

Tribhuvan University

Subversion of Conventional Gender Roles in Nayan Raj Pandey's *Ular*

A thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U. in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Sharmila Chhantyal

Roll No.: 37

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-538-26-2009

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

April 2018

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Sharmila Chhantyal has completed her thesis entitled “Subversion of Conventional Gender Roles in Nayan Raj Pandey’s *Ular*” under my supervision. She carried out her thesis from September 2017 to April 2018. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

Mahesh Paudyal

(Supervisor)

Date:.....

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Subversion of Conventional Gender Roles in Nayan Raj Pandey’s *Ular*”, submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Sharmila Chhantyal has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head
Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to express my profound gratitude to my respected supervisor Mr. Mahesh Poudyal, lecturer of Central Department of English, whose scholarly guidance and insightful comments made me complete my research work. It would have been impossible to complete this research without his valuable instructions and his generous support.

I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to Mr. Pradeep Raj Giri, Lecturer of Central Department of English for helping me during the proposal writing. I am equally grateful to Prof. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, Head of the Department for his inspiration in my academic achievement. Also, I am thankful to all the respected teachers of Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for their advices and encouragements during the completion of this research project.

I am deeply indebted to my parents whose blessing and inspiration made me achieve this success in my life. Similarly, I express my sincere gratitude to all the members of the research committee of the Department of English for allowing me to do research on the area of my interest. At last, my sincere gratitude and acknowledgement goes to all those who genuinely advised directly or indirectly during my research work.

April 2018

Sharmila Chhantyal

Subversion of Conventional Gender Roles in Nayan Raj Pandey's *Ular*

Abstract

This research paper analyzes the subversion of conventional gender roles in Nayan Raj Pandey's Ular. Pandey precisely criticizes the conventional notion in the Nepalese contemporary society about the gender roles. In the male dominated society like Nepal, males are characterized as the bread feeder and the pillar of the society whereas the females are to give birth to babies and take care about the domestic activities. They are limited in the bed "service" and the housework "service". The novella portrays the leading characters from the members of the lower class society. Beside these facts, the author of the novella is success to portray the miserable picture of the Nepalese women in relation with the gender discrimination clearly. Dropadi is a leading female character in this particular novella. She works as a prostitute in a brothel. Being a female, she is supposed to get married and live a conjugal life by following the stereotyped trifle activities but she is revolting in her own way. She is the one who denied and changed the traditional gender roles that are preserved for the women of the society. The main significance of the study is to reveal the real meaning of gender by being particularly in the subject matters of gender studies. In order to analyze the text, the concept of gender from the perspective of Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam are used as the theoretical tool in the research. The traditional gender role in the Nepalese society is problematic; it is based upon the frequent practice. The patriarchy makes such roles to be called as superior.

Key Words- subversion, gender, gender roles, gender studies, gender stereotypes, identity, discourse, performance, masculinity/femininity ideology, construction, patriarchy, traditional/conventional

The research entitled “Subversion of Conventional Gender Roles in Nayan Raj Pandey’s *Ular*” basically deals with the issue of gender that is responsible behind the suffering of the women particularly in the Nepalese male dominated society. Pandey’s novella advocates the independency considering patriarchal realm. Women can be independent if they change themselves as the bread feeder of the family. She can be a bold character as represented in *Ular* if she allows her own will to rule her life. In the society, women are only supposed to be limited on the domestic boundary created by the patriarchal society; they are supposed to be the toy of patriarchal hands.

Apparently, women should be always submissive and they should not revolt against the norms and values created by the males of the society. A kind of negative stereotype is created for the women. A girl is taught to be a woman and her feminine destiny is imposed on her by the society. The patriarchal society only seeks for the vested interest by using women’s emotions, feelings and their sacrificial nature. On this notion, we can say that this novella is critically analyzed from the perspective of gender studies.

In the novella, subversion of conventional gender roles is visibly presented when the leading female character Dropadi breaks her conventional role as the society defines or makes her to follow. Moreover, the research work deals with the issue of the subversion of conventional gender roles by picturing the concept of new-women. It challenges the previous gender roles and also predicts the upcoming changes that are going to happen in the society. Dropadi as the leading female character alone challenges the patriarchal norms and values and advocates on behalf of every other female. The constructed patriarchal society often portrays the women as weak, inferior and dependent but Dropadi being a prostitute by profession denies following the traditional concept and revolt for her freedom. The presentation of the female

characters as strong as their male counterparts proves that female cannot be represented as submissive and obedient in their whole life; they cannot be bound on the four walls as in the past.

The novella criticizes all the conventional boundaries made by the society that treat the women to be submissive in their whole life. Basically, it proves the traditional role of gender to be unjustified as the gender and the performance is often misinterpreted. The othering tendency has always portrayed female as weak and subordinated kind. Moreover, from the gender studies perspective, the main objective of the research paper is to dismantle the structured gender concept.

