

## Chapter I:

### **Women in Maithili Dramas: *Tutul Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]*, *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]*, *Domkachh*, and *Sakhi***

This dissertation focuses on the dramas [*Broken End of a Thread*] (1973A.D.) and *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* (1979 A.D.) written by Mahendra Malangia and *Domkachh* (2014 A.D.) and *Sakhi* (2018 A.D.) written by Ramesh Ranjan Jha. In particular, it explores the dramatization of women's identity in the selected dramas by Malangia and Jha. These selected dramas of Malangia depict the scenario of the Maithil<sup>1</sup> societies of the Panchayat period. However, Jha's dramas portray the Maithil society of contemporary times. While exploring the socio-cultural identity of women characters in Maithili<sup>2</sup> drama, this dissertation draws the idea from Butler's concept of performative gender identity. According to her, the identity keeps on shifting as there befalls a transition in the indicators of identities established by the patriarchal society. She argues that there is a need to question such patriarchal tendencies set by the society regarding gender roles that fix the gender stereotypes that command women to behave in a feminine way and men to behave in masculine ways and subjects them to prejudice and even violence if gone against these set norms. She suggests that the only way that we can change society is by deconstructing the concepts of gender. Butler expresses that identity is not something that can be fixed but it keeps on changing according to the liberal change in politics. This dissertation studies the portrayal of women characters' and the gender identity in the

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<sup>1</sup> Maithil: The term "Mathil" refers to geographical territory for the people residing in the Mithila region. This geographical region constitutes of Province 2 and Province 1 in Nepal and Bihar and some parts of Jharkhand state in India. It also refers to the culture, society and literature of this region.

<sup>2</sup> Maithili: It is one of the main languages spoken by people in Mithila.

selected dramas of Malangia and Jha during the various transitions of Nepal specifically in Maithil society.

This dissertation also uses the concept of Raymond Williams who addresses major issues of a shift in culture resulting in the change in social, economic, and political situations. He suggests the following five key points to study the change in the general pattern of human culture. He describes:

Five words are the key points from which this map can be drawn. They are industry, democracy, class, art, and culture. The importance of these words, in our modern structure of meanings, is obvious. The change in their use, at this critical period, bear witness to a general change in our characteristic way of thinking about our common life: about our social, political and economic institutions; about the purposes which these institutions are designed to embody; and about the relations to these institutions and purposes of our activities in learning education and arts. (Williams, xi)

This paper takes Williams's idea of change in a society invites the pattern of changes in the formation of a new society which provides an individual with the opportunity to transform themselves according to the shift in the culture. This paper uses the concept from Williams's democracy and the effect of political democracy about the change in social structure and social feelings in Maithili drama and analyzes the selected drama in the changing socio-cultural and politico-cultural setting of Maithil society.

The depiction of women characters in the four dramas of Malangia and Jha (two each) are slightly different as Malangia and Jha represent the first and second-generation of Maithil dramatists respectively. The socio-cultural setting of the Maithil society depicted in the dramas of Malangia and Jha is definitely different. Malangia

depicts society during the 1970s in his Maithili drama. Jha portrays the contemporary version of the society as he belongs to the list of dramatists after the Maoist Insurgency Period in Nepal when the popular culture had begun to be political. Beerendra Pandey states that this shift can be observed in the contemporary writer's work. He points out:

Literature is now seen as politically interested, that is, representing values that are moral, local, and historical, to particular groups and interests. The political has started to displace the aesthetic, requiring a reconfiguring of the criticism of South Asian Literature along the lines of new-look formalist methodology which is increasingly alive to the text's cultural-political enmeshing: a co-existence of the aesthetic and the historical, which offers a synthesis between the ideological and literary views of literature. (10)

In Malangia's play *Tatal Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]* there is an internal conflict between husband and wife. The inner conflict occurs inside the house and ends as per the husband's wish inside the four walls of the house. This traditional drama of Malangia denies agency to the women and the decision-making power remains to the male of the house. The woman character who is unnamed is not given much space and dialogue in the play. The language that Malangia assigns to the male character is derogatory and discriminatory towards the woman character throughout the play. Similarly, in the second drama, *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* portrays a woman as an agent of patriarchy who is responsible for breaking the house. She is framed as the main cause of rivalry between the two brothers and the father. The woman character *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] is depicted as the typical vamp of any daily soap opera. This woman is given agency and decision-making power but she is not a 'good woman' but the 'evil one' because she does not

consult with the male of the house for decision making. Unlike this wicked character, 'good woman' is the wife of the younger brother who is shy and says yes to everything her husband decides for their family. The 'good woman' is rewarded and the 'bad woman' is punished at the end of the drama. Similar to the patriarchal norms of the 1990s which didn't allow women more space and rights even in the Maithil society.

