the Nepali novelists use gender as a prominent theme of their novels. Highlighting the drive of the novelists of this era, Baral elucidates that During 1930s, the Nepali novelists use novels to shape the people's idea about gender equality (*Marksbaad* 398). On the contrary, Gyanu Pandey presents a different idea than that of Baral. Pandey claims that even after the two decades of the Modern Age, the novelists have hardly used gender as theme of their novels (28). She observes that, the novelists of these periods are not much concerned about the gender-bias social norms and practices. In Pandey's perception, the novels produced in the Modern Phase, present female characters highly misogynistically. She reveals that the novelists follow this trend for two decades. She claims that the novel *Swaasnimanche* is the first novel that inspires the novelists of the nation to showcase the injustice, abuse, and discrimination against women, which are caused due to faulty socio-cultural norms and practices.

Unlike Pandey, Krishnahari Baral and Netra Atom argue that incorporation of gender issues in Nepali novels started with the Publication of the novel *Bhramara* (1993 BS) by Rupnarayan Singh. They argue that since Singh gets exposure to the world literature that already have reflected the revolutionary ideas regarding equality and freedom, influenced by such scenario, Singh presents the similar sort of thoughts in his novels. Consequently, supporting the idea of gender equality, he portrays female characters of his novels as strong and independent individuals (95). In Baral's and Atom's observation, besides *Bhramara*, the novel *Swaasnimaanchhe* by Hridayachandrasingh Pradhan set an outstanding example of feministic thought.

Similarly, Indra Bahadur Rai also reinforces that Nepali novelists unravel the gender issues in their novels from the beginning of Modern era of Nepali literature. Rai reveals that the novelists of the Modern Phase condemn the normative gender practices that set unequal relationships between the male and the female (25). Rai observes that some of the female characters of the novels of Modern era, while following their dreams, dismantle the stereotyped gender roles. Confirming Rai's idea, Dayaram Shrestha and Mohanraj Sharma claim that since novel flourished as a popular genre among the readers, the Nepali novelists of the Modern Phase impart the message of gender fair social practices in their novels (105). In Shrestha's and Sharma's insight, conveying the message of gender equality, in their novels, Nepali novelists project an ideal society.

In the same way, retracing fictional works during more than three decades, ranging from 2011 BS to 2045 BS (1954-1988 AD), Pandey exposes initiatives in gender representation in Nepali novels. In that line of representation, *Swaasnimanche* becomes a pioneer in advocating the females' rights. It is followed by *Anuradha*, *Subhadra Bajai*, and *Teenghumti* (33). Conversely, Gurung notices that

due to insufficient presence of female novelists, females' issues do not strongly and densely appear in Nepali novels (394). In Gurung's perception, even Bishnu Kumari Waiba, with Parijat as her pen name, fails to unfold some of the genuine female issues in her *Shirishako Phul* [*Blue Mimosa*]. However, Sanjeev Upreti presents his thoughts different from those of Gurung. He claims that Parijat explores the gender issues in *Siriasko Phul*. He views that in this novel, Parijat shows how the exhibition of masculinity resulted in the tragic end of female characters (257). In Upreti's observation, *Shirisahko Phul* revolves around the female experience with gender discrimination in the patriarchal Nepali society. Hence, Pandey and Upreti reveal that Nepali novelists deploy gender as prominent issues in their literary narratives.

Like the Modern Nepali novels, contemporary Nepali novels also reflect the gender issues that exists in Nepali society. Mohanraj Sharma asserts that contemporary literary creations reflect the realities, insanities, absurdities, ironies, comedies, and contradictions prevailed in post-globalization human cultures (6). Therefore, in Sharma's observation, reflecting the social realities, contemporary Nepali novelists unravel the changes appeared in people's thought, regarding gender. Similarly, Michael Hutt notices that contemporary novels enjoy high readership because: "Number of Nepali books published since 2005 have reflected or sought to influence public understandings of recent and contemporary Nepali realities" (2). He further claims that many of the contemporary Nepali novelists portray the picture of progressive reformation in order to solve the inequality based on class, gender, and ethnicity. Hence, in Hutt's understanding, contemporary Nepali novels succeed to implant the thought of egalitarian society.

Exploring contemporary themes in their literary narratives, the contemporary novelists revise, redress, redefine, reform, and reconstruct the characters' gender roles

in their novels. By doing this, they reflect the issues of homosexuals. Rajani Dhakal notices that contemporary Nepali novelists invoke people's reaction against stereotyped gender identities in their literary narratives (92). Dhakal argues that the contemporary novelists challenge the traditional notion about gender. Likewise, Baral points out that contemporary Nepali novelists use novels to advocate for gender equality under the influence of an idea of egalitarian society ("Samakaalina" 90). In Baral's perception, the contemporary novelists illustrate the prevailed gender stratification of Nepali society in response to the status of the male and the female in society and family. In Baral's notion, by doing this, contemporary Nepali novels bring awareness to the people, regarding their rights and freedom.

In the same way, the novels that are produced during and after the Maoist insurgencies deploy the issues of gender equality and fair treatment, in their novels. Narhari Acharya also reposes the urgency of equal relations between the female and the male in contemporary Nepali novels: the subject of gender equality is not only the concern of female; it is equally important and essential for male too. Therefore, both the male and the female novelists should advocate for gender fair society in their literary creations (par. 11). In Acharya's notion, the contemporary novelists invoke the readers for dismantling stereotyped gender practices.

Presenting gender equality as the prominent agenda of their novels, contemporary novelists reflect their dream of gender discrimination free society. Nevertheless, the history of Nepali novel witnesses that, mainly female novelists focus their writing on gender issues because in Margaret Kirkham's perception, social and cultural discourses of various periods have represented women in such a way that corroborated the general oppression of women, and women writers of all ages have to confront this either through assimilating or subverting it (36). Therefore, affirming

Kirkham's thought as well as falsifying the accepted notion of Nepali society that femininity and creativity will not go together, the women novelists enter the literary and intellectual activities and attempt to condemn the gender inequality of Nepali society. Moreover, the characters of their novels dismantle the stereotyped gender roles and identity.

Like Nepali novels, from the beginning of its journey, Nepali films also unravel the gender issues. Both Nepali novels and films make the readers/audience aware about the gender discriminatory social practices that establish unequal relation between the female and the male. Moreover, these genres reflect the peoples' reaction and revolt against gender biased social norms and values. Therefore, the researcher selects the contemporary novels and films for her study. In order to lay the foundation of this study she elucidates, in the section below, how Nepali films depict gender concerns in Nepali films.

Gender as a Theme in Nepali Films

Nepali film industry does not have a long history. *Satya Harishchandra* directed by D.B. Pariyar, made in 1951, is taken as the first Nepali film produced from India (Subedi *Chalachitra* 95). Subedi reveals that this film explores the narratives of religious scripture. In his view, though the film was made in India, it was made in Nepali language. Later, after thirteen years of the production of *Satya Harishchandra*, Nepali films were started to produce in Nepal. In National Film Policy Drafting Committee 2013's observation, the first movie produced in Nepal was in the year 1964 and was titled *Aama*, meaning "Mother". *Aama*, directed by Hirasingsh Khatri, was produced by the Department of Information of the Government of Nepal. After the production of *Satya Harishchandra*, very few Nepali films were

produced till 1970. The time frame of 1950s to 1970s is marked as the First Phase of Nepali cinema.

Though very few films get produced in the First Phase, after the involvement of a private company in the production of Nepali films in 1966, Nepali films make remarkable presence in the nation. Subedi claims that the entry of a private production house in Nepali film making, contribute significantly in the development of Nepali movies. The first film produced by a private production house in Nepal is *Maitighara* (1966) directed by B.S. Thapa (*Chalachitra* 97). So far as the exploration of gender issues is concerned, this film highlights the struggle of Maya, the central character who gets victimized due to the gender-biased social norms and practices. Like *Maitihhara*, *Aama* also unravels the gender issues of the then society.

Depicting the unequal status of the female and the male in the family, *Aama* reveals the existed inequality caused by gender-bias social norms. Likewise, the characters of this film represent the changes that appeared in the performance of gender roles of the characters, who belong to the two different generations. Harka Bahadur ascertains his masculinity by exercising authority over his wife. On the contrary, his son Man Bahadur exhibits masculinity by performing as a responsible, hardworking, and rational person. Likewise, Harka Bahadur's wife appears as an unassertive and submissive woman, whereas Sanu, Man Bahadur's beloved, appears as a bold and determined woman. In this way, *Aama* reflects the status of the female and the male of the then Nepali society. Hence, both *Maitighara and Aama*, help to envision the gender discriminatory practices prevalent in that social milieu. However, till the production of *Maitighara*, very few numbers of films were produced in Nepali film industry because Nepali films flourish only after the establishment of Royal Nepal Film Corporation.

When the Government of Nepal established an organization called Royal Nepal Film Corporation in 1971, and started the production of movies in Nepal, that time is marked as the Second Phase of Nepali cinema. The establishment of Royal Nepal Film Corporation not only enhances the quality of Nepali films, but also increases the quantity of movies' production. Krandan Chapagain claims, "The film industry has been set to grow and develop rapidly after the establishment of Royal Nepal Film Corporation" (206). Chapagain underscores the characteristics of the Films those are produced in the Second Phase. In his observation, Nepali films that are produced after 1971 expose gender practices of Nepali society that constricted freedom and equality for women, by confining them to the stereotyped gender roles.

The duration of 1980s to 1990s is taken as the Third Phase of Nepali cinema. Idealizing the patriarchy, the films produced in this phase confine women within a certain structure of representation that belongs to the idealized values of womanhood; moreover, in the films, such as *Sindura* (1980) directed by Prakash Thapa and *Aadarshanaari* (1984) directed by Hem Lama, woman lacks ground for female subjectivity. Rajendra Subedi claims that in this Phase, films are used as a medium to inject the social norms and values. Likewise, the films produced in this phase convey the message about the importance of being an ideal person (*Chalachitra* 102). Therefore, in Subedi's observation, the films produced in this phase, reflect the gender status of women in that social milieu by presenting the central character as an ideal woman endowed with feminine virtues.

In 1990 Nepali film industry witnessed the rapid increase in the production of movies. With the restoration of democracy in 1990, which established people's right to freedom, speech, and broadcasting, film producers and directors enjoy a conducive environment for producing films. In fact, using the rights granted by the constitution,

they freely explore themes and technologies in their movies. Similarly, increment in the number of cinema halls also contribute in the flourishing of Nepali films. The article ‘Nepali Film Industry-Past and Present’ reveals, “A total of 140 movies were released during a period of three years while more than 300 cinema halls were built after the restoration of democracy in Nepal” (par. 4). The films produced after 1990s is taken as the Fourth Phase of Nepali cinema.

The fourth Phase of Nepali cinemas reflects the real condition of Nepali people. As film makers enjoy liberal environment, they fearlessly condemn the wrong social practices of Nepali society. Subedi argues that this phase starts as a new age of Nepali cinema because the films that are produced in this period reflect the thought and ideology of common people (writers, directors and producers) (*Chalachitra* 106). In Subedi’s observation, the films such as *Annyaaya* (1990) directed by Tulsi Ghimire, *Chota* (1991) directed by Shyam Rai, *Kanyaadaana* (1991) directed by Prakas Thapa, *Jhuma* (1992) directed by Pradip Upadhyaya, and *Balidaana* (1993) directed by Tulsi Ghimire, advocate for the equality and justice for common people. These films condemn the disparity, exploitation, oppression, and the wrong practices prevailed in the society. Nevertheless, the persons, who fight for injustice and exploitation, are undoubtedly the male characters.

The films produced after 1990s also give continuity to casting the male character as a lead of the film, who fights against wrong social practices such as injustice, inequality, and exploitation. Nirmala Adhikari underscores the main feature of the films, those are produced after 1990: “In the films those were produced after 1990s, the main plot is weaved to explore the conflict between good and evil. Obviously, good is represented by hero and evil is represented by villain” (65). Adhikari notices that in these films, hero is a savior who rescues the oppressed and

suppressed people from the clutch of the villain. Similarly, hero, the good man protects woman, particularly the heroine of the film, from the wicked and malicious people, mainly the male. Hence, in these films, the males get the major and powerful roles. Thus, these films reflect the social mechanism of Nepali society that provides major roles as well as authority to the males, whereas the female characters are assigned to the minor roles. Apart from that, practice of assigning the characters to stereotyped gender roles, finds its way into Nepali film industry, particularly in the Fourth Phase, when Nepali film makers starts copying Bollywood.

Bollywood movies that focus on the traditional gender norms influence Nepali films of the Fourth Phase. Consequently, they follow the Bollywood's trend. Highlighting the influence of Bollywood in Nepali film industry, Timothy Aryal reposes that, Nepali filmmakers in the 80s and 90s randomly follow the trend of Bollywood that present the hero as a typical embodiment of patriarchy. Consequently, in his observation, the 90s are the heydays of onscreen machismo in the form of actors like Bhuwan KC, Shiva Shrestha, and Rajesh Hamal--muscular, angry young men attempting to rescue damsels in distress (par. 18). Likewise, in Vatika Sibal's observation, Nepali films of the 90s copy the Bollywood movies in which "The heroine is devoid of any independent existence and her journey throughout the film is explored in relation to the male character. This kind of straight-jacketing limits the women's role to providing glamour, relief, respite and entertainment" (Sibal 3). Sibal reveals that Nepali films also restrict the females' roles to an object of entertainment. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, remarkable changes appear in Nepali filmmaking. Consequently, stereotyped gender roles get deviated as well as dismantled in the films; that are produced after the 2000s.

Nepali films, produced in 2000s, after the conversion of the country into a republic state, reflect people's consciousness to their rights, equality, and freedom. While reflecting people's awareness about their rights, these films use gender as a major theme. Chapagain assesses that the Nepali films produced in 2000s address the issues of identity, rights, justice, and fairness. He claims that reflecting the political change, the films of this era raise voice for the establishment of identity and equality (218). Likewise, citing example of the film *Numafung*, Martin Gaenzle claims that in 2000s the Nepali filmmakers appear with ethnic or indigenous cinemas. In Gaenzle's perception, the movie "*Numafung* (2002) belongs to the growing genre of ethnic or indigenous cinema that brings the culture of marginalized Limbu community in the limelight" (77). Gaenzle reveals that the reflection of the empowerment of ethnic culture in Nepal can be seen through the production of *Numafung*.

Similarly, Seira Tamang observes that *Numafung* is able to highlight the women's issues by presenting an alternative image of women. Tamang points out: "*Numafung* has presented the image of women as strong, determined, and full of agency and will" (par. 1). Nevertheless, even after the 2000s, Tamang assess that some of the films sustain the old trend as they continue to present the stereotyped image of the female and the male. Tamang notices that even the male characters of *Numafung* appear in traditional gender roles for they recurrently abuse female characters. *Numafung*, the central character of the film, is suppressed by her father and abused by her husband.

Abhimanyu Dixit, like Tamang claims that while exploring the social issues, Nepali filmmakers have not yet freed themselves from the conservative and narrow thought. Citing the example of the film *Machhaa Machhaa*, Dixit opines: "This film isn't just misogynist, it's also racist" (par. 10). He observes that this film has not only

disrespected the language and tone of ethnic people, but also has presented the female characters negatively. Likewise, Naresh Newar reveals that while copying the Bollywood cinema ridiculously, Nepali films reinforce the gender disequilibrium. Newar claims: “Kollywood superstar Rajesh Hamal stares down a gang of never-dowells. They charge towards the fearless hero who demolishes them with his bare hands. Later, when the effects are put in, the sound of fist meeting chain will be dishumdishum” (8). He observes that presenting Nepal’s favorite leading man in action; Nepali films reinforce the stereotyped gender roles, in which unbelievably strong hero defeats dozens of macho males. Conversely, flord damsels are being chased or they dance around pine trees.

Nischal Basnet, the director of Nepali film industry, observes that after 2000s, Nepali films have gone through sea change that resulted in exploring new trends and styles in the films. Basnet admits: “The Nepali film industry is changing its ways. We are seeing changes in the way we tell stories. Authentic Nepali stories are being explored” (par. 1). In Basnet’s view, reflecting the social realities, Nepali films portray the female characters in the new avatars. He claims that while achieving the goals of their life, they act boldly and provocatively; moreover, to a great surprise, they are not punished for trespassing the confinement set by the society. Chapagain’s view resembles to that of Basnet: Nepal has witnessed tumultuous political changes since the 2000s and these changes can be clearly found in the films produced after the post war period (people’s war) (108). Likewise, Chapagain appraises that introducing new theme; style, and technique, Nepali films explore the issues of marginalized people of our society.

Krishna Prasain observes that contemporary Nepali films depict the impertinence and discrepancy of the society, by bringing the marginal people such as

woman, Dalit, Indigenous and Madhesi at the center. Pointing out the changes that came in Nepali films after 2000s, Prasain reveals that, a new generation of savvy directors and producers, familiar with global trends in cinema, are changing the way films are made. So, these days, “these directors and producers do not hesitate to experiment and take bold risks” (par. 2). In Prasain’s perception, contemporary Nepali filmmakers explore the gender as theme because gender is a burning issue of the society.

Kyle Knight and Bibek Bhandari agree that gender has been used as a major theme of the films by Nepali filmmakers of 2000s. Knight and Bhandari assert: “In recent time, Nepali movie industry is opening up to LGBTQ issues, giving a glimpse of realism to a larger audience” (par. 7). They claim that Nepali movies have started to explore the theme of LGBTQ that has been ignored by Nepali filmmakers for several years. They point out that the contemporary filmmakers start focusing on the script, presentation, and promotion of their films, which have explored gender issues. They observe that contemporary film makers reveal the social and cultural constructions of femininities and masculinities.

Though in Nepal, laws and policies have not yet made substantial contribution for establishing gender just society, contemporary Nepali filmmakers have put their effort to project gender discrimination free society in their films. They highlight as well as condemn the faulty social practices that reenforce stereotyped gender roles and unequal relationship between the female and the male. They also provide space to those who break the stereotyped sexual orientation. The characters of these films are both heterosexual and homosexual people. This is because, “what roles women, men play onscreen is more often than not the male director’s notion of what roles they ought to be playing. This notion is based on the director’s beliefs, attitudes, and

values, combined with what the viewers want to see” (Nandakumar 3). In Nandakumar’s view, mostly, the director presents only those themes that are in stark demand in the market. Hence, the directors of Nepali films also have made films following the market’s demand.

Revealing the viewers’ psychology, Nandakumar observes that what viewers want to watch is something that conforms to their beliefs, attitudes, and values, which come from the social framework in which directors live. Nandakumar further claims: “Each member of the audience looks for entertainment that confirms to an existing system of beliefs, attitudes, and values which comes from a socio-cultural context in society” (3). Therefore, observing the changes that are adopted by the people in the contemporary social milieu, Nepali filmmakers explore the issues of gender minorities, men, and women in their films.

In fact, influenced by the socio-political changes in the country, contemporary Nepali film makers reflect those changes in their films. Moreover, they expose even the concealed issues like homosexuality. Not only that, in Knight’s and Bhandari’s perception, the filmmakers also depict the painful conditions of the sexual minorities of the society that is governed by heterosexual people (par. 10). Knight and Bhandari reveal that for Nepali filmmakers, to explore the issues of homosexuality is still possible because apart from entertainment, film plays a major role in transforming the social structures. In Knight’s and Bhandari’s notion, films are not only abiding by the root values and generalities, there are also sparkling dialogues that activate communities around the key social issues. Hence, observing these strengths and attributes of the contemporary films, the researcher has selected the films *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava*, and *Pashupati Prasad* for this research.

Rational of Selecting the Texts

Since the contemporary Nepali novels – *Facing my Phantoms* (2010), *Toda* [*Thank You*] (2013), and *Cheerharan* [*Disrobe*] (2016) – and films – *Ma Hoina Ma* [*I am Not Who I am*] (2016), *Soongava* [*Orchid*] (2012), and *Pashupati Prasad* (2016) – explore the gender issues prominently, the researcher has selected these texts for her research. The researcher tempts to select these three novels because they are written by contemporary women novelists. The researcher believes that being female novelists they have explored the pains of females, caused by gender biased social norms, very realistically. Apart from that, they have proved through their literary narratives that female novelists not only observe the males’ problems minutely, but also points out the causes of their difficulties. Likewise, these novelists point out that the existing gender-biased social norms are the main cause of suffering of both the females and the males. Similarly, all of these novels have portrayed the problems caused by gender stereotype that occurred mainly, during the conflict in the nation. The identical portrayal of gender issue in the war-led country instigates the researcher to carry forward her study concentrating on these texts. Likewise, the researcher selects these films because film is more effective means to present the social issues than that of novels. Film easily reaches to the large number of audiences, whereas novel is reachable to only those who are educated. The researcher selects the film *Pashupati Prasad* for her research because the film appears as one of the most popular films of Nepali film industry that highlights the harmful effects of imposition of masculine roles to the males. Similarly, the researcher selects the films *Soongava* and *Ma Hoina Ma* because these films have explored the rarely used issues of LGBTQ. Though in Nepali films, lesbian and gay have been presented as minor characters or as ridiculous characters, these films have centralized the story on lesbian

and gay characters by casting them as major characters. Moreover, the films have unveiled the pain of non-heterosexual people who struggle hard to live a normal life in our society.

Statement of the Problem

The selected novels and films depict the societies that constrain the individual to the traditional gender roles. In these societies characters are assigned to the stereotyped gender roles such as submissive house-wife, devoted mother, self-sacrificing daughter, dutiful daughter in law, and loyal wife to the females; and responsible bread winner, rational leader, authoritative family-head, courageous warrior to the males. Consequently, privileged from the traditional gender roles, the male dwellers of these societies appear as the oppressor to the female residents. Likewise, confined to the traditional gender identity, female members get oppressed. In fact, in these societies both the female and the male characters get repressed in the burden of the socially assigned gender roles. Similarly, some of these texts portray the societies that carry hatred towards homosexual people. By endorsing heterosexual identity, the inhabitants of these societies exploit, abuse, and discriminate against the homosexuals. These texts also expose that being males, the characters get associated to the certain professions such as arm force, police force, corporator, head of the village and the alike which put them into vulnerable state. Likewise, the ongoing conflict in the nation put the male characters in more problematic condition because assigned to the roles of brave warrior, competitive corporator, successful leader, male characters involve in war, conflict, competitions, and rivalry that resulted in death, physical assault, abuse, and disappearance. In the selected texts, the changed circumstances bring deviations in the gender roles of the characters that resulted in punishments from the society and the family. As contemporary Nepali literature reflects the social happenings, whether

such issues of gender imbalance configure in fictional narratives, including contemporary Nepali novels – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda*, and *Cheerharan* – and films – *Pashupati Prasad*, *Soongava*, and *Ma Hoina Ma* – or not is the main concern of my study. Therefore, in this context, with the assumption that the selected texts have explored the gender issues, the researcher has formed the following research questions:

1. How and why do the characters of the selected novels and films confine to traditional gender roles?
2. Why do the characters transgress the traditional gender roles and identities?
3. Transgressing the socially imposed gender roles and identities, what consequences do the characters face?
4. What consequences do the characters face as they perform stereotyped gender roles?
5. How do the characters liberate themselves from the stereotyped gender roles and identities?

Hypothesis

The characters in the selected texts are confined to the stereotyped gender roles due to socio-cultural norms; nevertheless, they do not stick to the conventional gender roles and identity; rather, they recurrently transgress the gender norms and liberate themselves from the gender confinement as gender is constructed and fluid.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research is to explore the reasons for the dynamics of gender roles in contemporary Nepali Novels and Films. The general objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate reasons behind major characters' confinement to traditional gender roles in the selected texts,

2. To navigate consequences, characters face while confined to traditional gender roles,
3. To offer consequences, characters face while transgressing stereotyped gender Image, and
4. To analyze processes of characters' liberation from the traditional gender roles and identities.

Methodology/Conceptual Framework

To meet the above-mentioned objectives, this research deploys the qualitative research model. Based this dissertation on qualitative research design, the selected contemporary Nepali novels – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda*, and *Cheerharan* – and films *Pashupati Prasad*, *Soongava*, and *Ma Hoina Ma* – have been critically analyzed. These novels have been used as primary texts because these texts enunciate the gender issues prevalent in contemporary heteronormative Nepali society. Similarly, to justify and validate the arguments of this research, the ideas and arguments have been taken from the social phenomena such as criticisms made on these novels, experts' suggestions and interviews with the novelists are only the few. Apart from that, for the interpretation and analysis of the texts, books on gender theory, religious and constitutional texts, research documents published by various institutions and unscripted gendered aphorisms have been used. These materials are used as the secondary source, which have been collected through library sources, books, and websites.

As a conceptual framework, the theoretical concepts of: 'gender performativity' 'gender fluidity' and 'gender normativity' that have been adopted from the idea of constructivist gender theorists Judith Butler, R.W. Connell, and Michael Kimmel have been used. These theorists postulate that gender is a socially

constructed phenomenon that is instituted and controlled through social and cultural norms. These theorists argue that the gender roles and identities of every individual, the LGBTQ people, the male, and the female are constructed through social norms and values, which are imposed through religious scriptures, aphorisms, socially produced script and social practices. Constructivist gender theorist claim that since gender is not an innate entity, people defy the socially imposed roles and deviate from the socially constructed gender identity. These theoretical concepts and methodology of this research are discussed in detail in the third chapter of this thesis which includes methodological approach, theoretical framework, models of theoretical approach and concept; and methods and techniques of data collection and interpretation.

Significance of the Study

This study engages the readers to the prevalent gender practices in the contemporary Nepali society and the people's affirmation as well as reaction to the stereotyped gender roles and identity. Likewise, it will support them to make a comparison of gender practices of Nepali society in the past and at the present. Furthermore, it will assist the readers to understand and analyze the gender issues of contemporary Nepali novels and films. Moreover, it will attempt to inform the readers about changed scenario of the society where people's expectation of gender roles has changed as the role and responsibilities of the female, the LGBTQ people, and the male have already shifted. It also encourages the scholars to compare between the contemporary Nepali novels and films and the novels and films produced in the past. Finally, the English-speaking readers will also benefit from the knowledge about the Nepali literature and films.

Delimitation

This study is confined to the close and detailed study of the contemporary Nepali novels – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda* and *Cheerharan* and films – *Soongava*, *Ma Hoina Ma* and *Pashupati Prasaad*. Other texts produced by these authors and film makers are excluded from this study. The study focuses on the analysis of these novels and films from the perspective of gender theory. Though theme, technique and style of these selected texts can be analyzed using other theories and ideas from Marxist theory, cultural studies, only gender theory has been used in this research.

Organization of the Study

Tentatively the study has been divided into six main chapters and other sub-chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction of the study. Laying the foundation for the study, the first chapter includes an introduction to the area of study. This chapter explains the problematic of the research, purpose of the study, significance of the study, delimitation and methodology, along with the relevance of the study. The second chapter is Review of Literature which reviews the previous literature relevant to the topic. It critically analyzes and evaluates the existing body of knowledge related to the topic. This chapter shows how this study makes a departure from all previous studies on the use of gender theory for the analysis of the novels and films. The third chapter discusses gender as a theoretical methodology. It deals with the concept of gender theory and its development and use of these theories in the analysis of literature as a theoretical tool. This chapter includes the method and technique of data collection. The fourth and fifth chapters analyze the texts to solve the question raised in the statement of the problems. These chapters have examined the text in relation with the theory discussed in the third chapter. Finally, the sixth chapter has concluded the dissertation. It has included summary, findings and recommendation.

Chapter Two

Reflection of Socio-political Changes in Contemporary Nepali Literature: A Review of Literature

This dissertation explores gender issues in contemporary Nepali novels and films. This chapter focuses on the ideas of the writers and critics that help to develop the understanding about the concept of the term contemporariness and contemporary literature. Similarly, since the study demands to present the trends of contemporary literature and cinemas, this chapter includes critics' views on the trend of contemporary literature and movies. Apart from that, this chapter consists of the reviews on literature that deals with the influence of the trends and techniques of world movies on Nepali films. Likewise, this chapter contains the critics' views and ideas on the selected novels – Uma Subedi's *Toda*, Sheeba Shah's *Facing my Phantoms*, and Neelam Karki Niharika's *Cheerharan* and the cinematic texts – *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava*, and *Pashupati Prasad* –for this dissertation. The researcher notices that to analyze the contemporary Nepali literature and cinematic texts, it is necessary to begin the study with the definition of the term 'contemporary' and features of 'contemporary literature'. Therefore, the following sections create a background for the analysis of contemporary Nepali novels and cinematic texts.

Defining the term 'Contemporary'

Theorists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, and Giorgio Agamben define the term 'contemporary' relating it to the concept of time. They relate the term to the temporariness rather than permanence. Therefore, the term contemporary denotes the time duration of present time. Nietzsche situates his claim for contemporariness with "respect to the present" (qtd in Agamben 40). He presents the characteristics of contemporariness: "those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those

who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands” (40). In Nietzsche’s perception, having disconnection to the demand of the time and having the feature of anachronism, contemporary authors become more capable than others in perceiving and grasping their own time.

Similarly, Agamben argues that contemporariness has singular relationship with one’s own time. For him, contemporariness adheres to the present time and, at the same time, it keeps a distance from the present time (41). He further suggests that contemporariness consists of the essence of both past and the future. In the same way, Agamben views that the term ‘contemporary’ is associated to experience a state of proximity with one’s temporality. So, it addresses and deals with the issues that are result of the immediate social realities. In the same vein, throwing light on the concept of ‘contemporary’, Claire Bishop underscores that “‘contemporary’ denotes a decisive break with modernity, one that postmodernity failed to recognize. It is marked by the emergence of biopolitics, and cognitive labor as new historical realities” (qtd in Mangolte et al. 46). Bishop observes that contemporariness is a state of being founded on temporal rupture. For Bishop, the contemporary asserts a specific relationship to time. Likewise, Clemens Spahr and Philip Löffler define the term ‘contemporary’ as “a series of global, political, social, and cultural transformations that began to affect the U.S. in the late 1980s” (162). They urge that to grasp the idea about the contemporary a vast historical horizon should be approached. In Spahr’s and Löffler’s perception, the term contemporary comprises current trends in national and global politics along with cultural and political formations produced in the present era.

In the same way, artists and authors such as Melillo, Manson, and Nelson claim that contemporary art amalgamates global perspectives, and influences the contemporary world activities. Joseph V. Melillo argues that he finds contemporariness in

the plays that uncover something new in the familiar. Melillo delineates contemporary art: “contemporariness is found in the art that reveals the spirit and essence of some of the world’s great cities and cultures, and in all those innovative works that have tremendous immediacy giving the audience a new and unexpected perspective” (qtd in Mangolte et al. 57). Similarly, Caden Manson and Jemma Nelson find contemporariness in a paradigm shift in concert that has been appearing with innovations in technology in areas of communication, language, image, economy, presence, democracy, and environment (qtd in Mangolte et al. 58). They view that contemporary has nexus to innovativeness and novice ideas.

Likewise, Cohen Samuel argues that contemporary literature reflects current realities in life and culture. Highlighting the features of contemporary fictions, Sam underscores that, “Contemporary fiction constituted a radical break in its form and content from the fiction that preceded it” (17). In Cohen’s perception, contemporary authors focus their writing on textuality, self-reflexivity, and meta-fiction. In the same way, Jago Morrison also focuses on the trend and features of contemporary novels. He argues that since questions of ethnicity, gender and sexuality have become central to academic literary debate in Britain and United States, contemporary novels are anything but homogeneous (5). In his view, contemporary novels are interesting for their ability to locate themselves in the interstices—the spaces between national cultures, genders, and histories. He suggests that contemporary fiction needs to be read as a product of cultural conditions from which it emerges.

Likewise, Morrison, sets the duration of “the past two and half decades” (7) for the contemporary literature. Similarly, Mohanraj Sharma and Amar Giri agree upon the idea that the literature produced within last two and half decades make contemporary Nepali literature (13). Thus, following the time frame, set by these critics,

the researcher selects the texts for her study. Hence, to lay the foundation of this research, the section below consists of the trends and features in the contemporary Nepali literary creations.

Trends and Features in Contemporary Nepali Literature

Contemporary Nepali literature reflects the changes occurred in contemporary society. It portrays the current political upheavals and socio-cultural transformation occurred in Nepali society. Based on these characteristics, critics outline the Nepali literature, more or less, in the same time frame i.e., the time period of about two decades. Nevertheless, Ramprasad Gyawali argues that the idea of contemporary literature is in itself a very rough estimation; so, it is very difficult to encapsulate it in a certain time frame (56). Purosotam Subedi and et.al also reinforces about the limited time frame of contemporary literature. They observe that contemporary literature covers very short duration; in fact, it generally takes the time period of one or two and half decade (*Pragyaa Samakaalina* 12). So far as declaring the time frame of contemporary literature is concerned, critics present the same time frame. However, they have not presented the identical ideas about the starting date of contemporary literature.

In fact, Nepali critics have presented various dates as a starting point of contemporary Nepali literature. Abhi Subedi claims that the initial date of contemporary Nepali poetry is 2025 BS/1964 AD. In his notion, from this date, Nepali writers start to reflect the changes that resulted from the influence of the global changes (20). On the contrary, Amar Giri and Purusottam Subedi et al present the different date than that of Abhi Subedi to indicate the starting point of contemporary Nepali literature. They claim that contemporary Nepali literature started to be written from the date 2036 BS/1980 AD (*Samakaalina Nepali Kavitaako Baichaarika*

Paripekshya 10, *Pragyaan Samakaalina Nepali Kavita Bhaaga eka* 12). Similarly, pointing out the starting date of contemporary Nepali poetry, Kumar Prasad Koirala and Gita Tripathi underscore that the poems that are written after 2036 BS/1980 AD is contemporary Nepali poetry (142, 191). Conversely, Netra Atom claims that the literature created after 2046 BS/1990 AD is contemporary Nepali literature (9). Hence, critics present various dates as the beginning of contemporary Nepali literature.

Likewise, Gautam views that Nepali critics have defined the term contemporary variously; however, their definitions have commonality as they delineate that ‘contemporary literature’ is the reflection of a certain tendency of a particular age or time period (*Samakaalina Nepali* 147). Therefore, in Gautam’s perception, contemporary literature consists of norms and values, beliefs, ideas, events, consciousness, thoughts, perspectives, and principles of present time. He discloses that the inclusion of present circumstance is an essential factor of contemporary literature. Supporting the similar idea, Gita Tripathi explicates that among many times division of present time, the latest phase is related to the contemporary; likewise, the literature that reflects the changes appeared in the society and various walks of life is contemporary literature (191). In her view, contemporary literature should reproduce the current social changes. So, for her, the literature that fails to reflect the current occurrences and beliefs cannot be contemporary literature even though it is a product of present time.

Purosottam Subedi, whose view resembles to that of Tripathi, argues that contemporary poets have ideas and understanding about the current time and its reality. He suggests that contemporary poets need to have realization of philosophy of life and capacity to feel the problems of modern life (*Sankramanako Saahitya* 35).

Likewise, Amar Giri affirms that a basic point of writing contemporary Nepali literature is the construction of the time's consciousness that makes them serious and sensible about various aspects and issues of their time. Giri suggests that belongingness of contemporary time does not make the creator contemporary; rather, to become a contemporary writer, the essence of contemporariness is obligatory (*Samakaalina Nepali* 11). These critics affirm that 'contemporariness' is a kind of unique facet in literature; so, the writers should acquaint the contemporary circumstances and activities while creating contemporary literature.

These critics believe that there is a strong connection between contemporary writers and the time in which they live; therefore, contemporary writers capture the current moments and reflect those moments in their creations. Amar Giri, Hemanath Poudel and Laxmanprasad Gautam, claim that in the context of Nepali literature, contemporary authors observe the changes occurred in 2046BS/AD1990 in the nation and reproduce those changes in their writings (10). For them, the literature created after the revolution of 2046 BS/1990 AD and the literature created during and after the ten-year long armed conflict (2052/1996-2062BS/2006) are contemporary literature as authors have documented as well as depicted the current socio-political activities in their works. Similarly, Laxmanprasad Gautam suggests that contemporary is related to changing time, and so to be connected to the current time is a major feature of contemporality (*Raajaneetika* 110). In Gautam's perception, contemporality is related to the shifting of time; so, contemporary literature adopts and echoes the changes of the surroundings.

Proposing the similar idea, Laxman Prasad Gautam underscores the features of contemporary literature and argues that contemporary literature swathes the changes of contemporary society. He suggests to labeling the literature created in 1996-2006

as contemporary literature for they reflect the socio-political changes of the nation (1). In his notion, contemporary Nepali literature always gets influenced with the political upheavals of the country; therefore, contemporary literature echoes the terror, fear, murder, violence, corruption, and tumult of the contemporary society. Gautam apprises that inclusion of political upheavals is a prominent feature of contemporary Nepali literature, whereas, in Purosottam Subedi's observation, the features of contemporary literature are: experimentations in style, use of stream of consciousness technique, short sentences, and exploration of themes such as current national and global issues (*Sankramanako* 46). Likewise, highlighting the style of contemporary writers, Manjushree Thapa asserts: "their language was simple, with a diction more spoken (and colloquial)" (par. 6). She reveals that the major features of contemporary Nepali literature reflect in its style.

In the same way, focusing the main theme of contemporary literature, Laxman Prasad Gautam claims that there is always vast relationship between political movements and contemporary Nepali literature; therefore, political turmoil and its effect is the major theme of the contemporary Nepali literature (*Rajnitika* 5). In his view, contemporary Nepali literature has been used as a medium of protest against mischievous and immoral deeds of politician, prevalent injustice, suppression, and corruption in the country. Consequently, political changes are used as a main theme of contemporary literature. Likewise, for Gita Tripathi, the major themes of contemporary Nepali literature are: protest of the tradition, search of humanity, portrayal of disparity, satire on the human values, disbelief on the power of God, appeal for change, and expression of pain caused by various wars, protest against political instability, feministic thought, diasporic expression, and globalization (191).

Apart from this, she claims that the ecological issue has become a major theme of contemporary Nepali literature.

Like Tripathi, Giri explicates that ups and downs, light and darkness, pain and loss-faced by contemporary people-are the themes of contemporary Nepali literature. In his perception, influenced by globalization, which resulted in economic-political interference and cultural attack, contemporary writers use these issues as themes (103). He notices that contemporary Nepali writers deploy the themes such as search for identity, feeling of patriotism, development of cyber consciousness, love and obsession towards native culture and alike in their literary creations. Mukul Dahal's observation resembles to that of Giri; as he argues that "In the twenty-first century, human civilization has seen an unimaginable development of information technology by which human consciousness experienced unforeseen changes in spheres of various activities. Consequently, the impacts of this all apparently appeared as themes of contemporary Nepali novels" (par. 4). Dahal views that the changes around the world influence contemporary literary narratives.

Supporting Dahal's idea, Hariprasad Sharma reveals that since decrease and dissolve of humanity are the reality of contemporary society, the contemporary Nepali fictions depict those issues as themes. He observes that contemporary Nepali writers have not only exhibited the discrepancy of the society but also have portrayed the people's reaction against them in the forms of the despondency, dissatisfaction, frustration, and aimlessness of the people (254). Sharma further claims that contemporary Nepali fiction portrays the changes that appeared in local and global scenario and its effect. He notices that apart from this, these writers have explored the issues such as gender, ethnicity, and Diaspora in their creations.

Like contemporary fiction writers, contemporary Nepali novelists have reflected the current social issues as themes in their literary narratives. Contemporary novels have employed the issues of gender, caste, and culture. Hrishiraj Baral reveals that influenced by the ongoing socio-political upheavals of the country, the contemporary Nepali novelists explore the tales of Maoist cadres, army officers, female activists, corrupt political leaders and the alike. Through these characters they reveal the discrepancy such as inequality, injustice, exploitation, and discrimination, prevalent in Nepali society (*Maarksbaada* 392). He points out that major themes of current literary narratives are: ten-years long People's War, longing for the past, anger and agony towards the depletion of ideal and decline of political-cultural values, increasing desire for political identity, commitment for revolution, consciousness towards revolution and change (*Maarksbaada* 400). In Baral's perception, contemporary novelists portray the condition in which characters raise their voices against those discrepancy.

In the same way, Rajendra Subedi views that postmodernism influenced contemporary Nepali novels. Therefore, under the influence of postmodernism, the contemporary Nepali literary narratives have developed the following trends: i) genre mixing; ii) genre deconstruction; iii) non-objectivity; iv) attempt for non-thoughtfulness; v) attempt for non-structurality; vi) indifference toward established values; vii) non-identification of identified object, style, and thought; vii) and identification of non-identified object, style and thought (*Samasaamayikata* 9). Similarly, Baral highlights the literary style developed by contemporary Nepali novelists. In his observation, the contemporary novelists have used flashback technique, stream of consciousness technique, and descriptive method ("Samakaalina" 95). Likewise, the use of first person and third person point of view are other style and

techniques that have been used in contemporary Nepali novels. Apart from this, he claims that contemporary Nepali novels present the features such as distortion of myth, indifference towards established values, attempt to establish a new value, and use of trauma theory.

Numerous critics have reviewed the major features of contemporary Nepali literature. Moreover, they argue that inter-textuality, genre-mixing, and deconstruction are the major characteristics of contemporary Nepali literature. Likewise, they claim that breaking the convention, the contemporary literature brings the margin into the center. Not only those, the contemporary authors portray the disparity, despondency, and disintegration prevailed in the society. Furthermore, they also reflect the eagerness of change, political instability, and persistence of war. Additionally, these critics observe that every genre of contemporary Nepali literature has commonality in employing the themes, issues, style and technique.

Though critics show their interest in various aspects of the contemporary Nepali literature, it is yet to take the gender issue as a main point of research and discourse. So, the contemporary Nepali literature needs a detail analysis of this theme. Likewise, in order to find out whether gender is a prominent theme of contemporary films, the researcher surveys the major themes and trends of contemporary Hollywood films in the section below. In this section, the researcher focuses her study on contemporary Hollywood films because by coping Bollywood films which get influenced by Hollywood films, Nepali films reflect the themes of Hollywood films

Themes and Trends in Contemporary Hollywood Films

In changing landscape of cultural norms, popular media such as movies reflect as well as influence the current values of society. The analysis of themes and trends of contemporary movies, therefore, offer insightful information about the reciprocal

influence. The contemporary films witness and reflect several changes in the late twentieth century in both: subject matter and the technique all over the world. In “New Hollywood, New Millennium”, focusing mainly on the film industry in the late 1980s and 1990s, Thomas Schatz observes that “The new Hollywood steadily morphed into Conglomerate Hollywood” (19). In Schatz’s perception, in early 2000 notable changes appeared in Hollywood “due particularly to the combined impact of conglomeration, globalization, and digitization—a veritable triumvirate of macro-industrial forces whose effects seem to intensify with each passing year” (19). Schatz reveals that influenced by other cinemas, Hollywood cinemas absorb the global changes and start using new themes and techniques.

Hollywood’s top franchises followed the current trend that appeared globally in movie making. Consequently, to follow the new techniques and subject matters become a rule of this genre. Schatz reveals that following the demand of primary market and target audience as well as exploring the nature and range of transmedia reiterations, Hollywood’s franchises “follow many (if not most) of the new techniques” (34). In Schatz’s observation, addressing the demand of the audience, film makers in Hollywood explored various themes and concepts in their creations. Consequently, Hollywood films became more complex thematically and politically as well.