Nayan Raj Pandey's *Ular* is a popular Nepali novella first published in 1996. As Pandey has spent most of his childhood and youth years in the Terai, his literary works are mostly focused on the social, cultural, political and economic issues of that region. The present novella is also inspired from the streets of Nepalgunj. The leading character of the novella is Dropadi. She is the wheel for conveying the subversion of conventional gender roles. Contemporary Nepalese society assumes prostitution as a low profession; it is seen as an easy way to earn money by selling own beauty and body. Here in this novella, although Dropadi is prostitute by profession, she doesn't feel embarrassed or any kind of guilt. She supports her family; she is the bread feeder. As like Dropadi, there are other female prostitutes who exchange their body pleasure for money. Author has named these characters with so-called low profession as the name of religious Goddess. The names of the characters who are the prostitutes are Dropadi, Sita, Kunti, Ahilya and many others. These are the name of the Hindu Goddess and are the mythical allusions from the Hindu religious book. Similarly, on the other hand, the place where they sell their body is named as Vagwan-Talawa. The place is real but the name given to the place is fictitious. A kind of irony is created

among the readers and is forced to think further. Moreover, the story is open ended.

Numerous critics have examined *Ular* from various perspectives. Maximum critics have studied the present novella from the subaltern perspective as it portrays the clear picture of the marginalized community. However, a gender study is not found to be done in an appropriate way.

The critique Komal Prasad Phuyal writes about the book *Ular*. He highlights on the fact that how a character represented in the novella goes through the layers of the society.

The pursuit for happiness encounters many puzzling circumstances through which to observe the functioning of society, whereby enriching his life with experience of divergent dimensions of human nature at three levels: local, regional, and national. He passes through all the layers of society like an eddy in the maze of politics in democratic Nepal of the 1990s. (1)

Furthermore, Phuyal compares the text with the perspective of subaltern. The novella has portrayed its character from the marginalized community.

Ular (1998) presents a Tonga man, Prem Lalawa, as a typical Nepali subaltern subject, whose journey unfolds the happenings in the novella. The defeat of his patron in election begins his quest for rightful position. He suffers from ignorance and goes on to accept things as they happen, whereby presenting himself a weak subject controlled by circumstances and outer forces that result in a state of flux in him. The unrest of mind directly corresponds to the socio-political atmosphere of the liberal politics of the 1990s in Nepal. (1)

Apart from Prem Lalawa, most of the other characters like Dropadi, Kaluwa, Sita, Kunti, and many others also represent marginalized community. Similarly, Bimala Pradhan has shown the misrepresentation of the characters in her thesis. She argues

that the representation of the subaltern in *Ular* by Nayan Raj Pandey is ventriloquizing and a flat misrepresentation.

Pandey in *Ular*, at least has not any sense of the poetic justice which is the reflection of his dominant ruling class' ideology and pretends supporting their liberty, equality and democracy. Pandey himself becomes Rajendraraj, Shantiraja and Shilababu who makes the characters licking the sole of the elite class' shoes but never create even a single situation to raise the voice against the injustice and suppression over them. He just has made them to work for elites and offer the flesh and blood. "They do not hesitate to contribute their ribs for the ladders to them. But shame on them they climb the same ladders" (Social Imbalance 2) and turn their ears deaf to the problems of the same people. Or in return? Only pain and woes. It is the hesitation of the writer to break the tradition to reward the people for their contribution. Prem Lalawas are indebted while making contributions and in return are bearing sufferings, bullets, pain and anxiety. (7)

Likewise, some other critics in the Kantipur newspaper have said that the author Nayan Raj Pandey in his novella *Ular* has successfully placed the psychology and exact politics of the then society by portraying the clear picture of simple tanga-wala Prem Lalawa from Nepalgunj city. A simple lower class person from Terai has justified the condition of the politics of the then Nepalese society.

The language used in the novella is transparent and reality based. The character in the novella shows the social behavior as it is and they are straight forward. Pandey seems very capable to show the lower agony and the story is very optimistic and futuristic at the same time which is really a rare condition in Nepalese fiction writing trend. Moreover, Pandey also succeed to establish the critical approach

which requires ethnicity, a particular event and the context. In totality, *Ular* replicates the contemporary social and political failure of Nepalese society and encourages the readers to become bold and courageous.

