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**Quest for Women's identity in Ashmina Ranjit's Art Works**

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master's of Arts in English**

**By**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

This thesis entitled "Quest for Women's Identity in Ashmina Ranjit's Art Works" has been prepared by Nandu Maya Thapa under my supervision. I recommend this thesis to be submitted for the viva-voce.

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**Letter of Approval**

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## **Abstract**

Ashmina Ranjit deals with the images related to female body which are considered to be taboos in her art works. Giving space to such images and highlighting the role of females through the help of her paintings, installations and performance art, Ranjit has raised the issues of female experience in patriarchal society. She depicts the images like shell, germinating plants, blossoming flower etc. which are related to female body part. Hence, taking the help of feminism as forwarded by Beauvoir, Cixous and Kristeva, the study asserts that Ranjit, through the help of her art works, celebrates the sensuality and sexuality of women's body to carve their identity by resisting the patriarchal attitude found in our society.

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## **I. Ashimina Ranjit, Her Art Works and Feminism**

Giving space to the images related to female body which are considered to be taboos, Ashmina Ranjit celebrates the sensuality and sexuality of female body to carve their identity by resisting the patriarchal attitude found in our society. Ranjit's Art works depict the images of shell, germinating plants, hair warp as well as other images. These images are related to woman's body part. Taking the help of Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous' notion of feminism, this study asserts that how Ranjit resists the patriarchal perspective of Nepalese society. Moreover through the depiction of those images, performance art and installation, she aims to assert woman's identity.

Ranjit is an interdisciplinary visual artist who has worked actively in the field of painting, printmaking, installation, performance art and films. Her paintings, installations, performance and films have been included in solo and group exhibitions around the world. She has participated in several art residencies in Asia and Europe and has also co-ordinated and organized a numbers of art events and workshops in Nepal. The owners of numerous awards, Ranjit's art works are included in collections of various private and public museums and institutions around the world. She has taught at several institutions around the world including Tribhuban University in Nepal.

Ranjit was born at Pakho in Kathmandu and brought up at her maternal home, Koiti. She was kept for six years at her maternal home and brought back to her father's home at the age of six. As she was brought back to her own home by her father, she was not allowed to return to her maternal home forever. Though she was not aware of these circumstances fully, she was a curious child who used to become rebellious when the girls and women were insulted. Anyway, she spent her childhood days happily. As she completed her secondary level education, she joined I.Sc having the intention to be pilot and fly over sky.

Unfortunately, she could not complete I.Sc. regularly. Taking the advantage of her free time, she decided to join Fine Art at Lalitkala Campus, Bhotahiti.

Ranjit's father was the then well known artist who used to draw fine landscapes. Though his art did not affect her directly, on subconscious and unconscious level she was inspired by his profession. Her desire to fly over sky could not be limited to physical level, rather she desired to fly spiritually. That is to say, she desired to outlet her inner freedom and for that she chose fine art as the best means of expression. Thus, it seems, she chose fine art to assert her identity through the means of art works.

Due to the encouragement, inspiration and her regular effort, she topped her class as she completed BFA. However, she was not totally satisfied with the system of Nepalese education. Even she could not get chance to study master in cultural studies at T.U. As she was searching the new opportunity, she got full bright scholarship at University of Tasmania in Australia and left Nepal for her study. She completed BFA from there as well. While studying in Tasmania, she got totally new environment. As a result along with painting and printmaking, she began to work on installation and performance art. As installation and performance are done with real and natural object, she finds life on them and she enjoys those forms. However, she does not give value only to the form, rather she views that the form should suit with content. Disagreeing with the view that art is the expression of feelings and emotions, she argues that art carries certain meaning and ideologies that in long run can change the perspective of the observers.

As Ranjit believes that art with certain meaning should change the perspective in society, she works with this ideology in her art works. Her different Art works like *Women and Sensuality*, *Hair Warp*, *Cultural Body*, *Womb Room*, and other not only give space to the images like shell, germinating plant, flowers etc. which are related to female body parts but also highlight different roles of women which are prevalent in the patriarchal society and

challenge them. To challenge the norms and values of patriarchal society, she depicts the power of female body and sensual and sexual joy of female experience. Explaining such theme of Ranjit's art works, Manjushree Thapa in an exhibition catalogue "Feminine Force" argues:

Ashmina began to directly take on women's physical experiences, focusing on their sensual and sexual joy and the power of their bodies. This has been an important move from an artist working in a society that too often denies women the right to claim their own body. ("Feminine Force")

Ranjit attempts to break the barriers that are found in Nepalese society. Depicting the images of menstrual blood and yoni, she tries to link them with life force and origin of all creations. In the introduction article of an exhibition catalogue, "Feminine Force" Ranjit herself writes that "menstruation is a natural phenomenon without which creation would come to a standstill" ("Feminine Force").

Ranjit's art works are interpreted from multiple perspectives. Many critics have commented her art works in multiple ways. According to an art critic, Bijaya Thapa, her art works reflect socio-political scenario of Nepal. Commenting on her art works in an exhibition catalogue"?!", Thapa argues "Ashmina's art reflects the contemporary scenario of our country and world as a whole" ("?!").

Ranjit as a Nepalese artist, is influenced by Nepalese culture and tradition. She depicts the popular culture, style and womanhood in surreal way. Commenting on her surreal quality in an exhibition catalogue, "Hair Warp" Arun Ranjit argues:

Her fascination with the details of the popular culture, style and womanhood are interwoven with her dream like semi- autobiographical compositions where all the images float like clouds over the white paper surface and often mimic its soft edge. ("Hair Warp")

No doubt, Ranjit depicts dream like semi-autobiographical images in her arts works. Moreover, she is an experimental artist who invents new techniques for her expression. Following the concept like form must suit its content Ranjit chooses different mediums. She is equally skillful in graphics, installation and performance arts. Commenting on her style, Abhi Subedi argues, "Her style is closer to postmodern form and her works have the effect of theatrical performance without reuseable text" (A. Subedi, Overview, 117).

Of course, her art works are postmodern. There is not any hard and tight rule applicable in her art. However, she balances the form and content in her art works. Commenting on the harmonious relation of form and content of Ranjit's art works, Arun Ranjit in an exhibition catalogue "Hair Warp" further argues:

A collection of works using the charcoal medium is an harmonious grouping in terms of both content and form. She pushes the normal boundaries of charcoal to produce robust, strong-featured figures, alive with attractive line gesture. What-ever the truth behind the drawings, artist Ashmina has a gift for creating simple, elegant works which are both aesthetically pleasing and conceptually challenging. ("Hair Warp")

Her art works are direct, simple and elegant and they are equally important from the perspective of aesthetics and conceptually both.

As such different critics have commented her art works from multiple perspectives. Most of them have raised the issue of style and themes, simultaneously. Though someone have raised the issue of femininity, they have not proved it satisfactorily. It is therefore, drawing upon and departing from those critics, in my dissertation of master degree, I will attempt to prove how she asserts women's identity in her art works thoroughly.