However, the scenario of the post-1990s had changed as there was a shift in political structure and the rise of popular culture and social media which depicted the rebellious characters as seen in the-then Maithil society breaking the traditional norms. Jha's drama *Domkachh*<sup>3</sup> breaks away from the traditional folk drama of Domra<sup>4</sup> and Domin<sup>5</sup>. He has established a few male characters as Vaidhya, Domra, King, Police, and Guard which is not allowed in the folk drama because women enact as the male characters too. There is rare participation of males in the folk drama but Jha gives more space to the women's performance where they express themselves and introduce male performers in the drama. Unlike Malangia's selected drama, the two selected dramas of Jha Jha not just break away from the traditional performance but also provides the women characters with a voice of their own. One can find a slight shift in the dramas of Malangia and Jha regarding the characterization of women characters.

The reason behind the difference between Jha and Malangia's drama can be the timeline in which the dramatists have written the drama. Malangia wrote these

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<sup>3</sup>*Domkachh* means a folk drama performed by women of groom's family at the wedding night when every man is out at the groom's procession. It is similar to *Ratyauli*, performed by women in Pahadi community.

<sup>4</sup> Domra is a male character of the drama who represents the man belonging to the dalit community called Dom.

<sup>5</sup> Domin is a female character of the drama who represents the woman belonging to the Dom community.

dramas during the post-1970s and the setting and characters of his dramas depict the scenario of a conservative society of that time. Jha published this drama in 2014 A.D., a time when Maithil society has already witnessed the Madhesh movement, Maoist Insurgency, Citizen's Movement for Democracy and Peace (CMDP), abolishment of the monarchy, and other movements in Nepal. Due to this, the issue of the marginalized people like the identity of woman and dalit, has been pertinent in Maithil society. Jha portrays Domra and Domin, who belong to *dalit* and so-called untouchable community who unlike the traditional drama are completely aware of their rights.

Jha presents the change in the people of Maithil in society during the climax scene of *Domkachh* where the gatekeeper tells Domra that the king has right upon everything in his state even to his wife. Instead of backing off, Domra argues that the king has no right to the life of poor people. Domin also saves Domra from the police while they run from the palace through some bribe. This consciousness level of Domra and Domin is high because they are not the characters who represent the people of older times where major political events like Citizens Movements for Peace and Democracy (CMPD), Madhesh Movements and abolishment of monarchy had not taken place. But Domra is a character who is resisting the monarchy in the drama and is ready to fight with the social system that labels him as a subject of domination being a *dalit*. Moreover, Domin is depicted as a character who is not going to remain silent about the discrimination inflicted upon her but questions the double standards of society for questioning her chastity rather than questioning the king's behavior who abducted her. She blames society for being hypocritical when no one comes to help her during the problems but now is questioning the characters of Domra and Domin. Distinct from the characters of Malangia in *Tatal Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a*

*Thread*], *Birju Biltu aa Babu* [*Birju Biltu and Father*], Jha in *Domkachh* and *Sakhi* gives his character specially women characters *Domin*, *Pavitri*, *Shobha*, and *Gita* with more space and a voice who don't subjugate to the patriarchal norms like the unnamed women characters. Similarly, Jha's second drama *Sakhi* depicts women characters of the time of the Maoist Insurgency period. Usually, in the traditional drama, the women characters are portrayed as helpless beings who cannot defend themselves and need a male to rescue them. However, compared to the women characters in Malangia's drama, women characters get more space and a voice of their own. One of the central woman character, *Pavitri* of *Sakhi* is depicted emotionally and mentally stronger than her husband *Sagun* and is not simply portrayed as strong but villainous characters like 'Woman' in *Tutal Taagak Ekta Ore* [*Broken End of a Thread*] *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] in *Birju Biltu aa Babu* [*Birju Biltu and Father*]. Likewise, *Sagun* husband of *Pavitri* is depicted as emotionally weak which is against the established gender role for males in a patriarchal society. Jha does not seem to hesitate to portray the emotional vulnerability of *Sagun* in his drama by breaking from the traditional gender roles depicted in Malangiya's selected dramas. In comparison to Malangia, there seems to be a subtle shift regarding gender roles in Jha's drama as Malangia does not show the men in these two dramas as much emotional but characters who try to maintain the toxic masculinity in order to prove themselves stronger in front of the women characters in these dramas.

The women's characters presented in Jha and Malangia's dramas are different in terms of their portrayal. Malangia's *Tutal Tagak Ekta Ore* shows an unnamed character of a woman who leaves her husband and child after being framed for a theft at a family function. She remarries another man but returns back for her child. The dramatist shows the woman who is regretting her decision of leaving her husband and

child because she does not fit into the frame of a 'good woman'. The dramatist warns the women who are rebellious and independent through this character that they would draw a similar fate as this woman. By showing the regret in the woman who is denied individual identity, the drama tries to instill a fear of being doomed to suffer like this woman if they want to become an independent woman. Likewise, in *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* the woman character who is called *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] is presented as a determined person who makes her own decision. She talks freely with her father-in-law and husband which was not allowed for the woman in the traditional Maithil society. But she is depicted as an evil who tries to create hurdles in the reunion of a family and controls her husband. And as a result, she is punished and the last decision made by the father of the family is not in her favor. The social context of the 90s was patriarchal in the Panchayat system that denied any sort of agency to women. Both of the dramas of Malangia portray a woman character who belongs nowhere outside the home if she breaks the patriarchal norms. The male character of the drama becomes a mouthpiece of the patriarchal society that does not allow the female character back inside the home (so-called safer space for women) because she made her own decision.