Schatz underscores the new trend of Hollywood movies and claims that dismantling the traditional concept of presenting hero as a well-mannered, good-looking person, Hollywood films presents its protagonist as a rugged individual. Likewise, in Schatz’s perception, Hollywood movies adopt the technical ingenuity, and reinforce the masculine superiority. Apart from that, he reveals that targeting the younger and less sophisticated audiences, Hollywood films concentrates on the idea

of presenting the concept of superhero and fantasy franchises. Apart from that, in Schatz's observation, Hollywood movies tend to "portray the world and its inhabitants in simple binaries of light and dark, good and evil" (34). He further points out that to present the prevalent disorder of this world, is a major theme of contemporary cinema. In his view, these movies also have supported the belief that the disorder is invariably the result of human volition, of evil-doers who abuse and misuse power; suggesting that the restoration of order can only be attained through the intervention of the superhero.

In the same way, Harry M. Benshoff points out that exploration of the issues of sexual minorities is another major trend of contemporary films. For him, the production of films that dealt with the issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBTQ) through the portrayal of the condition of these characters, set a new trend in film industry. He argues that "After decades of invisibility and/or connotative stereotyping (enforced by the Hollywood Production Code and the film industry's more far-reaching and long-lasting heterosexism), the last twenty years have seen the rise of a vigorous gay and lesbian independent cinema, including the so-called queer cinema (192). He further claims that this boom in LGBTQ media, mirrors the tremendous gains that LGBTQ people in Western nations have made in most areas of real life, bringing the message that the main mainstream dominations are beginning to welcome homosexuals into their congregations.

Benshoff suggests that the film that explored the issues of LGBTQ helps to address their problems. He views that because of presenting LGBTQ's issues in the films, the debate for gay marriage, which most LGBTQ people could not have even imagined taking twenty years ago-has moved to center stage. In his perception, while exploring the current affairs in the movies, these films tremendously used LGBTQ as

theme. He reveals that since in 2003, any and all state laws criminalizing consenting sexual behavior between adults were struck down by the United States Supreme Court, people of USA start accepting the existence of sexual minorities. Moreover, they stop expressing their hatred towards LGBTQ people, at least in public zone. Therefore, noticing these changes, the film makers in Hollywood start deploying these changes in films (192). Besides the issue of LGBTQ, another major issue that is brought in the contemporary cinema, is feminist issue.

Influenced by various feminist movements and the occurrence of changes in the surroundings, contemporary cinemas bring women's issue and women character at the center. In Vojkovic's perception, "Mainly, Asian films start to present female heroes who possess super human skills emanating a sense of female empowerment. The heroines in these films can perform 'masculinities': they are physically strong and they display combats skills, they can act as leaders, and maintain or restore the law and order in the society" (Vojkovic 183). In Vojkovic's view, influenced by Asian cinemas, Hollywood movies started to present the female character in powerful roles.

On the contrary, Jocelyn Nichole Murphy presents a different picture of Hollywood. In her critical reception, Murphy claims that Hollywood projects women in the patriarchal structures. Murphy further argues that the representation of female in contemporary cinemas has always been exploitative because in these films, women are presented nothing more than objects to be won, prizes to be shown off, and playthings to be abused (5). Likewise, Laura Mulvey also presents the similar views and reveals that in Hollywood films, females are objectified because heterosexual men are in control of the camera (837). The cameraman is a professional, so he or she takes several shots of female body in line with the script of the movie the film

industry prepared. Similarly, the script is based on the story which is a product of the patriarchal society. The erotic representation of female body on the screen is guided and controlled by the psychic of patriarchal society. In the film industry itself, the man becomes the dominant power inside the created film fantasy, whereas the woman is submissive to the active gaze from the man.

Likewise, highlighting the trend of Hollywood movie, Walt Bi points out that “Hollywood movies seek to build a national image characterized by freedom, equality, prosperity and other positive aspects. Concepts such as freedom and equality are reinforced through storylines” (qtd in Andrew Ali Ibbi 96). He asserts that Hollywood movies have influenced the culture of people around the world. Since filmmakers around the world have influenced each other and have copied each other’s techniques and stories, Nepali filmmakers are no exception. Therefore, the section below discusses how film industries have influenced each other and how Nepali films have influenced from Hollywood movies, Bollywood movies and even Korean movies. This sub section has also discussed that coping the films from the various nations, Nepali cinemas have brought some drastic changes in themes and techniques.

Circulatory Influences in Contemporary Movies

The contemporary movies have developed certain techniques and has grown analogous trend all over the world. This happens because the film industries of the world copy the themes and techniques from each other. Sasa Vojkovic claims: “In the past, the dominant exchange of influences was between Hollywood and European cinema. Today, with the movement of globalization, the third element has been inserted into the Euro-American exchange-Asian cinema” (176). In Vojkovic’s perception, there are an increasing number of films in which the circularity of influences has been reflected.

Affirming to Vojkovic claim, John Woo points out the reciprocal influence between Hollywood and Asian films and describes the trend of copying each other by Hong Kong films and Hollywood films in the following way: “it is ironic that Hollywood started to imitate Hong Kong films of the late 1980s and 1990s, whereas Hong Kong films (to a certain degree) are imitations of Hollywood films, so Hollywood is imitating Hollywood” (qtd in Vojkovic 177). Citing the example of Hollywood and Hong Kong films, Vojkovic and Woo argue that imitating themes and techniques used by the movie industries of the different parts of the world, movie industries develop cinematic texts in a new line of communication. Similarly, adoption of each other’s trend, films are opened up to the urgency of intersubjective engagement, as well as intercultural and transnational literacy.

Reinforcing the idea that cinemas are being revitalized through the influences of global cinema, Chris Berry and Laikwan Pang argue that “in the age of flexible production, Chinese cinema has also been seen as something more flexible, multiple, and open interconnected with dynamic participation in global cinema” (91). They further claim that as a combinatory, Chinese cinema is never static but constantly in dissolution and reconstruction. In Berry’s and Pang’s perception, the tendency of reconstruction makes the Chinese cinema interesting. Moreover, the trend of adopting the trend of other film industries enhances the status of Chinese cinema globally. Likewise, containing the essence from the film industries around the world, Chinese cinema reflects the general condition of global cinema.

Similarly, in “Hollywood, the American Image and the Global Film Industry”, Andrew Ali Ibbi shows the influence of Hollywood in Chinese cinemas. She points out that “in the earliest days of silent films, Chinese directors already were keenly observant of the Hollywood style and techniques, having adopted analytical editing,

soft focus, black lighting and masking from the Americans and this process continues till today” (101). Ibbi notices that Asian films that feature female heroes with super human skills, who involve in exhilarating action scenes, have made remarkable influence in Hollywood and have spread around the world. Likewise, Alison Butler, has highlighted influence of Hollywood, particularly while exploring gender as a main theme, on the movies that were produced in the different parts of the world. The essay mentions: “Hollywood constructions of gender have worldwide significance because of the global reach of the US film industry” (par 3). Hence, in film making, western and eastern trends got amalgamed.

In the same way, pointing out the influence of Hollywood to Hindi Cinema, film and TV writer Paurush Kumar claims: “Although the Hindi film industry has a lot of heights, it is more than its fair share of flaws which is caused by the influence of Hollywood cinema. Chief flaws among these are: copying of costumes, characters and plotlines from Hollywood” (par. 1). Paurush Kumar views that due to the blind copy of Hollywood, Bollywood has lost its creativity. Equally, pointing out the influence of Hollywood in Bollywood, Jonathan R. Miller argues that Hollywood has immensely influenced the Bollywood; nevertheless, Bollywood’s access to Hollywood has not necessarily increased to the same extent. He further claims that yet, “Bollywood maintains a presence within the global city through the Indian Diaspora; Bollywood is absolutely located within the global city and as a ‘major actor of social engineering’” (38). Hence, Miller has pointed out the reciprocal influences of Hollywood and Bollywood.

Similarly, in the article “Hollywood, the American Image and the Global Film Industry”, Andrew Ali Ibbi claims that “It is not only in Africa that Hollywood has come to dominate the way of thinking of filmmakers and the audience, it is the same

in film industries all over the world” (94). He observes that although movies from around the world has continued to influence American filmmakers, their impact pales in comparison with that of Hollywood’s output on the rest of the world. He further reveals that Hollywood film is the American ideological medium of mass communication; it has influenced the movie industries in several countries as well. He updates that this process is called Hollywoodization, in which the Hollywood affects the movie industries in Asia to adopt the production style, dressing, or even imitate the name of Hollywood. Coping Bollywood, Nepali film industry also goes through the process of Hollywoodization because Bollywood is influenced by Hollywood.

Nepali film critics observe that Nepali films are always under the influence of other film industries. Ramyata Limbu observes that, Nepali films have been grossly influenced and dominated by Hindi cinema or Bollywood film in its choice of subject matter to techniques (par. 4). In her perception, vastly influenced with Bollywood and Nepali films are producing films with invincible heroes, nubile heroines, doses of melodrama, and prolonged song and dance sequences. Nepali film critics such as Krandan Chapagain, Rajendra Subedi and Yangesh claim that Nepali films are under the shadow of Bollywood films for over the four decades.

In fact, in these critics’ perception, Nepali films seem to be the photocopies of Bollywood films. They reveal that since Bellwood films are produced under the influence of Hollywood films, coping Bollywood, Nepali films do not remain untouched by the impact of Hollywood films. Yangesh has presented two reasons for Bollywood’s influence over Nepali movies. First reason is that filmmakers actually learnt the technique of film making from India. He observes that since Bollywood was a school of film making, for them, it was obvious to get influenced by Bollywood. Another reason, according to him, is that the film makers implanted the style they

learnt in Bollywood. So, unfortunately, they never can free themselves from the influence of Bollywood over the period of time (par. 9). Similarly, Chapagain underscores that the trend of copying the Bollywood movies had been started from *Sindura* (208) that continues till today.

Since there is a reciprocal influence in movie making around the world, a leap that Hollywood has taken, in making of contemporary cinema, automatically reflects in the films all over the world. Pointing out the changes, Chapagain claims that new generations of Nepali film makers are familiar with and have influenced by global trends in cinema. Consequently, they have adopted those changes in Nepali films. According to Chapagain, Nepali films have been influenced by the world cinema. He observes that it is highly influenced by Hindi films and Hollywood films, and nowadays the influence of Korean films is also in its extreme (228). Reinforcing the idea that Nepali movies have completely influenced by Bollywood movies, Sarala Gautam presents Yadav Kharel's view: "Nepali viewers are more sophisticated now and their preference has evolved, it's the makers who have fallen behind. We are still trapped in Bollywood's grip and as we scamper to break production records, we have sacrificed quality" (par. 4). For Kharel, copy of Bollywood movies has done great harm to the Nepali cinemas.

Rajendra Subedi presents a different view to that of Kharel. Subedi reveals that influenced by the world cinema, Nepali film makers have been introducing new techniques and themes that has proved to be fruitful for Nepali audience. Nepali films have started focusing the issues such as gender, ethnicity, and Diaspora, which used to place in the margin, in films. He also exposes that Nepali film industry is just crawling towards the techniques that are used in contemporary world cinema (*Chalachitra* 108). In his perception, though Nepali cinemas reflect some changes in

choice of subject matters, they are yet to employ the gender issues adequately.

However, a few of them have presented the gender issues in their films which draw the researcher's attention. The selected texts for this study are among them, which have been reviewed in the following section.

An Overview on Contemporary Nepali Novels and Films

This research deals with gender issues explored in novels – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda*, and *Cheerharan* – and films – *Pashupati Prasad*, *Soongava*, and *Ma Hoina Ma*. So, in order to establish a firm background of this study, and to find out the research gap that paves the way for the further study of the texts, all the available previous studies, along with critics' perspectives on the selected texts have included in this section. The researcher observes that after the publication, the selected texts of this dissertation establish a significant amount of critical consideration from various scholars' perceptions and reflections. Critics have shown interest and concern about the trend and elements of contemporary Nepali novels and films and have analyzed the different aspects of these novels and films. To facilitate the present research the available literatures that are related to the selected novels and films are reviewed herewith.

The novel *Facing my Phantoms* is appreciated for reflecting the ongoing political upheavals in the country. Critic Amar Bahadur Shrestha writes, "When Sheeba Shah starts writing *Facing my Phantoms*, the then political atmosphere was still in considerable turmoil. The novel ends at the point in Nepal's history when the king has been overthrown and the parties are celebrating at the Tundikhel" (8). Shrestha observes *Facing my Phantoms* depicts the political changes and its effect on the people of the then society. For this reason, he finds this novel very appealing. Likewise, in his perception, to draw the readers' attention, there are various factors in the novel.

He guesses: “A few will no doubt identify themselves with the protagonist and some could even see a bit of their own lifestyle in Sanjeevani’s” (8). Apart from that, Shrestha notices that to make the story interesting, in *Facing my Phantoms* Shah beautifully mingles the two stories of different characters Sanat and Sanjeevani; similarly, she captures the moments of two different times of history, highlighting the condition of females.

Highlighting the atmosphere portrayed in *Facing my Phantoms*, Devi Raman Pandit underscores that, setting *Facing my Phantoms* in the background of the Maoist insurgency, Sheeba Shah provides a glimpse of socio-political milieu of contemporary period. In Pandit’s perception, *Facing my Phantoms* reflects “The ongoing Maoist insurgency and the bloodshed concomitant to it including the death of the protagonist's brother Sanjaya” (12). Apart from this, he notices that being a strong advocate of females’ right, Shah delves boldly into repressive cultural values and social norms, to liberate women from "certain stereotypes" (12). He argues that in this novel, Shah appears as a vocal critic of traditional patriarchal and authoritarian value system, the legacy of which continues to govern the Nepali society, wherein women are projected as docile and self-effacing, always ready to submit to male needs and patriarchal ideology. He reveals that in the novel, against this backdrop, there come several disturbances in the life of the protagonist, who defies the family prescription not only on matters of etiquette and family values but also on love, marriage and sexuality.

In the same way, Abhi Subedi highly praises novelistic style of *Toda*. He praises the novelist for using lucid language and fascinating style in *Toda*. Subedi declares that though *Toda* is Subedi’s debut novel, the novelist displays maturity in writing style and selection of theme. In, “Umako Pahilo Upanyaasa” (“Uma’s First Novel”), Subedi discusses about the unique theme, style and presentation of *Toda*. Prais-

ing Uma Subedi's technique on the formation of lucid language and its use on the presentation of serious subject matter, critic Subedi claims that as a novelist, Subedi has a bright future and reader can expect more from her (10). He argues that the author has a specific imaginary and vision by which she can recreate a history that she presents in a realistic way. He claims that Subedi's realistic portrayal of the suffering of Nepali women in a foreign land is very praiseworthy.

Krishna Dharabasi also rates *Toda* as an excellent novel. Dharabasi views that reference of war and its effects are major themes of *Toda* (chha). Likewise, he notices that Subedi has presented the current scenario of Nepali society where Nepali women are aware of their condition and are conscious about their rights. In "Todalaai Swaagata" ("Welcome to *Toda*"), Rajendra Parajuli focuses his criticism on the captivating skill of storytelling, and setting of *Toda*. Parajuli points out that in her debut novel, Subedi interestingly portrays the psychology of Jews residing in Israel, after escaping the shadow of death created by Hitler in Germany (par. 6). He observes that Subedi presents the psychology of the people who belong to the war-torn nations Nepal and Germany. Likewise, she portrays the excessive pain and torture faced by female characters in both of these nations. Parajuli reveals that by presenting the story of common people, the novelist wins the readers' heart. Parajuli underscores that depicting the miserable condition of people of war-torn countries; *Toda* succeeds to get connected to the readers.

In the same line of argument, critic Richa Bhattarai points out that the novel *Toda* by Uma Subedi appears with a powerful female character Parbati who proves her strength and capability through her victory against every difficulty of her life. Evaluating Parbati's effort to set a new standard of women power, Bhattarai claims that "Readers in *Toda* will find themselves peering out at the world through the eyes

of Parbati, a young Nepali girl who comes from a lower middle class. Under threat from the Maoists on the one hand and ostracized by a materialistic family on the other, she is compelled to head overseas in search of more lucrative prospects” (10).

Bhattarai observes that Subedi portrays the courageous female characters, who convert the problems into strength. Likewise, Tika Dhungana underscores that *Toda* pertinently highlights the female characters’ psychology and their sexual desire (par. 2). In Dhungana’s perception, Subedi unhesitatingly spills her ink in depicting women’s sexual desire in *Toda*; apart from that, Subedi also reveals that sorrow is always painful for all females no matter s/he belongs to any geography.

Like that of Subedi, Parajuli and Shah, in “Remityaansa Saahityako Indreni” (“Rainbow of Remittance Literature”), Tekendra Adhikari comments *Toda* in terms of theme, style and technique. He claims that Subedi’s choice of setting is very wise as she has set the novel in the nations to which she is familiar or connected (8). Apart from this, he affirms that her writing style and narrative technique are also superb as reader does not drop the attention while reading this novel. In his perception, Subedi’s exposition of the heart rendering condition of Nepali workers in the foreign land is indeed commendable. In the same line of argument, critic Kesav Prasad Upadhyaya highly appreciates the poetic expression used by the novelist in *Toda*. He suggests that philosophic expression, lucid sentences, and poetic style have heightened the quality of *Toda* (52). He views that *Toda* is a powerful and successful Nepali novel.

In “Toda Rabba Uma”, Bhumi Bhandari underscores a painful story of two countries Nepal and Israel in *Toda*. Bhandari claims that Subedi portrays the consequences of war and its effects on the people in two different places and in two different times of history (par 3). On the one hand, Bhandari claims *Toda* exposes Hitler’s tyranny and torture upon Jews. On the other hand, it throws light on the troublesome

life of Nepali society, resulted by the armed conflict between the government and the Maoists. Bhandari claims that *Toda* is an excellent novel as it consists of all the qualities that are needed for a good novel.

Similarly, critics evaluate Niharika's *Cheerharan* from different perspectives. In "Mahaabharatako Naari Sanskarana" ("Female Version of Mahabharat"), Rajkumar Bania discusses the style, theoretical perspective and theme of *Cheerharan*. He notices that allured by the mythical story of the *Mahaabhaarata*, Niharika has used this mythical and religious scripture as a source of her novel. She has presented *Cheerharan* with a new aroma and flavor. Pointing out the writer's objective behind the creation of this novel, Bania argues that *Cheerharan* begins with an assembly conducted by female characters of the Hindu religious scripture the *Mahaabharata*. In this assembly, the male characters have been invited as guest by the female characters in order to condemn the conspiracy, bloodshed, war, and huge destruction brought by males. He points out that the novelist intends to falsify the blame that is put against women, particularly Draupadi, for becoming a reason behind the war in Kurukshetra. Bania claims that in *Cheerharan*, Niharika presents most of the female characters as powerful, wise, and courageous women (cha). Hence, he argues that the novelist puts the novel in the frame of feminism.

Niharika reveals that she finds the story of the *Mahaabhaarata* always fascinating. After reading the original text the *Mahaabhaarata* and other several literary texts based on its story, she realizes that since males are the authors of these texts, they cannot do justice to the female characters. Thus, it is necessary to present the story from females' perspective. So, she wrote this novel to expose the original guilty people who were behind the eighteen days war of *Mahaabhaarata* (par. 2). She admits that through this novel, she has portrayed the situation and circumstances

created by patriarchal society to make females victim. Similarly, in “Kasale Marlaa Baaji”, Rajendra Thapa rates *Cheerharan* as a well acclaimed contemporary Nepali novel enriched with a powerful plot and impressive style. He observes that in this novel, Niharika has provided a new insight to the reader to see the socio-political issues such as injustice, discrimination, exploitation, and identity crisis persisted in contemporary society (26). In *Cheerharan* she has depicted the miserable condition of female characters who are deprived of rights and freedom.

Hrisiram Bhusal’s view resembles to that of Niharika as he discloses that *Cheerharan* stands against the baseless claim of people that the war of the *Mahaabhaarata* was caused by two female characters. He observes that in this novel, Niharika denies the blame put on Draupadi that she instigates Pandav to wage the war against Kaurav; likewise, she claims that Draupadi is not the real cause behind the war. Instead, the real causes are lust for power, blind governance, and desire for revenge (chha). In Bhusal’s perception, in *Cheerharan*, Niharika strongly condemns the males’ lust for power, property, and politics; she believes that these factors germinate conflict and war making our life hellish. He finds uniqueness in the structure of this novel. Furthermore, he argues that critic may raise some questions on its subject matter, point of view, and presentation but despite that, this novel is an excellent creation.

Analogously, Sujan Lamsal appreciates the novel for its powerful language, and lucid sentence structure. He evaluates that using stark Nepali language she has created a Nepali flavor in this novel (47). Lamsal notices that not only the language but theme and style of this novel are also equally commendable. He claims that reading *Cheerharan*, get chance to be acknowledged with the ancient story of *the Mahaabhaarata* in a very lucid form as in the novel, she has avoided the use of

complicated Sanskrit words. He argues that though the source of *Cheerharan*'s story is an ancient epic *the Mahaabhaarata*, Niharika serves it in Nepali flavor as she creates Nepaliness in portrayal of the characters, presentation of the story, and structure of the plots.

In the same line of argument, Santa points out both strength and weaknesses of *Cheerharan* in "*Mahaabhaaratko Punrbyaakhyaa*" ("Reinterpretation of Mahaabhaarata"). He claims that keeping the females' issue at its center, the novel highlights the different subjects such as war, conflict, politics, power, society, philosophy, and religion (52). He claims that to address these various issues in a single text, is the strength of this novel. Nevertheless, to restrict the female characters to traditional gender roles and to belittle the women's position is its weakness. He criticizes Niharika for not providing proper space to all the female characters. In his perception, in *Cheerharan*, the novelist seems to be hesitant to give strong roles to the most of the female characters.

The above reviews expose that the critics have highlighted the styles and trends used in these novels and have highly praised these texts for the use of fresh ideas and techniques in the presentation of structure, plot, language and subject matter. They also have noticed that these novels explore the themes such as gender inequality, unemployment, draining of youth towards the foreign land, myth, war and so forth. Likewise, they have analyzed these novels from various perspectives including the perspective of feminist theory. Though using feminist theory, some critics have evaluated these texts, they still demand a detailed study from the perspective of gender theory. Likewise, since this research includes the study of contemporary Nepali films as well, the following section presents the reviews done in this area. To facilitate

the present research, the available literatures that are related to the selected films are reviewed herewith.

The contemporary Nepali films appear with the issues like gender, ethnicity, war, and politics as the theme. Likewise, deploying the latest techniques and styles, these films have drawn the attention of many critics. In 'Extraordinary tale of a common man', the storyline of the film *Pashupati Prasad* has been highly praised. The review mentions: "Putting together the commonly used ideas, *Pashupati Prasad* wins your heart thanks to its story line, actor's notable performances, witty dialogues, and creditable cinematography" (par. 1). The review highlights the subject matter of the film i.e., plight, dreams, frustration, of people residing in the premises of Pashupati temple area. The review reveals that this film has depicted an uncommon story of common people; by doing this, *Pashupati Prasad* has made a difference in the pile of Nepali films.

Similarly, "Movie Review: *Pashupati Prasad*", Bishnu Sharma highly praises the film *Pashupati Prasad* for its excellent content, style and dialogue. This article claims that the theme and setting are the asset of this film. The article further points out that just like the previous movies *Jhole* and *Tulke* of Dipendra and Khagendra, the film *Pashupati Prasad* presents the philosophy based on reality" (par. 4). Apart from that, "*Pashupati Prasad* wins audiences' heart by its content as well as dialogue punch line. In this film, the audiences feel emotional attachment with the lifestyle, language and regular struggle of lower-class people" (par. 5). The article stresses that the story of this film is linear; likewise, narrative style and the climax are traditional one.

In the same vein, film critic Nisha Dhungana finds *Pashupati Prasad* as a total package to draw the audience towards the film hall. She opines: "The movie has been

able to touch the heart of people by natural acting of characters, sensitive story, well-known locations and story of people who are generally ignored by the society” (par. 1). In her view, another remarkable quality that makes this film a complete package for the reviewer is, without advocating about religion and without touching the spiritual part of Pashupatinaath, the movie depicts a powerful story of life and death, dreams and hopes, achievements and disappointment.

In the same way, the film *Soongava* has been highly praised for its unique story in “Nepali film *Sungava* goes International”. The article points out: “the movie creates a stir with its story when the news of the production is surfaced because it has a bit different story for the Nepali audience. Its story revolves around two women who are in love with each other; it shows the complication of their relationship” (par.1). Likewise, the director of the film Subarna Thapa reveals: “Although the subject matter of this film is new to Nepali cinema it is not so to our society, same sex relationship has always been there but not many have initiated and depicted such issues in any form of arts” (par. 2). The director Thapa admits that the film exposes the hidden issue of homosexuality.

Like Thapa, Clarence Tsui highly admires the issue of sexual minority explored in the film. Praising the effort of the director Subarna Thapa, Tsui asserts: “what is astounding is how the story is told”. He further points out: “Mirroring the lesbian-drama, *Blue is the warmest color*; Thapa’s film-which is more implicit in its depiction of sexual desire-explores the fallout of a relationship between two young women with distinct differences in their background” (par. 4). Tusi suggests that Thapa presents the protagonists who are torn apart by the oppressive, conservative society, which remain sturdy in even the most Westernized house. Tusi applauds the brilliant technique of the film, deployed by the debut director: “Set amidst the affluent

middle-class in the country's capital, Thapa's directorial debut is prepared with many an art house mannerism, from the premium of non-incident music, the presence of dialogue-free travelling shots and even a flash of Rohmer-esque shot-counter shot in a conversation scene" (par. 2). He notices that the story as well as the technique, used in the film, is admirable.

In these reviews, the researcher notices that critics have focused their study only in the style and technique of these texts. Likewise, though some of them have discussed about the females' issues to some extent, they have not done detailed study on this subject. Moreover, above mentioned reviewers have not even discussed about the problems faced by LGBTQ's. Likewise, they have overlooked the males' issues. Hence, they have left enough space for the study of contemporary Nepali novels and films from the perspective of gender theory. Since gender issues have been prominently used in the contemporary novels and films, the analysis of these novels and cinematic texts are in need of thorough study from the perspective of gender theory. Thus, this study proposes to study the selected Nepali novels and films through the viewpoint of gender theory. By doing so, though partially, it tries to bridge the gap. In order to meet this perspective, the researcher has designed a methodology that has been presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Methodology: Gender as Socially Constructed Phenomenon

This chapter presents the modality of research methodology to analyze the gender issues of contemporary Nepali novels and films. The sections incorporated in this chapter are ‘Outlining Theoretical Framework’, ‘Theoretical Concepts’ and ‘Methods and Techniques of Data Collection and Interpretation’. The section ‘Outlining Theoretical Framework’ includes the assumptions and arguments of this dissertation. Likewise, it shows how gender studies and masculinity theory validate the arguments presented in this dissertation. Similarly, the section ‘Models of Theoretical Concept’ discusses the key concepts of gender studies and masculinity theory which are used as theoretical tools for the analysis of selected texts. In the same way, ‘Methods and Techniques of Data Collection and Interpretation’ discusses the ways of data collection, types of research method, types and sources of data, and way of the presentation and interpretation of data. Collectively, these procedures help to accomplish this dissertation.

Delineating Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the assumption that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that is instituted and controlled through social and cultural norms. Constructivist gender theorists Butler, Connell, Haraway and Kimmel illustrate that the concept of gender was developed to contest the idea that gender is nature. Highlighting the constructed nature of gender, Haraway argues: “Men and women are socially constituted and positioned in relations of hierarchy and antagonism” (131). She views that personal and collective identity is precariously and constantly socially reconstituted (148). For Haraway, gender identity is a process that goes through social

and cultural norms, rituals and practices; consequently, men and women get accustomed to recognize their respective places in social and familial hierarchy.

Focusing on the constructed feature of gender, Connell asserts: “Gender must be understood as a social structure. It is not an expression of biology, nor a fixed dichotomy in human life or character. It is a pattern in our social arrangements and in the everyday activities or practices which those arrangements govern” (*Gender* 10). In Connell’s view, gender is socially constructed and organized factor. Therefore, it does not reflect the biological differences between men and women. These theorists develop the ideas: ‘performative gender’, ‘regulated gender’, and ‘gender subversion or deviation’. Based on this domain of knowledge, this chapter will be exploring the reason behind the performing of traditional gender roles by the characters; role of social and cultural practices for regulating people’s gender; and causes for the deviation from the stereotyped gender roles by the characters.

In constructivists gender theorists’ observation, people acquire gender roles and identity by repeatedly performing the roles prescribed by the society. Butler defines ‘gender’ as a product of a culmination of repeated actions that an individual performs following the socially written script. In Butler’s understanding of gender, the ‘performances of gender’ are enforced through social script. In Butler’s view, an individual’s gender is created by performing the script regularly. Stressing the role of socially prescribed script in the construction of gender, Butler argues that “the script provides cues for other to follow the assigned roles” (526). The individual rehearses, repeats, and internalizes the instructions of the script. Thus, people get entrapped in the fixed role through fixed script and the scene (526). As Butler’s claim, the researcher sets the assumption that the characters of the selected texts are also entrapped in the fixed gender roles because those roles are imposed to them through

the social script. For example, following socially prescribed gender roles, Parvati's father in *Toda* and Avishek's Father in *Ma Hoina Ma* appear as authoritative father. Conversely, female characters perform the role of an obedient daughter and submissive wife.

The researcher exhibits that prescribed gender identities for men in Nepali society are: macho, brave, reasonable, authoritative and strong. On the contrary, woman should be docile, dependent, submissive, fragile and unreasonable. Observing the activities of Nepali women, Lynn Bennett writes: "The Nepali women held the view that they should be obedient, respectful, and pleasing" (175). Similarly, the report presented by Care Nepal claims that in Nepal, men are assigned to the role of a bread earner for their families or communities (par. 2)). As mentioned in the report, the characters of the selected texts also practice to perform the traditional gender roles. Males try to benefit in the roles of the bread-winner, and the sole provider of the family. Likewise, females try to appear in the roles of an obedient, self-less and self-sacrificing member of the family.

Likewise, the researcher exposes that the selected novels also depict the violence and death faced by the male characters caused by traditional roles. Performing the roles of valor fighter and fearless protector, they lose their life. While exhibiting their courage for the sake of their family and the nation, Sanjay in *Facing My Phantoms*, and Kshitij and Sagar in *Toda* are killed. Similarly, the female characters Parvati, Sanjeevani, Draupadi, and Kunti, bear discrimination caused by gender-biased social norms. In the same way, the contemporary Nepali films portray pains and sufferings of sexual minorities and non-heterosexual people. *Soongava* shows the tragic death of Kiran, a lesbian character, as her brother kills her for

keeping lesbian relationship. Likewise, the gay characters of film *Ma Hoina Ma* are harassed, beaten and tortured.

This dissertation reveals that in the contemporary Nepali films and Novels, while exhibiting their manliness, the male characters act cruelly, and authoritatively. They deprive women of rights, freedom and equality. They discriminate between their sons and daughters. Nevertheless, the socially prescribed gender roles do not prove to be beneficial for males, too. The traditional gender identity and roles paralyze their progress and freedom. In *Facing My Phantoms*, stifled under the role of a responsible son, Prashant and Sanjaya have to sacrifice their dreams. Similarly, in *Cheerharan*, performing the role of a responsible son, Devrat sacrifices his right to the throne and Arjun shares his wife with his brothers. The researcher notices that the selected novels present the gender issues; and they highlight the problems caused by gender-biased social practices. Thus, the researcher has proposed to analyze the selected texts through the perspective of gender theory.

In the same way, the researcher illustrates that the gender identities and roles of the characters are regulated and imposed through 'gender normativity'. The researcher proposes to validate this argument through Butler's Connell's and Kimmel's ideas of 'gender normativity' and 'regulation'. These theorists claim that society excludes and punishes the individual who deviates from the normative frame of gender. This is because, the normative frame demarcates who can be conceived of as viable subject and who cannot. Pointing out the role of social norms in regulating the individual's gender, Butler argues: "the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on the social norms" (*Undoing Gender* 2). Therefore, one gets dehumanized incase his/her desire does not resemble to the desire that is

originated through the effect of social norms because the terms by which one gets recognized as human are socially articulated.

Based on the assumption that gender is regulated through punishments, the researcher shows that the contemporary Nepali novels- Uma Subedi's *Toda*, Sheeba Shah's *Facing my Phantoms*, and Neelam Karki Niharika's *Cheerharan* - and the films- *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongabha*, and *Pashupati Prasad*- have presented the problems caused by the traditional gender roles and identities to the characters. The researcher discloses that while maintaining their gender identity and gender roles, the characters of the selected texts face problems as their gender is not innate but is imposed through punishments. Consequently, on the one hand, they become victim of abuse and violence. On the other hand, they undergo injustice and inequality. For example, while exhibiting their masculinity, the male characters beat, rape, rebuke and even kill their female family members and male rivals. In *Facing My Phantoms*, Sanat, Saneevani and her aunty are raped. In the novel, narrator depicts Prabhat's brutality towards Durga:

One-night, Prabhat enters their room, where Durga is spread out, unconscious in deep sleep. He begins to feel her body all over. ... He sends her tiny form flying across the bed. Terrified, she begins to cry. Durga's helpless, vulnerable figure suddenly begins to excite Prabhat with a strange obsession and he stand over her, his tall legs spread apart above her, more like a towering bridge.

Petrieved Durga covers her face with her hands and begins to sob. (Shah163)

While showing his manliness, Prabhat rapes his wife. Likewise, performing the role of an unassertive and submissive wife, Durga bears the physical abuse. The novel portrays how the traditional gender roles of males and females are harmful and dangerous to female.

Similarly, another concern of the researcher is to expose that the characters of contemporary Nepali literary narratives repeatedly defy and deviate from the traditional gender roles and identity. The researcher validates this argument in the textual analysis of this dissertation through Butler's, Connell's and Kimmel's idea of 'gender fluidity and subversion'. Connell claims that gender identity is "neither fixed nor stable; rather it is fluid" (*Gender* 10). In Connell's perception, as a socially constructed phenomenon gender varies over time and place. For example, in *Soongava*, unassertive and submissive Diya changes into assertive and bold lady. Likewise, in *Cheerharan*, Draupadi's character fluctuates between the traditional gender identities and non-traditional gender identities. On the one hand, Draupadi mutely tolerates the injustice. On the other hand, she appears as a vocal critic of discrimination and operation that have been done to her. The fourth and fifth chapters of this research will analyze in detail the reason behind the deviation of the characters from the traditional gender roles and identities. The above-mentioned concepts of gender have been discussed in detail in the section below.

Models of Theoretical Concepts

This qualitative research asserts the arguments those are completely based on the data collected from the selected texts. So, to authenticate the arguments those are proclaimed in the dissertation, the key concepts of 'gender performativity' 'gender fluidity' and 'gender normativity' and ideas of the theorists Butler, Kimmel, Connell, Haraway and Halberstam have been used. The purpose of this chapter is to carry over with the arguments that gender is a fluid artifice that is constructed through performances and regulated through the social norms. These arguments are justified by the theoretical concepts of: 'gender performativity', 'gender normativity' and 'gender fluidity' that are adopted from gender theory and masculinity theory. In order

to create symmetry between gender theory and masculine theory, these theoretical apparatuses have been kept under the frame of Gender Studies. Hence, this section consists of ‘Making of Gender Studies’, ‘Constructing Gender Through Performativity’, ‘Gender Regulation through Normative Framework’ and ‘Gender Fluidity and Gender Subversion: Medium of Liberation’.

Making of Gender Studies

The academic study of gender and its development was triggered by second wave feminism during the 1960s with the purpose of establishing the rights, equality and recognition of women. The history of feminism is divided into waves, with a first wave, dating from 1830 to 1920 and best recalled for the suffragette movement, and second wave, organized around Women’s Liberation and dating from 1960. As Fiona Tolan claims: “‘second wave feminism’ is best associated with the American feminist Betty Friedan and Simon de Beauvoir” (320). She argues that Friedan and Beauvoir bring up the idea that there is no such thing as ‘feminine’ nature; therefore, there is no physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men.

Second wave feminism condemns the prevalent gender inequalities, in both personal relationships and in social positioning of people in economic and political sectors. Likewise, this movement criticizes the gender-blind sociology that featured women only in the traditional role of wives and mother within families. The second wave feminists notice that “Differences and inequalities between women and men at this time were not recognized as an issue of sociological concern and were not seen as problems to be addressed” (Pilcher and Whelehan ix). Consequently, second wave feminists protest the discrimination of women in academic disciplines those excluded the experiences, interests and identities of women. Moreover, they design the course

‘Women’s Studies’ to make women visible. Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson highlight the purpose of ‘Women’s Studies’:

Women’s history sought to rescue from obscurity the lives of significant women who had been ignored or whose work has been minimized by traditional androcentric scholarship—the now-celebrated painters, composers, writers, and political and military figures who had been consigned to minor footnotes if they were recognized at all. (xv)

Kimmel and Aronson observe that through Women’s Studies course students explore the complexity of women’s lives. They acknowledge about the hidden history of exemplary women. Likewise, they come to know about the daily experiences as well as routine of women.

Women Studies appears as the scholarly wing of the women’s movement. Rocco L. Capraro investigates the objective of the women’s study and reveals: “The objective of the women’s studies was to study the females’ experience; and its purpose was to criticize male-centered ways of knowing and eradication of women’s oppression” (535). Capraro observes that after the arrival of Women Studies in academia, men realize the need of their presence in academic world and they proclaim their appearance through Men’s Studies. Highlighting the aim of Men’s Studies, Capraro argues: “In 1970s, men minutely observed the prospect of change for women in society and pursued its implications for men. Then, they started men’s movement and started Men’s Studies as its intellectual companion” (534). Capraro asserts that although the men’s movement starts with the purpose of making men self-reflective about the negative consequences of masculinity—for women and/or for men themselves, and to rethink of masculinity, there are ideological divisions within the movement.

Similarly, Pilcher and Whelehan highlight the ideological divisions of Men's movement. They observe that conservatives advocated for reinstallation of men as the rightful head of the families and the public sphere. In Pilcher's and Whelehan's perception, mythopoetic men explore men's problems and quest for a more confident masculinity for men, whereas pro-feminist men's movement argued the virtues of feminism and showed their solidarity with women's movement (88). Likewise, Capraro explains the reason behind the emergence of Men's Studies: "Men's Studies was engaged primarily in consciousness rising about the perils of the male role and critical thinking about how men are socialized" (534). The masculinist theorists reject the traditional gender roles for men as they find it contradictory, inconsistent, and unattainable. Similarly, Kimmel incorporates views on the paradoxical nature of masculinity and on the sources of power and pain in men's lives in his works.

At the same time Women's Studies and, later, men's studies become established as specialized areas of academic inquiry. When broader theoretical developments such as postmodernism and post-structuralism appear and undermine the rationale of women's studies and men's studies then, new area of study develops under 'gender studies'. Pilcher and Whelehan examine the reason behind the emergence of gender studies: "Postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches challenged the idea of women's studies and men's studies that takes 'women' and 'men' as discrete and unitary categories. Moreover, postmodern and post-structuralist theories argued that the identity of men and women vary over time, space and culture" (xii). Pilcher and Whelehan bring in the idea that the disciplines of men's studies and women's studies could not meet their objectives as they focused on the singular and rigid status of men and women (xii). In this context, both of the disciplines get merged under 'gender studies'. Likewise, the concept of gender develops as a

complex, multi-faceted, and multi-disciplinary area. Picher and Whelehen reveal that in gender studies, 'women' and 'men' are regarded as constructions or representations, achieved through discourse, performance and repetition rather than being real entities.

Reflecting the influence of poststructuralist theory, Gender Studies addresses the lapses appeared in Women's Studies and Men's Studies that they created by presenting the monolithic model of 'woman' and 'man'. Likewise, it incorporates the post-Judith Butler view that "gender assignation only takes meaning through performance and iteration" (Pilcher and Whelehan xii). In the context of postmodernism, Butler initially views the category of "gender" as a human construct enacted by a vast repetition of social performance. Butler offers the poststructuralist versions of gender theory in two highly celebrated books, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993). In these books she challenges the idea of 'essential womanhood'. Butler proposes to defy the concept of 'conscious subject' and emphasizes that the subject exists only during the performance. She also illustrates the possibility of subversion of gender role while performing the acts repeatedly. Likewise, she claims that to remain in the traditional gender roles and identity is a must for an individual to be saved from the punishment.

Gender theorists, such as Butler, Haraway, Kimmel, and Connell disagree to the concept of 'gender as biology'. These theorists discard the essentialist gender conviction that 'gender is an expression of biology', and involve in the significant body of scholarly debate on biological versus social determinants of gender. Kimmel and Connell argue that since the traditional roles are constructed, most of the people cannot attach in those roles and feel excluded. In *Theorizing Masculinities*, Kimmel assesses that the rules of manhood are constructed; therefore, only an insignificant

fraction of men believe that they are “the most virulent repudiators of femininity and the most daring and aggressive” (138). Conversely, those who fail to fit into the traditional gender roles, feel so powerless and humiliated.

In this way, this section of my research highlights the claim of gender theorists Butler, Connell, and Kimmel, who argue that gender is constructed phenomenon. The researcher intends to apply the key concepts of these theorists- concept of ‘performativity’, ‘gender normativity’ and ‘gender fluidity’– as theoretical tools to analyze the gender issues in the selected texts. Butler postulates the theory of ‘gender performativity’ to reinforce the constructive nature of gender. She argues that gender is constructed through repeatedly involving in the performance. Butler coins the concept ‘gender performativity’ to explain gender as a product of repeated actions rather than the culmination of biology (*GT* 44). She underscores that individuals form gender identity by repeating their performance over time and coping to other’s performances. Butler supports her concept of performativity of gender with instances from the social script designed by the society for the people who are forced to act the socially assigned gender roles. Concept of ‘Gender Performativity’ has been used to analyze the causes for performing the stereotyped gender roles by characters in the selected texts.

Butler and Connell postulate the idea of ‘gender normativity’. In Connell’s and Butler’s view, society confines individual’s gender into a normative frame of gender. Butler underscores that people’s acts are regulated through the social norms (8). Likewise, Connell observes that individual’s gender is regulated through the censorship, the constructed gender is materialized through punitively regulated cultural practices (5). Consequently, people embodied the gender under duress. Likewise, while performing gender, one compels to serve a social policy of gender

regulation and control because “performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all” (Butler 528). Based on these theorists' idea of ‘gender normativity’; the concept of ‘gender normativity’ has been used to assess the factors that regulate characters' gender.

Likewise, the idea of gender fluidity postulates how and why the characters defy the gender roles and oscillate between the traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. Inferring to Butler's, Connell's, and Kimmel's concept of ‘gender fluidity, the researcher approaches gender as fluid phenomenon. For these theorists, individual's gender identity is unstable. Emphasizing the unstable nature of gender, Connell argues that it is not possible for the individual to stick to the fixed identity. Therefore, an individual creates several identities and roles while dealing with various relations and responsibilities (*Gender* 108). He views that since gender relations require a de-structuring of the self, one's identity keeps on shifting. These theoretical concepts have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

Constructing Gender Through Performativity

The constructivist gender theorists Butler, Kimmel, Connell, Haraway, Mary Holmes, Jude Browne come up with the idea that gender is constructed through various factors such as social, cultural and religious practices, laws, and social institutions. After his research on construction of gender, Connell proposes the idea that “gender is defined collectively in culture and is sustained in institutions (*Men and the Boys* 11). Furthermore, Connell concludes through his research on gender: “man and woman is a becoming, a condition actively under construction” (*Gender* 5). Connell's views on gender underscores that for the constructivist gender theorists, gender is a process of becoming masculine or feminine and that process is influenced

by various factors socio-cultural taboo, customary socio-cultural practices and socio-cultural norms and rules. These theorists debunk the essentialists' gender definition which is based on the idea that "a certain essence defines the center of our identity as human beings, and as men and women" (Storykey 12). Constructivist gender theorists demystify the firm belief of essentialists that men and women have certain identifiable fixed characteristics and their identities are rooted in nature.