The novella seems successful to illustrate the real lifestyle and the language used by the different caste of people from Terai belts. The novella is the representative of the local people from Terai. Our society has created several discourses that the writer who belongs to the hilly region is mostly biased upon the issues of Terai. The same issue is discussed in the show named 'Open Door' series by Dharmendra Jha. In this context, *Ular* has crafted upon the issue of political culture and its consequence. According to Manju Shree Thapa, *Ular* is not a regional fiction rather it is a representation of whole Nepalese politics. Though the story represented in the novella is of Terai belts, it covers the sentiment of the people from whole Nepal. The political situation of our country is exactly same like presented in the novella.

Nevertheless, Prem Lalawa's bold decision at the end of the story in the novella and thinking to settle down with Dropadi is really a revolutionary step in the Nepalese contemporary society. Not all the people but some of the people only dare to think so. Dr. Murari Prasad Regmi who is a psychological critique has also analyzed the text from the psychological perspective. He mentions that the novella is succeed to show the state of fear, pity and obstacles faced by Prem Lalawa. It is the representation of some marginalized groups who are far from the mainstream of the society. Regmi further mentions that there are numerous stories which portray the lifestyle and the language of the people from hilly regions but it is the authors' charismatic ability to present the 'Madhesi' in the story of Terai belt. In fact, Pandey has shown his magical skill by portraying the usual and common happenings which

occurs frequently in our home, neighborhood (society) and the country in a simple form.

Novelist Pandey is succeed to represent the excellent intentions of the protagonist in the novella. Writer has evoked the people of Baadi community to raise their voice and change their life like Kafka raised his voice upon the public of Czech Republic and as James Joyce referred his voice upon Ireland's Dubliner. Pandey is also as successful as James Joyce- writer of "Ulysses".

(My Translation 2)

Dr. Murari Prasad Regmi is fully confident about the fact that the author of the novella and the novella itself is capable of raising the voice like Kafka and James Joyce through the writing.

Similarly, Bindu Sharma in the sociological criticism of novella mentions that the novelist seems very observatory and conscious about the current time, ethnicity, geography and the social happenings. The mental state of the characters of the novella and the novelist himself are alert about the contemporary time and the society. Moreover, Sharma assumes that if we go precisely through the lines of the novella then a single character like Prem Lalawa alone can also teach the lesson to the society to be alert and conscious about the situations around us.

In this regard, it becomes clear that though the text has been analyzed through various perspectives by various critics, the theory of gender studies has not been applied, so there lies a strong need to carry out the research on this novella from a gender perspective. Therefore, this research paper attempts to explore how the gender studies is an appropriate way to challenge the traditional and stereotypical gender role of the society; especially in Nepalese contemporary society. The novella tries to break the hierarchy between the male and female.

The term gender studies was coined by the British critic Cora Kaplan by joining two different words 'gender' and 'studies' in her discussion of the film *Warrior Marks* (1997). Kaplan has enlarged the idea of gender study postulated by Judith Butler on her remarkable book *Gender Troubles*. Gender study is not a new area of research; it has been always there in the research field in the world. Our Nepalese society is a bit different from the western society. We are still guided by the patriarchal norms and values and our beliefs are deeply rooted on the traditional base. Therefore, Gender study is still a fresh area to be researched.

Moreover, gender study is an approach to the literary criticism and literary based premise that considers a product of gender roles, representation and performances of different gendered characters rather than as an isolated work of art or the text. Basically, it is the central categories of analysis in the field of interdisciplinary study devoted to gender identity and the gendered representation. It has come in the arena as it is the opposition to the stereotypical representation of the gender on the grand narrativization of the text. It basically connects the text with its pragmatic approach. Gender study was first used by the phalo-centric twentieth century professional critics as ignoring the greater gender and representational consequences of literary texts. They mostly used to focus on the text wearing patriarchal spectacle and analyze accordingly. In this sense, gender studies reading are more often skeptical, suspicious, demystifying and critical in comparison to the study of one sided analysis of the text. Gender studies includes women's studies, men's studies and queer studies moreover concerning about women, feminism, gender and politics.

Gender study is basically concerned about the questions of the gender roles and their performances. Gender study is constructed on the ground of the stereotypical

and conventional belief constructed by our traditional society. The voice of females, basically who are marginalized, oppressed and back warded from the mainstream culture gets primary focus in the gender studies. The traditional/conservative gender consciousness creates discrimination between male and female, and separates social and family role on the basis of sex. Most of the time, gender study is confused with the study of sexuality. Gender studies mostly try to raise the question about the conservative gender roles that are made by the patriarchy (ruling people). Alex Comfort explains:-

The 'gender role' which an individual adopts – 'manly' or 'womanly' – according to the standards of his culture, is oddly enough almost wholly learned, and little if at all built in; in fact, the gender role learned by the age of two years is for most individuals almost irreversible even if it runs counter to the physical sex of the subject. (42)