However, Jha in contrast to Malangia's drama gives some sort of voice to the female characters in his dramas. His dramas *Domkachh* and *Sakhi* are set in two different political backgrounds. *Domkachh*, the re-adaptation of folk drama is set in the period during monarchy written by Jha in 2014 A.D. but it picturizes the rebellious characters like Domra and Domin. Whereas, *Sakhi* is set in the background of the Maoist insurgency period of Nepal. In comparison to Malangia, Jha's drama to some extent gives voice to the women characters but the decision-makers are still the men of the society because the social context has not changed much for women. He

tries to blur the social hierarchies and gender construct to some extent as he belongs to the younger generation of dramatists. In most of his dramas, he uses satire and irony as a tool to question the Brahmanical Patriarchy and autocracy of males existing in the Mathil society.

Through critical analysis of the dramatic elements, the dissertation aims at analyzing the changes and continuity of approaches taken to address women's identity in the Maithil society. Moreover, the study intends at establishing the role of dramatization in defining the role of women in Maithil society. This study makes significant contributions, mainly in three areas of concern. First, the dissertation focuses on the elements of feminist theatre and the shift in Maithili dramas. Second, it makes a significant theoretical connection between the portrayal of women characters and their role in the Maithil society as they are depicted in the selected dramas. Lastly, it reflects the shift of the women characters and gender roles as per the changes in Maithil society during the political and social transformation.

Moreover, this dissertation will be based on library research, authentic internet websites, critics available in books and magazines, interviews with experts and practitioners, and interactions with scholars. This dissertation is limited to textual analysis of the selected dramas of Malangia and Jha and does not analyze the performance of these dramas. It depends on the text and script of the dramatists for the study due to the time limitation of the dissertation and the lack of documentation of the performance of Malangia's dramas. Roshan Janakpuri explains that Malangia is the pioneer of the Maithili Drama especially street and proscenium theatre. He describes that "The *Mithila Natya Kala Parishad* (MINAP) one of the first theatres in Nepal was established in Janakpur in 1979 by Malangia"<sup>6</sup>. This political timeline as

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<sup>6</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020. All personal interviews are my translations.



described by Prashant Jha in his book *Battles of new republic: A contemporary history of Nepal*, was the time when Birendra Shah had taken over the throne after the death of Mahendra Shah. He adds that in the time of 1979-1980 students “protests force the king to call a referendum on the nature of polity. The party-less framework defeat the multi-party system amidst suspicions of electoral fund” (xiv). The students’ unions were becoming more active and questioning the autocracy. This would later lead to the 1990s Maoist Insurgency Period to change the Panchayat System into a multiparty democracy. During this period, Malangia’s dramas were depicting the futility of human relationships, especially the relationship between man and woman. As the traditional playwright, the themes of his dramas were portraying the complication of human relations and as usual, women were pictured as models of patriarchy. Jha analyzed that the character of women in Malangia’s dramas was more not much with their own voice. He adds “The women were portrayed into two categories; one was the good woman who was shy, subservient and ‘yes woman’ and they were rewarded, the other was a bad woman who questioned the patriarchal norms and spoke her mind but was punished for that”<sup>7</sup>. Similar to the political scenario of that time, most men were part of the political protests and decision-making. The majority of women were still denied such power to express themselves freely and participate in public spaces as equally as men.

Janakpuri points out that, unlike Malangia, Jha came later to MINAP around 1985 a few years before the first Maoist insurgency period as an actor. According to Janakpuri “Jha started writing drama in 1994 A.D. after the first People’s Movement. The dramas written by Jha depicted the contemporary scenario in the subject matter. They dealt with modern techniques of drama and experimented with the traditional of

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<sup>7</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

Mathili dramas”. Praphull Kumar Singh Maun in his book *Nepal Ko Maithili Sahitya Ko Itihas* claims that the subject matter and characters depicted in Malangia’s drama were experimental because he was not simply reproducing the same themes popular in mythical-religious and folk dramas popular during that time. He did not show any mythical characters like gods, goddesses, monsters, or any other characters from Hindu religious texts. But they were common people closer to the real society like farmers, laborers, and so on. He states “Malangia is the experimental dramatist but all his experiments in his dramas cannot be acknowledged. Because he used to classify his characters as 1, 2 and 3, similar to the numbering in the game of football or cricket” (Maun123)<sup>8</sup>. The characters of Malangia’s drama were mostly nameless people who were not closer to the Maithil society. Not assigning any name to the characters is denying identity to those individuals. Furthermore, Janakpuri asserts that Jha is a progressive playwright of contemporary Maithili dramas. He analyzes “Jha is successful in satirizing the trend of man’s arbitrariness and Brahmanical culture of dominating people on the basis of their caste and gender. He exposes the discrimination based on caste and class based on the feudal and autocratic authorities”<sup>9</sup>. In both the dramas *Domkachh* and *Sakhi* there is a constant fight for identity and space against the discrimination and domination existing in Maithil society existing within the dramas.