Ranjit depicts different images which are related to women's body parts. She gives space to the shells, germinating seeds, hair warp and menstrual blood resembling genital

organs which are considered to be taboos in patriarchal society. Moreover, through different installations and performance arts, she highlights the role associated with female in patriarchal society. Now the question arises why does she depict such images? and what is the politics behind such installations and performance? This project seeks to explore the significance of those images which are related to women's body part and such performance and installations which highlights female's role in patriarchal society. It is therefore, I will apply the notion of feminism as forwarded by Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf and Helene Cixous as a tool of my research. For Kristeva, Language has two types 'poetic' and 'symbolic'. Deconstructing the structural notion of language, Kristeva argues that women's do have poetic language which is the language of rhythm, poetry and pleasure. Such language is not structural rather resembles child's echolalia. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir deconstructs the myth found in patriarchal society. Virginia Woolf deals on the environment required to females and Helene Cixous focuses on the role of female body.

By refusing to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to sex object, a second sex, a submissive body and other, the feminist criticism redefines women's activities and goals from women's perspective. Feminist philosopher challenge basic principles of traditional western philosophy, investigating how philosophical inquiry would change if women conducted it and if it incorporated women's experiences as well as their view points. While interpreting the history of western philosophy, feminists study texts by male philosophers for their depiction of women, masculine values and biases towards women. These philosophers also write about women's experience of subjectivity, their relationship to their bodies and feminist concept of language, myth and knowledge etc.

All the feminist critics believe that the entire cultural spectrum is dominated by a patriarchal value. The woman is made to be subjugated by male. They are exploited through any means like myth, culture and literature. In such context, all the feminist critics are

concerned with the destruction of patriarchal ideology. Its insufficiency and one-sidedness are highly foregrounded. And they assert their own identity by incorporating their typical experiences. The feminists are not only dissatisfied with patriarchy rather are guilty of not being able to be united and challenge such notion by developing collaboration among them. It is therefore, some of them aim to develop collaboration among females. Rejecting the Bloom's model of "anxiety of influence", which women find to be masculine model, Gilbert and Gubar develop the model of "anxiety of authorship" where they argue that women write by being united and they are not in combat with fore mothers. Highlighting the role of foremothers for contemporary feminists, Gilbert and Gubar in their essay "Infection in the Sentence" argue:

If contemporary women do now attempt the pen with energy and authority they are able to do so only because their eighteenth and nineteenth century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture. (1238)

When we look at the history, we find that female beings are treated as inferior to men. Aristotle viewed female as lacking some qualities and St. Thomas Aquinas went to the extent of calling woman as imperfect man when Descartes theorized a concept of split between the mind and the body, women have been associated with the body whereas men have associated with mind. For instance, Sigmund Freud believed that females suffer from penis envy. In such context, different feminists have protested against such concepts about women and their marginalization. They try to explain the causes and conditions in which men are more powerful and their production ideas and activities are seen as having greater value and higher status than women's. Charlotte Bronte defines feminism as "an entire world view or gestalt, not just laundry list of women's issue" (12).

Feminist theory thus began with the immediate need to end females oppression. The word 'Feminism' was not used until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century though the emergences of recognizably feminist ideologies were there before the nineteenth century as well. Any way it is a political theory and practice to free all the social bondage of patriarchy. John Wallach Scott keeps his views regarding feminism as:

Feminism as politics appeals to the women to mobilize them into a coherent political movement, the history of feminism thus has been the history of the project of reducing diversities (of class, race, sexuality, politics, religion and socio-economic status) among females to a common identity of women usually in opposition to patriarchy. A system of male domination. (4)

Feminists are united by the idea that women's position in society is unequal to that of men and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men to the political, social and economic detriment of women. However, feminists have used various theories to explain these inequalities and have advocated different ways of readdressing inequalities. It is therefore, there is the geographical and historical variation in the nature of feminism. In classical times and early Christian era women were excluded from public and were made subordinate to men. Throughout most societies women were deprived of property, education and legal status. They were given the responsibility of their husband if married or of their father's or other male relatives if not so they rose to counter such patriarchal notions.

The earliest form of feminism was concerned with equal rights for women and men. This meant equal standing as citizens in public life and to some extent equal legal status within the home. These ideas emerged in response to the 'French revolution' and the 'American war of independence' both of which advocated the values of liberty and equality. French school of feminism argued that revolutionary value of liberty and equality should be applied to all women activities in America. They called for an extension of the principles of

the American Declaration of Independence to women, including right to citizenship and property. Feminism resists against racial and sexual exploitation of women.

At first, feminism focused on equal rights for woman and man. The females revolted for the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to the chattel marriage and ownership of married women by their husbands. However, by the end of nineteenth century, Feminist movement primarily focused on gaining political power particularly the right of woman suffrage. In the later phase feminism came from socialist and civil rights movement which emerged in the 1960s. The second phase feminism emphasized the physical and *psychological* differences between women and men.

Simon de Beauvoir is 20<sup>th</sup> century French, existential feminist. By demonstrating her existential feminism Beauvoir refuses the notion of female essence prior to individual existence. She prioritizes the existence and argues that the prevailing notions of woman's nature is nothing more than just a concept of patriarchy. Women have nothing woman by birth. It is patriarchal society, which defined woman always with reference to man. Man is always the first, subject, one and practical with a soul whereas woman is the second, object, other, emotional and soulless. Saying that patriarchal definitions have been based on essence not on existence. Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* mentions that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman” (156). By this, she means to say that one is born free but in case of woman male constructs certain essence before their existence. For her one is not born as woman but patriarchy is assigning them to be woman. It is therefore, she aims to deconstruct such notion of myth constructed by males.

Beauvoir attacks the patriarchal myths of women which presumes the false essence defining it with stereotypes, opposed to the eternal femininity. Myths are always created and always based on binary oppositions like man and woman. Such myths are false which block the way to transcendence to women insisting that woman should remain silent and serve men.

Beauvoir argues, "the myth must not be confused with the recognition of significance, significance is immanent in the object, it is revealed to the mind through a living experience" (997).

No doubt, Beauvoir deconstructs the notion of myth. For her, myths should be discarded as they are created by males to dominate females. Moreover, she aims to foreground the typical experience of woman and their body through her essay, *The Second Sex*. According to Beauvoir, men treat women as beast but can never understand their pain and suffering. Because of their ignorance about female, male claims that women are mysterious and enigmatic. Hence, what Beauvoir views is that mystery is nothing but the failure of proper understanding or communication and males are as equally as mysterious as females. Beauvoir argues;

It is quite true that woman like man is being rooted in nature; she is more enslaved to the species than is the male, her animality is more manifest. To men's eyes the opacity of the self knowledge self, of the *pour-soi*, is denser in the other who is feminine; men are unable to penetrate her special experience through any working of sympathy, they are condemned to ignorance of the quality of woman's erotic pleasure, the discomfort of menstruation and the pains of child birth. (997)

For Beauvoir, women have their typical experiences like menstruation, and child birth which males cannot understand and realize. As they are unaware of such experiences they blame women as mysterious and enigmatic. But in reality, such mystery of women is not their fault rather that is their identity.