The people in power create their own criteria as like the traditional patriarchy has created. The gender role is based upon the traditional patriarchy. And the gender study is the way to challenge the so called traditional roles which are created by the patriarchy or the people who are in power.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Body That Matters* challenge the assumptions about the distinction between sex and gender which are culturally constructed. She emphasizes the role of the repetition in performativity. "Sex" is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. In the book *Gender Trouble* she addresses, "the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (10). Sex and gender are different from each other. Sex is

biological whereas gender is culturally formed. Judith Halberstam on the other hand illustrates how representation of dominant masculinities is reliant on minority masculinities in reference with Bond's masculinity in the book *An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men*. She does not approach male's masculinity; rather she approaches it as a fabrication that is no different from the one that men embody. Halberstam also develops the idea as like Judith Butler.

Moreover, gender study is theoretical approach to literary text that attempts to refigure the relationship between gender and the gender roles. In *Edging Women Out*, Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin trace out the idea that "male writing was said to display 'ideas capable of having an impact upon the minds', while women's novels were associated with ordinary feelings and the trivia of everyday life" (78). This idea also contributes to prove the fact that the things related to the women are taken as the trifle activity whereas the men's idea impacts upon the readers mind. The whole thing comes under the gender studies. The text should be analyzed from the gender perspective. Gender study does not differentiate between the literary text and non-literary text. Women feel just as men feel. Their gender does not bias upon their feelings. Gender studies dig out the gender roles without supporting the conventional notion created by the patriarchy.

Ular is a novella which presents its leading female character Dropadi fearless, strong and competitive. Basically, the novella is all about the free willed girl who in fact has broken the traditional role of the society. Working as a prostitute; she wishes to live a respected life in the same society where she works in a so called lower profession. She dares to challenge the patriarchal norms and values created by the society and revolt for her freedom. She is the bread feeder of her family. Her father, mother and her daughter are dependent upon her income. Time and again, she also

helps Prem Lalawa by lending him some money. Her name was Sita before she used to call by the name Dropadi; once she knew that her mother's name was also Sita and surprisingly her daughter's name is also Sita. Continuity in the same name of the same family for the three generation is obviously a thing to be noted. Her mother also used to work as a prostitute when she was young and healthy.

Dropadi's father is planning to make her grand-daughter a prostitute too. It shows his male dominance and supremacy. He is enjoying his masculine supremacy where women are compelled to follow. However, fathers are supposed to earn for the family but here in this novella, Dropadi's father is trying to escape from his responsibility. He searches for the costumers for her daughter and he used to do the same thing for his wife in the past. He denies to work and wants an easy way to earn money. He has some kind of inferiority complex. His behavior and his work show the lack of self-worth. He is uncertain about himself and has low self-esteem. Our Nepalese male dominated society believes that the male are supposed to do a grand subject matter whereas female do the little things and think the innocent things. Male are supposed to earn for the family whereas female do the house-hold works. But here in this novella, Dropadi as being female does what male is supposed to do. She represents both masculine and feminine character. She dares to challenge every other males of the society. Moreover, by observing Dropadi and her father, the novella breaks traditional concept of the real manhood. Dropadi's father is doing trifle works which are supposed to be done by the females. These all activities directly challenge the traditional concept of manhood and womanhood in the society and show the conversion of the gender role in the novella.

An American philosopher, feminist and gender theorist Judith Butler is best known for her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990)

and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). She challenges conventional notions of gender and develops her theory of gender performativity. Moreover, “Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible” (180). ‘Gender’ and ‘sex’ are socially and culturally constructed where ‘gender’ is performativity (nature that we acted out) and ‘sex’ is the matter of natural/biological fact. She also argues that “Although the claim of universal patriarchy no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once did, the notion of a generally shared conception of “women,” the corollary to that framework, has been much more difficult to displace” (7). These are the evidences that make us clear about the fact that there are some practical consequences that are followed naturally.

She furthermore states that the biological difference between the men and women is socially constructed; these are the acts that have been stereotyped with the repetitive usage.

The controversy over the meaning of construction appears to founder on the conventional philosophical polarity between free will and determinism. As a consequence, one might reasonably suspect that some common linguistic restriction on thought both forms and limits the terms of the debate. Within those terms, “the body” appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. (12)

Masculinity and femininity are not inherent; they are also constructed. She further discuss that, “power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between and subject and an Other; indeed, power

appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender” (xxviii). In our society, masculinity and femininity are kept in a frame as like male and female. Masculinity is for male whereas femininity is for female. The patriarchy has divided the gender into two parts and it’s like a universal truth. The very notion of “patriarchy’ has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts” (46). In fact, nobody is gender from the start. It is our performance (we act out) that determines. Novella presents Dropadi as a strong female character; she hides her pain and prepares herself as bold character. She is not weak and submissive rather she has a masculine attitude.