Jha’s *Domkachh* is an adapted version of folk drama in which Malangia discerns the introduction of the drama “...drama is, first, poetry and, second, it is the most pleasurable” (6). The Maithil characters depicted in these Maithili dramas are not simply the creation of the dramatist’s imagination but they represent the political

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<sup>8</sup> All the quotations used from Maun’s *Nepal Ko Maithili Saahitya Ko Itihash* are my translations.

<sup>9</sup> Personal interview. 20. Dec. 2020.

scenario of the existing society as well. The characters of Malangia *Tatal Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Threat]* and *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* show the social situation of the then-restricted society which restricted space for women in the Maithil society.

As a dramatist, Jha does not limit his dramas to be aesthetically loaded but he also links the character's actions to the political context they are living in. He portrays a Domra who belongs to a so-called untouchable class with the agency to fight against the autocratic king which was uncommon. When Domra returns from abroad, he finds his wife missing. He comes to know that the king has abducted his wife and has kept her at his palace. Domra runs to save his wife and fights with the police. He does not surrender before the autocratic king. He is able to speak against the domination of society over him. Domin has to surrender to the King who abducts her but when Domra comes back to get her from the King, she denies it in the beginning and blames Domra for her tyranny. Along with the political changes in Maithil society, there is a subtle shift in the characterization in dramas starting from Malangia to Jha. The contribution of Malangia in establishing the theatre culture in Maithili society is remarkable. On the other hand, Jha continued to introduce socio-cultural issues like caste-based discrimination and domination of marginal people existing in Maithil society in his dramas depicting the shift in the people of Mithila.

Likewise, Maithil society still practices the Brahmanical patriarchal norms and is conservative. Mostly, the women are still economically dependent on the male members of their family until now. The ideal woman is someone who is a 'good' daughter, mother, and daughter-in-law. The definition of 'good' is limited to the women who are accepting everything patriarchy imposes on them without any question. According to Coralynn Davis, "Maithil women are generally economic

dependents in their families – first as daughters, then as wives and mothers, and often as widows” (56). She asserts that although the situation of women in other communities of Nepal is similar the condition of Maithil women is severely dominated under the veil of preserving Brahmanical patriarchal culture and declaring them the sole legacy of women.

Juliette Rousselot in her article entitled “Nepal’s Maithil women break traditional Gender Roles” opines that the role of most Maithil women is limited within the four walls of the houses. They are made to follow the imposed gender roles by the male of Maithil society. Davis states:

[T]raditionally and for the most part still today, Maithil women do not hold [nor can they pass down] significant property, nor retain control over their own incomes if they have incomes. Their labour is in service to their husbands’ families [...] women’s sexuality is closely controlled, first as unmarried virgins and then [upon marriage by senior kin] as wives who must reproduce for their husband’s lineage. In order to ensure such control, women’s movements, communications, and bodily exposure are tightly regulated. (Rousselot, 1)

Rousselot argues this controlled life of women has become a culture and prevented women to step outside the patriarchal domination. She states that it is not like the change is not happening but radical changes are required for the women of Maithil society to gain independence and be their own decision-makers. Davis explains “Access to education and employment is greatest for those from better families. Things have changed least for the lowest castes. Still very few families educate their girls beyond secondary school” (57). The situation for some women belonging to the so-called higher caste families is changing slowly. The

discrimination they have to face is comparatively less than the women who belong to a so-called lower caste and economically marginal families. Maithil society follows the hierarchy based on caste until now. Similar to any other community of Nepali society, most of the people of this society are orthodox and conservative when it comes to the issues of castes. The person belonging to the lower caste are the ones who face lots of discrimination but especially women of those communities are more prone to domination and discrimination. The discrimination based on gender becomes more severe when it comes to the boundary of caste. However, the fraction of discrimination against women in Maithil society might differ but overall the domination of women still exists regardless of the fact to which social background a woman belongs to. Dollie Sah states “What I have seen in my family, and in all other families [in the Maithil community], how you raise your son is different to how you raise your daughter [...] It does not matter if your father is a doctor or an engineer: it’s just different” (Rousselot, 1).