Like Beauvoir, Helene Cixous acknowledges the value of female's peculiarity raising the issue of female's identity. Cixous argues that "woman must write herself woman must put herself into the text –as into the world and into history – by her own movement" (279). For

Cixous women have some peculiar qualities which should be asserted through texts (art, literature, and paintings) in order to alert the history of the world.

Cixous gives focus on women's body parts. For her feminine writing should be rooted on female's body. She opposes the negative notion of body as forwarded by classical thinkers and raises the significance of it saying "write yourself (so that) your body must be heard" (284). According to Cixous, female body has been repressed historically by the apparatus of male theology and philosophy, social system and even psychoanalysis. The direct repression of the body occurs in theologies which advocate for the negation or denial of one's body and its desire. Particularly the female body, in theology, is regarded as a source of temptation and often as unclean; in philosophical level Plato denies the world of reality i.e. world of body or sensation and Descarte shows the split between mind and matter where he ignores matter (body). Hence, to write without the body or to discourage body has been the norm from Plato to Descarte. And patriarchy by asserting their body as the representative of their identity for her foregrounding of women's body is an act of resisting male's theory i.e. "pure theory".

Describing the role of body in reference to Cixous, M.A.R Habib argues,

The body is a name, a metaphor for many things: the uniqueness of experience which refuses to be subsumed under a general category or to be reduced to exemplificatory status; and as Cixous reminds us, it can express the individuality of the self, inhabiting a determinate position in place, time class, colour, race and religion. To write with the body is to refuse to annul these differences. (704)

Of course, Cixous gives importance on female body part. She aims to deconstruct male's theory of language and philosophy by asserting or incorporating females typical experiences of body parts in works of art or literature.

In fact, Cixous writes in the theme of language and takes body as metaphor to deal on her theme. She disagrees with the tradition of patriarchy and wants to resist it. Analyzing the concepts associated with feminism in the notion of theology and the literary criticism or history of theories from Plato to Descarte, Cixous shows her disgust against them and chooses body as the best metaphor to resist the notion of "pure theory" As body was discarded by all theorists and critics, she wants to challenge it through the exposition of body itself. M.A.R. Habib further argues:

It is to reinstate the claims of the body as legitimate in the overall constitution of humanity, a restitution that is initially most visible in the constitution of femininity and its expression in feminine writing, Cixous suggests that, more "than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation women are body" ('LM",290). Whereas Simone de Beauvoir has viewed the rootedness of the woman's experience in bodily functions as a kind of imprisonment within immanence, Cixous regards woman's greater attunement to bodily needs and drives as potentially liberating. (704)

Another critic who writes in the theme of female language is Julia Kristeva who divides human stage into two parts: semiotic stage and symbolic stage and assigns feminine qualities to the first one and phallogentric qualities to the second. For her semiotic stage is the mother stage or pre-oedipal stage where a child defines himself with mother, he learns language from mother which is disordered and fragmented. At the beginning of language learning a child freely produces the sound which has no order and structure. Here is no rule but free expression thus the language in this stage is full of rhyme, rhythm, intonation and music. Unlike symbolic stage is the stage where the child enters into father's domain and begins to speak structured language. In 'semiotic stage' he is free. Hence Kristeva shows her preference to prior stage and presents the need of free expression in the case of women too. For her as

modern linguistic theories treat language as a formal object which is marked by arbitrary relations between signifier and signified and as such language lacks the "subject of enunciation", she finds it incomplete, and keeps her argument in the favour of separate language. Kristeva in her essay "From One Identity to Another" writes :

There is within poetic language a heterogeneousness to meaning and signification. This heterogeneousness detected genetically in the first echolalias of infants as rhythms, intonations, glossolalias in psychotic discourse, serving as ultimate support of the speaking subject threatened by the collapse of the signifying function; this heterogeneousness to signification operates through, despite, and in excess of it and produces in poetic language "musical" but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations but, in radical experiments, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic consciousness (of the signified object and ego) – for example carnivalesque discourse. (1167)

Deconstruction of myth, and language which is phallogentric and search of new language and myth are the subjects of many feminists. Beauvoir, Cixous and Kristeva like critics have raised the issue of myth and language significantly. In the same line another critic Virginia Woolf talks about the effect of tradition on females. In her essay "A Room of One's Own" She has explored the situation of women especially women writers and argues that women do not have their independency. She argues that women do not have money and room of their own due to which they can't write equally with men. She blames society for spending less money on female education. She argues that patriarchal society restricts the women's creativity. She believes that women had always faced social and economical obstacles to their literary ambitions. Her ultimate belief is that women can freely develop their artistic talents, if they achieve social and economic equality with men. There is not much difference in

between males and females physically, rather due to social biasness the females are being exploited. Therefore, women have to develop their feelings and emotions which are quite different from male's experiences.

Doing the historical survey of women writers Woolf argues that at the beginning, women writers suffered from hatred and fear of male writers. They themselves considered being inferior to male writers. They realized that male ridiculed them. So, they could not tell the truths about their own experiences. But by taking the advantage of such situation, males pretend to be superior thereby confining women within the four wall. Rejecting such patriarchal tradition Woolf argues:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffered from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer, and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags it is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than customs has pronounced necessary for their sex. (822)

For Woolf, women are like that of men and they have same feelings and emotions. They are confined to domestic works by patriarchy and they are laughed at if they want to do something new. Woolf criticizes such view of patriarchy and argues for the equal and friendly space for women in the society.

Of course, different theorists have raised the notion of feminism in order to assert their identity and resist patriarchy. Some of them have taken the help of body, whereas some of them have raised the notion of language. Through different means they have argued for

equality, freedom and independent existence of females in society. Hence, by raising the issue of feminism as forwarded by Gilbert and Gubar, Beauvoir, Cixous, Kristeva and Woolf, I will analyze the Art works done by Ranjit and show how she asserts women's identity through the depiction of different image, symbols, and female roles thereby challenging the culture and tradition found in our society.

As such, the first chapter is "Ashmina Ranjit, Her Art Works and Feminism", which introduces the artist, Ashmina Ranjit, her art works, the notion of feminism and the project as a whole. The second chapter will be "Assertion of Women's Identity in Ranjit's Art Works" which explores how Ranjit's Art works resist patriarchy and assert women's identity by celebrating sensuality and sexuality of their body and experience thoroughly.

At last, this study makes use of different art works done by Ranjit. However, it does not incorporate her each and all artworks. As the major objective of this study is to explore the assertion of women's identity in Ranjit's artworks, it has been centered on only limited number of her art works which are related in this field. For the study and documentation of photographs, a number of art galleries and museums were visited. As some paintings, and installations are not available in those places, the photographs of some art works have been taken from the artist herself. For the analysis, the supporting materials have been cited from different critics, researchers and writers along with the personal interview taken during short visit. The critics' views on her paintings, installations and performance arts are taken mostly from exhibition catalogues, newspaper articles and magazines as the books and scholarly journals on contemporary Nepali art are not available. Since the page number do not appear in most of the catalogues the name of the critics and the title of the exhibition catalogue or the title of the article that appears in the catalogue are mentioned in the thesis texts, and the details of the catalogue appear in the works cited. For documentation, the study follows the MLA format as far as practicable.