Dropadi comes to leave Prem Lalawa in her rooms’ door. She cares him like her own husband.

Dropadi: Go home safely.... Listen! You look a little bit weak nowadays, so take care of yourself. Buy some energy giving medicine.

(Prem Lalawa feels like he has someone there to care for him and being emotional he kisses Dropadi).

Prem Lalawa: Dropadi please smile forever ok? But Dropadi didn’t share about her pain with Prem Lalawa although she can’t sleep whole night due to her back pain. She cries whole night. (My Translation 39)

She is always prepared to show her boldness in the society. She has the concept that if she shares her weakness, the patriarchal society will characterize her in the list of the women who are emotional and sensitive. She does not want to be sympathized. In the same way, Butler also argues that “genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (174). Sex is already there to be differentiated naturally as there is a biological difference

between male and female but having a perception about the gender difference is different than the sex. “Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (179). Gender is casually formed by observing someone’s performance and organized with frequent practice. So, gender is most probably built upon our assumption. It is just an identity that is given to the male and female depending upon someone’s nature. Gender is different than sex; it is not natural factor like sex. That is why, every group of male and female should not be judged being on equal basis.

Dropadi reveals the hidden fact about how performance functions in the society as well as among the individuals. Though hiding the personal emotion and pain is a small act, it contributes the self by raising the confidence level within. These small act also helps to dig out the fact that the gender and the gender roles in the society are constructed by the people who are in power. Butler argues that, “when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (10). The idea is that nobody is gender from the start. And nobody can determine the quality of masculinity and femininity without knowing someone’s ability of doing something. Similarly, gender cannot be represented in the basis of sex. “Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; “the internal” is a surface signification and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody” (179). However, our society creates its own regime of the roles which functions through its distinctive values and beliefs. A newly born baby is the best example for the gender roles constructed by the society. They are supposed to act like the gender constructed by the society and more likely to be categorized them based on

their biological sex. A baby boy and a baby girl are differentiated with the dolls they are given to play. A baby boy is given an airplane and dozer whereas a baby girl is given soft and beautiful toys like Barbie doll. Similarly, a baby boy is assumed to be a player or a doctor or an engineer but a baby girl is not.

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions— and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (178)

The society pressurizes us to follow the regimes that are created for us. The performances are divided on the basis of gender differences. This novella shows how the society makes certain roles to be performed by particular gender and at the same time it presents the subversion of such conventional roles. Our Nepalese society also characterizes the male and female according to their gender. In the novella, the male wants to dominate the female but in reality females are more powerful than the males. Females are free to determine their willing. They are not ashamed of being prostitute and nevertheless they contribute more than the males of their house.

‘Basanti’ (Prem Lalawa’s horse who died while doing her job for the political purpose) is also a female. Though ‘Basanti’ is an animal, she is also the one who works for Prem Lalawa. She is the bread feeder of Prem Lalawa. She helped Prem Lalawa throughout her life. Judith butler in *Gender Trouble* connects the idea of Luce Irigaray (French feminist) too.

In Irigaray’s view, the substantive grammar of gender, which assumes men and women as well as their attributes of masculine and feminine, is an example of a binary that effectively masks the univocal and hegemonic discourse of the

masculine, phallogocentrism, silencing the feminine as a site of subversive multiplicity. (25)

The unequal distribution of masculinity and femininity to men and women respectively also generates the idea that men are superior to the women. Dropadi has the self-respect for her and she respects her costumer too. She is equal for every costumer. But she always scolds Ashahi Bishnu Prasad (police) for having sex with her without paying money. “Bishnu Prasad comes and undresses himself and has sex like a dog. Dropadi washes her vagina with Dettol after being intimate” (My Translation 61). Moreover, she doesn't let other people including police to know her as inferior. Nevertheless, she is fine to have free sex with those police as they can protect her other costumers.

Similarly, another theorist Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* argues that women are always defined in relation to men; they are not the part of themselves but they are relative to the men. Patriarchy (man) has stereotyped the women as they are secondary part in the same society. Beauvoir has explained that women are referred as the other and inferior then men in the society. Society teaches women to fulfill men's desire. Women's role in the society is to attract the male with their beauty and their body (more like the objectification of women's body). Besides that, women who do not follow the domestic norms, they are looked down upon in the society. Women are mostly characterized to do the bed and housework service. Here, in this novella, we find each female character (especially prostitute); they exchange money with their body and beauty. And never the less they are looked down. But this fact doesn't bother the females of the novella. Dropadi is optimistic about her life. She wants to settle her life with Prem Lalawa. Prostitution for her is an easy way to earn money, not a shameful job. Once Prem Lalawa randomly asked her about her

profession, “Prem Lalawa: Dropadi why do you work as a prostitute (dirty job)?