In fact, essentialists views contend with the idea of constructivist gender theorists because essentialists assume masculinity and femininity and of men and women as fixed biological determinants. The essentialists', such as Aristotle's, gender definition is based upon the assumption that the male is by nature more proficient leader, he is completer and mature than the female. Conversely, the female is incomplete, irrational, and dumb. Therefore, it is natural for the male to rule over the female (Newman 158). However, Kimmel debunks biologists' and sociologists' recommendation for male's superiority. He critiques the essentialist Gustav LeBon's view that "differences between women and men could be explained by their different brain structure" (22). Disagreeing to the essentialists' claim that men are stronger, more capable, and more intelligent by birth, Kimmel argues that "sex differences do not exist" (34), rather, they are invented. Likewise, Kimmel defies the claim of social scientist Edward C. Clarke who suggests that "women should be exempted from higher education because of the tremendous demands made upon their bodies by reproduction" (qtd in Kimmel 22). Though essentialists take masculine and feminine attributes as inevitable outcome of biology, in Kimmel's perception, gender is constructed "within our cultures, our societies, and our families" (53). Kimmel claims that gender is constituted while performing the roles assigned by the cultures, societies, and family.

Though essentialists stress on the prime role of biology for the construction of one's gender, Simon De Beauvoir disaffirms the essentialists' claim with her idea that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (273). She focuses on the idea that being a man or a woman is not a pre-determined state. For Beauvoir, the individual's gender is always under construction; it is a never-ending process that goes on throughout one's life. Similarly, concentrating on the constructive nature of gender, Haraway asserts: "gender is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism" (155). Through her investigation on the construction of gender, she draws the conclusion that natural bodies are trained into specific gender through social norms and practices; so, individual's biology does not determine his/her gender. For example, in *Ma Hoina Ma*, Srijana tries on urban fashion of clothing, hairstyle and make-up as she learns from the society that it is her wifely duty to please her cosmopolitan husband by following his interest. Therefore, when she notices the indifference of her husband towards her, she thinks that as a dutiful wife, she has to work in her body in order to get her husband's attention.

In the same way, Gayle Rubin underscores the reasons behind the construction of gender. In her perception, to regulate peoples' behavior and to maintain the familial and social structure and hierarchy, cultural norms create different images for men and women. She argues that gender identity is shaped by human and social intervention. Highlighting on the socially constructed identity of men and women, Rubin points out:

Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of feminine traits; in women, of the local

definition of masculine traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women. (542)

Rubin reveals that the society develops cultural practices of gender construction, which impose different attributes to men and women. In *Trafficking on Women*, revealing the role of the society in construction of gender, Rubin argues that gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities between men and women. Rubin asserts that constraining the activities of men and women, cultural norms create the diverse images of women and men.

Based on Rubin's idea that the individual's gender is constructed by the society, the researcher illustrates that the characters in the selected texts perform the socially prescribed gender roles. For example, in *Cheerharan*, the female characters perform the roles of 'devoted wife', 'dutiful daughter-in-law', 'loving and caring mother'. Conversely, the male characters are assigned to the roles of daring, manly, and potent, who can beget dozens of sons. Dhritarastra begets one hundred and one sons. Moreover, he competes to his brother Pandu to expand the family line, the earliest the possible. Hence, the research reveals that the society plays vital role to constitute the individual's gender.

Similarly, for gender theorist Jude Browne, gender identity is a socially imposed trait that works as a process of transforming women and men to 'feminine' and 'masculine'. She underscores that gender is a process influenced by interpellation of cultural realities, laden with gender-sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions. Browne proclaims: "Gender is concerned with the ascription of social characteristics such as 'womanly', 'manly', 'feminine' and 'masculine', all of which can be seen as culturally variable and not necessarily associated with the sex of an individual" (1). In

her view, through imposing certain gender identity, the society and culture classify as well as constrain the people. Likewise, in *The Men and the Boys*, Connell's basic proposition is to postulate that masculine character is socially constructed. He observes that people's gender gets affected by various factors such as globalization, social institutions, and work places. On the basis of his study and observation of the formation of people's gender, Connell claims: "Masculinity is not inherent in the male body; it is a definition given socially" (76). He stresses that gender is created in specific social circumstances and context.

Mary Holmes idea resembles to Connell's postulation of constructive nature of gender as she stresses that the social environment was the key factor in shaping individual's gender. In *What is Gender?: Sociological Approach*, Holmes highlights the process of shaping the female and the male. Through her study, she comes up with the idea that we are shaped into being feminine or masculine by powerful social structures. On the basis of her research, she concludes that every society has different social practices, and norms and values; therefore, the society constitutes individual's gender differently. (173). Holmes reveals that social meanings that attached to sexual difference contribute to the formation of individual's gender.

Like Homes, reinforcing the constructive nature of gender, Stephen M. White and Frank J. Barrett claim that gender is not the product of genetic coding or biological predispositions; rather, language plays a significant role in the construction of individual's gender. In their perception, much of our everyday language is permeated with explicit or implicit gender(ed) interpretations. Emphasizing on the role of language in the formation of one's gender, they claim that words such as "passive, active, sensitive, aggressive, emotional, caring, controlling, warrior, nurse, captain, leader, manager, cleaner, virile, frigid, impotent can be read in gendered

ways, and interpreted within dualistic but dominant understandings of what it means to be a man or a woman” (20). Thus, for White and Barrett, language not only informs concepts of masculinity, it also provides a tool through which we can perform, label, and interpret our gender identities.

Furthermore, stressing that the identity is constructed through the socially written script, Butler reveals that one’s gender gets constructed while performing the script as society assigns specific roles to every individual. Therefore, the script is a must for the actor’s existence. Apart from that, Butler discloses that the actor and the script depend on each other for their survival. In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” highlighting the significance of social script in the formation of an individual’s gender, she claims: “a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again” (526). She clarifies that the performer survives through the script and the script requires the performer in order to be reproduced.

In fact, Butler explores the theory of gender performativity to reject the idea that gender is an expression of sex. Butler contends the widely accepted belief that there is natural link between sex and gender. She argues that gender is not the causal result of sex, but rather the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes:

A sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a ‘natural sex’ or a ‘real woman’ or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another.

(GT 191)

Butler reveals that instead of being one of the determinants of gender, sex is actually its effect; moreover, she defines 'gender' as the product of mechanism through which "sexes are themselves instituted" (GT 11). Thus, she exposes the constructed nature of sex and concludes that sex does not play the role to construct the gender identity. Similarly, Holmes resists the idea that sex differences are natural. She claims that both sex and gender are constructed therefore, "'sex' itself is not necessarily a clear demarcation between two types of bodies (male and female)" (GT 16). Holmes exposes that once the concept of gender is freed from its false dependence on sex, it becomes clear that gendered self is an artificial social construct that exists only through the performance.

Similarly, Butler gives emphasis on the artificiality of gender and asserts that gender is constructed through the coherent enactment of prescribed acts those are presented as 'performance cues' and the body, as a biological entity, is used to inscribe the cultural rules. Butler emphasizes on the constructed nature of gender that become possible through performance:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core of substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative, in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (GT 185)

In Butler's perception, gendered body is performative because it has no ontological status. She suggests that gendered reality is fabricated as an interior essence that is designed through public and social discourse.

Butler discloses that the cultural constructions constitute the idea of gender, but without the constant practice and imitation of them gender does not exist. In fact, gender is an effect of performance and imitation over time as Butler asserts: “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (GT 191). Butler suggests to understand the stylization of the body as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. Based on this concept, in the analytical part of this dissertation, the researcher exhibits that in the selected texts, the characters try to create their gender through bodily gestures, movements, attire, and styles. For example, in *Facing my Phantoms* Sanjeevani, in her childhood days, tries to create a masculine gender for herself, by imitating men’s fashion: I liked my hair short, wore only pants, and completely stayed away from female fancies” (32). In this way, the characters try to create their gender through practice and imitation.

In point of fact, Butler’s performativity theory postulates that gender is corporeal style, a copy of copy. Exhibiting the pertinence of performance, she claims that the doer exists as long as one performs. Likewise, she views that the performer is restricted to perform the socially prescribed script that has been already in the scene and has been regulating the performance from undecided time frame. Moreover, stressing on the role of performance in the formation of gender, Butler argues that gender is created through surficial inscription on the body, and has been internalized through the repeated performances.

Connell, Kimmel, Rubin, Haraway and Butler claim that gender is socially imposed phenomena. Particularly, Butler has claimed that gender is socially constituted phenomenon that gets materialized through individual’s performance.

Following the same line of argument, in the analytical part, this dissertation examines how the characters of contemporary Nepali novels and cinematic texts perform their gender roles. Likewise, this research reveals that most of the characters of the selected texts perform the traditional gender roles as the society provides them the script that assigns those roles to them. For example, following the script prepared by the society, the male characters Pashupati Prasad, Bhashme, Mit Ba, in *Pashupati Prasad*; Milan in *Soongava*; and Avishek's father in *Ma Hoina Ma* act masculinely. They appear assertive, authoritative and even ruthless. Similarly, the female characters Kunti, Satyawati, Sanat, and Srijana perform the role of submissive, demure, undecisive, and weak. Similarly, this research exposes that the normative frame is used to regulate the characters' gender roles; thus, as to highlight the concept about the 'normative gender role' is essential, the following section discusses this concept.

Gender Regulation through Normative Framework

Society constrains the people's gender identity by regulating their performance. For that, society constructs the normative frame to delimit the gender behavior and appearance of people. Not only that, if people fail to befit in the normative frame, their identity gets questioned and they even are excluded from the socially approved and accepted group such as heterosexual male and female. In fact, people are compelled to get a respectable inclusion in the socially accepted group. Consequently, they try to make their actions and appearances viable to the socio-cultural norms. Butler uses the term 'cultural intelligibility' to "refer to the production of a normative framework that conditions who can be recognized as a legitimate subject" (qtd in Lloyd 33). In Butler's perception, people, who fail to constrain

themselves to the normative frame, are labeled as delegitimate people. Therefore, people hardly can dismantle the normative frame of gender.

Similarly, postulating the idea of gender normativity, Connell supports his idea with the instances from the societies that constrain people into gender binary system. In his study, he observes that in order to confine people to the gender norms, society arranges people's everyday business such as conventional marriage, sports, and such kinds of activities. Connell observes that in order to control individual's gender, society makes arrangements in such a way that people accept it as a part of the order of nature. Moreover, people, who do not follow the socially prescribed gender, get punished by society. Connell reveals the reason behind individual's confinement to the conventional gender roles: "Belief that gender distinction is natural makes it scandalous when people don't follow the pattern" (*Gender* 5). Furthermore, he exposes the ideas that gender-appropriate behavior are constantly being circulated, not only by legislators but also by priests, parents, teachers, advertisers, retail mall owners, talk-show hosts, and disc jockeys. His research on gender study of different groups of people discloses that society recurrently confines our body through normative frame of gender. In Connell's observation, the way our bodies grow and function is influenced by several factors such as food distribution, sexual customs, warfare, work, sport, urbanization, education, and medicine, to name only the most obvious influences.

Gender theorist Angela King, like Connell, views that society constantly attempts to make the individual's gender identity as a socially acceptable entity because it tries to convert her/him as a productive member of community. King discloses that female bodies are regulated in order to legitimate women's subjugation:

Medical and scientific discourses have confirmed the pathology of female biology and legitimated women's subjugation, prescribing in the past what activities women should engage in. What clothes they should wear to preserve appropriate 'womanliness', their moral obligation to preserve their energy for child birth and so on are taught to be socially disciplined. (34)

King believes that the woman's body is kept under control through social norms so that women cannot deviate from the traditional gender roles. Following the same idea, in the analysis part of this research, the researcher shows that in Nepali society, woman's body is constrained through social norms. For example, in *Soongava*, Diya's father, rebukes her for wearing revealing clothes. He does so because in Nepali society, there are social norms that prescribe certain outfits for women. Moreover, following that prescription, women cannot wear revealing clothes. Likewise, in *Facing my Phantoms*, Sanjevani's grandmother condemns Sanjeevani's dressing sense: "Look at the way you dress ... disgusting! Those pants clearly outline your crotch" (Shah 33). Thus, through King's idea on normative gender practices, this research exhibits how female's body has been controlled.

Tina Chanter takes a parallel proposition when she argues that society keeps the people under surveillance in order to check whether they are maintaining their gender identity or not. Citing example from Foucault's analogy of 'panopticon', Chanter claims that mostly, people are confined into the socially prescribed gender identity just like the prisoner of the 'Panopticon' (57). Chanter observes that the society obligates the individual to police their gender identity so that it meets the hegemonic rules. In Chanter's perception, "just like the prisoners who assume they are under surveillance, and act accordingly, the subjects of modern society take over the role of policing themselves" (57). She concludes that people of modern society

have been made so much accustomed to the socially imposed gender roles and identities that they quietly confine themselves to stereotyped gender roles.

Similarly, Diana Fuss discusses the consequences that an individual face in case s/he deviates from the standard gender roles and identities. She claims that if people's gender roles and identity do not match to the standardized social norms, they are socially punished. Therefore, in order to get the social approval, people rigorously police their own identities and activities. In Fuss' perception, since ambiguous gender roles become object of disgust and derision in public, people constrain their actions to the socially prescribed gender roles (54). She reveals that fear of being a stock of laughter regulates the people to the normative gender roles. Likewise, Butler highlights the consequences when individual deviates from the prescribed gender identity: "if individual fails to be recognized as a viable subject, then his life will be impossible, illegible, unreal, and illegitimate" (*GT* viii). Butler discloses that individual's gender behaviors are under surveillance from the socializing agencies; therefore, s/he does not dare to go beyond the normative frame of gender.

In her *Undoing Gender*, Butler underscores that people's gender identity has been normatively produced within particular racial and cultural frames. Butler reveals that through cultural intelligibility society/culture approves the individual's identity and shows the possibility of a livable life (that is, a life that is recognized as having value and legitimacy). In this book, Butler discusses about the role played by the socializing agencies in disciplining the people's gender identity as she examines that the body becomes its gender through series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. In Butler's perception, "the social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood"

(*Undoing Gender* 2). Butler reveals that the viability of individual's personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms.

Butler further perceives that; social norms bind the individual to acceptable standards of behavior. She highlights the reason that obligates people to perform traditional gender roles: "Becoming a gender is an impulsive yet mindful process of interpreting a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions" (*G T* 103). Assessing the power of social norms that are used to control individual's gender behavior, she concludes: "To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that reproduces and organizes them anew" (qtd. Salih and Butler 26), therefore, one hardly can deviate from the normative frame of gender. As in *Ma Hoina Ma*, trapped in the image of a heterosexual male, Avishek tries to appear in masculine fashion. He agrees to marry Srijana and tries to create the impression that he is in heterosexual relationship.

Likewise, Butler claims that the social constraints upon gender compliance is so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they perform their gender improperly. Moreover, "the risk of discrimination, loss of employment, public harassment, and violence are heightened for those who live openly as transgendered persons" (*Undoing Gender* 9). In Saliha's and Butler's observation, Butler exposes the socially formed gender trap:

In so far as social existence requires an unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside of established gender norms. The fall from established gender boundaries initiates a sense of radical dislocation which can assume a metaphysical significance. If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question. In these moments of

gender dislocation in which we realize that it is hardly necessary that we be the genders we have become, we confront the burden of choice intrinsic to living as a man or a woman or some other gender identity, a freedom made burdensome through social constraint. (Salih and Butler 27)

Butler explains that; people adhere to the social norms while expressing their gender because the society compels them to exhibit acceptable gender behavior in the process of becoming a certain gender. It is because “gender operates to secure certain forms of reproductive sexual ties and to prohibit other forms” (*Undoing Gender* 47). Butler concludes that one’s gender is an index of the prohibited and prescribed sexual relations; hence, a subject is socially regulated and produced.

Rainer Emig and Antony Rowland agree with Butler’s view that society disciplined human body through the imposition of prohibitions and obligations. Emig and Rowland underscore that in order to create the image of normative masculinity, “young men are increasingly encouraged by the media to work on and discipline their bodies” (6), whereas females are given “seductive image”. Likewise, Emmanuel Reynaud highlights the ways those are used to objectifying the female body: “she must wear make-up, be deodorized, perfumed, emphasizes her breasts, reduce her appetite, and, without making a single clumsy gesture, she must seem happy, dainty, and original” (402). Reynaud concludes that women are constrained to normative gender identities of an attractive, beautiful, cheerful and delicate person. Therefore, in *Facing my Phantoms*, “Hemlata painted her nails and brought matching bangles for her new salwar kameez” (Shah 32) because she wants to benefit in the role of an attractive lady.

Emphasizing the reason behind individual’s confinement to stereotyped gender roles, Emig and Rowland reveal that; the deviation from the normative gender

image resulted in the suffering such as ‘falling levels of confidence’, losing out in schools, jobs, personal relationships, overall health and wellbeing. Consequently, people hardly deny the socially imposed gender roles. Based on this idea, in textual analysis of this dissertation, the researcher exposes that the sexual minorities get victimized for deviating from the normative frame of gender. In *Ma Hoina Ma* and *Soongava*, the non-heterosexual characters lose their jobs and get deprived of love and respect from their family members, when their gender identity has been disclosed. In *Soongava*, Diya, a lesbian character gets ousted from her job as school principal announces: some parents have raised question on your character and have requested me to expel you from the job (*Soongava*). The researcher analyzes the reason behind Diya’s, a lesbian character’s, suffering. The researcher observes that for Diya, deviation from the normative gender image resulted in loss of job.

In fact, Butler points out that under the excessive social pressure, people put their effort in adopting the standardized identity. In Butler’s perception, “One important sense of regulation, then, is that persons are regulated by gender, and that this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person” (*Undoing Gender* 52). She notices that in order to control the people under a certain regularity frame of gender, “children born with irregular primary sexual characteristics are ‘corrected’ in order to fit in, feel more comfortable and to achieve normality” (53). Butler highlights about “the presence of forced normality in which the individual entrapped” to perform certain gender roles in order to constitute the socially approved gender identity (526). Likewise, Cheryl Chase claim that corrective surgery is sometimes performed with parental support and in the name of normalization, and the physical and psychic costs of the surgery have proven to be enormous for those persons who have been submitted, as it were, to the knife to the

norm (qtd in Butler, *Undoing Gender* 53). Based on her study on social practices on the gender regulation, Butler concludes that gender is produced through forced normality.

In the textual analysis of this dissertation, the researcher insinuates that normative gender practices are inescapable as they are regulated through punishments. Following the same trajectory of argument, in the next chapters, this dissertation examines how and why the characters of the selected texts cannot challenge the traditional gender pattern. For example, in *Cheerharan*, constrained to the role of an obedient and loyal wife, Gandhari decides to blindfold herself throughout her life. She explains the reason behind her decision: That was a symbol of a promise taken by a wife to feel the pain of her husband. Unless she felt darkness, she could not understand the difficulties of her husband and could not be equal to my husband who is blind by birth. Therefore, she had taken that decision (Niharika 69). Gandhari takes such a horrible decision because she fears that had she not taken that decision, she would have been condemned for being a selfish and undutiful wife. Through such examples, the researcher displays that the females cannot escape from traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, people cannot stick to traditional gender roles forever. Therefore, they persistently deviate from the socially assigned gender roles and identities. The same is discussed below.

Gender Fluidity and Gender Subversion: Medium of Liberation

Gender theorists such as Judith Lorber, Judith Halberstam, Butler, Connell, John MacInnes, and Kimmel leads to the belief that gender identity is not a rigid entity; rather, it is fluid. Pointing out the reason behind the fluid nature of gender, they reveal that gender is created through series of cultural inferences and outer forces such as attire, appearance, body language, and the like. Therefore, it is not possible to

derive a judgement about stable anatomy. Highlighting the possibility of unstable anatomy, Butler explains that one cannot guess about one's anatomy through his/her appearance because "the body may be pre-operative, transitional, or postoperative" (*GT* xxiv). Butler asserts that merely wearing different attire, an individual can create different gender identity. In such a condition, in Butler's perception, the reality of gender is also put into crisis. Butler stresses that what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality.

Similarly, stressing the idea of gender fluidity, Judith Lorber, and Judith Halberstam claim that gender is an unstable entity. So, there is the possibility of interchangeability of masculine and feminine traits in men and women. Lorber asserts that men and women can "enact the behavior of the other" through the manipulation of acts, gestures, appearance, and dress (Lorber 6). Likewise, Halberstam argues about the unstable nature of gender: "masculinity has been produced by and across both the male and the female bodies" (2). Postulating the idea of 'female masculinity', she stresses that female can acquire the so-called masculine attributes by building up her body and practicing strength. In her reflection, since the society intends to impose a fixed gender identity to the female and the male, female masculinity has been blatantly ignored both in the culture at large and within academic studies of masculinity (2). In her assessment, individual's gender is not fixed entity, therefore, individual time and again deviates from the socially imposed gender roles and identity. Similarly, MacInnes emphasizes on the idea that gender does not remain fixed and stable. MacInnes claims that following the socio-political changes and under the pressure of media and political policies, "masculinity keeps on reforming" (55) because under the global change, the definition of masculinity has also changed. For example, in the changed circumstances of the nation, in *Toda*, most of the male

characters deviate from conventional role of breadwinner; rather, they perform the role of househusband. As Parvati's husband discloses his intention to her: "*jaagira chhodna po man laageko chha malaai*" ("I want to quit my job"¹; Subedi 149). Since he feels insecure in the job of a police officer, during the conflict between the Maoist and the government, he wants to take the reversed role.

Conversely, essentialists such as Judy Stamp and W.C. Taylor stress on the fixity of gender. Stamp divulges that; men and women acquire different levels of skills and strength through their evolutionary trajectories (2). She claims that men by birth become aggressive, controlling, and managing because men honed such skills over centuries of evolution as hunters and fighters. Likewise, Taylor asserts that women are weak due to their biological condition. In his view, woman's normal biological processes make her unfit for the public world of work. In fact, Taylor believes that women are incapable to take the roles that need physical strength because they are biologically weak and they have to stay home and rest for at least five or six days a month. Presenting the reason behind the female's weakness, he claims:

We cannot too emphatically urge the importance of regarding these monthly returns as periods of ill health, as days when the ordinary occupations are to be suspended or modified.... Long walks, dancing, shopping, riding and parties should be avoided at this time of month invariably and under all circumstances. (qtd in Kimmel 20)

In Taylor's view one's gender is naturally or biologically determined; consequently, females are innately weaker than males.

¹ English translation is done by the researcher

Whitehead and Barrett, on the contrary, contend the assertion that gender is influenced by biology and it is stable and rigid. Reinforcing the idea that gender is uninfluenced by biology made by the essentialists like Taylor, they claim, “Masculinity reflects social and cultural expectations of male behavior rather than biology” (16). They argue that men’s aggression is not conditional upon testosterone. For them, “young boys with very little testosterone can be aggressive in certain social situations. Likewise, females can exhibit dominant and aggressive behaviors, and their testosterone levels are significantly lower than those of males” (16). Based on their study, they elucidate that gender forms differently in different social situations. Therefore, since men are not puppets of their hormones, ‘gender’, in Whitehead’s and Barrett’s perception, is not a stable entity; rather, ‘gender’ is a set of fluid social and cultural performances.

Along with Whitehead and Barrett, Connell also opposes the claim made by essentialists and asserts that since gender is socially constructed phenomena, gender does not remain fixed and stable in all circumstances, places, and time. He supports his concept of ‘gender fluidity’ through his observation on the influence of globalization on people’s thought regarding gender. He underscores that with the start of globalization, gender has become unstable and fluid. Exemplifying the fluid nature of gender, he asserts that the most highly muscular men, in fact, appear in cultural sideshows of body-building competition, do no more physical labor than the average suburban husband mowing the lawn and shoveling snow (*Masculinities* 58). Similarly, he observes that women have exhibited their strength and courage in wars after the military and military colleges opened their doors to women. He concludes that the socially imposed gender traits appear in deviated form as men appear weak and women appear strong in some circumstances.

Based on Connell's idea of gender fluidity, the researcher, in the analytical part of this dissertation shows that in the selected texts, the characters fluctuate between the traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. Since the characters go through various changes such as socio-political changes of the nation and the changes that appeared globally, they are unable to stick to the traditional gender roles. Consequently, the roles of the male characters and the female character get reversed. The female characters take part in war, whereas the male characters escape from the conflicting situation. For example, in *Facing my Phantoms*, Prashant leaves the village as he fears the attack from the Maoists. Sanat reports Prasant's vulnerability as belonging to a male member of feudal class, he is a direct target of the Maoists: "Prashant has fled. There is now a direct threat to his life" (Shah 218). Escaping from the village, Prashant exemplifies that his masculine image gets wobbled, when he acts cowardly. Thus, the researcher exposes that in the selected texts, the characters' gender fluctuates between the traditional and anti-traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, Butler brings the concept of gender fluidity and gender subversion as medium of liberation of the self. Butler observes that since constitution of gender identity is based on the repetitive performance, it provides chance to repeat the act differently. Apart from this, she emphasizes that since the gender is constructed through the social norms, gender gets changed when social norms are changed. In fact, there is no 'natural' gender, instead gender is an 'illusion' that is produced by repeated actions and societal norms (Salih and Butler 123). Butler evinces that there is no fixed identity that one must reflect because individuals, through repetition of actions over time, craft their identities themselves. In Butler's perception, since the act of repetition constantly changes, it makes the identity unstable, plastic and flexible.

In fact, Butler postulates the idea of ‘gender fluidity’ and asserts that gender is not a stable identity because gender identity is tenuously created. She argues that there is no firm ground on which gender is created; therefore, gender is constituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition. Salih and Butler point out the process of gender formation:

The abiding gendered self is structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their, occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this ground. The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-fortuity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.

(124)

Stressing on the idea of the groundlessness and discontinuity of the formation of gender, Butler proposes the possibility of gender deviation and subversion through parodic repetition of gender. Similar to Butler’s theorization of gender, Feminist critics Glover and Kalpan claim that one cannot imagine that there should or can be a psychically smooth and unproblematic path to a ‘stable’ gendered identity. They view that gender is socially constructed and regulated; hence, there is always possibility of change of gender identity and roles (13). In their understanding, the iterability enables the individual to have power that makes one capable of shaping change within oneself.

Butler elucidates that the inner truth of gender is a fabrication. In fact, a true gender is just an illusion that is maintained discursively in order to maintain for the purposes of the “regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of productive

heterosexuality” (GT 186). Butler reveals that gender can be neither true nor false, but are only produced “as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable-identity” (GT 186). In such a condition, Butler reveals that one may stray from the conformity of the imposed identity. Like Butler, focusing on the fluid nature of gender, MacInnes claims that “both men and women possess both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ attributes” (64). MacInnes argues that since gender is not determined by sex, both men and women share similar traits. For example, in *Toda*, Dil Bhadur deviates from the traditional masculine image. Roshani recalls, when she knows that Dil Bahadur wants to propose her, “*Usale Dil Bahadur ko Saato lieki thii. Tyasbelaa Dil Bahadur jhandai roeko thiyo*” (“She rebuked Dil Bahadur. At that time, he nearly cried”; Subedi 160). In fact, transcending the masculine image of daring and assertive person, Dil Bahadur appears as submissive and coward lover.

Similarly, debunking the parochial notions of gender identity, Connell comes up with the concept of multiplicity of individual identities. Connell asserts that the interplay of gender, class and ethnicity constructs several versions of masculinity that resulted in multiple masculinities within the same society and the same institution.

Connell argues for the possibility of multiplicity of gender identities:

The trend has therefore been to speak of multiple gender and sexual identities. Some psychologists, for instance, have mapped out the stages of acquisition of a ‘Homosexual identity’. ... as among a number of possible sexual identities in modern society. But there is a significant shift of ground in moving from the concept of ‘identity’ to the concept of ‘gender identity’. With the categories seeming more and more complex, the concept of identity has increasingly been used to name claims made by individuals about who or what they are. (*Gender* 107)

Through his research, Connell explicates that; various factors such as poverty, gender division of labor, and social status shape the individual's identity that resulted in the formation of multiple identities. In Connell's perception, an individual can get multiple identities such as the identities of a Black, a woman, a lesbian and so on; likewise, a homosexual can get the various identities such as 'effeminate', 'real men' (working class youth) and 'flamboyant queen'. Stressing on the concept of multiple gender identities, Connell concludes that identities change with the circumstances and situations.

For Connell, it is not possible for the individual to remain in a certain identity because an individual creates several identities while dealing with various relations and responsibilities. He comes up with the idea that since gender relations require a de-structuring of the self, one's identity keeps on shifting. In such a condition, in Connell's notion, experience of gender vertigo becomes a part of individual's life. Furthermore, Connell reveals that people's gender identity is in state of flux for several reasons; for example, in Australia, group of men try to change traditional masculinity for 'green movement'. Likewise, observing the people in United States, Connell exposes that people in United States bring fluctuation in their identity for the sake of 'fair families'. Connell observes that: "the configuration of sexual and social practice which might easily be read as identities were dependent on historically transitory social conditions" (*Gender108*). Connell concludes that the fluctuation of gender identity depends on the social condition.

Both Butler and Connell come up with the idea that since gender is socially constructed, the gender cannot remain stable. Moreover, Butler proposes the possibility to transform the gender identity through subversion. Butler suggests to challenge, defy, and dismantle the socially imposed gender identity through the

‘subversive gender performance’. She reveals that though the autonomous individual is unable to follow one’s desire; nevertheless, dual dimension of subjectivation enables the individual to subvert the gender identity. In fact, Butler renders this idea as “the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (*PLP* 2). She suggests that at the very moment, the individual is dominated by power, he or she becomes a subject capable of action.

Additionally, emphasizing on the possibility of gender subversion, Butler clarifies that the norms, while producing gender, require repeating-reciting- of acts in order to have effect. Hence, the act of repetition creates the space for the individual to repeat the acts differently. Butler explains, “the need to repeat thus allows for citations that twist or impair the very norms they are intended to fortify” (qtd in Lloyd 65). As such, for Butler, gender is constitutively unstable and it is “this instability that is the deconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition” (*BTM* 10). Butler gives emphasis on the repetition because she believes that agency is an effect that exists through repetition of actions. Like Butler, Holmes also proposes for gender subversion. Highlighting the possibility for gender subversion, Holmes emphasizes: “society is always organized in ways that constrain people, but that there are usually various possibilities within those constraints” (40). Holmes reveals that since society leaves gaps in its rules, those are made for constraining people’s gender, people make those gaps for their gateway of gender deviation.

In the same way, Butler underscores that agency is always and only a political privilege caught up within the very power relations it attempts to resist. Agency, for Butler, provides possibility of gender subversion because agency can deviate from the prescribed norms while repeating the acts variously. Butler reveals about the possibility of gender deviation:

Agency is to be located within the possibility of a variation on the repetition.

If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarism, then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (GT 198-99)

Indeed, for Butler, the norms that regulate the agency, do not always succeed; they can be manipulated at the moment of performance and such manipulation creates the possibility for subversion.

Likewise, Sonia Kruks suggests that gender performance takes place under duress, and it can be subverted through parodic repetition (78). Butler also proposes to subvert the socially imposed gender identity through parody. Nussbaum highlights Butler's perception of the term 'parody'. As Butler claims that 'parody' refers to "poke fun at the gender norms and the gendered self that is constituted through the norms" (par. 28). For Butler, parody is to create the false gender identity through copying the so-called real gendered being. She explains that the notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities.

Based on Butler's claim that gender performance takes place under the social pressure and it can be subverted through parodic repetition, the researcher shows that in *Ma Hoina Ma*, Abhishek subverts the definition of masculinity by parodying it. Though he is a male, he does not keep sexual relation with female. Rather he keeps sexual relation with male. Likewise, in *Soongava*, though biologically Kiran is female, she parodies her femininity by wearing masculine attire all the time.

Moreover, she is in live-in relationship to her girlfriend. Hence, the researcher tries to expose that the characters of the selected texts have parodied their gender.

Undeniably, in Butler's perception, by acting and speaking in a gendered way, individual not simply reports on something that is already fixed in the world; rather, one actively constitutes it, replaces it and reinforces it; and it becomes possible through parody. For Butler, "Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic-a failed copy, as it were" (*GT* 200). In Butler's perception, gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without origin. Becoming more precise, she claims that "it is a production which, in effect-that is, in its effect-postures as an imitation" (qtd in Salih and Butler 121). Butler reveals that the notion of gendered parody does not assume that there is an original to resignification and recontextualization. Thus, by claiming that there is no original gender, Butler asserts that to parody is to imitate the myth of originality itself. Moreover, Butler argues that parody blurs the socially constructed lines between 'man' and 'woman' as well as that of 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual'.

In fact, Butler, Connell and Kimmel claim that gender identity is a fabricated one; indeed, gender is just an illusion that is maintained through social norms and practices. Hence, defining gender as a fluid being, these theorists propose the chance for dismantling and defying the socially imposed gender roles and identity. Likewise, Butler presents the possibility of gender subversion. She discloses that gender is generated through repetition; and repetition lays foundation for gender subversion. She suggests that gender is constructed through the repetition of the forced societal

norms and taboos of gender dichotomy; therefore, one can repeat it differently in order to undermine the norms, taboos, and gender dichotomy.

Following the trajectory of gender ‘fluidity’ and ‘subversion’, the researcher explains how and why the characters of the selected texts subvert the traditional gender roles in the textual analysis part of this dissertation. Likewise, the researcher has tried to expose that both the female and the male characters of the selected texts do not remain in the socially prescribed gender roles and identity. For example, the female characters Roshani and Parvati in *Toda* and Sanjeevani in *Facing my Phantoms* deviate from stereotyped gender roles by appearing in the role of independent, capable and sole bread-owner of the family. Similarly, Prashant and Sanjay in *Facing My Phantoms*, Shrawan Kumar and Dil Bahadur in *Toda*, Devbrat and Arjun in *Cheerharan*, Pashupati Prasad in *Pashupati Prasad* recurrently deviate from the conventional gender roles of assertive, dependent, courageous males and appear as unassertive, unauthoritative, submissive, and self-sacrificing individual. With the intention of analyzing the gender issues of the selected texts, the researcher has formulated the following methods and techniques of data collection and interpretation.

Method and Methodology

This is library-based research. For this research, primary and secondary data have been used to analyze the issues of contemporary Nepali literary narratives. Hence, contemporary Nepali novels – *Facing My Phantoms*, *Toda* and *Cheerharan* – and films – *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava* and *Pashupati Prasad* – have been used as primary data. The research also uses religious, philosophical, constitutional and legal texts that are linked to issues related to gender, as secondary data. These data are based on books, articles published in journals, books, and newspapers which have

been collected through visiting library, websites, and bookstores. The research method of this dissertation is qualitative and analytical descriptive. In order to incorporate the arguments of this research, examples from the selected texts have been used as evidences. Likewise, in order to justify the major claims, characters' condition and circumstances have been analyzed. Similarly, in order to highlight the situation of the characters, the events of the selected texts have been extracted. Apart from this, the actions, activities, and motives of the characters have also been presented in order to meet the objectives of this research. Similarly, characters' conditions, feelings, emotions, reactions have been presented in twenty-two shots of the selected films; these shots reflect characters' conditions as well as emotions accurately. To validate that an individual's gender is regulated and constituted by the existing social/cultural norms, religious texts, texts that highlight the prevailing social system of our country, and the documents that present the condition of sexual minorities as well as females have been used. Likewise, collecting the information about the condition of Nepali people who are confined to the stereotype gender roles, by watching the interviews of gender experts in You Tubes, the researcher uses the experts' idea to support her arguments. She also watches the interviews of the sexual minorities of Nepal in You Tubes and present their condition in her thesis. By doing this, she has corroborated that contemporary Nepali novels and films reflect the problems of Nepali people that is caused by imposition of conventional gender roles. Since most of the texts are in Nepali language, the researcher presents it in her own translation through free translation method. The film's subtitle has been used while using extract from the films *Soongava* and *Pashupati Prasad*.

As a conceptual framework, the researcher incorporates the ideas of constructivist gender theorists Connell, Kimmel, and Butler to substantiate her claims.

As theoretical tool researcher uses the key theoretical ideas ‘gender performativity’, ‘gender normativity’, and ‘gender fluidity’ that are propounded by constructivist gender theorists. These theorists underscore that constrained to the normative frame, most of the time, people stick to the stereotyped gender roles. Likewise, since gender is not an innate human attribute, an individual’s gender cannot remain stable. So, people recurrently deviate from the traditional gender roles. Based on this conceptual framework, the researcher has explored and analyzed the gender roles and identities of the characters in the selected text in the next fourth and fifth chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Four

Journey from Normative to Non-normative Gender Roles in Contemporary Nepali Novels

Contemporary Nepali Novels *Facing My Phantoms*, *Toda*, and *Cheerharan* portray the gender related issues such as inequality, injustice, abuse, humiliation, frustration, depression and violence. In these novels, characters confine to stereotyped gender roles because of social pressure. Therefore, the female characters are constricted to the roles of obedient, demure, submissive, self-less, unassertive, tolerant, and dependent persons. Consequently, they are deprived of freedom, justice, and equality. Moreover, they are physically assaulted and murdered. Likewise, restricted to the roles of powerful, daring, rational, independent, and authoritative person, male characters also suffer. Indeed, under the burden of responsibilities, they sacrifice their dreams and desires. Apart from that, while exhibiting their power and courage, they suppress the emotions and feelings. Moreover, they appear as ruthless victimizers. Confined to the race of proving their success, power, and wealth, they are prone to violence, assault, and murder.

Nevertheless, when characters come across the changed circumstances such as conflict, unemployment, and exposure to the more advanced social milieu, they defy the stereotype gender images but they get punished for that. In fact, while defying the socially imposed gender roles, they get insulted, humiliated, tortured, condemned, and socially boycotted. Highlighting these issues, this chapter has been divided into three sub-sections: “Constructed Gender in the Selected Novels,” “Normatively Regulated Gender in Contemporary Nepali Novels” and “Gender Fluidity and Subversion in Contemporary Nepali Novels”.

Constructed Gender Roles in the Selected Novels

The selected texts – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda* and *Cheerharan* – reflect the contemporary gendered identities those are promoted, assigned, and endorsed in our social structure. In fact, explicating the characters’ experiences, these novels highlight the factors such as the social surroundings, family, interpersonal relations, class and cultural setting, that help to shape characters’ masculine or feminine identities. The society assigns the identities of independent, successful and responsible persons to the male characters. Therefore, the male characters try to make the image of a powerful individual who dominate the economy, politics, religion and social pinnacles of power because in Nepali society, “the definition of men still remains the same” (Pandey 34). Conversely, following social script, the female characters try to construct the identity of a docile, dependent, weak, and submissive person. Nevertheless, while doing this, they go through problems.

Shah’s *Facing My Phantoms* portrays the efforts of the characters in constructing stereotyped gender roles and identities. Setting the novel in different time-periods: Rana Oligarchy, Panchyat System and the Maoist movement, Shah depicts the gendered identities of the three generations of the Singh family. Actually, most of the members of the Singh family perform the traditional gender roles; either they belong to the first or the third generation because the Singh family, a high-class, wealthy, Hindu family nurtures them in that way. Beauvoir claims that woman and man acquired their gender through repeated practices within religion and social hierarchy (247). Presenting gender as an acquired phenomenon, Beauvoir stresses that education, family values, and social customs play important role to constitute one’s gender. In the novel, the familial environment of this royal family directly

shapes the gendered identities to its members. Consequently, the female members of the Singh family try to be obedient, loyal, weak, unassertive, and submissive wife/daughter/mother. Likewise, the male family members of the Singh family put their effort on appearing in masculine fashion: ruthless, daring, and authoritative.

Furthermore, the males of the Singh family appear as dominator because the “Hindu cultural practices have been guided by the law of Manu that prescribed the male’s supremacy over female” (Yadav 46). Influenced by the Hindu religion that assigns the role of a dominator to the males, the males of Singh family, dominate the female members. Raja Saheb, claims his possessions to the female family members, particularly, to his wives because men try to be ‘more masculine’ through exhibiting “physical strength, self-control, and power over others” (Kimmel *Manhood* 218). Enjoying the masculine supremacy over female family members, he collects several wives. However, instead of condemning and protesting against his mischievous deeds, his wives mutely tolerate his impishness because *Manusmriti* suggests that the women should be loyal to their husband at all conditions. As Manu urges: “Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constant worshipped as a god by a faithful wife” (Buhler 146). Since religion imposes inferior roles to women by showing that “the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth” (Beauvoir Li), the female members of the Singh family confine themselves to the role of submissive wives.

In fact, ascertaining his manliness, Raja Saheb exercises authority to his wives. He treats Sanat, his wife as mere fetish object that he possesses and uses to satisfy his carnal desire. Sanat reports Raja Saheb’s attitudes and behaviors towards her: “he watches her; a scrutinizing look that moves down her entire form. ‘You are too thin’... ‘you have nice hands, long and delicate fingers, very ladylike’” (Shah 52).

Performing the role of a master of his wife, instead of developing a love bond to his wife, he tries to own her body because he is guided by the thought that “It is not enough to be male to be masculine. Men have to prove their masculinity” (Synnott 23). Therefore, while ascertaining masculinity, Raja Saheb never expresses his love and emotion to her. Consequently, he deprives of natural human feelings and emotions that he could have felt, if he would not have been dispensed to the role of an oppressive husband.

Like Raja Shaheb, his eldest son Prabhat, also reproduces the culturally idealized forms of masculinity because he, too, belongs to the familial-cultural background, which reinforces masculine attributes to the males. Since that society injects the belief to Prabhat that man should display “real manhood” in his deeds (Gilmore 11), he behaves brutally towards the villagers. Sanat reports, Prabhat intimidated the ignorant villagers for no particular reasons. Likewise, while creating the masculine image he spent hours chasing Tharunis who run from him as though he were a devil (Shah 131). Hence, exhibiting his manliness, he tries to own women’s body because as a first male child of the royal family, Prabhat gets assigned to the role of a subjugator. Suthrell’s claim that “Having ascertained the sex, the process of gender begins” (13). So, getting the family’s support, in his juvenile age, Prabhat exercises his masculine traits by owning Badki’s body.

Furthermore, confirming rigid masculine norms prevailed in his family/society, Prabhat appears as *marda* ‘a real man’ by collecting several wives, drinking alcohol, and beating his wives. The narrator depicts his brutality towards Durga:

One night, Prabhat enters their room, where Durga is spread out, and unconscious in deep sleep. He begins to feel her body all over.... He sends her

tiny form flying across the bed. Terrified, she begins to cry. Durga's helpless, vulnerable figure suddenly begins to excite Prabhat with a strange obsession and he stand over her, his tall legs spread apart above her, more like a towering bridge. Petrified Durga covers her face with her hands and begins to sob. (Shah 163)

Prabhat rapes his wife Durga because he wants to assert his masculinity. Claiming his dominance over her, he indulges in non-consensual sexual activity because in the society, according to Population Council, "it supposes that men can have sex with women, whenever and wherever they want, even if she is not willing" (5). In Connell's and Messerschmidt's perception, masculinity actually does refer to "men's engaging in toxic practices-including physical violence-that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting" (840). Following the same line of thought, Prabhat appears in the role of an oppressor by imposing sexual thirst to his docile and fragile wife.