## II. Assertion of Women's Identity in Ranjit's Artworks

With the help of her painting, installations and performance art, Ashmina Ranjit directly or indirectly has raised the issues of female experience which are considered to be taboos in patriarchal society. Giving space to the images like shell, germinating plants, blossoming flower etc. which are related to female body part, Ranjit celebrates the sensuality and sexuality of female body and challenges the patriarchal attitude found in our society. Moreover, through different mediums, she highlights female roles and aims to quest women's identity in patriarchal society.

Ranjit's art work *Hair Warp* (fig. 1) depicts the long hair which represents women's body. As women grow long hair generally, the *Hair Warp* (fig. 1) in the canvas is the metonymic representation of female body part. The work appeals women to celebrate the sensuality of their body. Women's experience, emotion and feelings are different from that of men because of their different body and this difference is the root of their identity. Helene Cixous in *Laugh of Medusa* suggests women to foreground their body on the text so that it can be heard. Since the female body has been repressed historically by the apparatus of male theology and philosophy, social system and even psycho analysis the depiction of body deserves greater significance. Following the line of Cixous, Ranjit depicts long hair in *Hair Warp* (fig. 1) to celebrate women's body in symbolic form questioning and resisting the patriarchy.

According to Ranjit, women should not feel humiliated in being women but should be proud of their body and celebrate it (Interview). Patriarchal system confines women within the four walls and forces them to work according to the wish of their husband and father at home. Though their equality is guaranteed by constitution, in practical life they are dominated severely. They are not independent and free to express themselves. In such social convention

to raise the issue of the celebration of women's body is challenging. However, Ranjit tries to give voice to the women through the depiction of women's body part in her visual art.

Surfacely, *Hair Warp* (fig. 1) depicts long black hair which belongs to the women as a whole. But when we see it minutely, it seems, it is something different than hair. It looks like a tide found in sea during Tsunami. The tides in the sea create movements and the calm sea becomes aggressive at that time. The huge tides even forget their way and enter into the human settlement and destroy everything. Like that of calm sea, women are very calm, quite and peace originally. But when the patriarchy exploits them inhumanly, Ranjit seems to be hinting, they can be changed into Tsunami. And as the tides of Tsunami, they can destroy the norms and values that are prevailed in patriarchal society. In this case, the tide like images of *Hair Warp* (fig. 1) in the canvas is very symbolic and meaningful which represents the nature of women in the society. Moreover, she aims to carve women's identity through such images thereby resisting patriarchal norms and values found in our society.

Like *Hair Warp* (fig. 1), *Women and Sensuality* (fig. 2) is her next series in which she has drawn several images that correspond with female body parts. Among such images, the depiction of different colourful flowers deserve vital significance. That is because, these flowers can be interpreted from multiple perspective.

Among several flowers that she has presented in this series, I have chosen one in red colour. The flower is very natural. The combination of white, red, yellow and black colour together gives life and naturalness to the flower. It is blossoming and its center is clearly visible. The black at the center represents patriarchy which is covered by red and white petals of the flowers. The red is the symbol of revolution and white signifies purity and peace. Symbolically, the petals of flowers represent female who are peace and calm as represented by white colour but they are being revolutionary as symbolized by red colour as the

patriarchy misbehaves and misrepresents them remaining at the center. In this regard, the flower reflects the socio-political scenario found in patriarchal society like that of Nepal.

The women are suffering from non-representation, misrepresentation and under-representation in patriarchal society. Males sometimes glorify female by comparing her with other abstract things like flower. They give the false notion of beauty and delicacy to the female and the women are considered to be shy, naïve and beautiful. In the work of art, a boy is depicted as active and intellectual one whereas a girl is presented as passive, delicate and naïve. As Mary Wollstonecraft deconstructs such ideology saying that "Mind does not know sex" (396) in her essay "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" Ranjit needs to write women's history from female perspectives. To depict the challenging attitude of modern women, she carves the flower which looks like burning flame instead of delicate rose. The mixture of yellow colour with red creating rhythm in the canvas symbolically suggests how the women are burning to challenge patriarchy. The flower looks like erupting volcano which stands for revolution.

No doubt, in patriarchal society women are objectified. They sometimes are glorified as divine and sometimes treated as demon. What they should do and what they should not do is determined by convention which is totally bias. Most of the organs that belong to females are considered to be taboos and they are not permitted to talk about them openly. In such context, Ranjit aims to break the convention and argues that the hidden things should be shown. Ranjit views that sexuality is not sex rather it is being. She depicts the power of female body and sexual and sensual joy of female experience through the exposition of women's body parts. The flower, in this sense resembles with female's secret body part (vagina). Hence, by exposing the secret body part, she not only challenges the patriarchy but also celebrates the sensuality and sexuality. Commenting the theme of Ranjit's art works in an exhibition catalogue "Feminine Force" Manjushree Thapa writes:

Ashmina began to directly take on women's physical experience, focusing on their sensual and sexual joy and their power of their bodies. This has been an important move from an artist working in a society that too often denies women the right to claim their own body. ("Feminine Force")

The artist subverts the conventional belief regarding female body and treats it as a matter of celebration bringing it in the foreground of her canvas.

Similarly, her installation "*Womb Room*" (fig. 3) foregrounds different images which are considered to be taboos in patriarchal society. By doing so, Ranjit aims to celebrate the sexuality and sensuality of female body in order to carve their identity. By foregrounding the taboo images in her art works, she further wants to challenge patriarchal norms and values that are prevalent in our society.

Ranjit's "*Womb Room*" (fig. 3) is an good example of installation which she has done in Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal. For her installation, she used a small room where she hanged red curtain. At the time of inauguration when the curtain is removed the long hair can be seen hanging at the entrance of room. Just inside the room a triangle shaped object covered by short hair has been installed in which a red thread has been tied. The red thread lurks down to the floor and spreads through out the whole room. This simple looking small room carries a vital significance in it's symbolic form.

In broad level, the whole room stands for female genital, which has been hidden by red curtain. Hence, red curtain symbolically stands for gown, that the women wear to hide their shame. As we open the gown, the secret body part can be seen. The entrance of room which is decorated with long hair stands for female genital, which is the entrance of womb. Now, to symbolize the menstrual blood that comes from womb, she used red thread .The red thread is tied on the triangle shaped object made up of short hair and spreads through out the

whole rooms. Symbolically, the triangle shaped object made up of short hair stands for female genital from which the menstrual blood flows outside.

In general, Ranjit foregrounds the female genital which is considered to be taboo in patriarchal society. By doing so, she not only resists patriarchy but also gives voice to the women through the representation of their body. She questions, resists and breaks away from the patriarchal social convention and aims to carve women's space in society.