Dropadi: Why do you ride a cart? (Counter question)” (My Translation 41) Nothing is wrong and every profession is equal in the eye of Dropadi. She respects the money she earns and always tends to be a highly respectful person. She only takes money with the customer after fulfilling their desire. Once Dropadi went to Prem Lalawa’s home and there in his home, he was trying to give her twenty/thirty rupees but she denied to accept the money. She insists him to give money to her in the work place after having sex.

In the novella, Dropadi seeks for her self-identity. She does not follow the conventional role. Moreover, she challenges the patriarchal norms and value of the contemporary time alone. She defers herself to other conventional women of the time. She is different than Vouji. Though she works in the so-called lower profession than the Vouji, she is bold and courageous to take her decision. She is not afraid of her father as like Vouji who is afraid of her husband Kaluwa. If we see precisely upon the two female characters: Vouji and Dropadi by wearing the patriarchal spectacles, Vouji works far better than Dropadi. Vouji doesn’t sell her body with money; she chops grasses. Vouji represents the traditionally guided female whereas Dropadi is carefree; opposite than the women who are deeply rooted on the traditional norms and values. Dropadi celebrates her existence; she celebrates her body and her profession. She is bold and at the same time courageous than other women and men of the society to take her own decision.

Here, in the story, Dropadi has a daughter of unknown father, and she poses no guilt whereas she no more cares about the detail of her daughter’s father. She falls in multiple sex in the same day. By her carefree nature, she sheds light on the violent oppression of different forms against the female due to male dominated patriarchal

culture and the society rooted on gender discrimination. Dropadi attempts to create her extra presence in the society. She delights her own will and experiences what she wants.

In the Western society, women have been blamed for lacking intelligence therefore they remained sidelined as inferior whereas men are always preferred to be superior. Same thing is also dominated in our Nepalese society. The structure of our society and those of western society is built upon the patriarchal foundation. Furthermore, in Christianity, Bible doesn't allow women for their independent existence outside the society; they believe that women were created out of the ribs of the men. It is also believed that the fall of human beings from the Eden garden is also caused by the carelessness of the women. According to the biblical story of 'Adam' and 'Eve', female are supposed to be the source of misery. 'Eve' not obeying the God's word, we fell in the problems of the world. Some association and belief upon those religious and mythological stories, our society also followed the path of patriarchy. Certain situations in the novella also suggest the influence of that religion. Though some women in the novella are independent, they are under their husband's shadow. They are guided by the mythical description of the religious belief. Vouji should have been bold to stay strong in her decision to lend some money to Prem Lalawa but she can't. The leading female character Dropadi is not influenced by the traditional and religious beliefs. She is totally different than other characters. She makes her own move.

Dropadi feels like she would give all her money if she had when Prem Lalawa needed money to go to Kathmandu. Prem Lalawa is literally in pain after his horse- 'Basanti' died while riding cart for the political purpose. Dropadi feels like his pain is also her own pain. Dropadi herself is in pain nowadays. Her money is all wasted in

mothers' medical fair and she is unable to show her ill daughter to the doctor as she is having financial problem. Her father is of no use. He is there to waste her all money. She is planning to shift to Dang as it is the fruitful place for the prostitute to earn money. Though she has not enough money with her, she gives her gold (top:- ear jewelry). And she further more ask for bangle, necklace, sindur (traditional color for married women in Hindu religion). She is optimistic about her future with Prem Lalawa. Being a prostitute and hoping for the future is a bold and courageous decision in the Nepalese society as it is really hard to survive like a prestigious person in the same society for the prostitutes.

Prem Lalawa: I will take you one day.

Dropadi: You will take me; a prostitute? (Doesn't believes Prem Lalawa)

Prem Lalawa: Surely, you are my queen; my Shreedevi.

But Dropadi still doesn't believe Prem Lalawa. She knows that a prostitute is for a pleasure material but not a marriage material. Nevertheless, she starts dreaming about her and Prem Lalawa's future of being together and marrying each other. (My translation 38)

Dropadi always remember and cares about Prem Lalawa. She is worried about him time and again. Dropadi feels happy to share her pain with Prem Lalawa. She shares about her degrading business, her own life and about her feelings about her love. She cares more about him than herself. Apart from these facts, Dropadi is well-known about her position and identity in the society. She is alert about what the patriarchal society assumes about the so-called low profession; prostitution. Always hoping for settling with Prem Lalawa and asking him for bangles and sindur is just opposite activity of what the patriarchy has always bound for the women; especially prostitutes. She is a revolutionary character in the novella and the contemporary

Nepalese society too.