Maithil society is yet to be changed radically in terms of disseminating power to people of a different gender than males. The day is yet to come when masculine dominance will be abolished and women get more space and power to gain independence from the rigid patriarchal construct. However, the fact cannot be denied that there is a slight change for women and people from the rest of the gender because of the political movements. The immediate impact of the radical transition in political scenarios has made people aware of the existing differences and domination of the patriarchal society, which is based on caste and class. Sah elucidates “Since 2006 [the end of Nepal civil war], a lot of things have changed; people have been more aware [of these issues], but what has been holding progress back is the caste system and poverty: people not having choice” (Rousselot, 1). Tough people have started to

become aware of the social issues that are pulling back society from getting rid of the evil social traditions. Radical change is necessary in order to change the hierarchical domination based on caste, class and, gender existing in Maithil society.

Coralynn V. Davis in her article “Strategic Deployments of Sisterhood and Questions of Solidarity at a Women’s Development Project in Janakpur, Nepal” describes how the gender system in Maithil society is hegemonic. She states:

...the hegemonic Maithil gender system a system characterized by norms and practices promoting the paramount value of patriline. The core of the Maithil kinship structure, common to much of the region... is patrilineage, with alliances formed through patrilocal marriages endogamous to caste and exogamous to village. (60)

Davis explains that such kinship systems provided men with sole power in terms of gender classifying the rest of the genders as the subject of domination. She points out that especially males from higher caste and class enjoy all the privileges in Maithil societal structure. They are placed at the top of hierarchical kinship systems. She clarifies:

In Mithila, high-caste male are privileged over others by the formal and informal means that are structured through patriarchal and patrilineal relations and values, as well as through gendered and caste-based discourses of pollution. In essence, Maithil women marry into their husbands’ household, which are, ideally, multigenerational units consisting (minimally) of parents, their unmarried children, their married sons, and the wives and children of those sons. Property is held by men in lineage. Women are dependent on men: first on fathers, their husbands, and finally on grown sons. (60)

The situation of Mathil women is similar to this explained scenario of Maithil society by Davis. When it comes to Maithili literature the portrayal of women is not much different either. The Maithil women depicted in the selected dramas in this dissertation are women dominated by patriarchal culture.

## Chapter II:

### Political Changes, Dramatists, and Characters in *Total Taagak*

*Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread], Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father], Domkachh, and Sakhi*

Nepal has passed through different radical political transitions since the people's movement led by Nepali Congress in alliance with the communist party in 1990. This movement forced the king to dismantle the long-existing Panchayat system, which was curtailing the right of democracy to the Nepali citizens. Michael Hutt and Pratyush Onta in *Political Change and Public Culture in Post-1990 Nepal* describe political changes in Nepal as radical transitions:

The political changes that occurred between 1990 and 2013 include the establishment of multiparty parliamentary system, the ten years Maoist insurgency from 1996-2006 and the stymieing of a 2005 'royal coup' by a popular movement of democracy in the spring of 2006. They also include two rebellions in Madhesh/Tarai, Nepal's southern plains, in 2007 and 2008, two elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA) in 2008 and 2013, as well as the abolition of monarchy in 2008. (2)

Hutt and Onta argue that these 'radical political transitions' also contributed to socio-cultural changes including the rise in literacy rate and radical growth of the print, online, and broadcast media. According to them, these changes introduced a 'new era' of the public culture in Nepal. They explain:

The political space previously occupied by the monarch and associated elites in Nepal was filled with a new cast of characters during this period of change. Naturally, these included party political leaders and activists of many different hues, but the retreat of ancestral elites also provided the backdrop for the



emergence of a new class of citizens that was educated and political, but not necessarily politicized in party terms. (4)

Hutt and Onta elucidate that the newer inclusion of these agents from different backgrounds provided spaces for different versions of political discussion on democracy, polity, and much more. This introduced the Nepali print, online, and broadcast media, and the civil society organizations as the ‘important intermediators’ to change the traditional meaning of political and social changes. They challenged and questioned the traditional roles of family and caste as institutions. Furthermore, they describe the effect of these changes on the public culture:

Since the late 1990s, Nepali understandings of the transitions at the public level have been primarily mediated by the content of the Nepali language media, but films, songs, music videos, dramas, rumours, popular literature, poetry and most recently social media, have also played their part [...] The competition to influence the people with one’s own opinions and interpretations of what was going on gave birth to a new breed of specialist communicators, in the form of journalists, columnists, politicians, human right activists, activists affiliated to various social and cultural movements, film and theatre directors and public-relation experts. (5)

According to Hutt and Onta, these radical changes in the new popular culture were largely omitted by the Western scholarly work on Nepali society because of the less demand for engaging the political economy of scholarship outside Nepal. The reason explained by both of these scholars is the failure of the leaders during the time of conflict for representing the non-monarchical state. They describe “The historically important role that rumor has played in a society where people outside the political or aristocratic elite do not expect to be told the truth has been sorely neglected” (5). They

argue that this lack of attention for the Nepali public discourse is the main cause of the shock among the foreign observers, which they expressed at the time of the emergence of the Maoist insurgency and the CA elections.