Moreover, Ranjit associates menstrual blood with the women's identity. The red thread lurking down to the floor metonymically represents the flow of menstrual blood. Hence, the artist subverts the patriarchal attitude on menstruation, which is found in our society. Our society treats menstrual period with taboo. During menstrual period, family member and relatives treat women as untouchable and they have to live in separate room or cowshed. They are not allowed to be seen by their brothers. They are not permitted to touch other people and household goods. In this period, people consider them to be impure and the things they touch useless. But Ranjit brings the image of menstrual blood in the foreground in the forceful manner. She considers menstrual blood not as the thing to be looked down upon but to be celebrated. By breaking the taboos associated with menstrual flow, the artist takes it as significant element for women's identity and celebrates power of female body and sensual and sexual joy of women's experience. Commenting on her art work, art critic Manjushree Thapa in an exhibition catalogue "Feminine Force" mentions:

Working, more recently on the theme of menstrual blood, Ashmina continues to break barriers about what is permissible for a female artist to say in Nepal and enlarging the public Discourse within Nepal on women's Identity and experience. ("Feminine Force")

Ranjit also associates menstrual blood with the source of creation. Menstrual blood flows from womb and womb is the place where creation begins. Ranjit herself says that

"menstruation is the natural phenomenon without which creation would come to stand still" (Feminine Force). Mother is the source of all creations through which life continues. She is the *Shakti* who creates and nourishes the living being. The artist subverts the patriarchal concept that woman is inferior to man. Her work *Womb Room* (fig. 3), revolts against patriarchal domination and misrepresentation of women and encourages them to celebrate their body recognizing their power.

Ranjit's art works are highly sensitive. she views that art is not the mere expression of feelings and emotions for even animals express that. For her, as human is the rational and intellectual being, she is superior than animals, her/his work should have certain ideology. According to the artist, art should convey certain message and should be able to change the perspectives on the audience, in long run. In this case, she makes her art natural, lively and touchy as she appeals all senses through her art works. In the Womb room, we can see hair and other things. Moreover as we enter into the room, the hair warp touches our body that arouses certain feelings upon us. Similarly the hair, as it is real, creates certain scent that appeals our nose and when the air moves it, it produces sound which appeals our ear. Altogether, it appeals our senses and creates certain vibration on us thus her art work encourages the woman to realize the power of their body and force men to understand it. Ranjit is proud of her body, typical power of women and celebrates those things openly. She expresses her attachment with herself and other women, "I Love you woman, the one within me, another within you ..... do you love to touch me. my hair" ("Hair Warp"). Hence, Ranjit generalizes all women as equal and views that the feminine self is prevalent on female body part. As the hair warp hanging on womb room is capable enough to create vibration on audience, so does women, as a whole.

Similarly, Ranjit deconstructs the accepted and established notion of femininity and resists against patriarchy through her solo performance, *Search Inter-Definite: No Results*

*Were Found* (fig. 4) that was held in the last week of August 2008. She had staged her solo performance at Siddhartha Art Gallery located in Babarmahal Revisited Kathmandu. The performance had taken the time of nearly two hours. And during that two hour long performance, Ranjit seems to be highlighting the issues like women's ambiguous liminal spaces, cultural roles imposed upon women, social gathering and sexuality etc. Her performance pointed out manifestation of culturally imposed femininity while simultaneously seeking to reclaim women's personal experience in between the frames of socially defined roles and rules.

The performance was highly striking. For the performance one stage was constructed and decorated highly. A tall mirror was balanced at the center of the stage. At the beginning of the performance, Ranjit entered into the stage with dance like movements, swirling and humming in front of the tall mirror that was balanced on the center. Looking repeatedly at herself in the mirror, she started to decorate herself. She began to apply cosmetics to her face and eyes. As she applied cosmetics to her face and eyes, she began to place *bindi* or *tika* on her foreheads with a cheerful expression. As she looked at her image in the mirror her cheerful mood shifted to a somber one surprisingly. She picked up an earthenware pot from the stage and started to decorate it with *bindis* similar to the ones she had put on her forehead. She continued to stick *bindis* all over her face and the earthen pot simultaneously. For almost two hours, she silently repeated this movement with a sad expression while audience could occasionally hear faint sobbing. At the end of the show, she raised the pot, which was now nearly covered with *bindis*, balanced it close to her face and stared at the mirror with a sad look. The hushed audience in the room could clearly see the reflection of an uncommon expression on Ranjit's face, which had come to resemble the decorative earthenware pot.

Surfacely, the performance seems to be abstract. However, when we examine critically, it carries the notion of feminism as forwarded by Simone de Beauvoir, i.e. "one is

not born but rather becomes a women". We can say that through her art works, Ranjit presents how one is not born a woman but becomes through a reiteration of rituals like putting *bindi* on the forehead daily. Interpreting her art work, critic Archana Thapa argues:

I found that her performance created a site of transformation and proposed a paradigm for cultural resistance by showing that one is not born a women, but becomes one through reiteration of rituals-like putting on the forehead daily-associated with femininity. (24)

In fact, Ranjit's performance is highly symbolic. As she enters into the stage for performance, she is very happy. In a dance like movement, she stands in front of the tall mirror and looks her image repeatedly. Hence what she seems to have hinted is that patriarchy associates women with narcissicism and she wants to remind this myth through repeated looks on mirror. Moreover, she begins to apply cosmetic on her face and eyes. To appear beautiful women are destined to wear such cosmetics in our society and Ranjit does same which highlights females role, Not only this after applying cosmetics she began to put on *bindi or tika* which is considered to be must for married women in our society. *Tika* on forehead, especially the red one, is the symbol of married women whose husband are alive. In fact, it is believed that if the married women wear such red *tika* specially *sindur* on their foreheads their husband get long life and they should not suffer from any health or other problem. Teaching such lessons to the women patriarchy forces women to follow such rituals repeatedly and happily. Ranjit doing the same at first reminds her viewers how women act in the society.

Though she repeats rituals which are expected to be followed by women in our society at the beginning of her performance, she does not limit her act there after applying some *bindis* on her forehead, she looks again on her image on the mirror, At this moment her mood changes suddenly and her dance like movement and cheerful face changes into somber

one. What she feels it is not sure but she picks up an earthenware pot which was placed just by the mirror and begins to apply *bindis* even on that pot repeatedly. She puts on *bindis* alternatively on her forehead and on the pot. While doing so, she seems to be weeping. The tears fall on her cheeks and just the sobbing can be heard. What we can say is that the artist, though she is compelled to repeat feminine ritual in the society, is not happy in her act. Faint sobbing and tears on cheeks symbolize that how women feel dissatisfied due to their repeated rituals. She mocks the men who get proud in their wives beauty and feminine quality. Moreover, to indicate how patriarchy objectifies women, she takes the help of earthenware pot. For the artist, applying *bindi* on her forehead and applying on the pot is not different. Women are not women by birth, they are free at birth but due to the repeated feminine rituals they become women. Patriarchy treats women as the object for males gaze and they behave with women like with doll. To show how women and object are equal in patriarchy, she lifts the earthenware pot at last, which was nearly covered with *bindis*, balances it with face and stares at mirror with sad look. We as viewer clearly find out that there is homogeneity on both images.