The author of the novella Nayan Raj Pandey has intentionally given the name like Sita, Kunti, Ahilya and Dropadi to the prostitutes. These are the names of the most powerful Goddess in the Hindu religious books. Pandey wants to give some weight on their names where they do the weightless performance by their low profession as most of the people assume. Likewise, the place where they sell their body is named as Vagwan-Talawa (Vagwan means “God” in Nepali). A kind of satirical notion on the readers of the novella is presented intentionally.

Dropadi’s name was Sita when she was born; Dropadi was given to her by her costumer after she started her profession as a prostitute. Sita is an allusion from a Hindu religious book *Ramayana* where Sita stands for virginity. Similarly, Dropadi is also an allusion from *Mahabharata* where she is the wife of Panch Pandavas (five husbands). Sita in *Ular* remains Sita until she started to replace her mother’s profession. After begin to work as a prostitute, Dropadi has to bear thousands of Pandavas as her costumers. Here, we can analyze as a reader that Sita has become Dropadi in course of time according to her profession. In *Mahabharata*, Dropadi had a compulsion to marry Pach Pandavas but in the novella *Ular*, it is Dropadi’s willingness to be a prostitute. Although it was a kind of compulsion for Dropadi too to continue her mother’s profession in the early days, she was free to live her life after knowing everything. But she chose to be prostitute and have a respectful life at a same time. Dropadi’s name is Sita, her mother’s name was also Sita and her daughter’s name is also Sita. The name Sita, perhaps, is the name that is being long inherited and continues to be so.

Apart from that, in the myth, though the Goddesses are presented as strong as their male counterparts, they are presented as the lower ones. Their names are only

prestigious but their performance does not show their strong nature. The goddesses also had to suffer from the supremacy of the males. In the religious mythology of *Mahabharata*, once, Pach Pandavas lose Dropadi in the gambling (the dice game). Dropadi feels helpless. The jubilant Kauravas insults the Pach Pandavas in their helpless state and even tries to disrobe Dropadi in front of entire people of the hall. At last, Dropadi was saved by Krishna who miraculously creates the lengths of the cloth to replace the ones being removed. Similarly, in the story of *Ramayana* also, after meeting Sita who was kidnap by Rawan, her husband Ram asks her to undergo an Agni Pariksha (test of fire) to prove her chastity, as Ram wanted to get rid of the rumours about her purity. When Sita plunges into the sacrificial fire, the lord of fire raises Sita, unharmed and prove her innocence to the society. The idea of male supremacy was there in the myth too. Though Dropadi in *Mahabharata* was bold enough to take her decision, she was helpless in front of entire people. And the one who helped her from her disrespectful situation was none other than Ram (male). In *Ramayana* also the situation is similar to the case of *Mahabharata*. Sita had to prove her virginity to her husband and the entire society. The same society did not ask Ram to prove his virginity.

The characters here in the novella are taken from those Hindu mythologies, but they are not in the same context and situation. Here, Dropadi and Sita challenge the society. Dropadi in the novella is not virgin rather she works as a prostitute. Though their names are similar to the names of the myths, their performance is different. There is the subversion in their names and their performances.

Mostly, women are too submissive. They follow the norms and values created by the patriarchal society. They are under their husband's shadow. But in this novella, the female characters especially Dropadi is not bound by the patriarchal norms and

values. She does not live behind the four walls created by the males. Most of the females in the novella are independent. They earn money for the family too. They are stronger than other male counterparts; they are the bread feeder of their family. Nevertheless, they have also got their self-respect and they seek for it too. They seek for their freedom in the society. They are not submissive as they used to be on past. They are prostitute (whore) in their workplace only. They fight for their self-respect outside the society; tend to have their dignity. It takes bold as well as courageous heart and decision to be a prostitute and do not feel shame at the same time.

Likewise, Judith Halberstam in her book *Female Masculinity* takes a reference from 'James Bond'. Halberstam herself also seeks for her identity in the society. Female masculinity is always ignored in the society as the traditional society assumes women to be weak and inferior. However, masculinity is not solely embedded in or a product of the male body. The gender performance by James Bond in the movie is the criteria especially for the males of the society. Bond performs the masculinity which is totally a fabrication. "When you take his toy away, Bond has very little propping up his performance of masculinity. Without the slick suit, the half-smile, the cigarette light that transforms into a laser gun, our James is a hero without the action or the adventure" (4). The main character 'James Bond' who is admired by most of the viewer only becomes bold when he is decorated by that outfit like slick suit and the laser gun. We can grab the idea that the powerful person like James Bond is also a normal man without those outfits. If the woman is replaced in his part, nothing changes. The women in the society can also perform as men and challenge them in every area. The patriarchy or the people in power has always discriminated the women of the society. The movie has created the concept that men are more powerful than the women although they are same like women. Our male dominated society also

prefers the same boldness in the male.