Furthermore, performing persecutor's role recurrently, Prabhat constructs the image of a cruel, rude husband. Actually, he practices to ascertain his cruelty affirming that "gender can be accomplished through the disciplining of bodies, actions and language" (Bacchi and Eveline 96). Like Bacchi and Eveline, Butler claims, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (45). Prabhat appears cruel, whimsical, and violent towards his wives because Nepali society has been guided by the belief that "A drum, a rustic, outcasts, a beast and a woman, all these deserve beating" (Tulsidas 820). As Bibek Paudel notices that in most of the society, "women are being mistreated" and Nepal is not an exception (116). Hence, belonging to such a social milieu, Prabhat beats his

wife. Sanjeevani recalls his brutality: “Thulobua thrashing Aunty black and blue was nothing extraordinary. He had once beaten her throughout the night. Thinking her dead, at the break of dawn, he asked my father to dump her lifeless body somewhere” (Shah 140). Connell reveals that men actively struggle for dominance and this active struggle for dominance is actually fundamental in redefining what a normal male identity should be (*Gender* 28). Therefore, Prabhat regularly indulges in violence while constructing the image of a dominator.

Actually, Sanat’s, Prabhat’s mother’s, approval of his masculine identity encourages him to act brutally towards his wife. Since Sanat thinks that to befit in the masculine normative models, Prabhat should ascertain his masculinity. Therefore, she takes Prabhat’s brutality as a natural masculine attribute. Her approval to Prabhat’s activities affirms that “gender stereotype is made effective by the idea that other people reward conformity to them and punish departures from them” (Connell, *Gender* 50). Since family members have endorsed his viciousness, he keeps on exhibiting it. Sanjeevani reports her Thulubua’s brutality against his innocent wife:

I remember as a child, sitting outside Aunty’s room and hearing her stifled cries along with loud curses from Thulubua. I would wonder why no one did anything. Others, the elders, would pass the bolted door and sometimes even pass the bolted door when there was silence, but move away as soon as they heard aunty’s painful cries. (Shah 140)

Prabat’s violent activities confirms Yadav’s claim that, “One-third of married women aged 15-49 experience emotional, physical and/or sexual violence from their spouses” (49). Hence, through Prabaht, Shah reveals that with social and familial endorsement, Prabhat turns into a cruel perpetrator.

Conversely, assigned to the role of submissive wife, Sanat's happiness gets disappeared from her life because she can neither claim right on her body, nor can express her desire. In fact, performing the role of demure woman, her desires get countered severally. In fact, she even cannot claim her right on her body. The narrator reports her helplessness:

His hands begin to roam all over body and his mouth is close ... very close. She is filled with a desire she has never known. She can feel his hands push her thighs apart. Before she can gasp for air, he is on top of her and pushing into her-a piercing pain. It begins to hurt Sanat more each time he bangs into her, careless and reckless and with frenzy drives out all the passion that she had started out with. Now there is only pain, searing pain. She tightens herself with each banging. Hands clenched, eyes closed, lips forced together so that she does not let out a scream, Sanat hopes and prays for the nightmarish ordeal to end. (Shah 53)

Depicting Sanat's condition, Shah reveals that stereotyped gender roles cause unequal relationship between the male and the female. Since the society imparts husband's superiority over his wife, this practice resulted in victimization of women. As Hoorocks claims: "rape is undoubtedly part of patriarchy's humiliation and oppression of women" (139). Consequently, performing the role of a docile wife, Sanat goes through marital rape and bears it mutely. As, Babita Rai discloses that in Nepali society, due to the inferior position in family hierarchy, wives are not free to deny taking part in sexual intercourse even though they go through extreme dissatisfaction during the intercourse (par. 7). Therefore, Sanat mutely bears sexual abuse.

Similarly, through Sanat, Shah reveals that traditional gender roles are implanted on women since their childhood days. Thus, Sanat also confines to the role of subservient daughter. She begins to serve her father in juvenile age. Every day, she brings a glass of hot milk to her father. She oils his hair and does other works for him. Sanat practices regularly to become a dutiful daughter. As Butler argues that without constant practice gender does not exist. In Butler's notion, gender is an effect of performance and imitation over time (*GT* 191). Moreover, Butler suggests that individual acquires gender by routinely involving in certain activities. Sanat also regularly involves in the activities that reinforces her feminine attributes. Therefore, she cannot protest the forced marriage arranged by her father. Rather, as a weak individual, she pleads to her father: "Buajiu I beg you, do not leave me behind. I promise to work for you, clean for you, cook for you, and slave for you. Buajiu takes me back home" (27). Hence, Sanat confines to the normative female roles of unassertive, acquiescent individual.

In fact, Sanat gets restricted to traditional gender roles even more, after her marriage as society assigns her to the roles of suppressive wife, dutiful mother, and selfless housewife. Moreover, she circumscribes to the house and hearth. The narrator reports Sanat's effort on becoming a dutiful housewife: "Sanat glides around her festive household, giving orders in the kitchen.... After five years of marriage, Sanat has become proficient in dispensing her duties" (Shah 102). As a strategy of survival, Sanat tries to construct the image of 'selfless, beautiful, and decent person by adjusting and blending with the domesticity of her husband's domain. Butler points out that "gender performance is a strategy of survival within compulsory systems" (*GT* 178). Shah describes Sanat's effort: "She has taught herself not to run but to walk slowly, not shout but speak softly, not laugh but smile quietly, not wander off alone

but to take a suitable chaperone” (49). Hence, Sanat performs the stereotyped gender roles.

Performing stereotyped gender roles, not only Sanat, but her granddaughter Sanjeevani also becomes victim of sexual abuse. In her childhood days, her cousin brother sexually exploits Sanjeevani many times, but confined to the role of an unassertive girl, she fails to protest. So, she bears the agony lifelong. She exposes her vulnerability:

I had leaped up the staircase and was about to cross the landing to take the stairs to the terrace and found him standing outside his sister’s bedroom door. ... I should have run down and left the house.... I tried to creep by him hoping that he will allow me to pass. But he smiled and the look in his eyes confirmed my latent suspicion that he would not. I rushed to Hemlata Diju’s door and remember banging it with all my might but then her music was so loud.... I wanted to disappear into the door, merge into the hardwood in front of me. But that did not happen. Instead, I felt him behind me, pushing his weight on to my back side. I felt a snaky, slimy thing stirring on my buttocks. His hands grasped my hips, and he began thrusting. ‘Hemant Da, no, no, Hemanta Da!’ I remember a strangled plea amidst my banging on the door. (Shah 20)

Sanjeevani’s condition reveals that the stereotyped image of the female makes her insecure even inside home. In fact, Hemanta abuses Sanjeevani because he is sure that Sanjeevani does not dare to disclose this incident. Confirming his expectation, Sanjeevani suppresses the pain within herself because she fears that it brings her a great shame. As Ahrens unravels that rape survivors are “subjected to further trauma at the hands of the very people they turn to for help. Negative reactions can thereby serve a silencing function” (264). Sanjeevani’s condition exposes that rape is a

relative indicator of the social oppression of women that is boosted up through the imposition of stereotyped gender roles.

In matter of fact, not only Sanat, but most of the female members of Singh family confine to feminine identities. constructing the image of a beautiful woman, Sanat's granddaughter Hemlata decorates herself in feminine fashion because women are asked to maintain their image of delicacy and decency through decorating their different body parts. To confirm the delicacy of her wrist, she puts bangles on it as bangle is regarded as the emblem of femininity/weakness. Sanjeevani describes Hemlata's effort of enhancing beauty: Hemlata diju painted her nails and brought matching bangles for her new salwar kameez" (Shah 32). Hemlata uses fashion as a key agent to constitute one's gender because "gendered outfits adequately pass his/her particular gender" (Butler, *GT* vii). Hemlata follows the socially prescribed fashion, affirming Butler's claim that; gender is learned and artificial construction.

Hemlata practices to perform the feminine roles since her childhood and she gives continuity to it. Besides that, she practices to create the image of her as an obedient girl, submissive woman, dutiful wife and a sincere mother. Sanjeevani exposes Hemlata's effort on becoming a feminine woman:

Hemlata diju weighs and balances her responsibilities, obligations, and even her feelings. She wakes up on time, gets the children ready, pampers the husband, does her puja, sits with her in-laws nodding her head in silent agreement, and fucks her husband. I think her life has become a mechanical clock that moves along with each tick; robotic I should say, but she never complains. (Shah 18)

Upbred in a strict family, she learns to acquire the feminine identity through her elder family members. Confining herself to the socially prescribed roles, she lives a robotic

life. Hemlata reflects the condition of Nepali women who convert to a life-less machine, by confining to fix activities through social conventions.

Shah portrays that the image of the supreme being proves to be more harmful to the males during the conflict periods in the country as the male characters become target of the police force as well as the Maoists. Apart from that, in conflict period, men are killed in many pretexts because in the society, there is a “belief that ‘men are violent; therefore, they have to expect to be treated violently’” (Horrocks143). Hence, the police force kills the common men because it misunderstands them for as the Maoist cadres, who spread violence. Likewise, Maoists kill them with the excuse of stopping the entry of government’s spy in their region. Thus, mostly the males become victim of violence created by both sides. Sanjeevani reports the vulnerability of the males in the conflict period:

... to the fear end of our line where a man was beginning to get kicked. ‘But I am only going home to my wife and old parents,’ was the last we heard of him as we saw him being tied, blindfolded and pushed into the thickets of the jungle on the other side of the road. (Shah 81)

Shah discloses that in Maoists’ area, mostly the males become the victim of violence because they have an image of supreme being as they are authoritative individuals such as journalists, politicians, government officers, police, army officers and the like.

Shah elucidates that the stereotyped gender roles is problematic for not only the villagers of Ganeshpur, it is equally challenging for the male heirs of Singh clan. Since, the Maoists regard the feudal class as their enemy, they target the male members of the Singh family because they think that they have threats from Singhs. Consequently, the Maoists force them to leave the village and migrate to the city. However, when they challenge the Maoists’ threat by remaining in Ganeshpur, as

audacious offspring of the Singh family, the Maoists brutally murder them.

Sanjeevani reports the violence that is done against the males of Singh family:

Her cousins have been brought from the neighbouring villages ... they stand, hands bound behind their back, eyes flickering with the fear of the unknown. They look much like the sacrificial goats.... She sees her brother being tied with ropes...she rushes to her brother. Bruised and bleeding, his legs limp and fractured in front of him. His hands over his stomach. She sees Sanjaya throws up. A long trail of blood spurts out and he falls back on the ground. (Shah 223-225)

The stereotyped gender roles caused a dire consequence to the male members of the Singh clan because exhibiting their manliness, they challenge their foe, the Maoists and get murdered by them. Connell rightly claims that while proving their masculinity, men “get beaten and sometimes even murdered” (*Gender* 5). So, while incorporating the masculine gender roles, the male members of Singh family become victim of violence.

In *Facing My Phantoms*, the male characters display the traits such as assertive, powerful, daring, tough, hard-working, self-reliant and so on. These male characters try to act aggressively and violently. Likewise, while exhibiting their manliness, they endure brutality as a part of their normal life experience. Consequently, they get assaulted and murdered. Depicting the vulnerability of male characters, Shah has falsified the people’s belief that males are less vulnerable than woman. Horrocks asserts that though “there is the presupposition that male adolescents are less vulnerable than women” (143), however, males are more vulnerable. The vulnerable condition of male characters, confirms Horrocks’ claim about males’ victimization. The novel also presents the reason of males’ violence.

Like Shah, Subedi also highlights the problems caused by stereotyped gender roles to the characters in her novel *Toda*.

In *Toda*, Subedi explicates the reasons for sticking to stereotyped gender roles by the characters. She reveals that despite the political changes, gender patterns do not change radically in Nepal. Moreover, society still assigns people to the traditional gender roles through socially written script. Consequently, confined to prescribed gender roles, women appear in the roles of devoted, complaint, loyal, demure daughter/wife/mother. Likewise, men execute the roles of brave, rational, authoritative leader/father/husband/son. Lloyd mentions that, “Just as actors in a play act for an audience, so gender is also publicly enacted. (41). Lloyd underscores that following the script, people try to exhibit feminine and masculine attributes. So, in *Toda*, reflecting the society, characters try to confirm stereotyped gender identities through their activities.

Toda depicts the society, in which, aphorism such as ‘*Chhori bhaneko arkaako ghar jaane jaata ho*’ ‘daughter is destined to go to the stranger’s house’ and ‘*Chhoriko janma haareko karma*’ ‘daughters are destined to face difficulties and failures’, are implanted among the people confirming that, “masculinites are embedded in the social situation” (Messerchmidt 196). Consequently, in this social milieu, the male characters exhibit their manliness by insulting, abusing and suppressing the female members. So, Parvati’s father never expresses affection to her. The narrator reports Parvati’s father discriminatory behavior against her: Parvati could not know the meaning of father’s love as he did not exhibit any traces of love to her till, she was six years old. She did not have sweet memory that reminded her father’s love to her. Though pouring his love, her father carries Parvati’s brother in his shoulder, but she did not experience even a single loveable moment with him (Subedi

33). Subedi reveals that ascertaining the image of an ‘unfeeling father’, Parvati’s father becomes indifferent to her. Parvati’s father sets an image of an unemotional male because in that social milieu, to exhibit love towards children, particularly daughter, by a father is taken unnatural.

Creating the image of an achiever, Parvati’s father focuses his love and affection to his sons because mostly, in Nepali society, the males are guided by the Hindu religious scriptures. *Manusmriti* spreads the belief that to have a son is a great achievement (Buhler 37). Similarly, *Garuda Purana Saroddhara* mentions: “A Father becomes a father only when he impregnates his wife with a son” (84). So, Parvati’s father become a proud father by begetting sons. As a result, he pours his love towards his son, whereas he even denies Parvati’s existence in his life. Likewise, ascertaining the identities of a rational individual, he deprives her of education because in that social milieu, person who educates daughter is labeled as a foolish individual. As in *Toda*, the villagers interrogate Parvati’s father sarcastically, when she joins school: “*Banaaune bhais hoina ta taile aaphni chhorilaa Indira Gandhi*” (“Are you making your daughter a great leader Indira Gandhi”²; Subedi 37)? So, he punishes her for joining the school.

Subedi unravels that stereotyped gender roles create problems to females. As in *Toda*, while acclaiming their masculinity males involve in polygamy because in patriarchal society, males’ dominance over female is “culturally honored and glorified” (Connell, *Gender* 184). Therefore, males engage in polygamy. Consequently, the female characters Roshani, Thir Kumari, Bhimaa, Rina and Niti become victim of polygamy even though *the Muluki Ain 2019* has clearly outlawed polygamy, as Section 17 of the penal code states that if a married man marries another

² English translation is done by the researcher

woman, then such a marriage will be automatically annulled. Section 17 has clearly stated that “No one shall enter in to bigamy. Such a marriage shall be nullified and parties to the marriage shall be liable for an imprisonment of from one to three years. The Purohit (Priest) engaged in conducting marriage and other accessories shall be liable for a fine of Two Hundred Rupees each. (216). Through these characters Subedi reveals that though polygamy is restricted in Nepal, while exhibiting their manliness, the males still collect wives. So, women have to pay price for the social script that prescribed the image of *marda* ‘a real man’ to men.

Conversely, constructing the images of ‘docile’, ‘submissive’, and ‘indecisive’ individuals, female characters bear inequality, injustice, violence, and suppression. From her childhood days, Parvati’s family members and the villagers impose stereotyped gender identities/roles to her in such a way that satisfying their expectation, she appears in an ‘irrational’ and ‘dumb wit’ adult. Consequently, Parvati does not doubt on Sankar’s ill intention, when he offers her a help and takes her to a hotel. Moreover, he takes the advantage of the situation by adding sedative in her food to satisfy his carnal desire. Hence, sticking to the roles of idiotic and incautious individual, Parvati gets victimized from sexual abuse of Shanker. Nevertheless, restricted to the role of a ‘tolerant’ woman, she does not report the incident to the police. Instead, she lets him roam around freely because “Female victims of sexual torture, including rape, find it difficult to talk about their experience” (Chatterji 132). Since rape and sexual abuse are viewed as a failure on the part of woman to preserve her dignity or virginity, Parvati fears to take action against Sankar. Likewise, performing the roles of “gentle, nurturant, tolerant, passive, and dependent” (McCubbin and Dahl 189), she tolerates Sankar’s abusive behavior.

Like Parvati, her friends Roshani, Thir Kumari and Bhima also suffer while performing the roles of unassertive, fragile and coward persons. Through these characters, Subedi elucidates that the inequality and injustice against females are manifested by confining them to conventional gender roles. In *Toda* most of the female characters, meekly tolerate the injustice done to them. Though their in-laws' and husband treat them merely as a 'goose that lays the golden eggs', they ignore their mistreatment and let their husband and in-laws exploit them. The narrator highlights the exploitation and infidelity of Bhima's husband towards her:

Bhimale ijaraayala gaera aaphno shrimaanlaai prasasta paisaa pathai. Ra, paisaasangai maayaa pani. Usakaa shrimaan bhane tyo paisaa ra maaya lagera euti aaimaailai bhandorahechha, 'timraa laagi pariaae yo jyaanai dina tayaara chhu' (Subedi 108)

Bhima sent lots of money to her husband from Israel. She sent him lots of love, too. Nevertheless, her husband gave that money to his mistress and said 'My love I am ready to give my life for you'.

These characters get exploited and cheated by their lover/ husband/ in-laws. Nevertheless, they cannot take any action against those betrayers and exploiters. Burdened under the image of submissive, selfless, weakling they cannot expect freedom and justice for them affirming that "negative stereotypes based upon gender can also lead to diminished expectations" (Assister 28). Consequently, these women devoted themselves in service of their family.

In *Toda*, Subedi discloses that both at home and in abroad women are assigned to the roles of caretaker, cook and cleaner as in abroad, they are mostly engaged in the service jobs such as tending sick and old. Guided by the belief that "women's virtues are properly located in the home" (Assister 99), these women get restricted to the

periphery of house and hearth. Roshani's report to Parvati exposes the social status of Nepali women in abroad: "*Tero kaamaiko tungo laagyo kyaa. Tyahaa euti budhi chhe. Abadekhi ta usaki keyara gibhara*" ("You got the job of a caregiver of an old woman"; Subedi 43). Actually, assigning them to the images of emotional, selfless, loving and caring individuals society deprives them of reputed and high earning jobs. The condition of these characters reveals that though the country has guaranteed the equal opportunity to the citizen, regardless of their gender, the women have been still facing inequality due to their gender.

Similarly, Subedi exposes that though the Constitution of Nepal 2072 BS has declared rights and equality to females, still they have not been getting rights and equality in their practical life. Similarly, *Toda* unravels that though in terms of employment, women have made significant progress, still they are restricted to service jobs and therefore, get very low wages. The condition of these female characters resembles to the idea presented by Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett:

While wider economic and social changes have combined to provide women with work and lifestyle choices unimagined by their mothers and grandmothers, women still carry the burden of multiple roles. They have been facing a situation that has become more acute as work intensification pressures combine with the continued stereotyped roles such as about housework, child care, caring roles, and emotional labour. (5)

Subedi highlights that woman are still forced to be limited to the stereotyped gender roles. Apart from that, this novel elucidate that the reason of women's victimization is gender-biased social practices.

In *Toda*, Subedi not only unravels the problems that are created by the males to the females while ascertaining their manliness, she also exposes that stereotyped gender roles are problematic for males, too. In the novel, while performing the role of a ‘savior’, the males join the Maoists force affirming the social practices of “perpetrate war” by men and becoming “ready to be killed” (Horrock 134). Constructing the image of fighter and the rescuer, the male characters-Kshitij, Parvati’s father, and her youngest brother-take part in the conflict as the Maoists cadre against the government because they want to bring to an end of every kind of discrimination, injustice, and oppression of the feudal class. Subsequently, they are killed in the conflict.

In *Toda*, the novelist depicts the problems such as inequality, injustice, abuse, and violence caused by imposition of traditional gender roles to the characters. Depicting the contemporary Nepali society, Subedi exposes that even in the twenty first century, the social laws, traditions, and religious doctrines reinforce the stereotyped gender roles that sustain women’s subordination. Likewise, constrained to the roles such as warrior, savior, and valor, men also suffer as they get victim of violence. Like Subedi, Niharika also unravels the problems caused by stereotyped gender roles to the people.

In *Cheerharan*, by retelling the story of the Hindu religious scripture *the Mahaabhaarata* Niharika unwinds the painful conditions the residents of Hastinapur and its neighboring kingdoms that is caused due to the performance of stereotyped gender roles. Niharika exposes that since people cannot escape from the socially scripted gender roles, they recurrently involve in conventional gender roles. While ascertaining their femininity and masculinity, the characters go through innumerable problems. Moreover, she unveils the fact that imposition of traditional gender roles

causes unequal relationship between the males and the females, both in the past and the present (Niharika 525). Moreover, this resulted in the misuses of power, violence and exploitation.

The story of *Cheerharan* starts with the depiction of painful condition of the King Shantanu. Though “Men have to be successful, winners, number one” (Synnott 23), Shantanu appears as an unsuccessful ruler/husband when his wife Ganga deprived him to provide an heir to the kingdom, by killing their offspring. Performing the role of an authoritative husband/ruler, he should have stopped her when she murdered her newly born babies. However, he cannot do so because the contract restricts him to ask any clarification from Ganga about her activities otherwise their marriage will automatically break. Nevertheless, when Ganga throws her newly born sons in the river, performing the role of a powerful husband, he breaks the contract. He interferes and interrogates her actions. As a result, along with the contract, his marriage also breaks. Hence, while acclaiming his manliness, the King Shantanu’s peaceful life shatters into pieces.

Similarly, Shantanu’s son Devrat exhibits his masculine image of a responsible son. The society confines him to the role of a dutiful and selfless son. Consequently, he leaves his crown for his father’s happiness. In fact, for his father’s blissful life, he accepts Satyawati’s father, Dasraj’s, condition of sacrificing the right to throne. Moreover, he takes a promise to stay bachelor throughout his life. Satyawati reports his devotion: In comparison to his father’s wish, the crown was worthless for him. He was a bachelor, till, and promise that he would never marry in future, too. He would not beget child. He took that promise for his father (Niharika 85). Devrat exhibits his masculine image because the culture of Hastinapur prescribes the image of selfless son to him. As Kimmel and Aronson point out that in some culture,

definition of masculinity, based on “civic participation, emotional responsiveness, and the collective provision for the community’s needs” (xix). Therefore, while exhibiting responsibility towards his father, Devrat sacrifices his right to the crown.

In matter of fact, Niharika explains that most of the male members of Kuru dynasty try to perform the role of a proficient ruler because in Kuru Kingdom, to become a king, a person should entail with skill, bravery and strength. From expansion of the territory of their kingdom to get a bride, they have to demonstrate power and ability. Apart from that, since man is compelled to “protect himself, his family and his country” (Synnott 52), the princes of Kuru Kingdom leave home in their early age in order to get training on fighting skills. For that, they sacrifice comforts of the palace. Moreover, they train their bodies to bear injury and pain.

Through the male characters of *Cheerharan*, Niharika exposes that power is a key component to define and construct masculinity. Connell writes: “the power of men and the authority of masculinity are relatively connected” (*Gender and Power* 109). Therefore, Dhritarastra struggles hard to acquire supremacy because obtaining power, he wants to ascertain his manliness. Consequently, he does conspiracy to stick on the throne of Hastinapur which resulted into the great war that runs for eighteen days, massacring millions of people. Dhritarastra performs masculinely because in Hastinapur, there is no provision of making the eldest prince the crown prince of the kingdom. Rather, in that kingdom, empire’s legacy is transferred only to a high spirited, strong, and defiant man. So, Hastinapur reared Dhritarastra as a future king. For that, he gets training to become a valor warrior, authoritative king (Niharika 190). Dhritarastra’s upbringing verifies Connell’s claim: “Masculinities are defined in culture and sustained in institution” (*Gender and Power* 183). Hence, following the social practices, Dhritarastra demonstrates his masculinity.

Likewise, Niharika not only highlights the causes that make individuals stick to the traditional gender roles, she also unravels the consequences such as injustice, violence and abuse caused by the imposition of traditional gender roles. In *Cheerharan*, while exhibiting manliness, the males abuse females. Dhritarastra secretly impregnates a slave woman in order to win the contest of begetting the heir of Hastinapur. Moreover, when he fails the contest for Pandu's wife Kunti gives birth to the first male child as an heir of Hastinapur, he pours frustration to a helpless slave. The slave woman reports the violence done to her by Dhritarastra: "*Khabara sunnasaatha ma raheko sthaanamaa sawaari bhai malaai nikkai gaali garnubhayo ... ani mero kokhamaa jathaabhaavi laata barsaunu bhayo*" ("As soon as the king heard the news, he came to my place and rebuked me harshly...then he randomly kicked in my belly"; Niharika 199). Dhritarastra's activity confirms Connell's argument: "patriarchal ideology legitimizes violence towards women and subordinated forms of masculinity as a result of the hegemonic masculinity's superiority over them" (*Masculinities* 33). In order to showcase his masculinity, Dhritarastra tries to hold a resoundingly dominant position through the act of violence over the slave woman.

Hastinapur and the neighboring kingdoms promote masculinity by gifting the female members of society/family to the conqueror. Since these kingdoms instigate the males to acclaim masculinity by possessing the females' body, men of these empires involve in competitions of possessing the females' body. While possessing the female body, they even use violence as Messerschmidt claims that "crimes are chosen as means of doing masculinity" (198). Therefore, ascertaining masculinity, Jayadrath and Kichak try to possess Draupadi, but when Jayadrath fails to acquire her, he abducts her and assaults her. Similarly, Kichak insults her publicly, beats her and

tries to rape her, when she denies his proposal. She recalls: *Kichakle mero keshha samaayo ra luchhyo. Bakshasthala ra chhaatimaa mudki ra laathi prahaara garyo* (“Kichak held and pulled my hair. He kicked in my breast and chest”; Niharika 447).

Hence, exhibiting their manliness, they do violence against Draupadi.

In Hastinapur and neighboring kingdoms, the males exhibit their power not only in encroaching the land of a weak country but also taking possession of the females of that kingdom. As Connell reveals that, “men actively struggle for dominance” because this active struggle for dominance is actually fundamental in redefining what a normal male identity should be (*Gender* 28). Redefining his masculinity, Bhishma appears as the most powerful males. So, when Kashi king does not invite Hastinapur in the *swayambhar sabhaa* ‘an assembly where bride chooses groom for her’, he abducts Kashi princes Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika because he thinks that Kashi king challenges his masculinity, by not inviting in groom choosing ceremony of Kashi Kingdom. Likewise, while displaying machismo, Bhishma forces Gandhar king to give hand of a seamless, capable princess Gandhari’s hand to the blind prince Dhritarastra.

Similarly, *Cheerharan* unravels that the lives of female characters become miserable due to the imposition of stereotyped gender roles, particularly in the war-torn kingdoms. In Hastinapur and the neighboring kingdoms, there are practices of doing treaty between the conqueror and the defeated country. In such treaty, the defeated country present gifts to the conqueror country. Mostly, they use women as gift because these kingdoms constrain women to the roles of loyal, unassertive, submissive individuals. Amy Blackstone reveals that, “The social construction of gender is demonstrated by the fact that individuals, groups, and societies ascribe particular traits, statuses, or values to individuals purely because of their sex” (335).

Consequently, Madri is gifted to Pandu, when he defeats Madra kingdom.

Nevertheless, performing the role of a self-sacrificing and submissive daughter/sister she accepts the decision of Madra. Not only that, following the tradition of Sati system, which is taken as evidence of wife's loyalty to her husband, Madri is burnt in the pier of Pandu.

In that social milieu, women are assigned to the role of a dutiful daughter in law. So, princesses Ambika and Ambalika, Bichitravirya's widows, accept the queen's order when she asks them to beget a male heir to the kingdom. Consequently, in order to provide heir to the empire, they accept an unwanted sexual intercourse with an aged Vyas, after the death of their husband Bichitravirya. The queen Satyawati gives order to her daughters-in-law to bring offspring for the kingdom:

Mero putra Bichitrabirya yo dhartimaa narahe pani usako sampatti swarupa timiharu chhau. Patni bhannu patiko kheta ho. Khetako maalika bhannu pati ho. Yasartha khetamaa baali josukaile lagaae taapani tyasamaa ubjioko baaliko swaamitwa kheta maalikakai hunchha. Taatparya Bichitraviryakaa patniharu, timiharuko deha, unako ho. Timiharukaa maalika thie uni.

Yasartha timiharule janma dine santaana Bichitraviryakai kahaline chha.

Timiharu matra biu umaarne ra hurkaaune abhibhaaraa leu (Niharika 148)

Though my sons are not in this world, you are here as his property. Therefore, whoever cultivates the land, the ownership of that harvest goes to the land owner. It means as Bichitravirya's wife, you owe your body to him because he was your master. Therefore, the child you beget will be known as his child. So, you take responsibility of conceiving.

Thus, under the provision and rule of Hastinapur, Ambika and Ambalika perform the roles of oppressed. In matter of fact, they lose right to their body, a fundamental human right.

Not only Ambika and Ambalika, while creating the gender identity of docile, loyal and demure woman, Kunti also faces difficulties and sacrifices her happiness. Constrained to the role of a loyal daughter, she cannot disclose the truth when she conceives Karna, out of marriage. In Hastinapur, before marriage, a girl is not allowed to become a mother or to lose her virginity otherwise she is taken as a trespasser of social norms. Likewise, she is labeled as treacherous and immoral person. So, producing the image of an ideal woman, she conceals the truth about her pregnancy. As Butler claims that “ideal gender identity is produced on the outside of the body through acts, words, gestures, and desire, to create the illusion of an internal core or substance” (*GT* 173). Constituting the image of a loyal daughter, she throws her son Karna into the river. Similarly, performing the role of a dutiful wife of Pandu, she never expresses her love towards her son Karna even though she longs to expresses her emotions towards him.

Like Kunti, Draupadi also gets oppressed while performing the roles of demure, obedient and acquiescent daughter/wife. First of all, in order to materialize his plan of defeating his enemy, Dronacharya, her father uses her as a tool. Consequently, he selects Arjun, the most efficient archer, as Draupadi’s husband. Thus, Draupadi is deprived of the right to choosing her husband. Nevertheless, performing the role of an obedient daughter, she does not protest her father’s decision. In this context, Draupadi polishes her femininity through constant social performance, confirming that “gender reality is created through sustained social performances” (Butler, *GT* 180). As a result, this decision completely changes the dynamics of her

life because being the Pandav's wife, she loses the comfortable and prestigious life. Hence, these novels not only articulate the characters' gendered status, but also reveal their socialization in the society as a woman and man. Moreover, the selected literary narratives expose that traditional gender roles make characters' life problematic. Nevertheless, they stick to those gender roles. The reason behind this has been discussed in the following section.

Normatively Regulated Gender in Contemporary Nepali Novels

In the selected novels – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda* and *Cheerharan* – the novelists unravel that individual's gender is constrained through normative frame. As Lloyd points out that through the “production of a normative framework society declares who can be recognized as a legitimate subject” (33). Similarly, Butler reveals that their identity gets questioned and they even are excluded from the socially approved and accepted group in case they defy the socially prescribed gender roles. Consequently, confined to the normative frame, individual tries to appear as a legitimate subject. Moreover, to save themselves from the punishment, characters of these novels put their effort to make their actions and appearance viable to the socio-cultural norms.

Facing my Phantoms underscores the factors that deploy the normative frame to regulate characters' gender. Similarly, this novel portrays the characters' difficulties caused by the imposition of traditional gender roles. Moreover, depicting the lifestyle of the Singh family, Shah reveals that normative frame of gender is constituted through socio-cultural norms that set the specific rules for family. Moreover, those rules are manifested through marriage, parenting, death and so forth. Likewise, keeping the individual under the surveillance, people/societies check whether her/his activities confine within the normative frame of gender or not.

Therefore, men have to prove their masculinity because “other men are constantly testing the limits in their different ways: income levels, types of cars, physical prowess, weights bench-pressed, number or quality of lovers, length of penis, bravery, medals” (Synnott 23). Similarly, female characters have to display the traits such as loyalty, dutifulness, and selflessness.

Facing my Phantoms exhibits the struggle of the three generations of the Singh family –Raja Saheb, Prabhat, Prashant and Sanjay – while living under the social scrutiny resulted by normative frame of gender. Through these characters, Shah reflects the condition of socially regulated males and their miserable condition. Hence, presenting the males’ suffering as the subject of her novel, Shah falsifies the blame put on the Nepali female writers that “mostly Nepali female writers only portray women as the victims of men and ignore the massive causality figures of men” (Giri Personal Interview). Shah unravels the fact that manliness is imposed on the male members of the Singh family through social and familial rules. Therefore, Raja Saheb, the representer of the first generation of the Singh family, shoulders the burden to reinstate the power that used to be held by the Singh clan.

In fact, on the one hand, the Singh family has set a rule for the male members to uplift the reputation of family, on the other hand, society regulates men to protect the nation. Therefore, being a male member of the Singh clan, Raja Saheb has to protest against the Rana’s autocracy. Synnot claims: “Every society/culture value male differently. Warrior culture valued the warrior, religious cultures valued the ascetics, priests, mullahs, rabbis, monks etc. and trading nations valued smart businessmen. Agricultural societies valued successful farmers” (18). Since that society values a brave patriotic figure, Raja Saheb revolts against the Rana’s autocracy while exhibiting his patriotism. Consequently, Raja Saheb gets social

endorsement of a viable subject because social norms decide “who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 2). Nevertheless, to become a viable subject is not easy for Raja Saheb. Chanda explains Raja Saheb’s difficulties:

“Your husband is in exile, Rani Saheb. The Teen Sarkar in the capital doesn’t want him to needle with the politics there”

“He will be in problem if he returns ... until his allies working from Calcutta Benares, Dehradun manage to out the Teen Sarkar and help Raja Tribhuvan to gain control of governance” (Shah 50).

Following the social regulations, Raja Saheb has to exhibit his masculinity in every single move and action. Therefore, even after his exile to the remote place Kanda, he keeps in touch with the rebellion group and plan to throw the Ranas’ rule with the purpose of reinstating the Shah king in power.

Since the society forces Raja Saheb to construct the image of a successful king, as a king of Kanda, he exercises his power in that region. Moreover, in order to expand his authority beyond Kanda, he struggles hard. His activities affirm Normal Mailer’s claim “Masculinity is not something given to you, something that you are born with, but something that you gain ... and you gain it by winning small battles with honor” (201). Raja Saheb works days and nights to get back his former position so that he can exercise his power all over the country. Connell discloses that the “power of men and the authority of masculinity are relatively connected” (*Gender and Power* 109). Therefore, Raja Saheb puts his effort in redeeming the power of Shah Dynasty because his prestige and power rely on it.

Likewise, since the society constrains the male to the role of an ‘authoritative’ husband, Raja Saheb never proclaims his love to his wife neither publicly, nor

privately. Rather, he hides his true feeling under the mask of indifferent husband because in that society as the males' domination of the females is a social norm, it is unusual for a man to express his love for his wife. As Tamang observes that during the Rana regime, Nepal had "patriarchal type of society" that approve male's supremacy over female (131). Hence, the normative masculinity affects the males negatively because while exhibiting the masculine traits, they fail to express the essential human emotions such as love, care and affection. Gardner exhibits males' compulsion to ascertain their masculinity:

It narrowed their options, forced them into confining roles, dampened their emotions, inhibited their relationship with other men, precluded intimacy with women and children, imposed sexual gender conformity, distorted their self-prescriptions, limited their social consciousness, and doomed them to continual and humiliating fear of failure to live up to the masculinity mark. (5-6)

Raja Saheb also put his effort to live up to the masculinity mark. For that, he appears as feelingless, authoritative husband and a ruthless individual.

Singh family holds the male-centric perspectives, it validates normative masculine authority where men get the role of head of the family. Therefore, Prashant, the youngest son of raja Saheb has to leave home for boarding school. Hence, he gets deprived from loving company of his mother. Since society forces the males to be educated, to get exposure to the world, and to become a capable and successful person, Prashant's mother persuades him to leave home for his study:

Fatteh Baje can teach you only about the little that he knows. And what you don't know my kancha raja is that to be a big man, one has to be far more

knowledgeable than Fattedh Baje. Otherwise, wouldn't he have been a gentleman, big and famous by now? (Shah 132)

Sanat's teachings constrain Prashant to a masculine role as Eric Anderson claims that, "women were teaching boys how to be men" (27). Consequently, though Prashant does not want to leave the warm company of his mother, following normative masculinity he suppresses his desires.

In fact, Prashant is aware that society punishes the male for his failure to be a socially viable subject. Therefore, later, he tries to become 'brave' and 'responsible' person by taking the responsibility of his family. The familial norms of the Singh family regulate him to perform as a responsible son. Therefore, he repeatedly exhibits his manliness under the regulatory frame of the society. He returns to Kailali and takes the responsibility of the family. The narrator reveals Prashant's obligation; "Prashant had wanted to start his career in the land revenue department where he had been accepted as a land administrator but someone was required at the farm as their mother was now getting old and the family had increased in number" (Shah 190). Apart from that, he establishes himself as a successful landowner.

Furthermore, with the passage of time, under the social regulation, Prashant's masculinity refines it of more. Butler argues: "the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on the social norms; consequently, the social norms that constitute individual's existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood" (*Undoing Gender* 2). As a matter of fact, regulating Prashant's activities, the society forces him to be restricted to the roles of a brave person, who faces the challenge boldly. Accordingly, Prashant involves courageously in the political activities held in Kailali, which is full of risk. Sanjeevani reports his effort: "he had rushed down, a fortnight back, ignoring the threats to his own life here

in Kailali only to be a part of the reception committee for the king's visit to an area that once was his homeland" (Shah 178). Actually, his masculinity gets challenged when he flees from the village under the Maoists' threat. Therefore, he involves in the political activities held in Kailali, thinking that the alignment to the king may help him to get his image of a 'courageous man' back.

Like Prashant, his son Sanjay also suffers while confining himself to traditional gender roles. The Singh family has a normative frame to regulate the gender behavior of its family members. In fact, this family imposes the role of *saputa* 'a good son' to the son. Not only that, if the male defies that role, he is condemned as a *kaputa* 'a bad son'. Sanjay's mother reminds the norms of the Singh family to him:

'All this belongs to you, Sanjay. We have only taken care of it so that we can hand it over to you some day. You think your Bua did not have dreams and ambitions of his own? We both did, but we gave it all up for the family. Your father left his job in Kathmandu at the land revenue department so that he could take care of the family assets ... and now the responsibility is handed down to his son, you. Kaput went his dreams of Poona and the medical institute. (Shah 35)

Sanjay is cast in the role of a responsible son and a proficient successor of the Singh clan. Moreover, the norms of his family force him to take charge of the Singh family's legacy. Therefore, though he dreams to pursue a medical career, the familial rules force him into taking care of the farm. As Connell points out that becoming a masculine male "follows many different paths and involves many tensions and ambiguities, and sometimes produces unstable results" (*Gender* 6). Apart from this, entrapped in the role of a *saputa*, he can never live his life freely.

Singh family curbs its male child to the image of a good boy. Actually, to become a viable member of the Singh family, male children should be obedient and well-mannered. Likewise, they are restricted to express their emotion in front of the elder family members. Therefore, in family assembly, Sanjay even controls his laughter because he is assigned to the role of “the good boy, the obedient successor of the Singh family tradition” (Shah 143). Connell asserts: “sex roles were acquired by socialization. Various ‘agencies of socialization’, notably the family, the school, the peer group and the mass media, took the growing child in hand” (95). He views that through an immense number of small interactions, these agencies convey to the girl or the boy the social ‘norms’ or expectations for behavior. Hence, Sanjay also suppresses his feelings while restricting to the image of a well-mannered person.

Similarly, Shah elucidates the suffering of female characters while becoming viable subject, under social and familial pressure. Sanat’s father also arranges her marriage in her juvenile age because there is a social norm to conduct child marriage in order to make her a viable subject. Mary Daly argues that, “religion, law, and science were all methods of patriarchal control working to define and limit women” (Tolan 324). In fact, in that social milieu, marriage is used as an effective means to preserve female’s purity and chastity because there is a belief that “the more mature a girl gets, more are the chances that she will go against the parental authority by not conforming to the traditional norms and rules of the society” (Vandana 177). Therefore, to avoid any such embarrassing situations, Sanat’s father opts for her child marriage. Moreover, “the religious scriptures also sanction that a girl can be married with proper rites only when she is a virgin. Among Hindus, a father who could not marry his daughter before pre-puberty was believed to commit a sin” (Vandana 178).

Hence, restricted to social and religious practices, Sanat's father ties her marital knot to the aged Raja Saheb.

Furthermore, in that society, to control the women, the belief "the girl child is a liability on the parental family" (Vandana 177) is spread. In fact, in orthodox Hindu family, to arrange the marriage of a juvenile daughter is a ritual. Therefore, under such social practices, Sanat's father wants to return her to the rightful owner/her husband. As he admits: "My daughter...my angel...my beautiful Sanat, you were a jewel given to us. Precious as you were, I am now returning you to your rightful owner" (Shah 26). Hence, Sanat is confined to the role of a wife of an aged man. In fact, the then society aspires her to pass in socially arranged gender test.

In the same way, *Facing my Phantoms* unravels the despondence faced by the female characters while affirming their gender intelligibility. To become viable subject, the female members of the Singh family, mutely mold themselves into a duty-bound robot, affirming that "Bodies are docile and biology bends to the hurricane of social discipline" (Connell, *Gender* 55). Consequently, though "Deep inside her is an emptiness that she is unable to define and thus she walks around, mechanically dispensing her duties as wife, mother and mistress" (Shah 102), Sanat cannot deviate from the role of a loyal and obedient wife. Likewise, she does not protest even her husband sexually abuses her. Instead, she remains in the unwanted marital bond.

The condition of these women highlights that mostly in Nepali society, individual gender is regulated through social norms that allows men, particularly, their husband/master to own female's body (Yadav 132) even though there is a law against the marital rape, in Nepal. As sub-Section (4) of section 219 of the Criminal Code Bill states, "If a man rapes his wife when he is still in marital relationship with her, he shall be sentenced to up to five years in jail" (par. 2). Nevertheless, the female

members of the Singh family, hesitate to report the crime of their husband because to act assertively by the female is unacceptable in society. Millet rightly asserts, “Women are subjected to an artificially constructed idea of the feminine” (Tolan 326) that inspire them to tolerate operation and violence. So, under the social pressure of becoming a ‘good girl’, these women, tolerate physical abuse done to them by their husband

Apart from that, women are controlled through creating a beauty standard by the society. Moreover, they are scrutinized by the family members, relatives and even the strangers; and are punished in case they fail to meet the standard. Therefore, Durga gets tortured for being a small, thin, and ordinary-looking woman. Her husband expresses his hatred over her unattractive looks: ‘what good will it do your ugly shriveled up face? This powder, this kajal, tika and laali? Throw it out! You don’t need it’ Prabhat kicks his vanity case as she sits with it open by her dresser, the cosmetics inside it clearly on display (Shah 163). Thus, a woman gets victimized, when she fails to meet the standard of beauty. The society constrains women to the standardization of beauty in such a way that Durga feels guilty for her looks and admits her inferiority: “Raja does not like me. He does not find me pretty enough and I think he is right. I am not worthy enough for him” (Shah 164). Hence, due to such sorts of gender norms Durga gets victimized.