Hence, Ranjit's performance can be interpreted as an act of challenge to patriarchy. Her performance starts with her consent to traditional feminine norms when she carefully applies cosmetics on her face. Later, however, her silent actions resists Nepal's patriarchal culture by showing that traditional femininity itself is a matter of performance and that one becomes woman only by repeating the rituals of femininity. The performance was accompanied by the sounds of her sobbing. It shows that she is unhappy with the traditional role of a woman which she expected to perform. The performance shows how women experience a sense of alienation even when performing their role according to social expectation.

Commenting on her performance Archana Thapa argues :

As de Beauvoir suggested, one is not born woman but becomes one, implying that a society or the culture of a society constructs gender. Ranjit's monotonous act of putting *bindis* on her forehead symbolized the monotonous reiteration of femininity that is carried out through cultural appropriation of feminine roles. Like the decorative-earthen ware, Ranjit's body transformed into a passive medium into which cultural meanings were inscribed: her body became an instrument through which an appropriate and interpretive will determined cultural meanings. Our society is consequently structured to perpetuate patriarchal ideology and women willingly maintain an inferior position in the society. This persistence of patriarchal ideology throughout history has led both men and women to assume that men have a right to maintain women in a subordinate state. Women also internalize and adopt to this oppressed state. (31)

Hence, using her own body, as a conceptual frame, Ranjit first questions the meaning ascribed to *bindis* and the notion of the feminine body as decorative tendency of "framing and reading the signifiers of genders in terms of their fixed meanings." Moreover, her silent performance directs the audience's attention toward "undictated thoughts and undemarcated experiences of a woman" (31).

Ranjit not only uses her body to challenge patriarchy. Throughout her whole performance, she remains silent. Most of feminists raise question against our language saying that it is phallogentric and not capable enough to express women's feelings and emotions. In such context, Ranjit by remaining silent throughout her whole performance aims to convey same sense. Ranjit, like Cixous and Kristeva like other feminists, attempts to disrupt the discourse of symbolic language adopting silence as a form of resistance. Helene Cixous with the help of her term "écriture feminine" in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa* which literally

means gendered women's writing placed experience before language deconstructs the notion of patriarchal language, which is said to be opaque, bias or onesided.

As such Ranjit with the help of her body, cultural roles and act of remaining silent or sobbing not only challenges the notion of patriarchy which is prevalent in our society but also seeks women's identity by mocking the males who treat women according to their need and desire. Hence, Ranjit seems to be advocating for the freedom and independent identity of female in the society.

Ranjit celebrates sensuality and sexuality of women's body and expresses the need of equality in patriarchal society through her installation called *Rest Room* (fig. 5). In this art work the artist takes the help of sanitary pad which is considered to be one of most important means of security for women during menstruation. By installing or pasting the sanitary pads throughout the whole rest room, Ranjit further challenges the patriarchy which has considered such thing trivial. By foregrounding the pads which seem trivial in society openly the artist seeks to associate women's identity with them. "If such pads are essential for women why should we hide them?" said Ranjit.

Ranjit chooses a rest room for her installation and covers it with sanitary pads. The whole space including door and the walls are covered with such pads. However, the sign of woman, which signifies that the rest room is of female, is clearly visible. Hence what she seems to be presenting is that women's toilet should be women friendly. In our society we get toilets in public places for public use. However, they lack enough water and they are so dirty that we cannot use them comfortably. And even if they have water they are not friendly in females case. In normal situation, the females can use them but if they have been menstruated, they cannot use them easily. That is because women need to change sanitary pads during such period but no toilet in our society have such facilities. In toilets if there is water and toilet paper, it is believed that such toilets are healthy and hygienic.

But Ranjit questions do such places think about female's problems? She accuses the government and other local bodies like VDC and municipality for their partiality. She argues that being bias by patriarchal norms people construct such rest rooms and they don't care about females' problems. It is therefore, through the help of her art work *Rest Room* (fig. 5), she warns everybody to be aware of such difficulties and she compels them to manage those things on public rest rooms to change them into women friendly.

No doubt, Ranjit's installation *Rest Room* (fig. 5) urges for women friendly toilets in public places. However, this art work is not limited just on this theme. She highlights female issues through sanitary pads in symbolic way. In fact, sanitary pad is one which is needed only for women. No men need such pads for them. In this case, this pad represents the whole female race in symbolic way. Ranjit, with the help of such pads which are essential only for female, aims to raise the typicality and peculiarity in Patriarchal society. As a young artist she has the zeal of femininity and she dares to present it through different means.

Commenting her art work art critic, Arun Ranjit in an exhibition catalogue "Hair Warp" argues, "all the works of the artist are not to surprise and delight the viewers but the quality and the method are clear: they reflect her real life style as well as her obvious youth" ("Hair Warp").

Ranjit challenges patriarchy through the exposition of different images which are considered to be taboos in patriarchal society. Her presentation of germinating plants, blossoming flowers and shells resembling nude female body parts not only shocks the viewers whose perspective have been shaped by patriarchy. Rather such images encourage female to be assertive, daring and open in their typicality and peculiarity. By breaking the barriers constructed by patriarchy in terms of femininity, she asserts women's identity through different art works. In her installation *Rest Room* (fig. 5) too, Ranjit foregrounds sanitary pads which are considered to be taboos in our society. Taking menstruation as a hidden

matter and menstrual blood as taboo the people in our society hesitate to talk about them including the things related to menstruation like sanitary pads. In such context, Ranjit takes the help of these pads to prove her identity. Arun Ranjit in the same article "Hair Warp" further argues that "the work is a teaser: what is really going on? In recording her dreams and her impressions it seems she tries to press the boundaries and break all the academic rules seeking ultimate ways to express herself" ("Hair Warp").

In this way, by installing the sanitary pads in her art work *Rest Room* (fig. 5), Ranjit celebrates the sensuality and sexuality of female body to carve their identity. By resisting the patriarchal attitude found in our society, she foregrounds the images which are associated with females' identity. By breaking the barriers and redrawing the nation of patriarchy the artist speaks in the favor of equality. By taking the help of rest room and expressing the argument in favor of women-friendly rest room, Ranjit urges for equal space in each and every opportunity for females in our society.

Similarly, her next installation *Cultural Body/Cholo* (fig. 6), seeks women's identity in patriarchal society in symbolic way. In this installation, Ranjit uses her own *cholo* which represents the whole female race. Generally females in our society use *cholo*. It is our cultural cloth and whenever we see such cloth we remember our society. Females in our society use such clothes especially during rituals and cultural ceremonies. However, such cloth is used everyday by elder generation. As it is the cloth especially related to female, it represents female's experience and female's identity as well. The Ranjit celebrates women's sensuality and experience through the presentation of her own cloth, *cholo*.