Here, in the novella, most of the males are dependent upon the females. Prem Lalawa once cried with Dropadi when he has no enough money to go to Kathmandu. But Dropadi is the one to persuade and help him. Dropadi has more masculine quality rather than the so called feminine quality. Though she is in pain, she does not show them in the outer society. Halberstam argues that, “discussion on masculinity for women in such a way that masculine girls and women do not have to wear their masculinity as a stigma but can infuse it with a sense of pride and indeed power” (xi). Dropadi by hiding her pain to the outer society and presenting her boldness, she can feel a sense of pride. Our traditional role has bounded us with so many fears that crossing those traditional boundaries also, female can feel the freedom. Addressing the issue, Halberstam comments:

Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of the wealth. Masculinity seems to extend outward into patriarchy and inward into the family; masculinity represents the power of inheritance, the consequences of the traffic in women, and the promise of school privilege. (2)

She advocates for the masculinity. She argues that our society is a male-centered society. Patriarchy is a social system that elevates the status of gender. And the gender is always confused with sex. Masculinity and femininity are not biologically different as sex. Apart from that, female masculinity is totally ignored by the society.

Masculinity in our society is tied with the maleness and the people in power. They are the dominant factor for the women of the society. Our conservative society always assumes women to be weak and inferior to men and they are supposed to be

dependent upon the males of the society. She further argues, “modern masculinity is most easily recognized as female masculinity, consider the James Bond action movie, male masculinity very often appears as only a shadow of a more powerful and convincing alternative masculinity” (3). The novella is totally opposite than what the society characterize them to be. Moreover, the tags that are attached to the females of the Nepalese society are totally misplaced. Dropadi is not weak rather she is bold and strong enough to take care of her family. On the other hand, Dropadi’s father is totally dependent upon Dropadi. Prem Lalawa is also not bold enough to be put under the criteria where males are kept by the patriarchy. Dropadi’s father and Prem Lalawa do not meet the masculinity ideology of the society. Likewise, James Bond action movie also portray some social reality of the society. The name- James Bond itself also has some weight upon it. James Bond is James Bond when he has the power with him otherwise he is a normal man. His masculinity works when he has the power. He is an example for the society to be followed by the males. Society forces the men to be strong and courageous like James Bond. The division of masculinity and femininity is to men and women respectively.

Nayan Raj Pandey by creating Dropadi as a strong leading character in his novella is in fact presenting the subversion of traditional gender roles. Dropadi and other female characters in the novella are fighting for the women empowerment against the treatment by the culturally and ideologically superior men. The idea of gender is only a term created and assumed by the authoritative males of the society. Therefore, the term gender is cultural only and can be reversed. The individual themselves define the way they are presented in the society; gender is as not like the traditional society has preserved for the men and women. Women are free to express themselves and are bold and courageous.

Particularly, talking about this novella *Ular*, it shows the subversion of gender roles. The characters from the novella perform different roles which are not related with the traditional gender construction. They break the conventional boundary of gender roles. As Judith Butler argues about gender which is culturally constructed, the characters in the novella also perform the different roles which are not related to the traditional understanding. They perform different gender roles. Gender is rather performativity; no other identity exists behind its formation.

Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex. Critical Theory since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College 1992.
- Butler, Judith. *Body That Matters*. Roughledge, 1993. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routhledge, 1990. Print.
- Comfort, Alex (1963), *Sex in Society* . Duckworth.
- Glover, David and Cora Kaplan. *Genders: The New Critical Idioms*. Routledge, 2000.
- Halberstam, Judith. *An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men*. Duke University Press, 1998.
- Kantipur Koseli 14 Ashad 2071. Print.
- Nepal, Ratnamadi. "Nepalese Literature's Market and its Representational Context." Madhupark Ashad 2067. Print.
- Pandey, Nayanraj. *Ular*. Fine Prints, 1998.
- Parasar, Narendra. "NayanrajPandey's *Ular*: Introductory Comments." *Naya Patrika* 10 Apr 2012. Print.
- Phuyal, Komal Prasad. "An Eddy in the Maze: Subaltern Subject in Pandey's *Ular*." *Studies* 63 (2012): 66.
- Pradhan, Bimala. "*Ular* as a Text on Subaltern." Print.
- Regmi, Murari Prasad. "Psychological Analysis of *Ular*." *Naya Patrika Dainik*. Print.
- Regmi, Murari Prasad. "*Ular*'s Psychological Analysis." *Bhrikutitramasik* 2068. Print.
- Sharma, Bindu. "*Ular*'s Society Based Criticism." Print.
- Tuchman, Gaye and Nina E. Fortin (1989), *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change*. Yale University Press.