Like Durga, Sanjeevani also gets victimized due to the gender biased social norms. Since the normative frame of gender confines the female to the role of ‘docile’, ‘demure’, ‘weak’, ‘irrational’ and ‘dependent’ person, her family puts effort on her upbringing to make her a viable individual. Sanjeevani reveals her parents’ attitude towards a female child:

I was brought up to be given away eventually. I was kept as a precious valuable, handled with care and treated with utmost concern.... The fact remains that I was educated and groomed only to get a suitable husband who would in return boost my parent's own social status. I think that is why my parents never showed any keen interest in my academic skills. (Shah 32)

From her early childhood, restricted to the normative feminine image, she comes across the discriminatory behavior from her parents. Actually, constraining her to the normative gender, her parents disapprove her activities such as to go out to the market, stay up on the terrace, go over to spend the holidays at the friend's place and alike affirming that "gender is socially approved" (Jagger 27). Therefore, Sanjeevani cannot enjoy her freedom.

Sanjeevani is denied to follow her free will and to take any decision.

Moreover, when she trespasses the normative frame of gender, she is condemned. Thus, her act of breaking the engagement to her fiancé is disapproved. Likewise, when she keeps affair with a Marvari man, her parents, family members, relatives, and friends criticize her because "society attaches a great value to the virginity and chastity of women" (Vandana 178). Furthermore, social norms force the parents to protect the girl from indulging in promiscuity and motherhood before marriage. Therefore, Sanjeevani's parents restrict her to continue an illegal and immoral relation with the Marvari man.

Similarly, later, when she plans to do community farming in Ganeshpur, her parents and even the villagers oppose her scheme because while doing so she trespasses the normative frame of gender as she does not constrain to the role of weak and irrational person. So, Prashant never applauds the accomplishments that she gets

in her career. Sanat discloses the unfavourable situation she faced for being a female child:

Sanjeevani has gone back to Kailali to reclaim the family land that was seized by the Maoists. In her own small way, she has taken back some land and started a sort of community farming there. She is renovating the old house and is determined to continue living there. Is Prashant pleased or even proud of his daughter's achievements? Sanat thinks not. (Shah 249)

Though Sanjeevani exhibits courage, tactfulness, wisdom and farsightedness, her father does not seem to count her virtues because for him these qualities suit only to the male. Therefore, for her parents Sanjeevani's activities are scandalous because in the society people are guided by the belief that "gender distinction is natural" and they "make it scandalous when people don't follow the pattern" (*Gender 5*). Instead of opting for a good career, he expects her to marry to a rich and reputed person. Sanjeevani's condition unravels that even the educated and high-profiled girl like Sanjeevani faces gender-based discrimination as society confines her within a small periphery of house and hearth.

Since the normative frame of gender sets different identity for the male and the female, Sanjeevani's grandmother tries to confine Sanjeevani within the feminine gender category. Scrutinizing, Sanjeevani, she criticizes her dress and manner: "Learn some decency, Sanju. You are big girl now. You cannot go around the house walking and talking like a man. Look at the way you dress ... disgusting (Shah 33)! In order to restrict her to the feminine image, her grandmother tries to inscribe her body with social signifiers. She wants Sanjeevani to decorate her body and appear womanly, walk slowly, and talk softly. Butler argues: "When we try to become a particular gender, we aim, by and large, to approximate the historical and cultural norms that

define what that gender ought to be: how it should look, walk, talk, sit and so forth". She claims that cultural norms, taboos, conventions and even laws always construct our becoming. This is why those who fail to approximate the gender ideal, either deliberately or unintentionally may be severely punished for their failure (49). Sanjeevani's dressing sense has been criticized not only by her grandmother but also by her friends and relatives, too. People try to rectify her feminine image through criticism: "Sanjeevani! Look at you ... you look so beautiful in this dress. But darling, do something with your hair ... it's a mess" (Shah 42)! Hence, they try to confine her to the image of a beautiful girl.

Hence, in *Facing my Phantoms*, male characters are constrained to the roles of brutal, oppressive, and authoritative individuals, whereas female characters are restricted to the roles of docile, dutiful and submissive persons through punishment as well as reward. So, their condition affirms that "A sex role is a part that an individual play as a social actor-the patterns of feeling and behavior deemed appropriate or inappropriate because of her or his gender" (McCubbin and Dahl 189). In fact, the script that assigns gender roles to the characters comes from social expectations about exhibition of masculine and feminine attributes that result in violence, abuse, and exploitation. In *Toda*, similar sort of difficulties is caused by the normative frame of gender to the characters.

In *Toda*, Subedi depicts the pains and suffocation faced by the characters while constraining to the normative femininity and masculinity. In this novel, the characters are forced to exhibit the socially imposed gender identity because people who fail to do their gender correctly, or who do it in ways that accentuate its genealogy and construction are punished by culture and laws (Butler, *GT* 273). In fact, fear of punishment and vulnerability to dire consequences such as social

exclusion, hatred and so forth are the factors that regulate people's gender. As Connell explains that we make our gender, but we are not free to make it however we like. In fact, our gender practice is powerfully shaped by the gender order in which we find ourselves (*Masculinities* 74). Consequently, in *Toda*, characters are confined to the undesirable gender roles.

Under compulsion, in *Toda*, characters internalize the stereotyped gender roles but when they deviate from the normative gender roles, they get punished. Dil Bahadur gets punished for his failure to befit in normative frame of gender because though men are discouraged from having the following traits: 'naïve', 'weak', and 'emotional', Dil Bahadur has been defined through these attributes. He is a docile man with low self-esteem. Person who fails to befit to the normative gender roles, "he/she is perceived as a social failure" (Davis 283) therefore, Roshani thinks that Dil Bahadur is a failure. So, Roshani rejects him, when he proposes her in school days because as the narrator depicts: "*Dil Bahadur saarai sojho thiyo. Je bhane pani hune. Tharkaaeko pani thika, phakaaeko pani thika*" ("Dil Bahadur was gullible. To him, you can say whatever you like. He does not object either you threat him or persuade him"; Subedi 161). As a result, he should pay for failing to having masculine attributes.

In fact, Dil Bahadur faces problems throughout his life for his failure to meet the standard of normative masculinity. In the beginning, Roshani breaks his heart by rejecting his proposal. Later, Roshani cheats and deceives him. She uses him to take revenge against Promod, her husband, who cheats her. She thinks that she can teach Promod a lesson by betraying him as he also deceives her by concealing the truth about his first marriage. So, she uses Dil Bahadur as a pawn to win the game that she plays against Promod. She does so because Dil Bahadur is a gullible person; so, he

barely doubts her plan. Likewise, she is sure that since he is a coward, he cannot do harm to her. Thus, he suffers for his failure to exhibit his manliness.

As a matter of fact, imposition of traditional gender roles is deleterious for males as they have to pay for both, either they deviate from the stereotyped gender roles or confirm it. Consequently, constrained to the stereotyped gender role, Dil Bahadur conceals Roshani's betrayal within himself because otherwise, he would have been labeled as effeminate man. Kimmel reveals that "men have been taught to 'take it like a man' and are ridiculed when they feel that they have been maltreated by women" (*Gender* 333). Therefore, when he comes to know that Roshani uses her as a means to take revenge against her first husband, he leaves the village. He fears that people raise question on his masculinity in case they know that he fails to become a viable individual by being cheated, used and dumped by his wife.

In *Toda*, male characters try hard to fit in normative masculinity so that they can become a viable subject. Actually, to become a viable subject, they have to become a powerful leader, responsible citizen, valor warrior, conqueror, and competitive persons. So, within that normative frame of gender, the male characters search opportunities for displaying masculine traits. Therefore, Kshitij joins the Maoist movement because constrained to the role of a 'savior' of the oppressed, he has to end the class-based inequality. For that, he puts his life at risk by revolting and fighting against the government. Kshitij even takes physical training for that and kills many police officers, confirming that our body becomes sexed "through a continual process of acting and reenacting certain gender roles; this repetition occurs within a hegemonic system that shapes the very possibilities of the roles we can enact" (Payne and Barbera 270). So, in the conflict between the Maoists and the government, he perishes. Hence, constrained to the normative masculinity, he loses his life.

Moreover, in *Toda*, under the pressure of becoming socially viable subject, the male characters involve in rivalry and challenge other males. Consequently, they become victim of violence. Kshitij becomes prey of his own friend Akas. Akas kills him because he takes Kshitij as an obstacle in the path of his progress. In fact, Akas takes Kshitij as his competitor and murders him. By doing so, he makes the path clear towards the success. Thus, Kshitij becomes victim of the social practices, those confine the male to the role of successful person. In fact, “One of the most significant causes of male violence is gender inequality” that restricts males to the roles of warrior, victor, and achiever. Therefore, “the victim of this are not only women, but also men” (Kimmel 317). Subedi reveals that the males are conditioned to carry out violence; therefore, they readily involve on it either it is a war or a competition. However, whatever the purpose is, the males’ life is always at risk.

Actually, in *Toda*, constrained to the masculine roles, males opt to the professions such as police force, arm force, and the like that demand the exhibition of their courage and strength. Since males are under pressure to exhibit their masculinity, Parvati’s husband Sagar joins the police force and he becomes victim of the Maoists’ violence. When the war goes on between the Maoists and the government, Sagar, as a police officer, involves in the war and is killed encountering the Maoists force. Horrocks claims: “War is a holocaust for men-ordered to go and kill other men, and to risk being killed. During major wars, men become the property of the state, and any who refuse to fight are severely punished-often killed” (134). Being a man, Sagar cannot escape the violence as well as conflict. Moreover, his profession forces him to take part in war. As a result, he gets killed by the Maoists force. The villagers report:

*Aakramankaari ladaaku tyaaktaramaa chadhera aaekaa thie. Tiniharu
sabaisita banduka ra saketa bamaharu thie. Kehile paaipa bama ra*

*presarakukara bama pani bokekaa thie. Ekkaasi aakramanakaariharule
chaukimaa aakmarana gare. hatiyaara raakheko thaautira daudera jaadai
garekaa pulisaharu thaaukaa thaau dhale. Saagaralaai ta chhaatimai goli
laageko thiyo* (Subedi 182)

To attack the police station, the attackers had come in a tractor. All of them had guns and socket bombs. Suddenly, the attackers attack to the police station. While running towards the place where they have kept their weapons, the police personnel collapsed. Sagar was shot in his chest.

Subedi unravels that in Nepal, during the conflict between the Maoists and the government, though females also involve in the war from the Maoists' side, mainly men carry out the violence as Nepali society compels the male to join the arm force and involve in violence. Though Sagar knows that his life is at a great risk, he remains in the battlefield because to escape means to act cowardly. Moreover, he knows that if he derails him from the role of a courageous police officer, he is taken as a stigma on the males. Consequently, he dies in the war between the government and the Maoist force.

Similarly, in *Toda*, restricted in the identity of a 'docile', 'tolerant', and 'unassertive' woman, Parvati goes through injustice and exploitation. Her in laws capture her money after the death of her husband. Likewise, her mother-in-law blames her for her son's early death. She even calls her an ominous woman who devours her husband. She bears all the problems mutely because she knows that if she defies the socially prescribed gender role, she gets punished. These people exploit and abuse her because they take the advantage of the social norms and practices which put the females in the inferior position. Consequently, due to the discriminatory social norms for women, Parvati gets harmed and exploited everywhere. *Toda* unravels the fact that

gender is regulated through punishment. So due to the fear of punishment, people try to stick to the normative frame of gender. The same idea has been elucidated in *Cheerharan*.

Niharika elucidates that Hastenapur and its neighboring kingdoms manifest normative frame of gender through *Dharma* ‘guide lines of duty’. Actually, *Dharma* imposes the responsibilities to the males, by constraining them to the role of savior, warrior, and ruler of the kingdoms, whereas females are confined to the roles of dutiful and loyal wife/daughter/daughter-in-law. Moreover, they are forced to value the family honor more than their life. Hence, to become viable subject is very challenging for them. Furthermore, in case they deviate from the normative frame of gender, they are taken as offender, sinner, and *kaputa/kuputri*. Therefore, in these places, people fear to deviate from the normative frame of gender.

In fact, covering the time span from king Shantanu to his great grandsons Pandav and Kaurav, *Cheerharan* portrays the pains and sufferings of characters caused by gender-biased social norms that constrain them to the stereotyped gender roles. Shantanu’s performance unravels the obligatory gender practices that restrict him to the roles of a promising king. Therefore, King Shantanu sacrifices his desire to marry Satyawati even though he is desperate to marry her because to marry her means to step back from the decision that is taken by him for the kingdom’s well-being. In fact, restricted to the role of a responsible, reasonable, and far-sighted king, he decides to select a strong, valor, and skilled Devrat as a crown prince because Shantanu is well aware that he is under the surveillance of the people of his kingdoms. As Butler claims that individual’s behavior is “kept in place by both the social sanctioning of certain behavior and labelling of taboos” (520). Therefore, in order to legitimize his deeds and to save himself from labeling as unqualified king, he rejects

Dasraj's/Matsyaraj's condition. Consequently, he decides to sacrifice his desire of marrying Satyawati. Thus, he suffers while becoming a viable individual.

Similarly, *Cheerharan* reveals that the entrenched male-oriented system not only compels male to maintain the superior status, it also threatens the very constituents of the identity by which men define themselves. Therefore, despite his physical disability, Dhritarastra tries to acclaim his manliness. For that he acquired a strong physic through training, he learned to use weapons in order to become an efficient warrior, to become a successful ruler, he learned political skill because these all were essential for becoming the king of Hastinapur (Niharika 190). Butler argues: "the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production" (*Bodies Matter* 176). Moreover, while upholding his manliness, he actively participates in competitions with his brother Pandu, whom he takes as his rival.

Since in that social milieu, masculinity is linked with 'chivalry'; 'protector', and the 'master', in order to benefit in those roles, the males of that society try to provide safety and honor to their wives. Moreover, they feel guilty in case they fail to do so. Following the trend, despite his blindness, Dhritarastra also try to manifest those images. Nevertheless, due to his physical disability, he cannot perform those roles. In fact, he even fails to become the king and therefore, cannot make Gandhari the queen. Then, he feels guilty. Gandhari reports his guilt when he is unable to make her queen of Hastinapur kingdom:

Timro adhikaara yo Dhritarastrako snehamaa maatra simita chhaina. Yo raajyamaa pani timro uttikai adhikaara chha priyaa. Mahaaraaniko haisiyatale timro adhikaara chha. Parantu na jestha suputra bhaera maile raajaa banne adhikaara praapta garna sake, na jestha suputraki

dharmaptniko naataale timile mahaaraani hune adhikaara paayau (Niharika 171)

Your right is not limited to my compassion. My love, you also have right in this kingdom. As a queen you have right. But being an eldest son, neither I could get right to become the king, nor being a wife of the eldest son of the king, you got the right to become a queen.

Since Dhritarastra's fails to provide high social status to Gandhari, he fears that he is punished for becoming an effeminate. As Synnot claims that man who fails to prove his masculinity is "categorized as unmasculine" (23). Therefore, Dhritarastra goes through anxiety.

Like Dhritarastra, Pandu also tries hard to benefit in normative masculinity, under the social obligation. In that social milieu, defending their gender identities becomes a taxing proposition for men. So, Pandu goes through a great emotional pressure when he fails to become a father as in that society, to become a successful king he should beget a son or provide an heir to the kingdom. As it is indicated in the Vedas, "Through a son, he conquers the worlds, through a grandson, he obtains immortality, but through his son's grandson, he ascends to the highest" (Muller 272). However, due to the curse given by a raged sage, he cannot become a father. Consequently, there is a possibility that people, who strictly scrutinize his activities, put him the label of an impotent. Pandu's condition affirms White's claim:

Masculinity is something to be won and then defended, and something under constant threat of loss.... Manhood certainly does not appear to be self-reliant and autonomous. On the contrary, masculinity seems to depend chronically on the estimation of others, to be highly vulnerable to attack by ridicule, shaming, subordination, or dishonorable. (18)

Since his manliness is completely reliant on producing a son, he sheds tears and begs Kunti to become a mother by conceiving the sperm from another male. Kunti reports his condition: He pleaded Kunti to conceive a baby. He urged her to mate with other males and assured her that he would not show objection for that. He begged her bowing his head. He was weeping while pleading (Niharika 237). Thus, constrained to the masculine roles, he faces several difficulties.

Confined to the normative frame of gender, Pandu faces difficulties because as a king he has to maintain safety, prosperity, and honor to the Kingdom. Max Weber notes that the contribution that men make to the building of society, varying according to the values and ideals of different cultures (267). Actually, to become a viable person, in Hastinapur, the king should exhibit his success. Moreover, Hastinapur keenly scrutinizes the activities of the king and counts his achievements. So, Pandu puts his effort on conquering several kingdoms and annexing them to Hastinapur. Satyawati praises his dutifulness:

*Sadaasarbadaa rajya nai mahaaraj paanduko praathamikataamaa parne
gardachha. Rajya bhannu janma dine maataasamaana ho unako nimti.
Maataamaathi shatrula dhaawaa boleko kaanamaa parnaasaatha unalaai
kehi sujhena holaa* (Niharika 215)

Always and only the state was the first priority for the king Pandu. For him the state is like a mother. He could not think about other matters when he heard that the country was in danger.

Constrained to stereotyped gender identity, Pandu forms the identity of virile, macho, muscular, resolute, strapping, and vigorous man. He exhibits these attributes in wars. Moreover, Pandu devotes himself in the battle because winning the game elevates his masculinity while defeat effeminates him. Pandu focused himself only in the security

of the country and spread of the frontier. He became so busy that he even forgot that a newly married bride had been waiting for him (Niharika 215). While maintaining his masculine image, Pandu also sacrifices his personal needs and desire. Manprit J. Singh claims: “contradictory as it might seem, the skewered process of self-enhancement has debilitated men no less than women” (17). Portraying Pandu’s condition, Niharika reveals that to win the battle is crucial in constructing men’s masculinity because the victory endorses the winner’s masculinity.

Cheerharan portrays that Hastinapur and its neighboring kingdoms not only scrutinize the activities of princes and the kings, they also prepare them for war. Moreover, they cheer the exhibition of masculine attributes by the males because “boys receive more rewards for gender conformity” (Adam and Coltrane 234); since society places greater emphasis on men’s gender identity than on women’s, “there is a tendency for more attention to be paid to boys, reflecting an androcentric cultural bias that values masculine traits over feminine characteristics” (Adam and Coltrane 234). They further argue that “The way the boys are raised in the society not only reinforces masculine personality ideals but also encourages behavior that reflects those ideals” (Adam and Coltrane 234). The social norms of Hastinapur and the neighboring kingdoms are similar to the views mentioned by Adam and Coltrane because these kingdoms valorize manhood. Furthermore, they teach the male child to pursue the ideals of masculinity. Consequently, the males of Hastinapur correlate them to competition, violence, power, and domination. Likewise, the males of Hastinapur engage in competition aggressively and violently.

Actually, the males of these kingdoms engage in warfare, rivalry, and conflict because they are forced to claim their superiority over other kingdoms. James William Gibson claims that “State sanctioned violence and aggression are being linked to

masculinity through wartime imagery and discourse for without war, he (the male citizen warrior) would not know who he was or what the world was about” (308). Consequently, in these kingdoms, most of the males are warmongers. Arjun and Karna fight for the title of ‘the world’s best archer’. Similarly, the Kaurav and the Pandav compete for the crown of Hastinapur. For that, the Kaurav even give poisonous food to Bhim and throw him in the dangerous lake; they sack the Pandav’s rights to the throne of Hastinapur through conspiracy. Moreover, they even try to take their life by setting fire in their house. Finally, they get involved in the great war named Mahaabhaarata that continues for eighteen days, killing millions of people.

In fact, Hastinapur and other kingdoms practice violence overtly or covertly because these kingdoms applaud the males’ ruthlessness and sanctify the violence. Likewise, in these kingdoms, men are required to become expert in killing, forcible arrest, and other violence to their rivals. They also become ‘dominant’ ‘harsh’ and ‘unyielding’. Consequently, when the males fail to achieve Draupadi in the competition organized by her father, declaring that the winner will achieve her as a gift, they feel humiliated and act harshly towards Draupadi. As Draupadi recounts the incident in the king’s assembly how Karna insulted her by calling her whore. Similarly, Duryodhan also abused her, and Dushsasan beat her, dragged her, and undressed her (Niharika 368). The assembly organized by Draupad, Draupadi’s father, creates rivalry among the males. Consequently, it resulted in the victimization of Draupadi because “males’ rivalry is implicitly not only misogynous but anti-feminine-too” (Hoorocks 139). In this way, normative gender role that provokes male to involve in rivalry proves harmful to the females.

Similarly, Niharika exposes the problems caused by normative femininity to the female characters. She unravels that in that society, to become a viable subject, the

females need to acquire socially prescribed features otherwise their parents do not accept them because girl child is taken as a burden by the then society. As Satyawati discloses how her father abandons her for being a stinking girl child: “*putra bhaera janmeko bhae Chediraajako nimti swikaarya hunethie ma, jasari mero jastai Matsyagandha daaju swikaarinubhayo*” (“had I born as a son, I would have been acceptable to the king Chedi as my brother had been accepted despite having foul odor in his body”; Niharika 33). Since having a dark complexion and foul odor body, Satyawati appears as an unintelligible individual. So, her father abandons her.

Satyawati’s tale discloses the gender discriminatory social norms that existed five thousand years ago, which still exists in the present society. In fact, in Nepal, people are still obsessed for the sons. In most families, to become a female child itself is to become an unviable subject. Consequently, they kill or abandon the daughters. In her article “gendercide: A Scary truth” NS Shrestha explains, that “more than 2000000 females are missing from Nepal and the problem is on the rise because of the desire for a nuclear family, easy access to ultrasound scanning to determine the sex of fetus, and preference for male child” (153). The gender-based discrimination that Satyawati faces reflects the pains of the contemporary women of Nepal as thousands of fetuses of female child have been killed every year.

Niharika underscores that the women of Hastinapur and the neighboring kingdoms are constrained to the identities of ‘self-sacrificing’, ‘selfless’, ‘docile’, and ‘dependent’ persons. In fact, the society expects the qualities such as “cooperation, mutuality, sharing, compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking from women” (Johnson 122) moreover, women loaded with these traits are viewed as valuable and are culturally rewarded. Therefore, Kashi queen asks her

daughters to practice the so-called feminine traits, before their marriage: She expected from her dutiful daughters to exhibit tolerance, simplicity, dutifulness traits in their husband's home. She wanted them to show respect to their husband and to worship their husband as God (Niharika 111). Actually, she tries to make her daughters socially acceptable so that the society does not punish them.

In the same way, the daughters-in-law of Kuru clan are constrained to the roles of docile and submissive lady. Confined in the role of unassertive and demure daughter-in-law, Madri cannot take part in war even though she is a good archer and warrior. Similarly, Draupadi also has to compromise to the unfavorable decision taken for her by Kunti. She cannot oppose Kunti's order that confines her to the wife of five Pandav brothers. Due to this, she has to bear insult and humiliation. People call her whore. However, maintaining the image of an unassertive woman and a submissive daughter-in law of Kuru clan, she stays mute. Apart from this, she bears the dreadful life as she has to be divided among the five men.

In *Cheerharan*, Niharika depicts the society which carries the notion that masculinity and femininity are destined by nature. Consequently, gender discrimination is pervasive within that society as the society is regulated by *dharma*. Since religion instructs and influences the Hindu women to restrict to stereotyped gender roles, Satyawati also gets entrapped in that *dharmic* path and forces to become a dutiful and perfect wife. Moreover, her mother instructs her the duties of a good wife: she should compromise in every step of life. In order to let her husband win, she should accept defeat. Day and night, she should devote in service of her husband. She should suppress her pain so that her husband could live peacefully (Niharika 75). In *Gender in World Perspective* Connell defines gender as "a key dimension of personal life, social relations and culture" (ix). He claims that human existence is

always a gendered existence in a restricting sense so to stray outside of established gender norm is to put one's very existence into question. Therefore, Satyawati also cannot stray outside of established gender norms that constrain her to the role of a dutiful, submissive, and tolerant wife.

Similarly, Kunti suffers while proving herself as a viable woman. Being a viable individual, she readily accepts Madri as her husband's second wife. Her condition unravels that "Becoming a gender is an impulsive yet mindful process of interpreting a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions" (Salih and Butler 26). Following the social prescription of gender, she bears the discriminatory behavior of Pandu as he pays his attention to Madri and ignores her. Though, she does not like to spend time with her husband, restricted to the role of a dutiful wife/daughter-in-law, she goes to the family trip as she gets order from her mother-in-law to make a good image of her husband.

Showcasing the problems faced by the female characters while confining to the traditional gender roles, these texts claim that the main causes of gender-based problems are socially imposed gender roles and gender identity. In these novels, the novelists reveal that people, mainly the males, cannot see women's problems because in Nepali society, males get privileges automatically that resulted in blindness towards the problems facing by marginalized people. In Upreti's observation, in Nepal, "some people are suffering or some people are underprivileged just because they are born in a particular gender as a woman or even as third gender" (Discourse 11:10-11:18). Therefore, under the influence of the social norms, most of the male characters try to suppress female members of their family and society. Similarly, depicting the ongoing conflicts in the country, these novels reveal that the conflict affects not only the females but it also makes the males' life miserable. On the one hand, the males take

revenge against each other by abusing the females of the opponent group. On the other hand, constrained to the role of a brutal and ruthless individual, they tend to erupt into violent behavior more readily for there is a tacit social license to do so. Consequently, they get physically assaulted and even get killed. Though the characters of these novels suffer due to the imposition of stereotyped gender roles, they persistently defy traditional gender roles. Why and how they deny sticking to socially imposed gender roles have been discussed in section below.

Gender Fluidity and Subversion in Contemporary Nepali Novels

In the selected novels, characters recurrently deviate from conventional gender roles because socially imposed gender roles and identities make their life suffocating and problematic. Likewise, in the changed circumstances, the male characters unable to perform the role of the ‘family head’, ‘savior’, ‘bread earner’, and ‘authoritative’ father/husband/brother. Similarly, the female characters fail to stick to the roles of dutiful, demure, sacrificing daughter/wife/daughter-in-law. Rather, they appear assertively, independently, authoritatively. Consequently, they face social unacceptance, humiliation and mental disturbance.

Facing my Phantoms, reveals the situation in which characters deviate from the stereotyped gender roles. Shah portrays that since normative gender roles impose unbearable burden to the characters, they fail to uphold the burden. Subsequently, they oscillate between traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. In the beginning, Sanat also appears in the role of a submissive wife of Raja Saheb because her father, Raja Saheb’s illegal wives and servants groom her to benefit in the role of a perfect wife. Moreover, she is guided by the belief that women should be guided by the man “when he is alive and not be unfaithful to him when he is dead” (Olivelle 72). However, after the death of her husband, defying the identity of a weakly, demure,

and irrational person, Sanat not only takes the responsibility of her juvenile sons, but also takes smart decisions for them. Her actions and deeds subvert the stereotyped gender image of women as feeble and helpless person, confirming that “female heroes are emerging” (Synnott 130) with the passage of time. Sanat’s journey from a meek maiden to a heroic mother clarifies that gender is a fluid entity.

Actually, education that she acquired in her husband’s home makes her smart and intelligent. Consequently, realizing that her sons cannot get proper education in that remote part of the country, she sends them to the boarding school as a far-sighted person, who values education. Moreover, as an authoritative parent, she takes full control over her sons. She pries over their life and imposes decisions accordingly. When she realizes that her eldest son has become undisciplined, in order to bring him in the right track, she arranges his marriage with a loyal and well-mannered girl. Likewise, her youngest son does not marry his girlfriend, unless he gets her consent. Not only that, she guides her sons in every moment of their life. She sends them to meet the king in order to seek his favor:

‘Remember,’ she says, ‘king Mahendra is a friend of your father. Someone whom your dead father backed in his dire days and with good cause and reason. After all, we are his subjects. He is a king now, having succeeded his father. Then he was only the Crown Prince but what is more important is your allegiance to the institution of monarchy, without we Thakuris have no semblance of our own’. (Shah 166)

Sanat has knowledge about the political strategy to reach to the power. So, exhibiting her wisdom, she helps her sons to find the path of their life. Though *Manusmrti* designs an inferior position for woman in the family by claiming that the father protects her in infancy; the husband in youth; and sons, in old age; a woman does not

deserve independence (Olivelle 90), but Sanat dismantles the role of a submissive woman designed by *Manusmriti* to a widow. Rather, she keeps her sons under control, guides them and takes decisions of their life. Sanat's rationality, farsightedness, courage, and leadership quality confirm that "Masculinity and femininity are not inherent properties of individual" (Davis 283), rather, they are the acquired traits and therefore are interchangeable.

Through Sanat's character, Shah reveals that since gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, it is in a state of flux. A person goes through various gender identities in his/her life while performing the various roles. Consequently, though she appears as a submissive woman as a wife of Raja Saheb, she appears as an authoritative and far-sighted widow, after the death of her husband. Moreover, she performs the role of a family head very efficiently. Hence, she exhibits so called masculine attributes affirming Judith Halberstam's claim that "female masculinity is all about who feels themselves to be more masculine than feminine" (xi). She decides not to let her sons be doomed to the confines of the Kanda hills. Therefore, she moves to the terai for she knows that to remain in Kanda means to remain in darkness and backwardness as Kanda is detached from the rest of the progressing world. With her tremendous courage and reason, she arrives in Ramshikharjhala. Then, her authoritativeness takes its full swing. Shah reports Sanat's conversion from a meek housewife to a powerful landlady: Sanat bought a total of two thousand bighas paying a total sum of seven thousand gold coins. The Mahajan is called for, and from him Sanat buys her first three bonded labourers.... Sanat is established as a prominent zamindar of Ramshikharjhala Gaon Panchyat (Shah 131). Dismantling the role of a meek, demure and submissive wife of Raja Saheb, Sanat efficiently plays the role of an authoritative landlord.

Like her grandmother, Sanjeevani also debunks the role of an obedient, demure and submissive woman. Though her mother and grandmother try to confine her to traditional gender roles, she denies their interference in her life. In fact, she refutes restraining herself to the stereotyped gender roles. She admits:

I started rebelling for being a girl and most of my teenage years were spent in forcing myself to believe as I would want others to think I was a boy. I liked my hair short, wore only pants, and completely stayed away from female fancies.... I remember sauntering into the courtyard, chest held back, arms swinging in the air and wanting each woman there to feel my manly presence.

(Shah 32)

Sanjeevani uses her dress-up as a medium to subvert the stereotyped appearance of the female and the male. Therefore, wearing male's dress, she ignores her mother's and grandmother's effort to curb her to feminine appearance. Moreover, by wearing masculine outfits she challenges the social norms in which clothes and cultural accessories function to perpetuate the gendered distinction between men and women.

As Jane Gaines claims:

Costume delivers gender as self-evident or natural than recedes as clothing leaving the connotation 'femininity'. In popular discourse, there is often no distinction made between a woman and her attire. She is what she wears. This continuity between women and dress works especially well to keep women in their traditional 'place', especially during epochs when styles, which accentuate the 'natural' contours of woman's body, are favoured. (1)

Since Sanjeevani transgresses the gender confinement, she denies to stick to the role of a beautiful girl from her childhood days, in her adulthood too, she defies the traditional gender roles and identities. Even in the social gatherings, she appears in

plain dress. Hence, she dismantles the socially imposed gender image of a 'charming' woman.

In fact, Sanjeevani liberates herself from the stereotyped gender roles from her childhood days. Denouncing the role of a demure girl, she roams around the fields, "She splashed water on the buffaloes, climbs up and jumps from one pile to another and rides the bullock cart into the nearby jungles" (Shah 57). She is rebellious in nature from her childhood days and the level of defiance increases in her adulthood. Consequently, she subverts the role of an 'obedient daughter' and breaks the engagement with Nabin, a man chosen by her family as a perfect match for her. Moreover, she starts a live-in with Rajat, a Marwari man, who is unacceptable for the Thakuri family/ the ruling class; as he is regarded as a low caste.

Actually, Sanjeevani an educated person does not like to be confined to traditional gender identity. Therefore, she denies appearing 'self-less', 'demure', and 'dutiful' woman. Rather, she makes her image of a 'wild', 'shameless', 'assertive', and 'self-centered' person. Rajat defines Sanjeevani's character: "it is amazing Sanju, that you really do not see people! For you they are nothing but appendages to your selfish needs" (Shah 2). Sanjeevani's decisions and activities justify that "gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' rather than a 'being'" (Butler, *G T* 25). Sanjeevani is condemned for not maintaining the feminine traits. Actually, denying the socially imposed gender identity, she makes her life problematic. She becomes alone, she is socially outcasted and her family blames her that she smears stigma and shame in the reputation of Singh family.

Sanjeevani dismantles the conventional gender roles affirming that gender is not an innate human attribute rather "it is documented by the state, enforced by the

legal profession, and sanctified by the church” (Synnott 91). Sanjeevani takes a job in a newspaper and declares her economic independence, discarding the socially prescribed role of dependent and weak individual. Likewise, she stands firmly in the role of a rescuer, provider, and leader by taking the responsibility of her aunt. Similarly, she helps Sharmila, a poor victim of domestic violence, and becomes her savior. She saves her life, rescues her from her husband’s torture, and arranges an independent and prestigious life for Sharmila. Not only that, she works on a plan that uplifts the poor people of Ganeshpur village from the dark pitch of poverty, illiteracy, and grief. She goes to Ganeshpur, trains the people about the plantation of value-added crops, runs an awareness program in the village and plans a special program to upgrade them from their miserable condition (Shah 203). Thus, she plays the role of an unannounced social leader who fights for others’ rights and happiness.

Like female members of Singh family, male members of this family also cannot remain to traditional gender roles. Rather they recurrently exhibit the so-called feminine attributes in their behaviors confirming that, there is the possibility of man “possessing the feminine attributes” (MacInnes 64). Transgressing from the image of an assertive person, Prashant appears as a submissive individual who suppresses his desires and cannot go against his elder brother’s order. Sanjeevani discloses the feminine side of her father: “my father was completely dominated by his elder brother” (Shah 141). In fact, Prashant lets his mother and his elder brother take the decision of his life. Though he does not want to leave home even for his education, but later, he agrees to go to the boarding school because his mother wants that. He even does not do commitment to his beloved unless he gets his mother’s approval. He admits his guilt for falling in love without his mother’s approval:

Muajiu, do forgive me if you can for my insolence, but I have to admit that I have given my heart to this young lady who is two years junior to me in college. We have exchanged handkerchiefs and with it our hearts too. I feel that after my graduation and with your respectful blessings, the two of us should get married. I repeat, only if it is acceptable to you will I suggest this to her, or else I shall let this flame die out slowly but surely in my own heart ... do forgive me if my insolence has offended you, Muajiu, and do be assured that your son will not take any decision without your consent. (Shah 167)

Prashant cannot go against his mother's wishes. Moreover, he is ready to sacrifice his happiness for her. Thus, he dismantles the masculine image of assertive and self-centered male.

Since Prashant is an unassertive person, he cannot proclaim his plan to his elder brother. Though he has a dream to take a government job and to live in a nuclear family in the capital city, but following his brother's order he takes the responsibility of the family and settles down in Ganeshpur as a farmer. Hence, intruding the gender stereotype, he appears as a submissive person. Since the society "punishes the trespassers" of traditional gender role (Fuss 54), Prashant also gets punished for deviating from the traditional gender role. When he fails to perform the socially prescribed role of an assertive and authoritative person, his wife condemns him. She criticizes his subservience to his elder brother and complains: "why must you always listen to your brother? Preposterous! Another Lakshman. I tell you are like his pet dog" (Shah 190). Thus, he cannot maintain the image of a firm and intolerant man. Rather, he tolerates the injustice and oppression done to him by his elder brother. So, he has to face his wife's condemnation.

In fact, from his childhood days, Prashant appears as an obedient son. The narrator depicts his character: “he had always been a docile and compliant boy carving his mother’s attention” (Shah 165). Like all male child, he also gets the script that assigns the role of an assertive, courageous, and rational person. However, he denies that role and acts as a selfless and unassertive person. Lloyd mentions that one can subvert the gender identity simply by reinventing the gender identity or deviating from the prescribed gender dispositions while performing, and performing the gender role in unconventional way (65). Prashant deviates from the traditional gender roles of family head and a powerful guardian, because as a coward he leaves his family in the midst of Maoists threat and flees from Kailali, when he gets threat from the Maoists.

Like Prashant, his son Sanjay also appears in anti-traditional gender identity. From his childhood days, he appears as an obedient and unassertive son. In fact, he is so docile that his mother regulates his every move and action. Sanjeevani highlights Sanjay’s suppressed condition: “It was not that only I was subjected to my mother’s senseless dictations; my brother, too, was a victim to her tyrannous ways” (Shah 34). His mother plies him into a submissive poppet of her hand; consequently, he practices to act selflessly and unassertively. Sanjeevani exposes weaker side of Sanjay: “Dada gave in easily, too easily always without a fight. Sometimes, he even sacrificed his own wants and desires” (Shah 35). Though the traditional gender roles given to a male child are “warrior, rogue, and adventure” (Kantrowitz and Kalb 203), Sanjya, acts as a submissive individual. Since he is the offspring of a royal clan, the social teachings force him to become subservient to his elders affirming Connell’s claim that “Patterns of child rearing differs between cultures” (*Gender* 4). Consequently, he cannot go against the decision taken about his life by his mother.

Similarly, Sanjay cannot execute the role of an authoritative person who takes the decision firmly. Rather, he lets his mother interfere in his life. Moreover, he lets her take every decision of his life either it is related to his career or his marriage. Consequently, he has to sacrifice his wishes and desires. Moreover, he has to become a mere spectator, when the prime decisions of his life have been taken by his mother. In fact, he stays mute when his mother selects very incompatible wife for him. Likewise, accepting the career of a farmer in a remote village, he sacrifices his dream of becoming a medical doctor.

However, Sanjay oscillates between the traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. Therefore, though he is dissatisfied and frustrated, as a submissive person, he suppresses his emotions. Moreover, unlike his brutal uncle, he does not outpour his frustrations towards his wife even though he is not satisfied with his marital life. Rather, he compromises with the situation. Hence, he liberates himself from the image of cultural ideals of boys “with heavy dose of violence” (Kantrowitz and Kalb 203). Conversely, performing the role of a ‘daring’ person he denies his father’s suggestion to leave the village and is murdered by the Maoists. Gardiner argues: “masculinity is not monolithic, not one static thing but the confluence of multiple processes and relationship with variable results for differing individuals, groups, institutions, and societies” (11). Hence, on the one hand, Sanjay performs the stereotyped gender roles and on the other hand, he defies it.

Shah elucidates that like Sanjay, most of the boys and the men of Ganeshpur cannot stick to the stereotyped gender image of daring and courageous individuals. Instead, they leave the village as they fear from violence caused by the conflict between the Maoists and the government. Consequently, only old men, who can barely drag themselves to the fields, remain in the village because the security force

come to the village and harasses the male members of each of the family. Badki reveals the violence done against the males by the Maoists:” they say ‘mother fucker, where are your friends’? Sometimes they create a ruckus, beat and threaten. But sometimes they drag the boys along saying they are informers of the comrade party” (Shah 93). Along with the villagers Sanjeevani’s childhood friend Kallu also gets beaten by the police force. They break his hand, hit in his face making bruises all over his face and back. However, he cannot fight back as a masculine man. Likewise, the males of this village get terrified with the situation. They even cannot go to the hospital for the treatment as they fear to be arrested by the police in the name of inquiry and the punishment. Therefore, under such circumstances, they cannot stick to the stereotyped gender roles. Similarly, the characters subvert the stereotyped gender roles in *Toda*.

Toda depicts the condition of people, living in the war-torn country that reverses the definition of normative masculinity and femininity. In the novel, characters’ gender fluctuates in the changed circumstances. The female characters deviate from the roles of dependent and fragile women and play the role of a sole earner of the family and an independent woman, by going abroad for employment. Conversely, due to the problems such as unemployment and migration to the city, caused by the ongoing conflict in the nation, the males defy the roles of the breadwinner and the family head. Instead, they perform the roles of dependent brother/husband, house-husband and caretaker of their children confirming that “gender is not a thing that one possesses, but rather a set of activities that one does” (Kimmel, *Gender* 122). Placing themselves in the reversed roles, the male and female characters of *Toda* appear in fluid gender image.

The central character Parvati defies the socially prescribed gender roles ever since her childhood. In this society, girl's education has been regarded as a matter of shame and a crime because it holds the belief that *chhori lai padhaayo bhane boksi hunchhan* 'if you educate your daughter, she will be witch'. Nevertheless, she breaks the normative rules and takes the admission to the school, on her own initiation. Apart from that, she decides to take the responsibility of her widow mother and takes the job in Israel. Parvati's mother reveals about Parvati's gender role of the family head: Daughter, roof is leaking. Send some money (53). Exhibiting masculine traits, Parvati courageously and wisely handles the problems of her life, both in abroad and in homeland.

In fact, Parvati exhibits the traits such as strong, daring, and independent, which are taken as the males' attributes. She stands as a strong pillar of the house in every difficulty. After her father's death, she shoulders the responsibility of her family. She runs the tea shop; when the situation becomes tensed in the village, due to the conflict between the Maoists and the government, she goes to Kathmandu and then leaves for abroad for employment. As she gets exposure to an advanced country, she appears courageous, rational, and assertive affirming that gender is regulated rather than "dictated by some kind of internal nature" (Jagger 27). Parvati unravels that person's gender keeps on changing.

In fact, in the beginning, Parvati is a suppressed girl, but with the passage of time, she becomes assertive. So, when her employer misbehaves her, maintaining her self-esteem, she leaves the job. Likewise, when the staff of the agency scolds her for leaving the job without notice, she tactfully and fearlessly convinces the staff about her innocence. Consequently, even the staff praises her courage: "*Timi ekadama himmatili rahichyau*" ("You are quite daring".; Subedi 53). In Israel, she gets

exposure to the freedom; similarly, she becomes economically strong. Therefore, she became more confident as she promised to build a house for her mother and to make her mother's life comfortable and happy (Subedi 78). In the changed condition, Parvati acts masculinely because masculinity and femininity "constantly constructed within the history of an evolving social structure" (Kimmel, *Gender* 122). In fact, in the changed circumstance, becoming economically independent, courageous and tactful, she constructs the masculine image.

In *Toda*, like Parvati, other female characters, who are in Israel for the employment, also deviate from their traditional gender image as they act bravely and confidently. These women go through several problems; they bear the inequality, abuse, injustice, and exploitation in their home country as well as in Israel. So, going through these hardships, they become strong and face the problems boldly. As the narrator describes Thirkumari's courage: "*Ahile unamaa aatmabishwaasa badheko chha*". *Aba uni logneko dayaabinai bachnasakne bhaeki chhin*" ("Now her confidence has developed. In these days she can live without her husband's mercy"; Subedi 125). Similarly, another woman satisfactorily declares how she bears the responsibility of her parents: "*baa aamaaka thaaplaamaa rinako thulo bhaari thiyo, maile halukaa paaridie*" ("There was a huge burden of loan in my parent's head but I made their burden light"; Subedi 125). Thus, appearing as a provider and the family head, these women dismantle the traditional gender image of dependent and weak women. Their deviation from the so-called feminine identity confirms that gender is not fixed; rather one can "achieve and sustain their gender identity" (Davis 287). Davis views that to maintain the gender image, one needs to engage continuously in the prescribed roles. In *Toda*, these female characters fail to engage in the prescribed gender roles and dismantle the traditional gender image.