Hutt and Onta quote Appadurai and Breckenridge to describe the idea of ‘public discourse’:

to refer a set of arenas ... that have emerged in a variety of historical conditions’ including those outside of Europe ‘that articulate the space between domestic life and projects of the nation-state where different social groups (classes, ethnic groups, genders) constitute their identities by their experience of mass-mediated forms in relation to the practices of daily life’ ... ‘public’ ceases to have any necessary or predetermined relationship to formal politics, rational communicative action, print capitalism, or the dynamics of the emergence of the bourgeoisie and becomes quite appropriate for the usage in the context describes above. (Qtd. in Hutt and Onta, 5-6)

Public culture as per this definition means a public space for discussions and debate and a suitable domain to understand the various interpretations of socio-cultural change.

The format of public culture changed drastically after the emergence of *Loktantrik Natak* (Theatre for Democracy) during the Citizen’s Movement in Nepal. Monica Mottin in “Protest Space and Creativity: Theatre as a Site for the Affective Construction of Democracy in Nepal”, explains how theatres in Nepal contributed to uproot the monarchy and autocracy in Nepal through *Loktantrik Natak* (Theatre for Democracy)<sup>10</sup> and *Kachahari Natak* (Forum Theatre)<sup>11</sup> all over the country. The shift

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<sup>10</sup> *Loktantrik Natak* (Theatre for Democracy) means the political street dramas performed during the Citizen’s Movement in Nepal.

in the awareness level of people brought by the Citizen's Movement depicted the effects of the political movement on the life of people. The socio-cultural environment was changing along with the shift in the political scenario:

...there is more in performing arts than interpretation and representation, in particular in the specific form that *loktantrik natak* took during the Citizen's Movement for Democracy and Peace (CMDP) in Nepal. The artists' experience shows that a performance is not only an 'ideological transaction; (Kershaw 1992) but also and indeed an affective one. The emotions conjured up Aarohan's dramatic performances in the streets, as well as the other artistic forms... helped co-create an affective space for the Citizen's Movement to develop and sustained the protests' struggle, as many studies on the role of emotions in social movements (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 2011). (170-171)

As described in this essay, theatres of Kathmandu like the Aarohan Theatre<sup>12</sup> and Sarwanam Theatre<sup>13</sup> travelled all over the country to engage people in conversation and realize the notion of democracy for common people through their street plays. According to Jha, the *Mithila Naatya Kala Parishad* (MINAP) in Janakpur, which was the center of theatrical activities in Madhesh was also actively performing street plays all over Madhesh to aware people of the importance of democracy during the Citizen's Movement. He describes "The subject matter of the street plays was extremely different from the traditional subject matter of the plays

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<sup>11</sup> *Kachahari Natak* (Forum Theatre) is the name given by Nepali artists to *Theatre of Oppressed* (1979) introduced by Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal (1931-2009).

<sup>12</sup> The theatre established in 1982 A.D. in Biratnagar by Sunil Pokharel to create Nepali theatre movement *Aarohan* means 'ascent' or 'mounting'.

<sup>13</sup> The theatre established in 1982 A.D. in Kathmandu by Ashesh Malla to counter the political suppression during Panchayat period.

during the Panchayat period”. The traditional Maithili street dramas described the glorification of the King and the existing patriarchal culture prevailing in the Maithil society. He mentioned that the themes of the plays changed into rebellion against the autocracy and monarchy, which were written during the Maoist Insurgency period.

Mottin argues that the form of *Loktantrik Natak* changed the concept of people regarding the existing political system and challenged the notion of monarchy during the CMDP. She explains:

...the aesthetics of *loktantrik natak* challenges hermeneutic and semiotic aesthetics. The theatrical performance becomes a ‘site’ intended as ‘an active and always incomplete incarnation of events, an actualization of times and spaces that uses the fluctuating conditions to assemble itself’ [...] in this case the imagination and feeling of a new democratic order – could emerge. (171)

Mottin concludes that the theatrical performances during the CMDP were not merely for entertainment because they provided the ground for the social movements and networks. Theatre, a popular form of art, transformed into a political theatre to represent the political demand of that time. She states that the theatrical performance during CMDP “... test and undermine the limits of dominant discourses of power, and challenge human understanding by crossing the boundaries of different categories. Political struggle becomes a struggle of representation. Political theater exposed the gaps, the invisible mechanisms that ‘do’ power” (190).

Meanwhile, the subject matter of Maithili dramas was also influenced by the socio-political changes taking place all over the country. Malangia in some of his dramas slightly hints about the domination of autocratic government. As analyzed by Maun “In Malangia’s drama *Okra Aanganak Barhamasa* (1980 A.D.), one socially marginalized character mentions that neither the previous government has provided us

with *qafan* nor the present government will care for people like us. It depicts the society of that period where marginalized had no other option than lamenting on their situation” (123). This was the socio-political scenario of the Maithil society during the regime of Late King Birendra Shah, which was also the beginning of student protests in Nepal.