In the installation, the artist hangs her own *cholo* on the canvas. While installing this *cholo* she manages it in such a way that it moves as the wind blows. As the wind blows, the *cholo* moves and it seems that the *cholo* has been worn by someone or there is life in *cholo*. As the *cholo* is the cultural body, the artist uses it to explore the cultural role of women in our

society. Manjushree Thapa, an art critic comments her art work in an exhibition catalogue “Feminine Force” as:

Ashmina Ranjit explores female identity in her art work raising questions about women’s cultural roles, social gendering physical experiences, and sexuality in her lithographs, paintings and installations. In her provocative groundbreaking work, she reclaims women’s experience and gives voice to their political, as well as to their most intimate expressions of desire, joy and fulfillment. ("Feminine Force")

Defining culture as tattoo in society, Ranjit seems to be hinting that the women’s identity in patriarchal society is false and illusionary. Women in such society move act and work everyday but they are not independent. They move with the help of their husband, father or brother who is male. In this sense, women’s identity is based on male in patriarchal society. To indicate that theme, Ranjit chooses her installation *Cultural Body* (fig. 6). In her installation the *cholo* moves in the way that it has life but if we see it minutely it does not have life within. It moves only with the help of wind and if the wind stops to blow, it stops to move. That is to say, the *cholo* moves on the basis of wind or it is dependent. In our society as well the women are made to be dependent. They are not able to move themselves as the *cholo* can not and their identity is based on male figure as the *cholo*’s identity is based on wind. So, in a sense the artist has chosen the means of allegory to present the parallel situation in between women's identity in patriarchal society and *cholo's* identity in the art work.

To be specific, with the help of her installation *Cultural Body/Cholo* (fig. 6). Ranjit reflects the socio-cultural identity of women in patriarchal society. However, at the same time, she wants to assert her identity through the presentation of her own *cholo* that symbolizes the femininity as a whole. The movement in the cloth can be interpreted from both

perspectives: first as a revolutionary movement to challenge patriarchy and second as an illusionary movement that moves per others' desire. Hence, whatever the movement be, the art work is very symbolic, meaningful and playful through the help of which Ranjit celebrates women's sexuality and sensuality in order to carve their identity thereby resisting patriarchal attitude found in our society.

Likewise, Ranjit resists patriarchy through her art work, *Status Symbol* (fig. 7) which is an installation that she has done in Siddhartha Art Gallery in 1999. In this installation she has taken the help of different ornaments and jewelleryes to which, she gives the name '*Status Symbol*' (fig.7). One of the most significant installations '*Status Symbol*' (fig. 7) by presenting different ornaments which are worn by females in one hand celebrates women's identity and on the other hand resist patriarchy. The art work carries the symbols like necklace, gloves, chips, and shoes which are very symbolic.

In patriarchal society, women are objectified with the help of ornaments. In our society women, especially the married one, are forced to wear different jewelries saying that these are the means of identity. Moreover, women are supposed to be delicate, beautiful, emotional and smiling. At the time of marriage husband provides the ornaments to his wife and the wife wears such jewelries for her husband's sake. Males by creating certain norms and values forces women wear ornaments to appear beautiful .And women in course of time begin to internalize such myth and wear such things willingly. In this sense, despite being the means of identity such ornaments are burden for modern women. So, Ranjit wants to convey the message that the ornaments are the means to tie, clutch and capture women's body and identity through her art work *Status Symbol* (fig. 7).

In *Status Symbol* (fig. 7), Ranjit installs 'necklace' which can be interpreted as the means of tying. Necklace is the one which women wear around their neck and being tied around the neck the necklace controls them. Similarly clips are used on their head to control

hair and shoes and gloves in the name of protection and beautifying women's body hide them from being exposed. Not only that women feel insecure due to such ornaments in the society and they cannot work and move freely due to such things. It is therefore, Ranjit takes them more as barrier and burden than the means of beautifying. And even if they help one to be beautiful, such beauty is designed for male's gaze. Thus, the ornaments objectified women and make them the plaything to be played by males. Commenting on women in relation to Ranjit's art, Archana Thapa argues, "As a woman, she realized that her desire to look beautiful was a cultural reality, constructed by shared cultural codes. Her existence can be understood in relation to the image of the ideal "I" which is without an autonomous identity" (28).

No doubt, Ranjit takes ornaments as the barrier in women's life and treats them as the means that help to vanish women's identity. In other sense the symbols in this installation can also be interpreted as the means of resistance which can be used to resist patriarchy. Being fed up with patriarchal norms and values found in our society, Ranjit aims to revolt against such codes of conduct and she prefers such symbols in her installation to challenge patriarchy. One of the many symbols used in this installation are the gladiator shoes, which are also called Roman shoes and popular among women. Such gladiator shoes have legendary value in the history. It is said that during Roman period, the gladiator fights were very popular and to please the audience the live fights with wild animals used to be inacted on the stage. In such fight to be safe from such animals the fighters used to wear such shoes and from then onward such shoes are called Roman shoes or gladiator shoes. Now to give the sense of revolution or fight, Ranjit seems to be installing such shoes in her installation *Status Symbol* (fig. 7). Hence, Ranjit designs such shoes to be worn by females and to fight with cultural codes constructed by males in patriarchy. Not only the shoes, even other symbols in this installation are highly meaningful. They all look like weapons which can be used during

fights and war. Hence through the help of such symbols, Ranjit resists patriarchy saying that these are the weapons to fight against patriarchy. Moreover, the depiction of red colour in each symbol further reinforces the theme of resistance in this art work. In fact, what the artist seems to be implying is that the women should fight against patriarchal norms which are found in our society.

Apart from other themes Ranjit aims to assert women's identity through her art works. Like her other works, the '*Status Symbol*' (fig. 7) celebrates woman's identity through the presentation of woman's body. Means to say, Ranjit creates the illusionary figure of woman's body with the help of different ornaments in order to carve their identity in her art work *Status Symbol* (fig. 7). When we scan the installation minutely, It seems to be a woman figure. The clips at the top indicates head and just below that there is necklace. Among two necklace the upper one represents face and at the side of that figure there is earring. The belower necklace lies at the chest and the gloves with bangles at the side represent hand. At the bottom the shoes are installed which metonymically symbolize leg. Altogether, the art work depicts female body. Hence the artist represents woman's body to assert their identity. However the representation is very ironic. Instead of drawing natural figure of woman, Ranjit draws illusionary figure which too is not complete. She has depicted one ear ring, one hand but two legs. Hence, where does another hand and ear go? Ranjit, in this installation therefore, reflects women's status in patriarchal society. Due to the severe exploitation in patriarchal society, the women are so depressed that they are being handicapped.

Ranjit's intertextual art work, *Cultural Body/Ideal Wife Sita* (fig. 8) foregrounds the patriarchal myth associated with Sita. Sita is the ideal wife in Hindu culture and by presenting the materials related to Hindu culture and giving a note on it in the same canvas Ranjit shows how the patriarchal society constructs myths to exploit females. In the installation Ranjit puts make up box at the center and some description has been written and pasted on the wall. In

the box, the necessary materials needed for married woman in Hindu culture have been presented. The *bindi*, *Lachha*, eye-shadow and compact powder box etc. can be viewed clearly inside open box. The colour of box is red and it is very attractive.