In *Toda* female characters face difficulties due to the gender-based inequality; however, they strongly fight back the problems that hinder their happiness and freedom. At this point, Roshani insists: “*Manalaai phukkaaphaala chhaadinuparchha. Yasale je bhanchha tyahi garnuparchha*” (“Without curbing our desires, we should live freely. We have to follow our wishes”; Subedi 17). Though females are constrained to the role of self-sacrificing and repressed individual, Roshani values her happiness and freedom. She suggests her friend Parvati to live the life to the fullest as she believes to live freely, without suppressing desires. Actually, she denies the socially imposed roles for the females. Therefore, she dismantles the image of ‘a demure’ and discusses unhesitatingly about her physical needs. Moreover, Roshani openly talks about sex. By doing this, she reflects the changed image of Nepali woman who does not suppress her sexual desire as instructed by the patriarchal society.

Roshani does not constrain herself into the role of ‘demure’, ‘tolerating’ and ‘selfless’ person. Rather, she takes the roles according to the circumstances. In the beginning, as an obedient sister and daughter she goes to college, studies hard, and takes care of her old parents in the absence of her brother. Then she decides to take the role of a patriot and a rebel. Therefore, she joins the Maoist armed force and takes part in war very boldly. After that, she goes to Israel and starts her struggle to be economically independent. Thus, she challenges the gender roles designed for women. She performs the roles of a responsible daughter, a brave patriot, and an economically independent lady. Moreover, she also appears in the role of a selfish woman, when she uses a gullible Dil Bahadur to take revenge against her cheater husband Promod. Similarly, after the disclosure of Promod’s betrayal, she appears belligerently towards him. Roshani’s changed gender roles and identity confirms that

“a person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently” (Kimmel, *Gender* 116). So, involving in courageous activities recurrently, Roshani constructs the so-called masculine image of bold, assertive, independent, self-centered person.

In *Toda*, Subedi has presented the female characters as courageous, wise and confident. These characters face the difficulties of their life singularly. Depicting the struggle of Jews women, Subedi shows that these women defy the role of suppressive and fragile as they bravely escape Hitler’s trap. Not only that, they courageously fight against their dreadful past even after the several years of that cruel event. Likewise, the female characters Thir Kumari, Sita, Shanti and Bhima regenerate themselves as responsible, independent and courageous women. They take the responsibility of their children at home; therefore, work hard in the foreign land. They even get cheated by their husbands but do not run away from their responsibility of their children. They are aware of the importance of education. So, in order to collect expenses for the education of their children, they do not give up even in the unfavorable situation. Rather, they stand as a main pillar of their house.

Similarly, the novel *Toda* unravels the condition of the males of conflict-torn country, where the males go through innumerable problems while maintaining their masculine role. Since they cannot uphold the masculine image, they dismantle it. Subedi exposes that the conflict between the government and the Maoist revolutionary groups directly affect the economy and the development activities of the country as the factories, industries, and other non-government organizations get closed. Consequently, the males become unemployed. Moreover, due to various reasons such as being unskilled and lowly educated, they have few chances to get employment in the foreign country. Apart from that, like males of other countries,

they get affected by the world-wide recession, too. As Synnott explains how the men's employment gets affected:

The rapid decline of the primary and secondary sectors of the economy has negatively impacted men's employment and incomes. This has been due to a host of factors: outsourcing, downsizing, robotization, part-time, and contract work, both to reduce labour costs, and due to declining natural resources from coal to fish. Similarly, the rise of the service sector, which is female dominated, has substantially benefited women. (2)

The problem of unemployment directly affects the males because their image of the 'head of the house' and 'bread-earner' started to get distorted and dismantled. So, Dil Bahadur, Sagar, and Shrawankumar fail to perform the role of 'sole earner' of the family. Consequently, they face humiliation.

In fact, the condition of these characters, unravels that men's roles in the family and in society are in state of flux. Likewise, their condition reflects the fact that men are no longer the sole providers for the family because "women's participation in the labor market has increased dramatically over the last 30 years; and men are often not even the main economic provider. And with women's greater success in literary education and in the professions, the balance is likely to shift further and faster in many ways" (Synnott 3). Consequently, the changing paradigm of gender role is seen in Nepal, too, as most of the male characters send their female family members abroad because they cannot get employment inside and outside the nation. Consequently, they fail to perform the role of a bread-winner.

Likewise, Subedi exposes that the male characters who fail to perform the traditional gender roles, face humiliation and abhorrence. In the changed social condition, the male characters of *Toda* cannot perform masculinely because

“masculinities are not fixed; they change over time; over space” (Connell, *Men and Masculinities* 8). Parvati’s brother Shrawankumar cannot perform the traditional gender roles of a ‘responsible’, ‘successful’ and ‘intellect’ person. Rather, he fails the exam, leaves the school without completing his education, and roams aimlessly. Moreover, he is unemployed. Thus, he defies the traditional gender role. Consequently, he has to face humiliation and anger of his father. When he fails the exam and disappears from the village, his father outrageously declares: “*aaaja dekhi Shrawane maryo mero laagi*” (“from today, Shrawan is dead for me”; Subedi 42). Similarly, he faces condemnation of his sister Parvati for depending on her income and faces his mother’s frustration for being irresponsible son.

Likewise, Promod’s gender fluctuates. On the one hand, ascertaining his manliness, he threatens Roshani of taking her life. He tortures her when she leaves him. The narrator reports Promod’s brutality: Pramod sent threatful messages to her. His threat made Roshani stressed but when Roshani leaves him, he becomes emotional. Moreover, he outbursts in tears. The narrator explains his condition:

Promod raatabhari royo. Usale Roshanilaai phakaayo, kahile ghurkyaayo pani. Timi binaa baanchna saktina bhanyo.... Aaphno bigata lukaanera raakhekomaa Roshaniko paau maa maaphi pani maagyo (Subedi 164)

Promod wept the whole night. He pursued Roshani, bargained to her, he also asked forgiveness, by submitting on her feet, for hiding his past from her.

Promod’s gender identity is unstable. In fact, affirming Connell’s idea that gender “is a becoming, a condition actively under construction” (*Gender* 5), Promod seems to adopt different identities at different times. Through these male characters, Subedi unravels that construction of gender identities is ongoing and unfinished process because they are socially constructed, negotiated and performed. Therefore, in *Toda*,

the male characters cannot remain to the stereotyped gender roles. Similarly, in *Cheerharan*, characters persistently defy the socially imposed gender roles.

Like *Toda*, *Cheerharan*, depicts the temporal state of characters' gender. In this novel, characters' gender is not in stable state. Rather, their gender identities are ambivalent and dynamic because their gender changes according to circumstances. Highlighting the shifting notion of gender, Jenet T. Spence and Robert L Helmerich claim that masculinity and femininity do not restrict into a privileged domain of the men because both "masculinity and femininity are rooted not in the biological process but in the sociological process of learning, adaptation, evolution, assimilation and upbringing" (87). Since in *Cheerharan*, the characters go through the exposure to the new environment, conflict and so forth, they do not stick to the stereotyped gender roles and identity

In the novel, Satyawati subverts the traditional image of coward, unassertive and succumbing female. Free environment of home, provides Satyawati several chances to dismantle the traditional gender image. In her young age, she proves her skill and efficiency in competitions. She recalls her vigor: once, she took part in boat rowing competition. In that competition she stood first as she could row the boat even in the dangerous whirlpool and flood (Niharika 11). Likewise, from her childhood days, she does not limit herself in the four-walls of her house. Rather, taking the job of an oarswoman, she makes the image of a fearless and independent lady. Not only that, through this job, she gets exposure to the people from the different walks of life that helps her to expand the horizon of knowledge and experience. By successful manipulation of behaviors and activities, she forms the image of a masculine female for herself, confirming that we can construct the masculine or feminine image by "the

successful manipulation” of our behaviors” (Kimmel, *Gender* 119). Exhibiting manliness in her deeds, Satyawati dismantles the conventional image of women.

Actually, Satyawati appears as a fearless, wise, independent woman. However, she cannot overcome the socially imposed gender image that forces a girl to look beautiful and attractive but having dark complexion, she fails to meet the standard of beauty. As a result, she has to bear the people’s hatred and humiliation. Busar Cinar claims that society forces a certain gender identity to the people and punishes them by isolating and othering, and making cast out of society; in case they fail to remain in that identity (53). Therefore, in order to save herself from such criticism, she decides to make a deal with a sage. According to the deal, the sage converts her into a fair lady with a scented body; and for that, she does sexual intercourse with him. Thus, she appears as a submissive girl, who cannot face the difficulties and easily succumbs to the situation.

Satyawati oscillates between the traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. After becoming the queen, she constructs the role of a ‘ruler’ for herself because she gets acknowledged about the power that one can acquire by involving in the affairs of the kingdom. The narrator exposes the changed mentality of Satyawati: She decided not to be limited to the role of a dutiful wife (Niharika 99). Moreover, she determines that she will not remain to the role of the ‘king’s entertainer. Therefore, she involves in the state’s affair. First of all, she takes information about the neighboring countries. Then, she takes information about the main source of revenue and taxation system of the kingdom. She also looks after the policy and law of the kingdom. Apart from that, she takes part in the king’s assembly and exhibits her wisdom. Thus, Satyawati benefits in the so-called masculine roles of a ‘wise, ‘rational’ and ‘efficient’ ruler.

Similarly, the eldest princess of Kashi kingdom, Amba dismantles the role of submissive and tolerant woman and rebels against Bhishma's abduction. When Bhishma abducts her in order to make the bride of his younger brother, she strongly opposes his actions and deeds. She bravely condemns Bhishma for his chauvinistic thought: though by showing his physical strength, he abducted her, but he could never own her body. This sort of practice was a great injustice against women and was not acceptable to her (Niharika 117). Likewise, she unhesitatingly demands her freedom from the queen Satyawati and requests her to bring to an end to all the practices that do injustice against the female. Reinforcing the idea that gender is uninfluenced by biology, Amba appears as 'assertive', 'bold', and 'determined' lady. Amba's activities affirms that though the testosterone levels are prominently low in females, "they can exhibit dominant and ferocious behavior" (Whitehead and Barrett 16). Exhibiting these traits, she convinces the queen and sets her free from the forced or unwanted marriage.

Like Amba, deconstructing the image of weak and meek person, Gandhari appears rationally, strongly and assertively. Niharika exposes that the so-called masculine attributes emerge in her through the privileges she gets since her childhood. Providing opportunity to involve in the country's affairs, her father rears her like a son and praises her: Gandhari was more efficient than Sakuni to run the state as she was more understanding and farsighted (Niharika 160). Likewise, her brother Sakuni also inspires her to take active participation in the state's governance that confirms the belief that "gender is socially approved and politically regulated rather than dictated by some kind of internal nature" (Jagger 27). Therefore, inspired by her father and brother, Gandhari demonstrates her skills and intellect in the operation of the state. Likewise, when Gandhari senses danger in Gandhar Kingdom, as far-sighted princess,

she foresees the defeat of Gandhar with Hastinapur incase these two countries involve in war. Therefore, she accepts the marriage proposal of a blind prince Dhritarastra, sent by Hastinapur.

Through Gandhari's performance, Niharika affirms that gender is not a fixed category and therefore, does not locate in one's body as a fixed entity. On the one hand Gandhari appears as assertive, firm, and rational woman, and on other hand folding a piece of cloth in her eyes, she appears as docile, and emotional person who easily sacrifices her happiness for her husband. Mentioning the decision taken by Gandhari, Amba highlights on Gandhari's image of an emotional person: "*timro nirnaya timro bahakaau thiyo. Bhaawanaako bahakaau*" ("your decision was misleading one. Your emotion misled you"; Niharika 192). Actually, her emotion overpowers her rationality; so, she takes irrational decision. Hence, she affirms the stereotype image of an irrational person by spending her life as a blind just like her husband because she wants to prove herself as a 'devoted' wife.

Like Gandhari, most of the characters of *Cheerharan* are fluid because they recurrently fail to fit in the modality of gender stereotype. Consequently, though in the beginning, Kunti appears as submissive and unassertive girl, later she transforms into a brave woman. When her father hands over her to the childless King Kuntibhoj, her identity gets into crisis as her identity changes from Pritha to Kunti. Nevertheless, she mutely accepts her father's decision. Then, Kuntibhoj appoints her to the service of grumpy and fiery sage Durvasa, but still as a dutiful daughter, she devotes herself in the sage's service. Likewise, she prioritizes the honor of her family over her desires and happiness. Kunti constructs the image of a submissive and dutiful daughter by persistently obeying her father confirming that, "repetition is at once reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (Butler, *G T* 178).

Following social script, Kunti regularly exhibits so-called feminine attributes in her performances.

However, after Pandu's death, she cannot stick to the socially assigned gender roles because the responsibilities of her juvenile sons convert her to a brave and rational woman. Thus, she not only faces the difficulties boldly, but also takes the decisions intelligently. Moreover, she teaches her sons the skills such as value of patience, hard work, good conduct, and righteousness because she knows that these attributes are needed to become a successful ruler. Through her performances, she constitutes the images of courageous and rational woman. Her efforts justify that "mundane reproduction of gendered identity takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of the gendered existence" (Butler 523). Thus, hardships that come in her life convert a docile Kunti to a bold guardian.

Similarly, Draupadi's gender identity is in state of flux because she tries to maintain the image of dutiful, submissive, tolerant, and unassertive wife in most of the situations and circumstances but she defies the traditional gender image when her husband uses her as an object and loses her in the gambling. Then, as an assertive individual, she strongly opposes and condemns the wrong deeds of her husband. Following the changed circumstances, she appears bold, firm, and rational. As Judith Butler strongly believes in fluidity and instability of gender categories and suggests to "discard gender categories altogether" (*GT* vii). The key points of Butler's gender theory reflect in Draupadi's activities as she demonstrates the true instability of gender categories, particularly over time.

Likewise, when Duryodhan and Dushshashn abuse her, dismantling the image of a peaceful, loving, and caring woman, she converts into a ferocious woman who is

determined to destroy her enemy. She declares to take revenge with Duryodhan and Dushshashn, declaring that she will not tie her hair unless she washes it with Dushshashn's blood. Moreover, she criticizes the whole system and practices that insult and abuse woman. She raises her voice against the system and law that do injustice to women. Affirming that "gender is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, 'a set of repeated acts'" (Salih and Butler 63), she exhibits that woman change her identity according to the situation and the circumstances. By crumbling down the traditional gender image, the female characters of these novels have questioned the foundationalist frame within which the politics of gendered identity formulated.

Like female members of the Kuru dynasty, Dhritarashtra also recurrently fails to remain to the stereotyped gender roles. His gender identity deteriorates time and again. As due to his physical weakness i.e., blindness, he cannot win the contest of becoming the king. Hence, he is defeated by Pandu in the masculine contest for power and fails to become a masculine man because the society carries the belief that one should acquire masculinity by putting his effort. In Mailer's perception, "masculinity is not something given to you, something you are born with, but something you gain it with small battles with honor" (201). As being a physically impaired person, Dhritarashtra unable to exhibit the masculine traits, he needs to be dependent on others even though he becomes the king. Therefore, his masculine image gets shattered.

Similarly, Arjun's and Yudhishtira's masculine image gets blurred when they appear as self-sacrificing and unassertive person. As an obedient son, Arjun shares his wife Draupadi to his four brothers because his mother Kunti asks him to do so. Though Arjun is reluctant to share Draupadi to his brothers, he cannot claim his right over his wife. Hence, a powerful valor suppresses his desire and suffers. In the same

way, Yudhishtira sacrifices his right to become the king of Hastinapur and accepts Khandav region as the share of the kingdom. Though according to the royal law, being the eldest son of the king Pandu, Yudhishtira is the crown prince but he easily abandons his right to become the king of the most powerful Kingdom Hastinapur, by obeying the order of his elder uncle Dhritarastra. Moreover, he becomes the king of Khandav region, a barren land. The way Dhritarastra behaves confirms the claim that “masculinity is not exclusive to males, neither are feminine traits exclusive to women. Women may be more or less masculine and men more or less feminine” (Synnott 12). Dhritarastra’s tolerance, unassertiveness exhibit that he fails to stick to the prescribed masculine roles of firm and intolerant person.

In *Cheerharan*, both men and women persistently fail to display the masculine and feminine attributes. Moreover, these characters seem to possess both masculine and feminine attributes. The males sometimes exhibit the so-called feminine attributes such as demureness, compassion, care, and tolerance, whereas female characters appear authoritative, valiant, strong, reasonable, and tactful. Their rearing, circumstances, situational necessities, exposure to the different condition and so forth help them to liberate themselves from the stereotyped gender roles. Therefore, these characters’ gender identity fluctuates between the masculine and feminine self. In some occasions, they perform masculinely and in other conditions, they fail to exhibit their manliness and appear feminine.

Including *Cheerharan*, the selected novels for this dissertation, depict the change appeared in the performance of gender roles in Nepali society. Realizing the drastic political and social changes in the country, these novels present the characters who repeatedly deviate from stereotyped gender roles. Actually, presenting the fluid gender identity of the characters, these novelists propose to change the normative

meaning of women and men. In order to minimize the burden of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ from the men and women, the novelists reveal that masculinity and femininity are constructed phenomena and therefore, are interchangeable. Thus, in these texts, both the female and the male characters can overcome the rigid gender roles and identity imposed by the society. By doing so, they bring the obvious changes in their personality, relations, and social status.

Furthermore, these novels unravel that due to the imposition of stereotyped gender roles, in Nepali society, females still have equality battles to fight. The novelists elucidate that though in the advanced world of the twenty-first century, to carry the idea that ‘women have already got equality and rights’ is alluring, but before accept this idea as truth, one should always remember that due to gender-bias social norms, women still suffer in Nepal. In matter of fact, Nepali women suffer physical and mental hardships, violence, abuse, and inequality.

Similarly, these novels underscore the factors that restrain the male characters to their stereotyped gender roles and identity in the novel. In these novels, the family and the society put their effort to make the male members economically sound, physically strong and well educated so that they fit well in their gender roles. Society provides them opportunities to prove their manliness in their job/workplace, in the battle field, at home and everywhere. Consequently, performing roles of authoritative, strong, daring person they become ruthless, brutal, and violent that resulted in physical assault and even death.

Similarly, in these novels, characters liberate themselves from the socially imposed gender roles when they realize that it creates hindrance in the path of their progress, freedom and happiness. Nevertheless, to transgress the normative gender role is not easy for them because the predominant gender hierarchies and

discriminatory social, cultural and political practices continued, even after the restoration of democracy after the 1990's movement. Though political change of 1990 introduced the gender policy that promised to address the gender issues, they did not appear in practice. Consequently, "women have a long way to go in order to catch-up with men so far as access to credit, education, property, skill development, and knowledge of new technology is concerned" (Pokharel 30). The condition of women of the remote part of Nepal is even worse. Observing this situation, these novelists reflect the difficulties, characters go through in such social milieu. Like these novels, the selected films for this research also elucidate the gender issues of Nepali society, which have been discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Oscillation of Gender Roles in Contemporary Nepali Films

In this chapter, the researcher aims to elucidate that the contemporary Nepali cinematic texts – *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava* and *Pashupati Prasad* – explore gender issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination, injustice and abuse. The researcher tries to analyze the factors that regulate the characters’ gender performances in the selected texts. Similarly, this chapter also intends to analyze the consequences faced by the characters in both conditions: when they deviate from the traditional gender roles, when they perform the traditional gender roles. In order to meet the above-mentioned objectives, this chapter has been divided into three subsections. They are: “Socially Constructed Gender in the Selected Films: Reasons and Consequences”, “Normatively Regulated Gender in Contemporary Nepali Films”, and “Gender Fluidity and Subversion of Identity in Contemporary Nepali Films”.

The first subsection explores how the characters of the selected texts are confined to the traditional gender roles and identities. The second subsection examines the factors that regulate the gender of the characters of the selected texts. The third subsection analyzes the reasons for transgressing the normative gender roles and liberating themselves from the socially imposed gender roles and identities by the characters of the selected films. The sections below also analyze the impacts caused by the imposition of traditional gender roles on the characters.

Socially Constructed Gender in the Selected Films: Reasons and Consequences

In the selected films – *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava* and *Pashupati Prasad* – of this dissertation, the characters try to perform the stereotyped gender roles. Following the socially prescribed script, male characters try to appear as authoritative, harsh, ruthless father/husband/brother. Likewise, they act as a successful family head; and

assertive, rational, and resourceful individual. Conversely, female characters perform the roles of a loyal, obedient, submissive daughter/wife/daughter-in-law. Moreover, they appear as weak individuals who get exploited from the male counterparts/family members. Likewise, fulfilling the social expectation, the lesbian and the gay characters also try to appear in feminine/masculine fashion.

The film *Ma Hoina Ma*, directed by Ellum Dikshit and made by Blue Diamond Society portrays the characters who regularly, perform the stereotyped gender roles. Set in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, this film presents the story of a rich, reputed and educated family, whose members recurrently perform the socially imposed gender roles. Their gender behaviors are presented in the shots, which have been taken in Avishek's, the central character's, house and remaining shots have been taken in Srijana's college, her college, hotel, hospital and discotheque. The film starts with a scene of Avishek's marriage ceremony, which reveals characters' effort on confirming stereotyped gender roles.

Performing the duty of a responsible father, Avishek's father conducts the marriage of his gay son because he thinks that his son should be in heterosexual relationship. As Adam and Coltrane observes that, "Father tends to enforce gender stereotypes, especially in sons". In Adam's and Coltrane's view, father not only attentively scrutinizes sons' activities but also curbs their actions that do not define their gender (234). So, Avishek's father inspects his son's behaviors very minutely and when he comes to know about his homosexuality, he arranges Avishek's marriage. Through marriage he expects to control the homosexual relationship of his son. Since the Hindu culture spreads the belief that through *samskara* an individual can keep under control as "*samskaras* grant him dignity and decorum, nourish him and purify him. Without *samskaras* man becomes without any control, self-

disciplined and imbalanced in his life” (Satyaprasad 5). Moreover, “Among all sixteen samskaras, *vivaaha* marriage *samskaras* is the most important samskara because it establishes male’s supremacy” (Satyaprasad 5). Consequently, in order to make his son a self-disciplined person, as an authoritative family head, Avishek’s father arranges his marriage.

Likewise, since Avishek also realizes that as a member of a conservative Brahman family, a man is constrained to the identity of a heterosexual male, he takes part in this drama, performing the role of a groom. In Avishek’s case, marriage appears as socially written script, in which he is assigned to the role of a groom. Therefore, understanding the situation, he shares the room with his wife Srijana even though he does not share the bed. Moreover, he makes the impression to the family that there is a normal relationship between Srijana and him. For that, he spends time with her. He takes her to long drive; he teaches her driving. He develops friendship to her and they visit various places such as club, parties etc. together. Avishek’s activities affirm that, “we do gender by acting out our culture’s perception of those patterns that reflect what it is to be a man or woman” (233 Adam and Coltrane). As that socio-cultural milieu forces the male to perform the role of a heterosexual, responsible husband, he creates the similar image for himself.



Figure 1. Avishek making impression of a good husband Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author's screenshot)

(0:50:49)

In this shot, Avishek seems quite close to Srijana. Their body language reflects the compatibility between wife and husband. Not only that, both of them seem as a happy couple who share secrets to each other. Avishek creates the impression that he has good relation to Srijana. Hence, he performs the role of a responsible husband.

Avishek creates a masculine identity through parody. Though he is in homosexual relationship, he creates an impression of a heterosexual male through the manipulation of his behaviors and appearance. Kimmel writes: "Gender is a performance, a form of drag, by which, through the successful manipulation of props, signs, symbols, behaviors, and emotions, we attempt to convince others of our successful acquisition of masculinity or femininity" (119). The society assigns the role of a masculine male to Avishek; likewise, his family assigns him the role of a caring husband. Therefore, he creates the impression of the identity of a masculine male. He exaggerates his image of a good husband.

Through *Avishek*, the film exposes that gender identity is a label given to an individual; therefore, there is a possibility that one's inner and outer life may not match. In the film, the gender role, which *Avishek* plays out in the public, offers little clue about his sexual orientation and gender identity. Stoller explains that the very definition of gender identity is founded upon the possibility of an inner discord, a kind of non-identity with one's sexual being (qtd in Glover and Kalpan xxi). According to Stoller:

Gender is the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person, and, obviously, while there are mixtures of both in many humans, the normal male has a preponderance of masculinity and the normal female a preponderance of femininity. Gender identity starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not the other, though as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that, for example, one may sense himself as not only a male but a masculine man or an effeminate man or even as a man who fantasies being a woman.

(10)

For Stoller, the appearance of the gendered self is produced by the social regulation; consequently, the individual time and again, feels alienated to his/her gender identity. Similarly, *Avishek* feels alienated to his gender identity, whenever he tries to create the image of a good husband.

Avishek's family members also construct their identity through frequently performing the socially prescribed gender roles. As Cameron mentions that feminine and masculine are not what we are, not traits we have, but effects we produced by way of a particular things we do: "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal over time to produce

the appearance of substance of a natural kind of being” (421). Following the social script, Avishek’s father performs as authoritative, strict and responsible family head. He not only minutely observes the activities of the family members, but also keeps them under control. Moreover, he even rebukes and beats his sons and daughter-in-law in case they knowingly or unknowingly break the family’s rules and norms.



Figure 2. Avishek’s father slapping him after revelation of his gay identity Ma

Hoina Ma

(Source: author’s screenshot)

(0:36:05)

In this shot, performing the role of an authoritative father, he beats Avishek with a view to bring his son to the right track. This shot has been shot in Avishek’s school, the camera focuses on the school’s playground, where children are playing football, then camera moves towards a man who reaches to the children and drags a small boy, pulling his ear. After that, camera focuses on the principal’s office, where principal, a man, a woman, and a boy are sitting. When the boy enters the room, he starts caressing a boy sitting in a sofa. This act of him makes a man angry and he slaps the boy/Avishek. Through this shot, the audience comes to know about the boy’s

attraction to the same sex person. When his father notices that he is deviating from the heterosexual identity, he hits Avishek.

Avishek's attraction towards his male friends is taken as a crime in the school. So, when his gender is disclosed, the school principal calls Avishek's parents and complains against him because in Nepal, there is "lack of an LGBTQ friendly environment in educational settings" (UNDP/USAID 10). The report Presented by UNDP/USAID reveals that in educational institutions, prejudice against LGBTQ comes from other students and also from teachers and education officials. Therefore, the school administration takes LGBTQ students' activities negatively and reports to the parents. Likewise, the school administration reports Avishek's activities to his father because schools define as well as regulate individual's gender by setting "the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity" (Kessler et al. 42). Since Avishek's gender does not match the pattern regulated by the school, the school administration lodges complain against him. Consequently, in great shock and anger, Avishek's father beats and bullies him. From that day, he starts hating Avishek. Not only that, he even starts to ignore him.

Furthermore, since Avishek's father is aware of the people's hatred towards the homosexuals, performing the role of a savior of his son, he puts effort to save Avishek from the people's abhorrence. Therefore, he constrains Avishek's sexual interest and life. He forces Avishek to break his homosexual relationship to Raj and urges him to indulge in heterosexual relationship. In a family gathering he not only praises Avishek's effort, but also convinces him to stay in heterosexual relationship: "After marrying Srijana Avishek has become a complete man. From experience of thirty years of my marriage I think that a man cannot be complete without his wife" (*Ma*

Hoina Ma). Likewise, he exposes his determination and duty towards his son as he admits that being a homosexual:

*Avishekle haamro pariwaaramaa lajjaaspada sthiti lyaayo yasalaai haami
birsana sakchhau tara u bhitrako rakshasa ajhai jaagrita nai chha tyasalaai
haamile nikaalnai parchha (Ma Hoina Ma)*

Avishek brought a shameful condition to the family even though we could forget this fact but the monster in him is still alive, we have to throw it out from him.

Performing the role of a protective father, he tries to change Avishek's identity of a gay because in the society, "Gay men are systematically made targets of prejudice and violence" (Connell, *Man and the Boys* 203). Aware of the fact that the society glorifies masculinity and victimizes effeminate, Avishek's father tries to protect his son.

Avishek's father constrains Avishek within the definition of a masculine male as he also knows that otherwise his son will be victimized by the society for being homosexual. As Aboim Sofia claims "Hegemonic masculinity discriminates against men from lower classes and, even more so, gays and non-white males" (3). Guessing the worst consequences for Avishek, he tries to control his sexuality. Since he cannot accept his homosexuality, he declares Avishek a sick person. Likewise, he declares that Avishek's sickness is curable. He even presents the cure of his solution as he pronounces that Avishek's sickness can be cured through marriage. Then, he arranges Avishek's marriage. After that, he asks his wife and the eldest son to spy on Avishek so that he gets constrained in heterosexual relationship. In the same way, he urges

Srijana to make him heterosexual. Thus, he makes a mechanism to control the whole family; and uses that mechanism to control Avishek.

Avishek's father constructed the identity of a responsible family head. Therefore, he appears always concerned about the reputation of the family. When Srijana decides to leave her homosexual husband after knowing his relationship to Raj, she leaves Avishek's home and moves to her natal home. At that time, Avishek's father goes to fetch her because he thinks that Srijana's presence in Avishek's life and the family is necessary for saving the family's reputation. Likewise, when he comes to know about her extramarital affair, he rebukes her. Then, he reminds her duty as a wife and daughter-in-law to that family; and asks her to break her relationship to her boyfriend Kabir.

Following the socially prescribed script, Avishek's mother also constitutes the identity of an obedient wife. Since Hindu religion directs woman to devote herself for her husband's happiness and comforts, Avishek's mother does the same. As *Sankshipta Sivpurana* mentions the duty of a devoted wife: "for a wife her husband is a God. For wife, husband's position is higher than the greatest God Brahma, Bishnu and Shiva. So, she never should make her husband worry and upset. She should be in his service like a slave" (343). Therefore, through her acts Avishek's mother displays that the purpose of her life is to keep her husband satisfied and happy. Since the social script prescribes "submissive, tolerant and self-sacrificing identity and role for woman" (Yadav 46), Avishek's mother practices the same. She constantly tries to keep her husband happy by obeys his every instruction and order.

Performing the role of an obedient and loyal wife, Avishek's mother makes her husband's wish her wish. Therefore, when her husband infuriates with Avishek and creates distance with him, she also does the same. Moreover, she does not show

love and affection to her youngest son because she fears that her expression of love towards him may upset her husband. Likewise, when her husband declares that Avishek is a sick and marriage is the cure, she supports her husband, by searching a bride for her son. She persuades the bride's mother for marriage by giving her expensive gifts and other lures. Likewise, when she comes to know about Srijana's affair to her classmate, she sneaks this to her husband. By doing this, she appears as a dutiful wife who helps her husband to keep the family members under control and to keep them integrated. Thus, by supporting her husband's actions, activities and thoughts unquestionably, she constructs the identity of an ideal wife for whom her husband is *parameshwar* 'god'.

Another prominent character who regularly performs the role of an obedient and submissive woman is Srijana. Following socially prescribed gender roles, Srijana tries to mold herself into an ideal wife and daughter-in-law. Srijana puts great effort to constitute the identity of an unassertive, dutiful and submissive woman. Her efforts confirm Cameron's idea that gender is socially constructed rather than 'natural'. Repeating Butler's view, Cameron claims that becoming 'woman' or 'man' is not something you accomplish once and for all at an early stage of life. Gender has constantly to be reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms which define masculinity and femininity (421). In the film, Srijana accomplishes her gender identity, by repeatedly performing the socially prescribed acts.

Srijana performs the role of a dutiful wife and a daughter-in-law by regularly attending in the service of her husband and in-laws and confining herself to the household chores; she cleans the house and prepares meal for the family. As Connell claims that traditional gender roles have been created to limit women to unpaid

domestic and service work. He observes that statistics of contemporary societies show that women do most of the cleaning, cooking and sewing, most of the work of looking after children, and almost all of the work of caring for babies. He further argues: “this work is often associated with a cultural definition of women as caring, gentle, self-sacrificing and industrious” (*Gender* 3). Similar to Connell’s claim, Srijana is constrained in the role of a self-less, self-sacrificing housewife who concentrates her life to make her family members happy and satisfied.



Figure 3. Srijana following the married woman’s fashion Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author’s screenshot)

(0:11:43)

In order to perform the role of an ideal wife Srijana follows the fashion of a married woman as the Hindu society prescribed a certain fashion to a married woman.

According to Hindu ritual, married woman should wear a specific cloth items, ornaments, and make-ups because there is a belief that for her husband’s longevity, she should follow the particular fashion of clothing and makeups. As *Sankshipta Sivpuran*, gives instruction to married woman to decorate herself: “woman who wishes for longevity of her husband, should put sindura, coal, auspicious jewelry; she should do her hair or make braid of her hair beautifully; she never should take off

ornaments such as bangles and earrings” (343). *Ma Hoina Ma*, unravels that such fashion becomes norms within the materiality of imposed cultural signifiers, such as red attire, bangles, tika, pote, tilahari, and sindura. Therefore, Srijana also performs as a married woman following the socially prescribed fashion.

Similarly, performing the role of a dutiful wife, Srijana tries to keep her husband happy. For that she tries to find out the reasons of his unhappiness. She even spies on him. Consequently, Avishek’s homosexual relationship with Raj gets disclosed to her. Not only that, the revelation of Avishek’s homosexuality makes her angry, sad and frustrated. Nevertheless, she keeps on sticking in the role of a dutiful wife. Moreover, she decides to compromise to the situation. Likewise, she develops friendship to her husband and tries to understand his pains and problems.



Figure 4. Srijana helping Avishek as a devoted wife Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author’s screenshot)

(0:53:30)

In this shot, Srijana seems to present herself in Avishek’s service as a devoted wife. Here, she seems helping Avishek to his official work. Moreover, her posture and body language expose her subordination towards Avishek as he is working in a computer and she is assisting him.

Furthermore, performing the wifely duty, she shows her deep concern on her husband's happiness. Therefore, she even lets him continue his homosexual relationship to Raj, his male partner; moreover, as a faithful wife, she does not disclose this matter to the family because *Manusmriti* constrains the women to be loyal to their husbands at all conditions: "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constant worshipped as a god by a faithful wife" (Buhler 146). Since, "Nepali society is still regulated by the rule of *Manusmriti*" (Yadav 46), Srijana cannot escape from it.

Likewise, since the socio-cultural norms prescribe her the role of an obedient daughter-in-law, following the urge of her father-in-law, she gives breaks up to her lover because *Manusmriti* regulates that: "woman must never mention the name of another man" (Buhler 157). Therefore, she keeps the happiness and the reputation of the family at the top priorities. As Butler claims that the agency makes a strategy to regulate the human body in such a way that it does not "enforce a repression of their desires, but to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style and necessity" (GT 183). In fact, the society and culture enforce its rule and represses her desire in such a way that she takes her self-sacrifices to the family, as her duty. Likewise, she acts submissively, loyally, unassertively as if these are the essential traits of women.

Hence, in this film, performing the stereotyped gender roles, the characters face difficulties. Avishek's parents cannot show their affection to him. Likewise, Avishek lives a fake life. Similarly, Avishek and Srijana carry an artificial relationship/marriage to his wife. not only that, Srijana has to sacrifice her freedom and wishes. In this way, by highlighting the gender pattern that creates gender identity of the characters, the maker of this film exposes the process of the construction of

gender in Nepali society. Similarly, the film unravels that as gender is ‘inscribed’ as an essence to the human body through various mediums such as law, social norms and practices, the characters regularly perform in such a way that it constitutes their gender identity as a man or woman. In the same way, the characters in *Soonagava* also try to constitute stereotyped gender identities by performing the socially prescribed gender roles.

The film *Soongava* focuses its plot on the two reputed, conservative middle-class families whose members put their effort in forming the socially prescribed gender identities. In the very beginning shot of the film, audience can notice that all of the members of Bajracharya family constitute their respective gender identity and gender roles through their performances. In the frame of the camera, the audience sees that Bajracharya family has gathered to discuss about the marriage of their youngest daughter Diya. Apart from Diya, all of the family members unanimously show their agreement on this marriage proposal because it is the decision of her father, the head of the family. In Nepali family, to accept the decision of the family-head unquestionably, is a social practice. Therefore, performing the role of ‘dependent’, ‘submissive’ individuals, all of the female family members accept the decision of Diya’s father.

In this family, confined to the stereotyped gender identity, every family member attentively performs the traditional gender roles confirming that “the family is considered the main institution for both production and reproduction of polarized gender values” (Adam and Coltrane 233). Diya’s mother accepts the decision of Diya’s father. In fact, performing the role of an obedient wife, she does not question to her husband’s decision. Likewise, other female members: Srijana’s sister and her grandmother also appear with feminine attributes such as ‘submissive’,

‘compromising’ and ‘unassertive’ because they also do not dare to question Diya’s father’s decision. Rather, they support his decision because they want to show that they have full conviction in his rationality that he used in selecting the groom for Diya.

Performing the role of an authoritative individual, Diya’s father treats Diya as his property; so, he fixes her marriage without taking her consent. Likewise, he interferes and scrutinizes Diya’s acts and behaviors. He disapproves Diya’s short, exposing dress and criticizes her for coming home late. As he rebukes Diya: Have you seen the time? Is this any time to come home (*Soongava*)? Johan Alan Cohan points out: “Stereotyped roles lead to prejudices and customary practices that are premised on the inferiority of women, who in many cultures, still today are considered a part of a man’s property” (181)). Performing the role of strict father, he prepares ‘do’ and ‘don’t do’ lists for Diya. He rebukes her for coming home late night from the party.

Through Diya’s father, *Soongava* reflects that performing the role of a family-head, the males exercise their power over female family members. Moreover, by performing the role of a bread-winner of the family, the male characters constantly boast of their supreme position in the family. They appear authoritatively to the female family members. Connell claims that when males get the role of a ‘provider’ they also get a “dividend from patriarchy in terms of honor, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend” (*Masculinities* 82). Connell observes that in the rich capitalist countries, men’s average incomes are approximately double women’s average income; consequently, male gets the role of a ruler or power-holder. Like Connell’s claim, the male member of Bajracharya family performs the role of a power-holder, whereas women get subordinate role; moreover, they stick to that role.

Diya, the youngest daughter of Bajracharya family, also acts as an obedient and subversive daughter. Therefore, though she does not want to be tied in the marital knot, she suppresses her desire because she thinks that her denial may make her family members unhappy. Likewise, when her fiancé proposes her for a dating, as unassertive and submissive woman, she agrees to his proposal even though she is reluctant for that. Similarly, despite her unwillingness, she keeps sexual relationship with her fiancé when he insists her. Actually, she hates his company; moreover, for her, even his touching is disgusting. Her hatred has been presented in the film:



Figure 5. Diya cleaning, rubbing and wiping unwanted touch of her fiancé

Soongava

(Source: author's screenshot)

(00:39:53)

In this shot, Diya's compulsion, anger and hatred have been portrayed through zooming the camera's lance and focusing it on her facial expression as well as each of her body parts those she rubs very harshly. In this shot, it is shown that after returning from the date, she washes the body parts those are touched by her fiancé. She cleans her body in such a way as if his touch has made her body dirty. His touch is so

hateful and disgusting for her. Therefore, by rubbing it so hard, she nearly peels off her skin. Nevertheless, she does not complain against his behavior to her parents because being his fiancée, she is confined to the role of a submissive woman. As in Nepal, there are the cultural practices that wife and would-be wife should be devoted towards her husband. Moreover, she should serve her husband; and should make him happy at all costs (Bennet 180). Hence, she suppresses her feelings and stays quiet.

In the film, most of the female characters: Diya's mother and her sister; and Kiran's mother Shanti Sharma: constitute their identities of ideal women. Performing the role of perfect women, they put their effort to save the family honor. Therefore, these female members appear as loyal, submissive, dutiful persons. Likewise, they implant the same attributes on their daughters, too. Moreover, they confine their sons/daughters to the stereotypical gender roles because they fear that if the family members deviate from the socially gender roles, they bring disrespect in the family. Thus, Diya's mother and her sister scold, spit and even beat Diya when Diya's lesbianism discloses. As Connell claims that the homosexual people often get attacked and "these attacks occur in a context of general hostility towards homosexuals that ranges from discrimination in housing to legal anger" (*Gender and Power* 12) Likewise, Kiran's mother also tries to end Kiran's homosexual relationship as she thinks that this brings stigma in the family honor.

Likewise, performing the role of authoritative brother, Milan, Kiran's brother, even murders his own sister while saving the family honour. In fact, performing the role of a strict and responsible male family member, Milan acts ruthlessly and feelingless. In the beginning, he seems as a caring and friendly brother. He gives company to his sister while visiting different places but when he comes to know about his sister's homosexual relationship, he acts brutally. Highlighting the negative

attitude towards lesbian couple, Gopinath argues that the figure of the lesbian remains “impossible” in our society. Our society refuses to see female same-sex desire even when it is present. Such nationalism marks woman as inherently heterosexual (183). He does not think about his sister’s feelings and desires. He just thinks that no matter what consequences it may bring, as a male member of the family, he has to save the family reputation. Consequently, he brutally murders his sister affirming that while taking the role of a ‘real guys’, male “partakes in the culture of cruelty” (Kantrowitz and Kalb 204). While becoming a real guy, Milan’s feelings and emotions and his affection towards his sister disappears. Aftermath, he acts brutally.

Soongava unravels that people are placed in the socially prescribed gender roles and identity in such a way that they follow them unquestionably. Moreover, they put their effort to perform the traditional gender roles. In fact, they do not bring any kind of changes in stereotyped gender identity while performing the gender roles. Therefore, the family members of both Bajracharya family and Sharma family try to constrain their daughters Diya’s and Kiran’s sexual orientation when they come to know that being lesbians, Diya and Kiran have been deviating from the socially imposed gender identity. Since both of these families are regulated by the socio-cultural discourse that defines males’ and females’ identity in terms of heterosexual sexual orientation, they cannot understand the discourse of homosexuality that is created by Diya and Kiran. In Teresa de Lauretis’s view, just as women have had to struggle with resisting categories that relegate them in theory, in practice, in society, in the economy, in the political sphere, to second-class status, sexual minorities too have had to wage analogous battles against heteromasculine acts of marginalization and bias (xv). Hence, by depicting the character’s thought and behaviors, the film exhibits that gender is constructed by the cultural and social discourse of which they

are a part. Likewise, becoming the part of socially written script, the male characters of Pashupati Prasad also perform the traditional gender roles.

The film *Pashupati Prasad* unravels the causes of performing the stereotyped gender roles by the male characters. The film depicts the struggle of the characters: Pashupati Prasad, Vashme Don, Hanuman, Mit Ba, the Jeweler, and a fast-food vendor: to display their manliness. This film reflects the male characters' thirst to prove their masculinity that resulted in rivalry among the male characters. The male characters involve in the race of ascertaining manliness because in Nepali society, to construct the masculine image, male should be economically prosperous (Yadav 143). In normative masculine sense, a male should "construct the image of a successful man" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 120), for that, he should acquire personal and social achievements as well as economic and social success. In that social milieu, the male's success is measured through his earning and property. Therefore, these males struggle hard to make money so that they can maintain their masculine image.

The film *Pashupati Prasad* has been shot in the premises of Pashupati temple, where Pashupati Prasad, the lead of the film, arrives with the burdens of responsibility, i.e., to pour ashes of his dead parents to Bagmati River, imposed on him by his parents who are guided by the Hindu religious practices. According to Hindu religious practices, son has to do the religious duty that is related to death rituals. As Constance Jones and James D. Ryan in *Encyclopedia of World Religion: Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, mention Son's duty in Hindu religion, after the death of his parents: "After a day or two the eldest son will return to the burning grounds to retrieve the ashes and bones. The ashes are usually put into the urn and either buried or poured into a sacred river, this guaranteeing liberation or heaven for the deceased" (154). To complete that ritual is customary for the son otherwise, he is regarded as

kaput 'ruined son who brings disrespect to the family honour'. Therefore, assigned to the role of '*saputa*', Pashupati Prasad comes to Kathmandu from the village, carrying the ashes of his parents because "His parents wish him to scatter their ash in the Bagmati River, after their death". Pashupati Prasad's deeds support the argument that to construct our gender "we need to make visible performative elements of identity" (Kimmel *Gender* 120). So, he involves in the activities that ascertain his masculinity.