A similar shift in the subject matter of street plays in the theaters of Nepal along with Mithila Natya Kala Parishad (MINAP) where Jha was actively involved can be seen in his dramas too. He continuously satires upon the Brahmanical patriarchy and the domination of feudal government in dramas like ‘Sakhi’, ‘*Domkachh*’, ‘Murda’ and many more. Janakpuri in “Maithilima Vishistha Natak: Outstanding Drama in Matihili” states that “The difference between the dramas of Malangia and Jha lies in the subject matter. Malangia depicts the complexities of human emotion and the futility of life. Jha’s dramas delve deeper into the social evils and the various forms of discrimination existing in the society” (1).

Before delving into the history of gender theory and political theories, one has to look into the introduction of feminist characters in the history of British and American Drama. In the history of modern theatre, Henrik Ibsen is one of the dominant figures who contributed to Scandinavian theatre, European theatre, North American theatre and theatres in other parts of the world as well. Ibsen is known to introduce women characters in his drama who were completely opposite to conservative society that believed in stereotypical gender roles. Simon Williams blames the British and American theatre for being ignorant and indifferent to the “intellectual and scientific” advances of the nineteenth century. He believed that theatre should address the fundamental problems existing in society in order to transform society. He states “The plays of Henrik Ibsen were pivotal in the first phase

of this transformation of the theatre” (165). Ibsen became successful in introducing a new flavor for the theatre enthusiast through portraying the unconventional characters of the-then society. Whether it was Nora from *A Doll's House* or Hedda from *Hedda Gabler* such characters broke the traditional norms of stereotyped women in the conservative social structure.

Williams proclaims that Ibsen went against the popular concept of art in his time, which art was meant to be something beautiful and ideal. He explains:

While critical controversies over Ibsen in different countries varied in emphasis, most objections were consistently repeated [...] most pertinent complaint was that his plays did not elevate, but focused primarily on degrading aspects of human conduct; consequently they were dismissed as appealing solely to people with morbid interest. Certainly they confuted what was then conceived to be the fundamental purpose of art, namely to create only what is ideal and beautiful. (169)

Ibsen was blamed to glorify the “unwomanly woman” who did not follow the ideal concept of being subordinate to the male counterparts of their family. However, he gained supporters as well who loved his unconventional work. The effect of Ibsen’s play on the audiences as described by Williams “The polemics of Ibsen’s drama divided the audience and revealed rather than covered broader rifts within society as a whole. Ibsen challenged the most basic assumption of the function of theatre his work did not create a community, it divided it” (171). The dramas of Ibsen broke the conventional aim of theatre which was limited to only pleasure and introduced a radical spectrum of modern drama that helped to create debate about the conservative social and cultural norms.

Ibsen established this new dimension of theatre-going that gave liberty to the actors of not just pleasing the audience but performing human nature. The audience was not simply allowed to have a pleasant experience but it forced them to rethink the social values and constrained human behavior in the conservative society. Williams describes:

The play was no longer staged solely for entertainment, and the actors needed no longer to ingratiate themselves with audience [...] as characters became complex and revealed their personalities through non-linear medium of memory and as much of this revelation centered around symbols that were difficult to grasp, Ibsen seem to be asking for more imaginative effort from his audience than any playwright prior to him had done. (172)

Ibsen reversed the traditional stereotyped gender roles in his plays. The constraint of one gender staunchly following the conservative gender roles is broken in the plays of Ibsen. William believes:

...traditional gender roles were often reversed, a heroic quality being required of the women, while actors playing Ibsen's men had to suffer the shameful extremity of a weak soul stripped naked before an audience looking for heroism. But perhaps the most formidable challenge faced by the Ibsen actor was the questionable moral quality of his characters, which could easily alienate them from audience. The real challenge to the performer of Ibsen was therefore to make the character 'sympathetically unsympathetic' (174).

Ibsen redrew the spectrum of actor-audience relation in theatrical practice. Actors were not limited to playing an unrealistic artistic being but they were forced to depict the real human emotion disregarding the conventional gender roles. And

audiences were compelled to come out of their “comfortable” but orthodox concept of human behavior and question the fixed gender stereotypes prevailing in their society. Ibsen’s plays were rebellious for the nineteenth-century society because it reversed the gender roles and advocated for equal rights for women who were considered only subordinated to male counterparts. Finney in “*Ibsen and Feminism*”, argues Ibsen as a feminist playwright who asked for equal gender roles in society. He proclaims “The question of Ibsen’s relation to socialism is illuminated by the fact that, in the nineteenth century, socialism and feminism were familiar bedfellows. The most prominent socialist thinkers of the day, male and female, saw that true sexual equality necessitates fundamental changes in the structure of the society” (89). Though Ibsen brought the base of feminist idea of blurring the gender roles in society through theatre and performance, his ideas were only limited to the binary idea of gender; man and woman. In order to address the issues of gender roles, we need a feminist perspective of Judith Butler to incorporate the fluidity of gender and performativity.