According to Hindu myth, Sita is considered to be an ideal wife. However her ideality is measured in terms of her relation with her husband. She is devoted, Pativarta and fully dependent on her husband, Ram. And due to her self effacing nature she is considered to be ideal wife. Ranjit disagrees with such patriarchal biasness and questions that does Sita has independent existence? It is from the note that she has given in the installation it becomes clear that the artist is not happy with such myth. She argues, “Sita has not independent existence, no independent identity in all things. She sees herself as intricately bound up with Ram. Apart from him her life is meaningless” (note in canvas).

In the Hindu tradition, a woman is taught to understand herself primarily in relation to her husband. She is taught to emphasize in the development of her character what others expect of her. Hindu women are taught to cultivate an attitude that their existence is meaningless in the absence of their husband. And Sita represents all the qualities of an ideal woman thereby symbolizing wifely devotion, forbearance and chastity. In a society, mother is supposed to be the teacher who trains her daughter and daughter-in-law to be ideal. Hence, patriarchal society safely becomes successful to handle such myth from generation to generation by using females themselves. Ranjit, to question such attitude found in our society and to resist patriarchy ironically foregrounds females’ cosmetics in her artworks. Commenting her installation in an exhibition catalogue "Hair Warp", Arun Ranjit argues, “visually confusing, they brim with deliberate self-irony, the works are complex and multi sources, no soil-earth or horizon line exists in her feelings. Her images reveal insights into situation and character, and the subtle interplay in human relationships” ("Hair Warp").

Ranjit is a multidimensional artist who does not depict images only in realistic sense. She satires patriarchy through ironic representation of images or symbols in the society. The juxtaposition of make-up box with the text of comment on Hindu society in relation to ideal wife, Sita reinforces the theme of irony. Hence, what becomes clear is that the artist's presentation of cosmetics within make up box is not for encouragement. Rather she satires patriarchy and awares females not to be pleased on such trivial things. She through this installation conveys the message that women are objectified in the names of cosmetics and ornaments in patriarchal society

Ranjit's another installation, *Uplift* (fig. 9) celebrates women's sensuality and sexuality and presents the need of unity among women in the society in order to resist patriarchy. In the installation, she presents the materials especially the vests which she had collected from several women who had participated in a workshop that the artist had done in Japan in 2002. In her workshop, more than hundred women participants had been participated who were of seven to seventy years old. From them she had collected several materials like toys, vests and others. At the end of workshop, she presented an art show, where she had presented this installation *Uplift* (fig. 9) as well. In this installation, she managed the vests in such a way that it on the one hand shows the importance of unity in between females of different age, castes and colours and on the other hand, it asserts women's identity through the exposition of women's secret body part.

First and foremost the installation is the collection of different colourful vests which do not have equal size. The multiplicity in size not only shows the multiplicity of females qualities but also reinforces that how the women of multiple race, caste and class have to be united in the society. As Gilbert and Gubar argue that there is not "anxiety of influence" among women and there should be collaboration and co-operation among them to develop their career Ranjit too gives the sense of collaboration and co-operation among women

through this installation. Until and unless the women in the society are united to be one it's difficult to resist patriarchal norms and values that are rooted deeply in our society. It is therefore, there is the need of collaboration among them. Ranjit in her art work *Uplift* (fig. 9) depicts light at the center which reinforces that if the women are united in the society they can receive the light of knowledge and wisdom and due to this light of knowledge they can be independent and free in the society. The dark background of the installation showing light on vests indicates the ignorance in the society among women in the absence of their unity. It shows how they become enlightened if they are united.

Apart from the presentation of need of unity among women in society Ranjit's *Uplift* (fig. 9) celebrates women's sexuality and sensuality in order to carve their identity thereby exposing female's secret body part of the center. In this art work, the artist manages the vests in such a way that it looks triangle shape. The triangle is the shape of women's genital which is considered to be hidden part in patriarchal society. Ranjit instead of following patriarchal norms to hide such body parts resists patriarchy by foregrounding them at the center of the art work openly. Women have different experiences and different body parts which the males may not understand. In such situation, the women should not hesitate to expose them. By exposing their typicality and peculiarity only they can celebrate their sensuality and be proud of their identity. The red like object at the side and the triangle shaped vests' arrangement symbolize the females' genital through which the artist aims to assert their identity in patriarchal society.

### III. Conclusion

In this way, giving space to the images related to females' body parts which are considered to be taboos in patriarchal society and highlighting females' roles in her art works, Ranjit celebrates the sensuality and sexuality of females' body to carve their identity by resisting the patriarchal attitude found in our society. Depicting the images like blossoming flower, germinating plant and shell resembling with females' genital and playing with females' clothes, menstrual blood and cosmetic in her arts works she asserts females' identity thereby challenging patriarchal norms found in our society.

In, our like, patriarchal society women are objectified and treated partially. Most of the organs that belong to females are considered to be taboos and they are not permitted to talk about them openly. In such context, Ranjit aims to break the convention by exposing those organs to the public openly. Viewing that sexuality is not sex rather it is being she depicts the power of females' body and sensual and sexual joy of women's experience through the exposition of females' body parts. The depiction of blossoming flower in her painting *Women and Sensuality* (fig. 2) is the best example of such depiction.

In patriarchal society, women are assigned certain roles which encourage women to be naive, shy, delicate and beautiful. Due to the internalization of such patriarchal norms women enjoy practicing such roles. Ranjit does not agree with such norms and she shows her dissatisfaction with them through her art works. For instance, she deconstructs the accepted and established notion of femininity through her solo performance, *Search Inter-Definite : No Results Were Found* (fig. 4). Her act of putting *bindi* on her forehead and on the earthenware pot repeatedly at the same time and her act of sobbing during the time of applying *bindis*, signifies that the artist represents women as object who are not happy in their roles in patriarchal society.

Similarly, depiction of menstrual blood to assert women's identity can be found in her art works. As our society treats menstrual period as taboo and treats women as untouchable during menstruation, Ranjit subverts such attitude through the depiction of menstrual blood in her different art works. With the help of *Hair Warp* (fig. 1) and *Womb Room* (fig. 3), Ranjit associates menstrual blood with the source of creation. For her, menstruation is the natural phenomenon without which creation can never be possible.

Finally, Ranjit's art works are highly sensitive and symbolic. She has been successful to assert women's identity, to celebrate their sensuality and sexuality and to challenge patriarchal norms which are found in our society. In this regard her art works are not the mere expression of feelings and emotions rather contain certain messages which are capable enough to alert the patriarchal attitude found in society.

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## APPENDIX



**Plate. 1 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Hair Warp* (2000) Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu.**



**Plate. 2 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Women and Sensuality* (1998) Kathmandu Art Gallery,  
Kathmandu.**



**Plate. 3 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Womb Room* (2002) Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu.**



**Plate. 4 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Search Inter-Definite: No Results Were Found* (2008)**

**Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu.**



**Plate. 5 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Rest Room* (2010) Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kat.....u.**



**Plate. 6 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Cultural Body/Cholo* (1999) Siddhartha Art Gallery,  
Kathmandu.**



**Plate. 7 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Status Symbol* (2002) Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu.**



**Plate. 8 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Cultural Body/Ideal Wife Sita* (1999) Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu.**



**Plate 9 : Ashmina Ranjit, *Uplift* (2002) ACAC, Japan.**