Apart from that, Pashupati Prasad is loaded with another responsibility i.e., to pay debt that is taken by his father. Therefore, constituting the image of a responsible son, he moves towards the capital city, after his parents are killed in the earthquake. Man should construct the image of a masculine man, by repeatedly exhibiting his manliness. So, Pashupati Prasad not only decides to fulfil the wish of his dead parents but also takes the responsibility to pay their debt. In the Hindu cultural practices, son inherits his parents' loan in case his parents die without paying their debt. Actually, in that society, there is a belief that a man cannot go to heaven in case he dies without paying his debt. Therefore, "after the death of his parents, son should pay his father's loan" (qtd in Kane 416). Following the same, his relatives and neighbors prescribe the role of a responsible son to him. As Connell reveals that we construct our gender "in a culturally specific way" (*Masculinities* 68). Consequently, Pashupati Prasad, under socio-cultural pressure, performs the role of a responsible son and the rescuer of his father's soul.

Pashupati Prasad performs the role of assertive and determined person. He persistently exhibits his self-esteem. When the villagers humiliate his dead parents for being the loan defaulter, he makes a promise that he will not scatter the ashes of his dead parents until he repays his father's debt. As Resser argues: "Masculinity is not a conscious process. It is perpetuated through social institutions and is enforced and

polished through individual interactions and variations of masculinity based on race, location, culture, time period, age, ability, etc.” (121). In that social milieu, Pashupati Prasad learns that *praana jaaos tara bachana najaaos* ‘man should not break his promise even though it costs his life’. So, he declares that rather than escaping from the challenges and difficulties, like a *marda* ‘a real man’ he faces challenges that comes in his path while paying debt.

However, the way that he chooses in order to construct his masculine identity is not easy because for that he has to earn enough money. Unless he earns money to pay the loan of his father, his image of a masculine male is in jeopardy. As Davis mentions that when an individual fail to sustain his gendered identity, “they are perceived by others as failed individual” (287). Therefore, he needs to seek sources of earning. Nevertheless, at that time, to find a job or ways of earning in the village is almost impossible for there are hundreds of thousands of people get unemployed and fall under the poverty line due to the earthquake. International Labour Organization reports: “Using official population projections the ILO’s 2015 baseline estimates indicate approximately 3.1 million workers were in the most severely-affected districts: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Dhading, Dolakha, Gorkha, Kaverepalanchowk, Lalitpur, Rasuwa, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, Sindhuli and Sindhupalchok.” ILO further claims: “workers in these districts are highly vulnerable to loses to their livelihoods and incomes...demand for agricultural labourers is likely to fall in affected areas” (1). Since Pashupati Prasad cannot get any job in the village, which has devastated by the earthquake, he leaves Sindhupalchok, and moves towards Kathmandu. Subsequently, his moving towards the unknown city becomes a testing measure of his manliness because he comes across several problems in the alienated city.

In fact, Pashupati Prasad follows the social script so sincerely that he condemns the man if he escapes from the problems like a coward. So, when Hanuman shows sympathy to the person while reading the news about a swindler who escapes after losing money in casino, Pashupati Prasad shows disagreement to Hanuman's thought. He angrily asks Hanuman: how could a swindler be a good person (*Pashupati Prasad*). He opines that a man should take all the challenges as opportunities, out of which he can make his story of success. He believes to stick on the stereotype gender roles; and therefore, act accordingly. As he recounts his effort:

When my home was destroyed it killed my parents. I became orphaned. Creditors bad mouthed me. I left the village and came here but I have not come here to hide, do you understand. Someday, I will return to my village and slap my creditor with thick wards of money. What kind of coward runs away from life! (*Pashupati Prasad*)

Assigned to the traditional gender identity, Pashupati Prasad performs as an industrious, self-esteemed and honest person. Consequently, he cannot accept the existence of male who lacks these attributes. Therefore, he shows disagreement on Hanuman's sympathetic feelings to a scam.

Conventionally, "masculinity has come to be associated with being bread earner and the protector of the family" (Connell, *Masculinities* 90). Likewise, becoming a masculine male "follows many different paths and involves many tensions and ambiguities, and sometimes produces unstable results" (Connell, *Gender* 6) therefore, while making the masculine image, Pashupati Prasad struggles hard in Kathmandu. First of all, he collects the items, mainly the belongings of the dead bodies those are thrown in the Bagmati River. There, he collects some coins, and sometimes small and low-cost gold ornaments. But he earns very less from this work.

Likewise, in that work, a local hooligan named Bhashme Don creates problems to him by beating him, chasing him and snatching the goods from him. Therefore, he starts a job of collecting of burnt logs from the pyre for a local dealer. However, Bhashme, who dislikes seeing Pashupati Prasad in that job, sets up a trap in which Pashupati Prasad falls innocently. To materialize his plan, he sneaks against him to the dealer: Instead of working, Pashupati Prasad had been cheating him. He did not collect logs. Rather, he seated idle in the workplace (*Pashupati Prasad*). Consequently, the dealer ousts him from the job. Subsequently, he again starts the job of a street vendor. He sells the clothes of dead bodies, which are thrown in the Bagmati river. Hence, confined to the masculine role, he struggles hard.

Like Pashupati Prasad, the character Bhasme Don also struggles hard to constitute the masculine image. All the time, he tries to prove his masculinity. In Nepali society, the males have to prove their masculinity everywhere and anytime. Therefore, under such pressure, Bhashme makes a gang by collecting some hooligans. Then he rules over them. Moreover, performing the role of aggressive and brutal leader, he bullies them, rebukes them by using vulgar words, exploits them, and even beats them affirming Connell's claim that traditional gender roles harm men as well because ascertaining their masculinity, they consentingly involve in fight and argument. Consequently they "get beaten and sometimes even murdered (*Gender 4*). Internalizing the masculine image, Bhasme behaves aggressively towards his assistants.

Actually, confined to the so-called masculine image, most of the times, Bhashme talks about violence and involves in fighting. So, when one of his gang members, Sankar steals the gold ring that is found by Bhashme, he angrily makes the commitment: "he stole it from me like an eagle steals a chick. If I ever come across

him, I will feed on him like a tiger feed on a goat. I will kill Sankar whenever I will see him” (*Pashupati Prasad*). He takes Sankar’s cheating as a challenge to his masculinity. He thinks that Sankar outsmarts him. Therefore, he promises to kill him. Likewise, he warns them not to even think about cheating him.



(Figure 6. *Bhasme creating the masculine image by bullying his gang members*)

Pashupati Prasad

(Source: author’s screenshot)

(1:13:55)

In this shot, in the frame, there are Bhasme, and his followers. As an authority, Bhasme is at the center. Likewise, exhibiting his masculinity, he is giving threat to the members of his gang and they are in the state of fear. Audience can notice Bhasme’s bossiness as he has clenched his fist, holding his head high, whereas his followers have bowed their head in terror.

Likewise, in order to display his masculinity in the public places, Bhashme involves in competition with Pashupati Prasad because in order to exhibit their manliness, the males “exhibit the traits such as power, strength and courage” (Whitehead and Barrett 142). Consequently, when he sees Pashupati Prasad collecting goods from Bagmati River, he claims his superiority over Pashupati Prasad and threatens him: “I will kill you if I see you again in this area because this is my area”

(*Pashupati Prasad*). Bhasme claims authority and ownership on that area because they are regarded as essential traits of masculinity. Declaring his possession in territory of the Bagmati River, he tries to acclaim his masculine power and authority. Therefore, when he sees Pashupati Prasad in that area, he feels that Pashupati Prasad not only encroaches his area but also challenges his masculinity. Consequently, he takes Pashupati Prasad as his enemy. He beats him.



Figure 7. Bhashme acclaiming his manliness by beating Pashupati Prasad Pashupati Prasad

(Source: author's screenshot)

(1:19:45)

In the shot, Bhasme is displaying his power over his rival Pashupati Prasad. As he has thrust of exhibiting his strength, he tries to accomplish it through assaulting Pashupati Prasad affirming that “men are more commonly the victims of interpersonal violence” (Connell, *Gender and Power* 14). Connell observes that violence is commonly practiced by men to control their rivals. So, when Bhasme notices that like the boys of his gang, Pashupati Prasad does not succumb to his power, then, he decides to exhibit his power to him. Hence, he behaves ruthlessly towards Pashupati Prasad.

Bhashme always seems desperate to exhibit his masculinity. So, he recurrently performs the stereotyped gender roles of an intelligent rival and a powerful person.

Hence, he conspires against Pashupati Prasad in order to oust him from the job. By doing this, he outsmarts his boss as well. Realizing that masculinity is constantly under the social surveillance, he exhibits his masculinity through physical strength, authority and power. He repeatedly creates the impression of a wealthier person, by boasting of his expensive goggles and cell phone, to the don of the city: “Brother, this is branded goggles, and got this cell phone as a gift from my teacher” (*Pashupati Prasad*). Thus, he persistently exhibits his masculinity.

In *Pashupati Prasad*, most of the male characters are desperate to exhibit their manliness because man’s success is measured by his earnings. So, the food seller starts a fast-food business even though he is bachelor’s degree holder for he wants to earn a lot of money. In conversation to Pashupati Prasad, he discloses: “I have a bachelor’s degree even though I am not preparing for the civil service exams but running this cart. You need a weapon to make big money. This cart is my weapon for that” (*Pashupati Prasad*). Similarly, the jeweler murders Pashupati Prasad when he denies selling the gold ring in a very low price, which is offered by the jeweler. Actually, the jeweler wants to make high profit from the ring and he thinks that he can easily confiscate the ring from a gullible Pashupati Prasad. So, he offers a very low price to Pashupati Prasad for the ring but Pashupati Prasad denies his offer. In this way, on the one hand, his dream of making good profit from the deal gets shattered. On the other hand, he feels that his masculinity gets challenged when he cannot show his superiority over Pashupati Prasad. As a result, he acts very ruthlessly, by conspiring his murder. Hence, the film exposes that while maintaining the traditional gender roles, male involves in violence. People who assault Pashupati Prasad till death are only the males. This is an example of desperateness of males to exhibit masculinity. In fact, people exhibit the traditional gender identities because their

gender identities are socially regulated. Moreover, they are conditioned to perform the socially imposed gender roles, under the social surveillance. The same issue has been presented in the section below.

Normatively Regulated Gender in Contemporary Nepali Films

The selected Nepali films repose the characters' gender roles and identity in normative frame of gender, which is constructed through socio-cultural norms, rituals, and religious script. The films – *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava* and *Pashupati Prasad* – confirm to cultural norms that regulate Nepali patriarchal society at large. However, major characters in their real actions and behaviors in these films reveal that they cannot spare themselves from the gender roles since gender identities have already been scripted in their bodies in line with Butler's performativity of the body. At the same time, deviating from the socially imposed gender roles and identities can be considered crime in the patriarchal society. Consequently, they might be punished for breaking social rules and patriarchal norms. Certain social obligations confine people to perform stereotyped gender roles. However, these films reflect the problems of the sexual minorities, non-heterosexual men and women, and nonhegemonic men.

These films expose that though Nepal's constitution 2015 has explicitly mentioned the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) people, their condition is still the same. Nepal's Constitution contains several articles that enshrine protections and rights for the LGBTQ people. Article 12 states that citizens will be allowed to choose their preferred gender identity on their citizenship document. The choices available are the male, the female or the other. Article 18 states "No discrimination shall be made in the application of general laws on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex and physical condition" (12). The constitution mentions: "The state shall not discriminate citizen on ground of gender"

(12). It further adds that the government may make special provisions through laws to protect, empower and advance the rights of gender and sexual minorities and other marginalized and minority groups. Article 42 lists gender and sexual minorities among the groups that have a “right to participate in State bodies on the basis of inclusive principle” (24). Nevertheless, gender and sexual minorities groups have been still facing discrimination, inequality, injustice, abuse, and violence.

Ma Hoina Ma and *Soongava* portray the society guided by traditional mindset. These films reveal that an invisible network of ideological conditioning has permeated the entire social fabric of the society towards the heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, people residing in this society follow the social practices that promote heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. In this society heterosexuality has become a singular sexual practice as people have been following the same for ages. Therefore, they expect the same sort of gender practices from all. Not only that, in this society, in case anyone deviates from the prescribed gender roles and identity, s/he gets punished.

These films reflect the pains, sufferings and struggles of the homosexual people, who are punished, by excluding from the society for being culturally unintelligible. Moreover, the society regards non-heterosexual people as abnormal, sick, and stigma to family and society. Consequently, in these films, except the homosexual family members, most of the characters are constrained to the heterosexuality; they are within the clear identity of the male and the female. Likewise, their gender is restricted through the punishment. Actually, when their identity is disclosed, they are tortured, beaten and assassinated. Therefore, the homosexual characters hide their identity and sexual orientation in order to save themselves from the punishment.

In *Ma Hoina Ma*, the lead character, Avishek, is a homosexual. *Ma Hoina Ma* revolves around this character as the film focuses on the plights of homosexual characters. This film opens with a long shot of Avishek's wedding ceremony with recurring camera close ups on the groom, in which audience can notice Avishek's depressed mood. Actually, his indifference towards the wedding continues at the first night of his marriage because his parents arrange this nuptial tie to constrain him to the heterosexual relationship. In the frame, upset Avishek appears seating on the chair while his newly wedded wife has been eagerly waiting for him.



Figure 8. At the first night of their marriage, Avishek's reluctance to share bed with Srijana Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author's screenshot)

(0:04:28)

In this shot, Avishek seems completely indifferent towards his newly wedded wife; he does not even look at her; who is waiting for him on the bed. Rather, his eyes are glued on the floor and his hands are closed. Moreover, when his wife takes him to the bed and starts loving him, he brushes her off and sleeps on the floor alone. Hence, this shot exposes that Avishek's gender is forcefully regulated through marriage.

Actually, under the social pressure, Avishek's family tries to make Avishek a viable subject, by constraining him into heterosexual relationship. Societal and familial norms and condition validate his gender within a community. The society uses heterosexual relationship as a normative frame to control one's sexuality; and it validates only those who are heterosexual. Lloyd highlights the process of normatively produced human within a particular racial and cultural frame following the birth: "Before any individual can live a livable life, they have to first to be recognized as a viable subject. If they cannot be recognized in this way, then their lives will be impossible, illegible, unreal, and illegitimate" (33). Thus, being the part of the social production of viable subject, Avishek also is compelled to constrain within the identity of heterosexual male.

Since that society, regards the homosexual individual as an unintelligible subject, Avishek goes through series of punishments; marriage is one of them. As "Being LGBTQ in Asia: Nepal Country Report", unravels that in Nepali society, only heterosexual identity is viable; therefore, Nepali society does not accept the sexuality that does not benefit in heterosexual practices (9). Moreover, the society punishes those who do not fit in the system of heterosexuality. As Connell claims that gender identity is produced by the society under a strict supervision and it has been made inseparable from the individual's existence (*Gender ix*). Therefore, in order to constrain Avishek's gender behavior society incorporates social norms through educational institution, family, marriage, and such like. In the film, the school has become a prominent site to control the children's gender behavior. In the film, Avishek's activities have been keenly observed and when his teacher notices his attraction towards male friend, the teacher takes it as a crime.

Avishek's sexual orientation towards the male, appears as a challenge to the system of heterosexuality. In that society, to violate the system by a family member is a matter of shame for the family. Therefore, Avishek's father unable to accept his homosexual identity. So, he tries to change Avishek's sexuality through punishment. As a punishment, the whole family ignores his existence at home. Consequently, while reaching to adulthood, Avishek's life fills with despair. Anderson claims that the society "places boys into a gender straightjacket that forces them to mask their feelings, and disconnects from their families, and ultimately it leaves boys with a host of psychological disorders that follow them into adulthood" (46). His miserable condition reflects in the family photographs those are hanged on the wall of his house:



Figure 9. Avishek's posture shows his alienated and ignored position in family Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author's screenshot)

(0:23:02)

In the film, in order to highlight Avishek's unhappiness, the camera focuses on the family photographs in which Avishek looks very sad; Srijana comments: "next time I will be in this photograph; and you will not look so sad" ("*arke palta ma ni tyaahan hunchhu ra timi yati udaasa dekhidainau*"; *Ma Hoina Ma*). Not only his wife Srijana, but the audience also can easily notice the pain and distresses smeared in his face.

Moreover, his brother seems closely connected to his father as he has rested hands in his father's shoulder, whereas, Avishek has stood separately, folding his hand. In the photograph, Avishek's pain can be easily noticed. His pain is resulted by being alienated in his family. Consequently, he never shares the dining table with his family members. Similarly, he never shares his feelings, pains and difficulties to them. Despite being the youngest family member, he deprives the affection of his parents and elder brother as they punish him for being an unviable subject.

Later, in order to save himself from the punishment, Avishek creates an image of a heterosexual male because society prescribes masculine and feminine gender identity to people. Likewise, social norms restrict people to a fix gender behavior. Through Avishek's character, the film reveals that the images of 'masculine male' and 'feminine female' have become so natural that people can hardly deviate from these images. Not only that, people who fail to practice the normative role of male and female, who cannot support the heterosexual coherence get the tags of abnormal and sick. In *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault claims that the voices of variant identities are omitted from the scene as society intends to produce socially acceptable people who are disciplined to suppress the voice of difference which may challenge or disrupt the socially created gender identity. Highlighting the reason behind the social regulation of sexuality, he argues: "a country had to be populated if it hoped to be rich and powerful (26). He further claims that since country's future and its fortune are tied to their marriage rules and family organization along with the sexual behavior/orientation of each individual, the state compels the individual to confined to the heterosexual relationship. Foucault explains that society prohibits people to exhibit the identity that does not usher towards homosexuality because the society intends to enrich the country and to make the state powerful. For that, according to

Foucault, a country has to be populated. To populate the citizens, they need to be involved in heterosexual relationship. Since Nepali society also forces heterosexual relationship to people, Avishek compels to construct the identity of heterosexual male.

Similarly, through Avishek's condition, this film underscores the reason as well as its result for constraining the individual in heterosexual relationship that is also highlighted in "Being LGBTQ in Asia: Nepal Country Report" (43). As the report mentions that in Nepal, "family structure and marriage play a vital role to make the heterosexual relationship pertinent because in Nepal, families are almost without exception formed out of marriage between heterosexual couples" (43). The report further claims: "marriage is the promise of continuity in patriarchal family lines and has deep religious, social, and institutional significance. This concept of marriage is; therefore, a main cause of discrimination against LGBTQ people" (43). In fact, the pressure to get married, produce children, and to start a family have forced LGBTQ people to either conform and marry someone of the opposite sex or else to physically and/or emotionally distance themselves from their families. In *Ma Hoina Ma*, Avishek goes through the similar sorts of pain as mentioned in the report.

Due to fear of punishment, Avishek cannot deny the heterosexual relationship that is imposed on him through marriage. Therefore, he shoulders the unwanted, undesirable burden of marriage mutely. Also, he even cannot share his problem to his wife. Moreover, he always fears of revelation of his homosexual relationship. In this way, Avishek cannot live peaceful and reputed life because his sexual orientation is regarded abnormal by society and his family. They condemn him for deviating from conventional gender identity. As Connell asserts that many men pay a considerable price when they do not fit in the normative frame of heterosexuality. He claims:

“Boys and men who depart from dominant definitions of masculinity because they are gay, effeminate or simply wimpish are subject to verbal abuse and discrimination, and are sometimes the targets of violence” (*Gender* 7). Avishek’s wife hates him when his identity discloses to her. She even leaves his house. Likewise, the nearby shopkeeper and the customer insult him:

E yo chakkaako bihe bhayo re? kasle diechha yo chakkaalaai chhori?

Khai gaaun baata bihe garera lyaakkaa re (Ma Hoina Ma)

I heard that this gay got married? Who agreed to give the hand of their daughter to this gay? I heard that he brought the bride from the countryside.

The conversation between the neighbors reveals that due to his homosexual relationship, people call him *chhakkaa* ‘a derogatory term used for the LGBTQ people in Nepal’. In this way, depicting Avishek’s condition, the film portrays the problems such as abuse, insult and exclusion faced by sexual minorities in Nepal.

Likewise, for Avishek’s brother, both Avishek and his partner Raj are unviable subjects as they are in intelligible relationship. In his notion, their desires and performances are unnatural and improper because in that society, if a man desires another man, or if a woman desires another woman, those desires become culturally intelligible. As Butler argues that heteronormative regulations disdain non-heterosexuals and the heteronormative culture takes the non-heterosexual people as less-than-human (*Undoing* 2). Consequently, Avishek’s brother rebukes Raj when he notices that Avishek and Raj are in homosexual relationship:



Figure 10. Avishek's brother is warning Raj to stay away from Avishek Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author's screenshot)

(0:00:59)

In this shot, Avishek's brother expresses his anger and hatred towards Raj. Through the close-up shot, the camera has focused on his body language as pointing his finger, Avishek's brother is giving threat to Raj because he thinks that because of Raj his brother cannot come out from the swamp of homosexuality. Likewise, he thinks that if Raj keeps on remaining in Avishek's life, he cannot move ahead in his marital life.

Similarly, *Soongava* portrays the painful struggle of lesbian characters Diya and Kiran. In the film, these two women are good friends. Kiran is fascinated towards Diya's dance moves. They regularly meet each other and spend time together because they enjoy each other's company. Gradually, they realize that they are in love. Therefore, they decide to start a live-in. For that, first of all, Diya breaks her engagement that is done under the pressure of her family. Then, she discloses to her family that she is in relationship to Kiran. This brings havoc in her family. Likewise, the revelation of truth resulted in endless hurdles and difficulties in her life. She goes through series of punishments such as her fiancé insults her, her parents rebuke her

and blame her that she is a stigma in family. Her mother denounces Diya for disgracing herself.

Diya's family members cannot accept her homosexuality because the society has implanted in their mind that there are only two gender categories of human beings: masculine and feminine and only heterosexual relation is a normal relationship. Therefore, when Diya discloses about her homosexual relationship, her sister thinks that Diya has become abnormal and she needs some medical help. She says: "you are sick, go see a doctor" (*Soongava*). When Diya replies that she is not sick; then she thinks that she is raving mad because in her view a woman marries a man, not a woman. She takes Diya's homosexuality as an abnormal behavior. As McCubbin and Dahl reveal: "the patterns of behavior considered appropriate or inappropriate because of her or his gender" (189). So, in order to correct her inappropriate behavior, which disrupts the system of heterosexuality, she scolds, beats and even strangles Diya's throat.

Diya's case shows that her sister and mother condemn Diya's homosexuality because all of the family members are ruled over by the socio-cultural norms that has forbidden homosexuality. These female family members are guided by the thought that being a lesbian, Diya defames the family reputation. Consequently, Diya faces the collective hatred from the family members. Moreover, she is even physically assaulted:



Figure 11. Diya's sister assaulting Diya Soongava

(Source: author's screenshot)

(00:45:36-00:45:48)

in this long shot of Diya's confrontation to her sister, with recurring camera close ups on the sisters, camera focuses on painful face of Diya as well as raged face of her sister. Diya's sister beats and manhandles Diya. She even strangles Diya's throat. Nevertheless, Diya does not reply to her sister's attack. Rather, she only tries to defend herself because she has been treated as a culprit for violating the social norm, whereas her sister acts as an authorized person for punishing the trespasser of gender roles.

Not only Diya in *Soongava* but Avishek, Lopsang and Ricky in *Ma Hoina Ma*, also go through many problems; these LGBTQ people become victim of violence for indulging in culturally unintelligible sexual relationship. The society sees gender and sexuality as natural aspects of sex. People believe that maleness entails masculinity expressed in desire for a woman, whereas femaleness entails femininity expressed in desire for a man. Butler claims that the concept of 'gender identity' has been established as a cultural norm that is not possible to be changed easily. As Cinar mentions, "It was difficult to bring violence into view precisely because gender was taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed. It was assumed either

to be a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise” (56). Guided by such thoughts, people cannot understand and accept the homosexual relation of these characters. Consequently, they face people’s hatred and torture.

In that social milieu, homosexuality is unintelligible gender identity. In fact, in most of the society “to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question” and people “get punished for dislocating their gender” (Salih and Butler 27). Therefore, Lopsang and Ricky get punished for disordering their gender. As Lopsang complains “in the whole college, there are only you, sister who speaks to us properly. Otherwise, everybody seems reluctant to talk to us. They behave as if we are untouchable” (*Ma Hoina Ma*). When Lopsang notices that Srijana also dislikes their homosexual relationship, he expresses his bitter experiences in those words. Likewise, they feel that they are insecure due to their homosexual relationship. As Ricky admits that his family will hang both of them on the chowk, if their homosexual relationship gets disclosed to their family. Subsequently, Lopsang is attacked by Ricky’s family. He is beaten so severely that he is admitted to the I.C.U. Hence, by depicting the problems faced by the homosexual characters, the film *Ma Hoina Ma* has shown that Nepali society still is intolerant towards the LGBTQ people. Society regulates individual’s sexual interest through violence.

These films expose that in order to constrain their gender, non-heterosexual people are kept under surveillance. Since people keenly pry into the life of homosexuals, their sexuality becomes the matter of public discussion and public interest. Despite the fact that sexuality is closely linked to privacy of a person, Avishek’s sexual life always becomes a matter of discussion in family. His brother

keeps on nagging him whether he is in relationship with Raj or not. Similarly, Raj's wife constantly spies on their relationship. Not only that, Srijana also spies on Avishek. As a result, she sees Avishek and Raj sharing the bed. The hotel, where Avishek and Raj secretly meet to make love, is the secret meeting point for the homosexual couples. So, the hotel itself reflects the miserable condition of homosexual couples who have been taken as criminals by the society and therefore, they hide their relationship from the society.

Similarly, in *Soongava*, suspecting the intimacy between Kiran and Diya, Shanti Sharma starts prying on their activities. She sneaks on Kiran's bedroom and tries to trace their conversation. Likewise, when she gets the hint about their homosexual relationship, she follows them in order to confirm that her daughter Kiran is in relationship to her girlfriend Diya. Then she forces Kiran to break the homosexual relationship because she thinks that her daughter is in wrong path. In order to bring an end to their homosexual relationship, she punishes Diya by lodging police complain against Diya. As the police report mentions: "Diya is accused of taking advantage of Kiran Sharma and taking her hostage" (*Soongava*). Shanti Sharma believes that Diya has kept her daughter, Kiran, under control through seduction. Since she finds their homosexual relationship the abnormal one, she sends police officers to arrest Diya:



Figure 12. police officials showing the police complain of Shanti against Diya

Soongava

(Source: author's screenshot)

(1:03:04)

In the frame, there are Diya, Kiran, police personals, their landlord and Shanti Sharma. Through this shot, the film unravels that after the revelation of their lesbianism, Diya and Kiran fall in a serious problems and Diya is about to be taken to the police station. Though, Diya is set free from the police custody in Kiran's effort, the incident makes their life more difficult because society cannot accept their lesbian relationship. First of all, their landlord expresses his hatred to them, by asking them for leaving his flat: "pack your things and leave my house. I want you out of my sight. Get out!" (*Soongava*). He even does not give them time to arrange another house for them. For him, lesbian relation is immoral. So, he does not bear the presence of homosexual couple in his house.

Likewise, Diya's life fills with difficulties, humiliation and pain when her lesbianism gets disclosed in her work place. After Diya's police case has been aired in T.V., guardian of one of the students comes to Diya's work place and scolds and insults Diya. Additionally, she gives threat to the school principal that she will back

off her daughter from the school, if the principal does not oust Diya from the school. Consequently, addressing the guardian's demand, the principal expels Diya from the school. As Butler points out that there is always the risk of discrimination, loss of employment, public harassment, and violence to the non-heterosexual people (*Undoing Gender* 9). The report entitled "Being LGBTQ in Asia: Nepal Report", highlights the condition of LGBTQ in work place in Nepal: "LGBTQ individuals in Nepal face challenges in employment as individuals and as members of a community subject to discrimination and abuse, compounded by their often-inferior social status and position. Discrimination is common in the workplace based on perceived LGBTQ identity and occurs during recruitment and employment" (41). Diya is fired from her job because "Most traditional work settings in Nepal such as the government service, educational institutions, health care services and the private sector are not welcome or tolerant of openly LGBTQ people" (43). Due to the society's negative and discriminatory attitude towards LGBTQ, Diya suffers badly.

Diya loses her job because in Nepali society, it is not possible to exist outside of established gender norms. In fact, the established gender boundaries initiate a sense of radical dislocation for Diya. Straining outside of established gender, Diya puts her very existence into question because she is under the social scrutiny. Therefore, when her lesbian identity gets disclosed, she has to face series of problems. Through Diya's condition, *Soongava* unravels that, lesbians cannot enjoy the right to sexuality as their privacy and confidentiality are always under the social surveillance because the society constantly spies their activities in order to constrain them to the heterosexual relationship.

In similar fashion, Kiran's family members restrict her gender; they compel Kiran to abandon the identity of masculine female as well as her lesbian relationship

to Diya. They pressurize Kiran to follow the system of gender binary, designed by the society with the purpose of the establishment of heterosexual system. As Butler claims: “to guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, people are confined to a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system” (524). She observes: “cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which requires taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to affect that end” (524). In Butler’s view, “one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with ‘natural’ appearance and natural heterosexual dispositions” (524). Realizing that the system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with natural appearance and natural heterosexual dispositions, as a social representor, Kiran’s family forces Kiran to construct the feminine image for her and to involve in heterosexual relation.

Soongava, has been presented as a porthole through which the audience can peep the miserable condition of Lesbians caused by the society. Since, Nepali society cannot accept and understand the lesbianism as a natural biological state, the people take it as a disease from which they feel threat. Consequently, people express hatred and anger towards the lesbian people. Apart from that, they isolate them and punish them. An in an interview, Suman Panta, discloses the pain and suffering faced by homosexual people in Nepal. She reveals: “Generally, in Nepali society, people do not accept the existence of LGBTQ people. Therefore, they become violent towards them” (Mitini Nepal 21:53-23:34). She discloses that, the condition of lesbians couple

is very difficult as their family does not accept them. Observing the condition of homosexual couples, Panta exposes that the family ousts non-heterosexual people from the family. Likewise, they get victimization of violence, abuse.

Soongavaa exposes that while constraining homosexual relationship, people get violent. In the film, Kiran's brother comes to meet Kiran with the intension of convincing her to break the relationship with Diya Kiran begs him to let her free so that she can enjoy the happiness in Diya's company. She even discloses that being a lesbian, from her childhood days she neither had friend nor a true lover in her life as nobody accepts her identity (*Soongava*). Nevertheless, her words do not affect him because he believes that by keeping homosexual relationship, Kiran becomes culturally unintelligible. So, he punishes her strangling her throat ruthlessly. He does so because she brings a shame to the family. Horrocks claims that it is not men who are intrinsically violent and warlike and genocidal; rather, our culture prepares and selects its males to carry out violent activities against women (136).



Figure 13. Milan murders Kiran by pressing the cushion in her face Soongava

(Source: author's screenshot)

(1:11:00)

In this closeup shot, Milan's anger has been captured. In this shot, audience clearly sees how he presses a cushion in her face till she dies due to suffocation. He thinks that being a girl she should sacrifice her happiness for the family's honour.

Nonetheless, when he notices that she has already made-up her mind to continue the homosexual relationship, he murders her.

Soongava highlights that the society prepares a mechanism to regulate individual's gender. Moreover, deviation from the stereotype gender is taken as a matter of shame. So, the authorized persons i.e., mostly male members, attentively, restrict the family members from the gender deviation. Furthermore, in order to save the family honour, they even murder the deviator. Therefore, when Kiran denies obeying Milan's advice of living the life of a so-called 'normal' woman, he punishes her. Johan Alan Cohan elucidates that when a man feels that the act of the female family member has dishonoured, "the family will kill the woman in question as a means of restoring that honour" (181). In Cohan's perception, the dishonour is usually the result of violating sexual taboos by the female family members such as engaging in premarital sex or extramarital relations, elopement with the person not approved by her parents, or a romantic involvement with someone disapproved by the woman's family. In such condition, the male members assault her. Similarly, Kiran is killed for involving in the affair, which is disapproved by her family.

Soongava and *Ma Hoina Ma* unravel that in order to control the individual's gender, 'honour killing' is used in Nepal as well. Article "Tragedy in Rukum is Our National Shame" reveals that, on May 23, 2020, six men are killed in Rukum district, Nepal. They are killed by the villagers in order to save the honour of Malla family as a daughter of Malla family, Sushma Malla, plans to elope to Navaraj BK a boy from a so-called low caste (par. 3). Similarly, reporting the murder case of DK Thapa Magar

of Okaldhunga, by his father-in-law, the article “Honour Killings Comes to Nepal”, reveals: “Honour killings, rife in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, have now begun to be reported in Nepal as well” (par. 3). Though honour killings in Nepal have gone undetected mostly, “it is not the first case nor will this be the last” (par. 5). Honour killings are a worldwide phenomenon. Currently, the press release of United Nations Population Fund estimates that “there are five thousand honour killings per year” (1). Likewise, *Soongava* and *Ma Hoina Ma*, highlight that Nepal is no exception.

The films *Ma Hoina Ma* and *Soongava* depict the social practices of Nepali society that even overlook the right to privacy of the non-heterosexual people while making sure that any social member is not a homosexual. Though New Constitution of Nepal 2072 makes privacy a fundamental right as the Article 28 states that except on the circumstances as provided by law, the privacy of any person, his or her residence, property, document, statistics, correspondence and matters relating to his or her character shall, except in accordance with law, be inviolable (19). The condition of Avishek, Diya and Kiran unravel that though the constitution has allowed the right to privacy which is ‘inviolable’, however, the legislature fails to enact a separate law that actually protects privacy. Therefore, Avishek and Raj, Lopsang and Ricky, Kiran and Diya are deprived of right to privacy. Their condition unravels that without enactment of such laws, mere constitutional declaration cannot protect the fundamental right concerning privacy.

These films disclose that though the implementation of the New Constitution has secured the right of LGBTQ people, Nepali society still takes these people as culturally unintelligible. Consequently, the Nepali society, on the one hand, does not accept these people. On other hand, the society tries to convert them into the viable individual. For that, it sets several regulatory norms to constrain them by declaring the

punishments such as exclusion from the family and society. “Being LGBTQ in Asia: Nepal Country Report” highlights the reason behind misbehavior to LGBTQ:

Since society is close-knit and family and kinships are prominent, image and “saving face” play a significant role in an individual’s life. Many parents of LGBTQ children fear that a child being gay or transgender will make them lose face and become an object of derision. Instead of the individual, people are more accountable and obliged to society and community. A family’s prestige and social position almost always trumps individual freedom and choice. Making sacrifices for the sake of family is seen as honorable and desirable. Families attribute sadness, worries, and depression to having a lesbian, gay or transgender child. Some families are angry or neglect their LGBTQ member. (43)

The films *Soongava* and *Ma Hoina Ma* have depicted the anger and frustration of the parents of homosexual couples. They are angry with their children for becoming an unintelligible subject by bringing stigma to the family honor. At the same, they fear that due to their homosexual relationship, there could be discontinuity of the family line and shame in the eyes of other community members. Consequently, they try to constrain the homosexuality of their family members through punishment. Similarly, *Pashupati Prasad* elucidates socially regulated masculinity of the male characters.

Pashupati Prasad depicts the lifestyle of lower middle-class strugglers whose masculinities are enforced through social sanctioning and labelling of taboos. In fact, in that social milieu, masculinity is taken as an inevitable essence. As Connell claims that in order to control individual’s gender, society makes arrangements in such a way that people accept it as a part of the order of nature. Moreover, people, who do not follow the socially prescribed gender, get punished by the society. (Connell, *Gender*

5), the males are humiliated in case they fail to exhibit their manliness. Therefore, under the social pressure, Pashupati Prasad migrates to the capital city and takes trivial jobs such as collecting the waste of cremated persons in Bagmati River, gathering the half-burnt logs from piers and selling the clothes worn by dead people because he has to collect money to repay the loan of his father otherwise the society will label him the tag of an effeminate man.

Pashupati Prasad reveals that in Nepali society, still the essences of masculinity are bravery, gentility, success and wealth because the mainstream masculine norms still prescribe the warrior and protector model for men. Moreover, in Nepal, males are guided by the belief that “to be a man you need to be tough” (Nanda et al. 26) according to which they are still expected to work out of home and they have to ascertain their manliness by climbing the ladder of social success. Consequently, restricted by such social norms, Pashupati Prasad sticks on his mission of making money despite the difficulties created by his rival Bhashme as well as Mit Ba. Once, his condition becomes so worse that he has to take shelter in a tomb. Nevertheless, even in such a difficult time, he does not leave his masculine identity because had he defied the traditional gender roles, the society would have declared him a failure.

Similarly, constrained to masculine roles, Pashupati Prasad and Bhasme recurrently involve in the race to prove their masculinity. Actually, claiming his masculinity, Bhashme creates several problems to Pashupati Prasad. Since “emphasizing the linkage between the male body and strength, the society promotes the monolithic images of ‘perfect masculinity’ for males” (Whitehead and Barrett 142), Pashupati Prasad and Bhashme involve in the competition to outdo each other in the masculine contest for power. Bhashme becomes worried and angry when he sees

Pashupati Prasad entering his area. As the society pressurizes man to become economically sound, Bhashme feels insecure when Pashupati Prasad enters Bhashme's income zone as he thinks that Pashupati Prasad's presence may affect his income. So, under the social regulation of displaying the masculine dispositions such as competitiveness, cruelty, and oppressiveness Bhashme makes Pashupati Prasad's life difficult and complicated.

Moreover, when Bhashme feels threat to his masculinity from Pashupati Prasad, he decides to kill him because to acclaim masculinity "requires the construction of hyper-masculine ideal of toughness and dominance" (Connell, *Gender and Power* 80). He even hires a murderer to assassinate Pashupati Prasad. Through the character Bhashme, the film reveals that confined to the masculine identity, the violence directed by men against other men is taken in such a way as if this was somehow expected. As Horrocks argues: "many kinds of crimes, including thefts, assaults, threats, and robbery from the person, are more common against men than women" (133). In Horrocks' perception, "Particular forms of violence such as mugging seem to be directed primarily by young males against young males" (133). Affirming Horrocks' idea, Bhashme plans and plots against Pashupati Prasad to overrule him, but when he fails to dominate Pashupati Prasad, he chooses a violent act against him.

Similarly, the film exposes that trapped in traditional gender norms, the male characters in *Pashupati Prasad* recurrently practice to become a proper masculine subject. While becoming a socially viable subject, Mit Ba lives a fake life. Whenever he goes to village, he makes the impression of a wealthy person because to be a *marda* 'a real man', one should be rich and successful. Actually, Mit Ba's effort of acclaiming his masculinity affirms Connell's claim, "Gender, like other social

structures, is multi-dimensional; it is not just about identity, or just about work, or just about power, or just about sexuality, but all of these things at once” (11). Since drinking is “prescribed as a means of affirming masculinity” (Lemle and Mishkind 213), he drinks alcohol even though he cannot afford to buy it in his meager income. Moreover, he becomes defaulter of his creditors while buying alcohol in debt.

Likewise, depicting Mit Ba’s problems, this film unravels that normative masculinity caused difficulties to the males. When Mit Ba appears as unintelligible individual by taking the profession of a cremator, a low-incomed, trivial job, his wife leaves him as Synnott claims that the “patriarchal benefit to women have been enormous and the cost to men have been high” (212). Since his wife is guided by the belief that a poor and unsuccessful person cannot become a good provider, she dumps him. Equally, he has to bear Pashupati Prasad’s hatred and humiliation for being a failure. Pashupati Prasad spits on him and rebukes him as he cannot accept the failure or weak side of Mit Ba. Since Nepali society presents father as ‘authoritative, successful, perfect and powerful person, he expects the same from Mit Ba, a father figure. Therefore, when Mit Ba appears as unsuccessful, imperfect and weakling, it becomes unimaginable and shocking for him. Consequently, he leaves Mit Ba’s house making him alone.



Figure 14. Pashupati Prasad is furiously rebuking Mit Ba as he is stealing his eyes

Pashupati Prasad

(Source: author's screenshot)

(1:05:04)

In this shot, in order to show Mit Ba's facial expression, Pashupati Prasad's image has been blurred and the camera has focused on Mit Ba's face through close-up shot. Through this shot, audience can notice Mit Ba's helplessness as he bows his head when his scam is disclosed. Through him, the film reflects the situation created by failed masculinity.

Similarly, through the character Hanuman, the film depicts the pain of a male who fails to become a socially viable subject. The film discloses that in Nepali society, the males can take part in gambling but they are not allowed to bear a loss. To visit the casino, is taken as a prestige for males because it proves their sound economic status. Likewise, it reflects their sophisticated lifestyle. Following the same belief, in the film, Hanuman visits casino and loses all the money. Moreover, he embezzles the large amount of government's money in order to create his image of a rich and successful person. In this way, under the social pressure of creating the image

of a wealthy person, Hanuman chooses a wrong path. Hanuman's condition affirms Susan Bordo's claim; "most men find themselves embedded and implicated in institutions and practices that they as individuals did not create and do not control-and they frequently feel tyrannized by" (28). So, when he loses money in gambling and becomes a defaulter, he gets the image of a failure. Due to this, Hanuman loses his prestige. Consequently, he no longer remains as a viable subject. As a result, he hides himself behind the mask of Hanuman. Hence, Hanuman is punished for his failure. He fails while attempting to become a masculine male. Nevertheless, he never shares his story of failure to Pashupati Prasad because he fears that he will be humiliated for that.

The male characters of *Pashupati Prasad* are constrained to traditional gender identity; therefore, they go through several problems while exhibiting their manliness. The film exposes that since society imposes the normative gender roles to the males, they hardly can escape the stereotyped gender roles. Consequently, they suffer. The film also depicts the circumstances that entrap the male characters while molding them to a proper masculine subject. Thus, they hardly can dismantle the image of a strong, daring, oppressive and assertive person. However, since gender is not a monolithic entity, the characters of the selected films recurrently dismantle the stereotyped gender roles, which have been discussed below.

Gender Fluidity and Subversion of Identity in Contemporary Nepali Films

In these films, characters transcend the received models of masculinity and femininity. These characters inhabit an identity that neither fits exclusively the mark of male nor the mark of female because Avishek, Dava, and Raj look like males in their appearance but they are sexually oriented towards homosexuality. Hence, they disrupt the fraught gender categories of male and female. Since these characters fall

outside the binary oppositions of male and female, they create a threat to the stability of categories. Consequently, in order to maintain the social order and system of heterosexuality, the society tries to silence them by suppressing their homosexual desire which is taken as the main cause of their gender fluidity. Nevertheless, they find out the way to subvert the socially imposed gender roles and identity. As Butler argues, it is through unintelligible genders that disrupt dominant gender norms we can find resistance. Butler describes how, “the route to change is through repetitions that subvert dominant gender norms in the hope of destabilizing and displacing these regimes” (qtd in Jagger 34). So, by denying gender binary system, these characters disrupt the regime upholding the existing gender norms

The film *Ma Hoina Ma*, depicts the problems faced by the sexual minorities who are compelled to create dual identities for them. Avishek tries to establish an ambiguous i.e., heterosexual and homosexual gender identity parallelly. He creates the identity of a heterosexual male through the superficial features of clothing and gestures. In fact, he establishes a reliable male identity by focusing on superficial features, which underlines the importance of being recognized by others to become a male subject. For example, he appears in male’s attire and, he takes the so-called masculine job i.e., business. Likewise, he embodies the male’s body language. He even marries a girl and involves in heterosexual bond.

However, since Avishek’s identity is constructed one, it cannot be his fixed identity. Consequently, his identity fluctuates between the heterosexual and homosexual male. Though he is a gay, he ties the marital knot with Srijana for creating the impression of a heterosexual male. As Butler claims that the gender identity is not the real one but it is the naturalized or imposed one. In her view, gender can be created through outer forces such as attire, appearance, body language, and the

like. She claims: “gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous” (quoted in Salih and Butler 124). Nevertheless, he secretly continues his relationship to his boyfriend Raj.



Figure 15. Srijana seeing Avishek and Raj making love in a hotel room Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author's screenshot)

(0:24:55)

This shot discloses Avishek's identity as a homosexual. The shot has been shot in a hotel room that has been projected as a mysterious place. When Srijana sneaks into the hotel, she sees girls in pairs, coming out of hotels, in the lobby and in stairs. She finds the atmosphere of that hotel very awkward. Then, she opens the door of the hotel room. There, to her great surprise, she sees Raj and Avishek making love to each other. The revelation of their secret reflects the difficulties faced by homosexual couples. Due to fear of social punishment, the homosexual like him live dual lives. In the film, Avishek creates an impression of a heterosexual male publicly but privately, he maintains his homosexual relationship. So, his family members, relatives and neighbors cannot derive a judgement about his gender identity.

Avishek's abiding gendered self has been structured by repeated acts, not a biological fact; therefore, his gendered self is not stable. Highlighting the possibility

of constructed gender identity, Butler asserts “gender reality is created through sustained social performances” therefore, “the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (GT 124). So, merely, wearing different attire, the individual can create different gender identity. In such a condition, the reality of gender is also put into crisis. Avishek also puts his gender reality into crisis by constructing the feminine self in sexual relation to his male partner. Likewise, from his childhood days, he creates a feminine identity for himself. He creates a separate and secrete zone inside his room where he practices so-called feminine activities. He collects teddies and barbies and plays those things. There is a separate door in his room which opens towards the balcony. He keeps the door always close. On the door, he has written, “No entry”.



Figure16. Avishek’s secret zone for enjoying his feminine self Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author’s screenshot)

(0:14:20)

The above shot unfold Avishek's attempt to deviate from the role of heterosexual male. Though male child is expected to indulge in the games that required physical activeness, he plays with teddy and barbies. Hilary Aydt and William A. Corsaro underscores that the society prescribe different activities to the girl and the boy. He observes that, "Traditional, sex-typed activities such as sports and superhero play for boys and playing with dolls for girls" (1306). Nevertheless, Avishek's activities reveal that some of the members of a social group neither make up gender as they go along nor exactly replicate in rote fashion what was done before. Resisting or rebelling against the social norms, Avishek produces gender for himself. Though in public, he exhibits manliness, privately, he creates a separate place where he lives a girlish life.

Avishek oscillates between the masculine and feminine gendered self. On the one hand, he appears as an unassertive and submissive person by quietly allowing his family to control his life. As Jackson mentions: "A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually recorded against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life" (39). Likewise, when he comes to know about Lopsang's condition (he is beaten to death for being gay) caused by homosexual relationship, he realizes the essentiality of the revelation of truth. Then, as an assertive individual, he declares to his parents that in coming days, he will appear in his true self i.e., identity of a gay.

Through Avishek, the film highlights quite serious issues of non-heterosexual people. The film reveals that since the inner truth of gender is a fabrication, which is resulted by the negative social attitude towards the sexual minorities, they are compelled to live a fabricated life. The film exposes that a true gender is just an illusion that is maintained through the regulation of sexuality. Therefore, when Avishek realizes that conciliation of his homosexual relationship may cause the

disastrous condition, he discloses his identity to his family. Then he urges to them:

“Aamale mero samalaingikataalaai roga samjhinu bhayo ... malaai thahaa chha haami yasto samaajamaa baschhau jahaa haami jasto maanisalaai nicha maaninchha tara kamase kama mero pariwaarale malaai yasto nagarideos”;

(“Mother took my homosexuality as a disease ... I know that the society, where we live, take homosexual people as nasty but I want at least my family does not take me wrong”; *Ma Hoina Ma*). Realizing that, it is essential to construct a true self instead of a fabricated one, he admits that he cannot hold a fake identity of a heterosexual male, any longer.

In the film, not only Avishek, but his boyfriend Raj and another character Lopsang also have gender fluid identity. Raj’s and Lopsang’s bisexuality challenge the notion of gender identity as something stable, consisting of either a male or a female core. As Avishek’s boyfriend, Raj does not change anything about his inner self; rather, he enjoys the traces of both femininity and masculinity within him. He plays the role of Avishek’s boyfriend and Tara’s husband at the same time. In keeping their female as well as male self very much intact, both Raj and Lopsang challenge the binary oppositions of gender identity.

Similarly, Srijana’s gender also does not remain stable. When she appears in the scene right after her marriage at her husband’s home, she constitutes the identity of an obedient and ideal daughter-in-law because her mother and the society have set those roles for her. Therefore, on the first day of her marriage, she wakes up early in the morning and involves in household chores. As Connell argues: “women do most of the cleaning, cooking, and sewing. This work is often associated with a cultural definition of women as caring, gentle, self-sacrificing and industrious” (*Gender 3*).

She accepts that she should be confined into the house and hearth as those are the assigned places for women.

Similarly, while constituting an identity of a 'submissive' daughter-in-law, she starts her day by touching the feet of her in-laws because in Nepali society, influenced by Bhanu Bakta Acharya's *Badhu Shiksha* an ideal daughter-in law is expected to be devoted in the service of in-laws. Acharya instructs women: to wake-up early in the morning; she has to greet her in-laws by touching their feet. The whole day, she has to keep busy in household chores. She should not complain while doing her works. She should be quiet and tolerating as toleration is regarded as a precious ornament of woman. Then, at night, she has to massage her husband's and mother-in-law's feet (Bennett 180). Srijana performs the role of a dutiful daughter in-law because Nepali women still follows *Badhu Shiksha*. Bennett observes that in village area of Nepal, "daughters-in-law are, even now, expected to greet their mother-in-law by touching their foreheads to her feet...wash their clothes and rub oil on her feet at night" (180). Though, with the passage of time, mostly, in urban area, daughter-in-law does not involve in all of these activities, however, they still involve in some of these activities. Conversely, in rural area, daughter-in-law still has to do those activities as they are regarded as part of social rituals in Nepali society, mainly in Brahman and Kshetri families.

Since Srijana's mother teaches her to construct the identity of an ideal daughter-in law, Srijana performs as a ritualistic daughter in-law:



Figure 17. Srijana greeting her mother-in-law Ma Hoina Ma

(Source: author's screenshot)

(0:08:07)

The above shot unfolds Srijana's effort on performing the role of a dutiful daughter in law. Srijana learns the rituals those are expected to be performed by an ideal daughter in law. Srijana demurely admits to her mother-in-law about her mother's teaching: "*Aamaale bhannu bhaako tapaaiharulaai khusi raakhnu mero kartabya ho re*" ("mother said that to keep you all happy is my duty"; *Ma Hoina Ma*). Srijana involves in her duty in order to construct the socially acceptable gender identity. Srijana constructs the image of a dutiful woman not only through her acts but also through her attire. In the beginning, Srijana tries to construct the feminine image of her by wearing traditional attire; affirming that femininity is a "matter of construction" and "body is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which metaphysical commitments of culture are inscribed" (13). Later, when she notices Avishek's indifference towards her, in order to attract Avishek, she wears modern dress as well as makeup.

This film exposes that since gender identity has been scripted in the body, the characters hardly can escape from the traditional gender roles. Performing the role of a 'dutiful' wife, Srijana puts all efforts to seek happiness for her husband. She

becomes restless, when she notices his sadness because assigned to the role of a dutiful wife, she is expected to keep her husband happy. As Judith Lorber points out: “In social interaction throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order” (1). Similarly, Butler claims: “the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once” (*GT* 145). In order to be a heterosexually desirable object, Srijana tries to appear physically attractive. Likewise, in order to find out the reason of her husband’s sadness, she even spies on him.

The disclosure of truth changes a demure Srijana to an angry and aggressive woman. She rebukes her husband and insults him: “*Na chhu malaai ghinalaagdo! Ta sita kina kura garne? Chhakkaa. Ta utaa jaa! Ta saalaa purusha pani hoina*” (“Don’t touch me, you are disgusting! Why shall I talk to you? Effeminate. Get lost from here! You bastard! You are not even a man”; *Ma Hoina Ma*). Srijana expresses hatred towards him because she believes that male body has to be disciplined to heterosexuality. Her reactions support Connell’s argument that “compulsory heterosexuality is also enforced on men” (*Masculinities* 104). So, when she notices Avishek’s deviation from heterosexual gender identity, she leaves his house. Moreover, she daringly discards Avishek’s elder brother’s request when he pleads her for not to leave the house. By doing these all, she dismantles the image of an obedient, submissive, demure and unassertive woman. The changed circumstance i.e., the truth about Avishek’s sexuality, brings change in Srijana’s gender identity.

Srijana's gender identity becomes fluid affirming Butler's idea that there is no fixed identity that one must reflect because the identity itself is a construct crafted by societal expectations that individual makes through repetition of actions over time. Since the act of repetition constantly changes, it makes the identity unstable, plastic, and flexible (*GT* 33). In order to fulfil the social expectation, Srijana constructs the identity of a submissive woman by involving in the service of her husband and in-laws. Nonetheless, when she comes to know that her husband and in-laws have cheated her, Srijana decides to dismantle the socially imposed role of a subversive woman and acts as a rebellion. She oscillates between the traditional and anti-traditional gender roles because later she again returns to her husband's house. When her mother discloses the truth, Srijana decides to compromise. Srijana's mother admits:

Is there a mother, who does not want to see her daughter happy, rich and prosperous? ... look all the girls of this village have been sold. At least you are saved from being sold. You have to take it as a big achievement. Anyway, it is just a disease which will be cured after treatment. They are very rich. They can fulfill all your wishes and demands. (*Ma Hoina Ma*)

Srijana's mother's thought reflects the practice of that society where a groom should be superior to bride. For example, he should be taller, older, and richer than the bride so that he can easily dominate her. Likewise, groom is expected to take the responsibility of bride's livelihood. Therefore, they wish to find rich and capable groom; and Srijana's mother also does the same. So, when the truth behind her marriage is disclosed, Srijana again indulges in the role of a self-scarifying and tolerant woman. Hence, she oscillates between the traits those are categorized as

masculine and feminine. Likewise, in *Soongava*, Diya's and Kiran's gender fluctuates.

In *Soongava*, Diya and Kiran challenge the established notions of feminine and masculine gender. Though socially acknowledged performances of gender produce unified picture of masculinities and femininities, Diya and Kiran create ambiguous gender identity. Challenging people's rigid belief on normative gender practices, which impose heterosexual relationship, Diya and Kiran remain in homosexual relationship. Actually, deviating from the gender norms, their identity become "impossible, illegible, unreal, and illegitimate" (Lloyd 33). Consequently, they face hatred, insult, abuse, social boycott and even violence.

The film presents the journey of Diya's transformation from a meek and submissive woman to an assertive rebellion. Her transformation unravels that gender is a social process. By asserting her decision of breaking the engagement, she mocks at the established gender and sexual norms that constrain the female to an unassertive individual. Diya boldly declares that she does not marry her fiancé even though marriage invitation cards have been already distributed. In Nepali society, both bride and groom do not "retain a much greater freedom to reject parent's choice" (Bennett 71), however, following her will, she dares to break the engagement. Appearing self-centered, she even does not care about the shame that is resulted by her decision to her family.

Apart from this, declaring her lesbianism and starting a live-in with her female partner, she exposes that gender is not a fixed or innate characteristics of the people. Rather gender is assumed, proposed, endorsed, and ultimately imposed by the society to the people. Likewise, she involves in sexual relationship to Kiran:



Figure 18. Diya and Kiran making love Soongava

(Source: author's screenshot)

(00:25:45)

In this close-up shot, the camera focuses on the half-naked bodies of Diya and Kiran who are about to involve in sexual intercourse. Hence, they unhesitatingly subvert the social norms that restrict the sexual relationship between heterosexual partners. But Diya challenges the gender stereotype and she declares her love to Kiran.

Through Diya, the film unravels that gender identity is a socially imposed entity that works as a process of transforming man to 'masculine' and woman to 'feminine'. Diya appears as passive, unassertive and coward in the beginning because the society imposes those identities to her through gender-sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions. Jude Browne argues that "Gender is concerned with the ascription of social characteristics such as 'womanly', 'manly', 'feminine' and 'masculine', all of which can be seen as culturally variable and not necessarily associated with the sex of an individual" (1). Keeps in mind of her female sex, the society imposes the feminine identity to Diya but as one's sex is not necessarily associated to one's gender or in Butler's words: "sex is as culturally constructed as gender" (GT 9), Diya does not

continue to exhibit the feminine traits in her actions. Rather, she acts as a courageous and determined woman. Consequently, when the school principal terminates her from the job, declaring that he has to follow the school's protocol which does not allow keeping the lesbian teacher in the school, she boldly faces the situation. Moreover, she condemns the principal for hurting her self-respect and interfering in her personal matter. Likewise, after the death of her girlfriend Kiran, maintaining her self-esteem, she keeps on living independently. Thus, she dismantles the socially instituted and imposed identity and constructs the identity of an assertive, independent, and respectful woman.

Similarly, Kiran plays with and mocks at gender conventions. Though Kiran is biologically female, she keeps sexual relation to female. As Connell claims: "Most people often enjoy the gender polarity. Gender ambiguities are not rare. There are masculine women and feminine men. There are women in love with other women, and men in love with other men" (*Gender* 6). Being a lesbian, she plays with what is considered stereotypical for the female gender. Moreover, through this playfulness, she challenges the stability of the binary categories of male and female. Kiran's bold nature, her determination and assertiveness pull her towards the so-called masculine identity. Hence her activities reveal that gender is not something absolute.

Though society decides that certain attributes are appropriate for male and certain are for female, Kiran inhabits the traits of both genders at the same time affirming Connell's idea that the social category of 'man' and 'woman' can be "negated through practice" (*Gender* 81). In Connell's view, gender can be constructed "in a variety of ways"; it is even possible for "a whole new gender category to be constructed" (*Gender* 81). As Diya's girlfriend, she displays the traits such as unassertive, caring, and emotional. Exposing her cowardness, she fears to express her

love to Diya. Likewise, when the news of Diya's engagement suddenly discloses to her, revealing the emotional side of her personality, she cries bitterly. Not only that, she massages Diya's feet when she is pregnant. In fact, the tender side of her is disclosed when she takes care of Diya intensely at the time of Diya's pregnancy.

Kiran exhibits both masculine and feminine gender attributes. Moreover, she even switches the gender by acting in both feminine and masculine way. Displaying the attributes those are attached with both males and females, Kiran confirms that one's gender identity is a socially constructed phenomenon and therefore, it is in a state of flux. Her activities unravel that person goes through various identities in his/her life; and the meanings of femininity and masculinity are also subject to parallel change. As Kimmel claims: "women go through various identities while being pampered as a baby girl, to an executive of a company" (57). In his view, the meaning of masculinity and femininity change over the course of a person's life. Similarly, Kiran's actions and behaviors also change over the course of her life.

Disclosing her homosexual relationship, she challenges the whole social system that tries to constrain the people in the heterosexual relationship. First of all, by deciding to start a relationship with a girl, she chooses a difficult path for her as such sorts of practices are condemned in Nepali society. Likewise, during her struggle, she exhibits the so-called masculine traits such as courage, decisiveness and determination. Judith Halberstam argues: "masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies; however, female masculinity has been blatantly ignored in the culture" (2). She claims that there is a widespread indifference to female masculinity in most of the cultures and the societies because they have wielded masculinity to maleness and to power and domination. Though in that social milieu, masculinity is expected only from males, Kiran acts masculinely.

Asserting her right to freedom, Kiran opposes her mother's interference in her life, particularly in her relationship to Diya. Moreover, she brushes off the problems created by her mother in her life. Likewise, when her brother convinces her to sacrifice her personal interest and desire for the sake of family's reputation, she denies his request. Furthermore, she makes all the arrangements to start a live-in with Diya. Hence, she dismantles the socially created image of an obedient, submissive and self-sacrificing daughter. By presenting the saga of lesbian characters and depicting the subversion of the traditional gender roles by these characters, *Soongava* exposes that gender is a social construction made up by acts, rather than an absolute core.

In *Soongava*, the society constantly attempts to make Diya's and Kiran's gender identity socially acceptable because it tries to convert them as productive members of their community. For that, first of all, the society tries to regulate their bodies. Angela King in "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and Disciplining of the Female Body", argues: "female bodies are regulated in order to legitimate women's subjugation". She argues that "medical and scientific discourse has confirmed the pathology of female biology and legitimated women's subjugation, prescribing in the past what activities women should engage in" (34). She claims that the society even imposes the dress code for women and uses it as a moral obligation to preserve their feminine traits. Similarly, in de Beauvoir's view, female's bodies are put under control through prescribing certain fashion for them to follow. For example, "Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands: high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, were intended to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its capacity" (King 34). Though society tries to constrain the female in traditional gender

identity through various means such as dress, fashion and so on, in *Soongava*, Kiran discards to wear the socially imposed dress code for women.

Though the society, prescribes a fixed clothing and hair style for individual's gender, Kiran does not constrain in the socially prescribed fashion. When Kiran appears in the film's very first scene, her clothes and hair style influence the audience's perception of her as a masculine female.



Figure 19. Kiran in masculine attire in the Teej festival Soongava

(Source: author's screenshot)

(00:20:35)

Through this shot that has been shot in the premises of Pashupati temple, on the occasion of Teej festival, the film depicts that in Teej festival, most of the women wear traditional attire i.e., red saree and blouse. In this shot, women appear in traditional outfit, they also wear make-up and ornaments. This is because, they believe that for the longevity of their husband, they have to decorate themselves in red. However, Kiran does not wear the traditional attire even in the Teej festival. She visits temple with her mother and girlfriend Diya but even in this day, she wears t-shirt and trousers. Likewise, she never wears make-up. In the screen, Kiran always appears without make-up. The film highlights her masculine identity through her

choice of dress and hair style. In fact, throughout the film she appears in t-shirt and trousers and boy's cut hair. Hence, her choice of fashion does not work as something that strengthens her status as a woman, but rather as something that makes the audience doubt it.

Usually, clothing builds up one's gender identity, but in Kiran's case, it works to make her gender identity more ambiguous because she always appears and dresses-up in male's attire even though she is a female. As Judith Lorber claims that men and women can "enact the behavior of the other" through the manipulation of acts, gestures, appearance, and dress (6). Though the contemporary Nepali culture prescribes certain attire such as sari and salwar kurta for women, Kiran discards to wear the culturally prescribed attire.

Through Kiran's choice of fashion, the film exposes that Kiran discards the means such as cultural symbols, signs codes and other inscriptions on the body, by which power and ideology are made to signify gender. By focusing on the role of clothing and costumes, the film unravels that gender is superficial features created by society and the cultural discourse in which we exist. In Nepali society, clothes and hair style are used to create the gender categories of male and female. Through the use of clothes as a determining factor for one's gender identity, the film stresses on the constructed nature of genders. Likewise, presenting the female character Kiran in the male's look, the film emphasizes that gender identity is not absolute or limited to either exclusively male or exclusively female. Hence, Kiran's gender identity appears unstable. These characters' unstable gender identity reinforces the idea that gender is not absolute, but rather constantly developing. Similarly, *Pashupati Prasad* elucidates the conditions, in which the central character Pashupati Prasad oscillates between masculine and feminine gender.

In *Pashupati Prasad*, the central character Pashupati Prasad challenges the socially imposed gender roles. Moreover, his activities confirm the belief that masculinities in every society are “contingent, fluid, socially and historically constructed, and recreated through media representations, and individual and collective performances” (Gardner 11). In the film, Pashupati Prasad’s gender is in state of flux. In some occasions, he exhibits the dispositions such as ‘responsibleness’ and ‘determination’. He appears as a responsible son for he decides to fulfill his parents’ wishes and to repay their loan. Moreover, he takes the responsibility of Mit Ba and Aama even though they are not his relatives. Mit Ba is his father’s intimate friend and Aama is the character who lives in old-age home with whom Pasupati Prasad becomes intimate. On the one hand, performing masculinely, he confirms the stereotyped gender identity. On the other hand, he subverts the socially constructed image of masculinity as he appears scrawny, emotive, and tender-hearted person.

Males are restricted to express their emotions and feelings; rather, they are expected to “behave boldly and to appear strong” (Kantrowitz and Kalb 203). Nevertheless, Pashupati Prasad appears as an emotive and soft-hearted person. In fact, in that society, only hegemonic masculinity is applauded. Moreover, boys are trained to be masculine and femininity in men is a matter of laughter. However, Pashupati Prasad lacks the masculine attributes because he is neither dominating nor commanding. Actually, his activities do not match the traditional notion of masculinity because, expressing his emotions, he cries for several times. He weeps whenever he gets hurt. He cries when he is cheated by Mit Ba. Similarly, he cries while reporting about Mit Ba’s cheating on him to his friend Hanuman.



Figure 20. Pashupati Prasad crying while recalling Mit Ba's cheating Pashupati

Prasad

(Source: author's screenshot)

(1:12:08)

Though the act of weeping is regarded as “feminine attributes, and weeping symbolizes weakness and emotion” (Kantrowitz and Kalb 203), in this shot, Pashupati Prasad sheds tears. Similarly, depicting Pashupati Prasad's emotion, the camera is focused on his facial expressions. Through the close-up shot, Pashupati Prasad's pain and tears have been shown clearly to the audience.

Pasupati Prasad subverts the masculine image of a ‘rude’ ‘tough’ and ‘ruthless’ person; instead, he shows love and care to the people and he wants it back from them. Though males try to be emotionally detached as “they are aware of masculine stereotypes” (Kantrowitz and Kalb 203), Pashupati Prasad puts his head to his mother's lap and wants her to cuddle his hair. Likewise, when he becomes intimate with Aama, he seeks motherly love from her and puts his head in her lap. In the same way, he seems to be very caring. Pashupati Prasad deviates from the stereotyped gender roles by loving Mit Ba and Aama unconditionally even though

only females are expected to be selfless. Likewise, there is a social belief that only woman can express their love publicly. However, he expresses it publicly.

Pashupati Prasad repeatedly subverts the traditional gender roles and identity. He takes care of Aama's every problem and pains. He understands her feelings before she tells her. As in the film, Aama becomes surprised when Pashupati Prasad brings samosa to her. So, in the state of wonder, she asks to him: "How did you know that I love to have samosa" (*Pashupati Prasad*)? Pasupati Prasad takes care of all of her needs and necessities. Therefore, he buys a stick for her when her stick is broken by Bhashme. Likewise, when he comes to know that Aama has difficulty in walking due to arthritis, he buys medicine for her. In this way, showing the so-called feminine attributes such as 'loving' and 'caring', he dismantles the masculine image of him.

In Nepal, so far as the actual cases of nurturing children and aged members are concerned, men rarely involve in such activities because Nepali society still promotes existing gender binaries and hierarchies. Since in gender domestic division of labor males exclude themselves from household chores and involve in proving their masculinity, they engage in the masculine tasks and appear only in the public domain. However, Pashupati Prasad denies befitting in a place that is declared by the society to the males. Rather, he seems to well fit in both of the places: outside home and inside home. The film has presented him in both of the places. In order to earn his livelihood, he works outside home and makes money. There, he even faces challenges and threats in the work. Likewise, he equally shows his skill in the so-called females' places such as hearth and house. The film shows Pashupati Prasad engages in doing household chores: washing dishes and clothes; and preparing meals. Thus, his gender roles and identities are in state of flux.



Figure 21. Pashupati Prasad involving in so-called feminine work Pashupati Prasad

(Source: author's screenshot)

(00:52:15)

In this shot, camera has been focused on Pashupati Prasad. It is particularly, focused on his body language. Though, washing and cleaning are taken as females' job. Pashupati Prasad often seems engaged in these works. Moreover, he does these works efficiently. While doing these works, he neither complains nor feels ashamed. Rather, his body language reveals that he is accustomed to such sorts of activities. Hence, entering to the so-called feminine zone recurrently, Pashupati Prasad oscillates between feminine and masculine gender.

Similarly, whenever Bhashme challenges his masculinity, Pashupati Prasad fails to benefit in the traditional gender identity of 'macho', 'daring' and 'strong' male. Though generally, in Nepali films, hero is presented as a masculine figure who wins over the villain through his strength, wisdom and strategy (Subedi 122). Nevertheless, in *Pashupati Prasad*, Pashupati Prasad never can win Bhashme. Rather, he is cheated, beaten, abused and troubled by Bhashme. Likewise, every time, he needs outer support to be saved from Bhashme. In fact, most of the time, he is saved from

Bhashme's attack by his friend Hanuman. Similarly, once when Bhashme attacks him terribly, Aama saves him.



Figure 22. Pashupati Pradsad being attacked by Bhashme Pashupati Prasad

(Source: author's screenshot)

(1:47:00)

In this shot, Bhashme is attacking Pashupati Prasad. In this close-up shot, the audience easily can see Bhashme's aggression that reflects in his tensed facial muscle and swollen nerves of his neck. Likewise, in this shot, Bhashme is standing, whereas the helpless Pashupati Prasad is sitting. So, Bhashme seems taller and stronger than Pashupati Prasad. Since Pashupati Prasad is not so strong and clever, he cannot fight back to Bhashme. Hence, through the character Pashupati Prasad, the film shows that masculinity is not an innate characteristic of man.

Deploying the issues of the males, the females and the LGBTQ people as theme, contemporary Nepali films unravel the problems caused by imposition of traditional gender roles. In these selected films, breaking the traditional image of the hero, film makers have presented the male lead as an ordinary person. In these films, the hero does not have a muscular physique, neither can he defeat and outsmart the villain. Rather, burdened with the overweight of responsibility he collapses. Likewise,

the sexual minorities go through pains and problems. Entrapped in traditional gender roles and identity they get suffocated, feel strangled and even get crushed.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: The Kinetics of Gender Roles and Identities in Contemporary

Nepali Novels and Films

The selected literary novels and films discussed in the preceding chapters of this research demonstrate that in Nepali society, the societal norms, values, and social practices prepared scripted gender roles for the people. So, following the script, the characters recurrently perform the socially assigned gender roles. Likewise, the selected texts reveal that prevalent social norms not only endorse the stereotyped gender roles and identities, but also justify them. These texts also elucidate that socially written script on the one hand, constrains the individual to the stereotyped gender roles and on the other hand, it validates men's dominance over women and homosexual people. Observing this, the selected novels and films for this research display that existed social norms and practices are gender biased.

The research findings reveal that despite the appearance of political changes such as Maoists' movement and the revolution of 2005/2006, gender-biased social practices continue to prevail in Nepali society. In fact, most of the people have been still guided by the Hindu religious scriptures that regulate people's gender. Since there is reciprocal influence between the society and literature, characters of contemporary Nepali Novels and films appear in the conventional gender roles. Hence, constrained to the stereotyped gender roles, male characters shoulder the responsibility of the family; they protect the family as well as the nation; they boldly face difficulties; they take charge of their family, and society. Conversely, confined to the conventional gender roles, female characters appear as dutiful and loyal daughter/wife. Likewise, they selflessly serve the family members, tolerate every

problem, exploitation and injustice mutely. They limit themselves to the places like house and hearth.

Furthermore, while depicting the gender issues, the selected texts reveal that socially imposed gender roles is problematic for the characters. Though socially prescribed gender roles prove to be beneficial to males in several cases, it puts them under the unnecessary pressure. The males are forced to exhibit the masculine traits and are forced to shoulder the burden of their family as well as the nation. For that, they have to become a resourceful, courageous, and stone-hearted person. Since they are under pressure to exhibit their manliness, they face dire consequences such as untimely death, joblessness, alienation in the family and the like. Similarly, claiming their authority over females, they exploit, abuse, assault, rape, and even murder females. The stereotyped gender roles cause inequality, injustice, and exploitation to women. Moreover, entrapped in the traditional gender roles and identity, women loss freedom, get deprived of right to education, property, and the opportunity.

However, both female and male characters recurrently deviate from the traditional gender identities because so far as the formation of gender identity is concerned, multiple factors: unemployment, threat to their life, and desire of freedom: play the role. Apart from that, the changed circumstances resulted in the deviation from the stereotyped gender roles. The male characters stray out from the roles of a 'sole-provider of the family', 'savior', and 'courageous' son/brother/husband. Therefore, they no longer appear as the dominant protagonist. Rather, they appear dependent, submissive, and helpless individual. Conversely, when the female characters get exposure to the developed country and places that provide equal rights, justice, and freedom to all, adopting to the changed environment, they appear in the reversed gender roles of assertive, bold, and rational bread-winner of the family.

Similarly, the analysis of the issues of homosexual characters in the preceding chapter, confirms that Nepali society does not accept the alternative gender forms. In fact, the Nepali society strongly approves heterosexuality and condemns homosexuality. Furthermore, the chapter five of this dissertation exposes that in contemporary social milieu, homosexual and bi-sexual people are subordinated and marginalized. Through the analysis of the films *Ma Hoina Ma* and *Soongava*, the researcher highlights the condition of non-heterosexual people who live in continuous tension and fear. Since they deviate from the strict confinement of heteronormative society that endorses only heterosexuality and designs to punish homosexuality, they are prone to punishment. Not only that, while trespassing the socially assigned identity, these characters often go through several problems such as humiliation, alienation, depression, torture, abuse, assault, and even assassination. Hence, these selected texts portray the condition of LGBTQ in Nepali society.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to examine the reasons of performing traditional gender roles by the characters in the selected texts. The characters of the selected texts perform the stereotyped gender roles because traditional gender understandings are often deeply-rooted in almost every part of Nepali society. Consequently, regulated by the social norms, most of the time, characters of these novels and films cannot set themselves free from the confinement of stereotyped gender roles. In fact, in Nepali society, traditional gender wisdoms have been rooted in people's psyche through religion, culture, and institutions. They learn to practice stereotyped gender roles by observing their parents, peers, kith and kins. Consequently, gendered guided behavior reflect in their customs, day to day rituals and ceremonies. Hence, these characters cannot escape from the gender wisdom that

has been imposed on them. Moreover, they perform the traditional gender roles due to the fear of punishment as society punishes the gender deviator.

The selected novels – *Facing my Phantoms*, *Toda*, and *Cheerharan* – reveal that confined to the stereotyped gender roles, the characters of these novels exhibit so-called masculine and feminine traits in their behavior. Since the society provides the role of *marda* ‘a real man’, to the male characters, they are forced to exhibit manliness. Thus, while ascertaining their masculinity, Raja Saheb and his son collect several wives, drink alcohol and thrash their wives. Similarly, in *Toda*, Parvati’s father discriminates between his son and daughter, whereas Promod cheats his wife, involves in extra-marital affair, and tries to own Roshani’s body. Likewise, in *Cheerharan*, the males of Hastinapur: Bhishma, Dhritarastra, Pandu, Kaurav, Pandav try to accomplish power and authority. Moreover, the male characters in these texts, exploit, abuse, and oppress females. These male characters perform such heinous activities because their actions have been approved and applauded by the society.

Similarly, the selected novels unravel that constrained to the stereotyped gender, the female characters perform the roles of unassertive, fragile, and coward persons. Moreover, performing the role of demure and submissive wife/daughter, in *Facing my Phantoms*, Sanat devotes herself to the service of her father and husband. Likewise, in *Toda*, Parvati, Roshani, Theerkumari, Niti, Rina, and Bhima recurrently perform the roles of loving and caring mother, who sacrifice their happiness for the sake of their children. Likewise, in *Cheerharan*, performing the role of dutiful daughter-in-law, Ambika and Ambalika involve in unwanted sexual intercourse with Vyas, when their mother-in-law ask them to do that, because they are duty-bound to provide heir to the Kuru clan. In the same way, appearing as a loyal wife, Gandhari blindfolds herself. Moreover, as an obedient daughter, Kunti readily accept to be

foster daughter of the king Kuntibhoj, when her biological father hands over her to Kuntibhoj as a gift.

Similarly, the novel *Facing my Phantoms* also depicts the consequences caused by the stereotyped gender roles to male characters. While performing masculine role, Raja Saheb, risks his life by revolting against the Ranas' autocracy, Rajat is abducted by the Maoists, the males are tortured, assaulted and killed in the conflict between the Maoists and the government. In the same way, In *Toda*, playing the role of the savior of oppressed people, Kshitij, Sagar, Parvati's father, and her youngest brother are killed in the conflict. Likewise, in *Cheerharan*, in order to acquire the masculine attributes, the males leave home, learn skills, involve in competition, fight the war, and even get killed.

These novels exposed that confined to the socially imposed gender roles and identity, not only the males, but the females also suffer. In *Facing my Phantoms*, the female characters Sanat, Badki, Durga, and even Sanjeevani gets sexually abused but they do not protest against the perpetrators. Rather, confined to the roles of 'docile', 'tolerant', and 'unassertive' women, they bear injustice and exploitation. Likewise, in *Toda* constrained to the roles of demure, irrational, and selfless person, Parvati, Roshani, Theerkumari, Niti, Rina, and Bhimaa cannot raise their voice against the injustice and exploitation done to them by their male counterparts. Though their husbands and in-laws seize their hardly earned money from them, they stay mute. In the same way, in *Cheerharan*, confined to the role of a loyal wife, wives are burnt in the pier of their husbands as Madri is burnt in the pier of Pandu. Similarly, constrained to the role of a dutiful daughter/ daughter-in-law, Draupadi cannot protest against the decision taken about her life by her father as well as her mother-in-

law. Consequently, she gets shared among the five Pandav brothers and bears humiliation throughout her life as people call her whore.

Similarly, films *Ma Hoina Ma*, *Soongava*, and *Pashupati Prasad* unravel that, male characters – Avishek’s father, Diya’s father, Kiran’s brother, Pashupati Prasad, Bhasme– learn from the society to ascertain their manliness. Likewise, influenced by the religious teachings that impart the roles of an obedient wife/daughter and daughter-in law, the female characters devote themselves to the service of their family. Likewise, since they are regulated to prioritize to the family honor and the happiness of the family members, they appear as selfless and submissive persons. In the same way, confined to the role of a responsible son, Pashupati Prasad struggles hard to earn money and pays his father’s debt; moreover, while ascertaining masculinity, he has been beaten, insulted, and cheated.

Another objective of this research is to examine whether characters transgress the normative frame of gender or not. Analysis of the characters of the selected novels and films reveal that in these texts, the characters’ gender goes through the state of flux. In the beginning, following the socially assigned gender identity, the male characters Avishek, Raj, Dava and Pashupati Prasad try to appear masculine. Nevertheless, as gender is not an innate human attribute, they recurrently deviate from the assigned gender roles. In *Ma Hoina Ma* and *Soongava*, the characters: Avishek, Lopsang, Raj appear as heterosexuals but in private domain, they secretly maintain their homosexuality. Likewise, in his childhood days, Avishek involves in so-called feminine activities; he plays with teddies and barbies. When he grows up, he creates an image of a masculine male even though a fake one. Similarly, in *Soongava*, in the beginning, Diya appears as a docile, fragile, and submissive lady but later, she acts boldly, assertively, and independently. Likewise, in *Pashupati Prasad*, Pashupati

Prasad acts in both masculine and feminine ways. On the one hand, he acts boldly, responsibly and rationally. On the other hand, he appears feeble, emotive, and caring.

Similarly, *Facing My Phantoms* depict that, Prashant, Sanjay, Sanat and Sanjeevani deviate from the traditional gender roles. Through, Sanat's character, Shah exposes that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon; therefore, one's gender does not stay stable. In fact, an individual performs his/her gender roles differently in different circumstances. After the death of her husband while performing the role of the family head, Sanat appears as a responsible, bold, and rational person. Hence, she exhibits so called masculine attributes. The decisions she takes for her sons showcase her far-sightedness and intellect which are regarded as masculine traits. Like her grandmother, Sanjeevani also denies to stick in role of an obedient, demure, and submissive woman. Wearing masculine outfits, she challenges the social norms that constrain the individuals to a specific gender through clothes and cultural accessories. Furthermore, dismantling the stereotyped gender roles of 'self-less', 'docile', 'loyal', and 'dependent' girl, Sanjeevani appears as a 'wild', shameless', 'assertive', and self-centered person.

Facing my Phantoms reveal that like female, males also fail to stick to the assigned gender roles. So, they deviate from the stereotype gender roles. Both Prashant and Sanjay appear as submissive and selfless person who sacrifices their desires in order to fulfill the dream of their mother. They let their mothers take the decision of his life. Prashant acquires education just for the sake of fulfilling his mother's wish. Likewise, He even marries his beloved girlfriend only after getting his mother's approval. From his childhood days, deviating from the identity of confident, self-centered and tough person, Sanjay appears as an obedient, submissive and

unassertive son. Thus, both of them dismantle the masculine image of assertive and self-centered male.

Similarly, in *Toda*, Subedi has revealed that since gender is acquired attribute through repetitive acts, one cannot always exhibit the socially imposed gender traits. Subedi exhibits that in *Toda* though the male characters are expected to having the traits: cautious, rational, successful and bold, they appear naïve, weak, and emotional. Dil Bahadur appears as a naïve, who is easily cheated by his wife. Likewise, he fails to stick to the role of a sole earner of the family. Rather he gets dependent on his wife Roshani as he sends her abroad for earning. In a similar way, Parvati's brother Shrawankumar defies the stereotyped gender roles by withdrawing from the responsibilities.

In the same way, *Cheerharan*, depicts the temporal state of characters' gender. In this novel, characters' gender is not in stable state. Rather, their gender identity is fluid, ambivalent, and dynamic because their gender changes according to circumstances. In *Cheerharan*, the characters go through the exposure to the new environment, conflict, and so forth; consequently, they cannot stick to the stereotyped gender roles and identity. So, they defy the socially imposed gender roles. Most of the female characters, in this novel, appear as a daring, assertive, competitive, and ambitious person. They courageously overcome the difficulties of their lives; and time and again, exhibit their leadership quality. The characters Satyawati, Amba, Gandhari, and Draupadi subvert the traditional image of coward, unassertive, and succumbing females. This becomes possible because they get favorable environment to exercise the so-called masculine attributes in them in their home.

Likewise, *Cheerharan* exposes that not only female characters but male characters' gender also fluctuates. In some occasions, Pandav brothers appear in so-

called feminine identity: self-sacrificing and unassertive. In that society, according to the social norms, sons are dutybound to obey their elders. Therefore, following his mother's order, Arjun shares his wife Draupadi with his four brothers even though he is reluctant to do so. Likewise, Yudhishtira sacrifices his right to become the king of Hastinapur and accepts Khandav region as the share of the kingdom. Hence, by dismantling the traditional gender image, the characters of these novels have questioned the foundationalist frame within which the politics of gendered identity are formulated.

These novels unravel that to defy the stereotype gender roles is not easy. While deviating from the stereotyped gender roles, they go through dire consequences. Denying the socially imposed gender identity, Sanjeevani gets deprived of her parents' love. She becomes alone and socially outcasted. Her family blames her for smearing stigma in the reputation of Singh family. Likewise, since the society punishes the trespassers of traditional gender roles, Prashant also gets punished for deviating from the stereotyped gender roles. When he fails to perform the role of an assertive and authoritative person, his wife condemns him. She criticizes his subservience to his elder brother. Similarly, in *Toda*, for deviating from the traditional gender roles, Dil Bahadur gets cheated. Moreover, both Dil Bahadur and Shrawankumar get humiliated.

The film *Ma Hoina Ma* highlights the consequences faced by the characters while transgressing from the normative gender roles. This film exposed the problems faced by the characters while defying the traditional gender roles. They are condemned by their family, relatives and the society. Avishek gets alienated in his family. He gets insulted in school and gets rebuked and beaten by his father. He is forcefully tied in heterosexual relationship to Srijana. Moreover, his every activity is

kept under surveillance. Similarly, Raj, Lopsang and Ricky become victim of violence for indulging in the culturally unintelligible sexual relationship. Likewise, *Soongava* reveals the dreadful consequences faced by the lesbians Diya and Kiran for deviating from the stereotyped gender roles. They go through physical and mental violence.

On the basis of the analysis of the selected texts, the researcher concludes this research with the argument that the contemporary Nepali novels and cinematic texts have depicted the changes that have appeared in Nepali society. Moreover, reflecting the problems and difficulties caused by the stereotyped gender roles to the characters, the authors of these novels and makers of these films have appealed for the equal treatment of all genders. Similarly, they have proposed to change the normative meaning of men and women and set free the people from the burden of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Likewise, they have stressed on the fact that we cannot escape from the changes that compel the people to deviate from the traditional gender roles and identity.

Through these texts, the authors and film makers have conveyed the message that socio-cultural practices and religious scriptures have injected, implanted, and enforced the stereotyped gender roles and identity to the people. Through these sources they receive certain gender attributes and behaviors which reflect upon their understanding of gender. Consequently, they repeatedly perform the normative roles and create stereotyped gender identity. These texts also have exposed that imposition of traditional gender, through punishment, results in vulnerability not only to female and male but also to the LGBTQ people. Therefore, they recommend to denounce the essential notion of 'male/female'. They have proposed to defy the monolithic concept of gender and accept the plurality of gender. They have emphasized to dismantle the

notions of gender binary so that people do not get repressed under the burden of stereotyped gender roles and identity.

I conclude this research with the argument that non-normative gender practices are becoming more visible in contemporary Nepali society and the same has been reflected in the contemporary Nepali novels and films. Similarly, while reflecting the real condition of Nepali society, the contemporary Nepali authors have shown that so far as the imagination of gender just country is concerned, Nepal is yet lagging far behind. This is because constitutional provisions alone are not sufficient to assure gender justice to women and sexual minorities. Moreover, socio-cultural practices, political and economic condition continue to influence and regulate the gender behavior of Nepali people. As a result, they suffer while bearing the load caused by socially imposed gender roles. Nevertheless, since nothing can stay static forever, the concepts of people regarding gender also do not remain rigid. Consequently, contemporary Nepali people also cannot remain untouched by the socio-political changes of the country and they have started to defy the traditional gender roles. But, in social milieu of Nepal, LGBTQ community is still excluded and is taken as social stigma because in this country, binary norms of masculinity and femininity still exists very strongly.

Therefore, the researcher has realized that the government has to implement the rules that have secured equal rights to the people. Likewise, since gender has been injected through religious scriptures and social practices, those rules and practices have to be drastically amended. Moreover, these texts have appealed the readers to learn to become human rather than man and woman. The researcher notices that by presenting the protagonist of films and novels as role model, these selected texts can play vital role to shape the readers'/audiences' concept of gender. In fact, the

protagonists of literary narratives and cinematic texts convey the message to the readers/audience that gender is constructed phenomenon and it is fluid. Through protagonist of the texts, they also can pass the message to the readers/audiences that it is wrong to impose stereotyped gender roles and identity to the people and it is equally wrong to punish the one who deviates from or defies the traditional gender roles and identity. Since novels and films can work as a pioneer to bring revolutionary thought among the readers/audiences, government should appeal as well as motivate to the authors and film makers to convey the message of egalitarian society through their creations.

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