Judith Butler’s theory of gender has influenced both society and politics. Her theory on gender, desire, power, identity, sex, and sexuality questions the notion of enforcement of heterosexuality as normal. In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she begins by questioning the definition of woman in the light of feminism. She asserts that women cannot be defined as a unified homogenous group since every individual has a separate identity. She argues that women are always subjected to political representation. She states that women are regarded as one united group because of the intersectionality of their ethnic background, race, rank, and position. Butler, therefore, concludes that feminism should not try to achieve its goal by acting as a political movement or party. She argues that the feminist movement which calls for real equality in terms of daily,



political and social life cannot accomplish its aim if it believes that women and men are extensively different and endures in classifying into separate groups.

According to Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* "...the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms" (1). She suggests that a revolutionary way of looking at gender is needed. She states "The consequence of such sharp disagreement about the meaning of gender [...] establishes the need for a radical re-thinking of categories of identity within the context of relations of radical gender asymmetry" (11). She suggests that the only way to challenge the prejudices over gender is to reimagine the notion of gender from inside and outside. The idea of natural and normal should be redefined in order to understand the intersectionality of gender by totally undermining the singular idea of women. Butler criticizes the conventional notion sex, desire and gender. The conventional theory defines the sexual desire as attraction to opposite sex. Agreeing with Simone De Beauvoir's concept of "one is not born a woman, but, rather becomes a one" (12).

Beauvoir believes that there lies a difference between sex and gender. In the light of Beauvoir, Butler argues that the conventional theory creates sexual hierarchies and confusion over sexuality and gender. She explains:

Beauvoir is clear that one "becomes" a woman, but always under cultural compulsion to become one. And clearly, compulsion does not comes from "sex" [...] There is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence sex could not qualify as a pre discursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along. (Butler, 12)

She states that when one says gender is a cultural construct one is marking anatomically differentiated bodies of individuals with some determinism where those bodies are perceived as recipients of inevitable cultural laws. The cultural laws fix and determine the gender roles in terms of the biological orientation of an individual. According to Butler, in such a case, biology becomes the determining factor, which is wrong, and such practice should be changed because gender roles cannot be limited to one's cultural context.

Furthermore, Butler argues that gender is fluid and it should not be fixed under one category. She points out that gender and sex are two different entities. Gender is the perception of an individual and their will to define their personality. Gender is something related to human behavior which is bound to be fluid. She clarifies that sex has nothing to do with gender identity:

The pre assumption of binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex, whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. 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 male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as female one. (Butler 10)

She elucidates that the idea of gender is not a core entity of our identity rather gender is a performance or achievement. She argues that as claimed by the conservative theorists there is no rigid boundary of gender roles. She appeals to us to perceive the fluidity of gender roles.

Similarly, Butler clarifies "Gender ought not be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre given sex (a juridical conception); gender

must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes are themselves established” (11). She adds that “gender is not to culture as sex is to nature” (11). Unlike sex, gender is discursive because according to cultural laws sex is defined as natural and prior to culture. Culture sets the binary format of sex and amalgamate gender within the sexual identity. However, Butler believes that there is difference between sex and gender. Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of being female or male or feminine or masculine. On the other hand, sex refers to the biological characteristics of being female or male. Butler states that men and women are subject to unequal treatment by to society on the basis of the facts of their sex.

Moreover, taking point from Foucauldian notion of body and sex as “social construct”, Butler argues that sex is not the expression of human biology but sexuality is socially constructed phenomenon. The repetitive social convention of behaviors like eating, walking, talking, dressing manners give appearance of natural basis. She calls it ‘performativity’ where women and men behave as expected by the societal fixed roles of gender. She states:

...as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are parts of what “humanizes” individual with contemporary cultures; we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender rights. Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideals to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts there would be no gender at all. (Butler, 178)

She explains that the repetitive behavior of male and female is performed because of the fear of social punishment of ignorance and abandonment. If one does not follow the set rules of gender roles by the society, they become the subject of social mockery and punishment. Therefore, she argues that people are obliged to perform the hierarchical roles established as “normal” for their respective gender. She argues if there are not acts performed by the individual there will be no gender roles at all. Gender should not be considered as something rigid but the acceptance fluidity of gender will diminish the sexual hierarchy being practiced in the society.

According to Butler, the notion of the familiar cultural theoretical assumption that gender is socially constructed should be criticized. She believes that heterosexual normativity is the cause of the gender inequality existing in the society. She elucidates “In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires creates the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (173). She argues by framing illusions of gender identity society wants to establish heterosexuality as the normal and only option in the social structure. She explains that the inner identity is an illusion and the societal and cultural rules control gender acts through repetition.

The institutionalization of framed gender roles provides us with the clue of politicization of making the heterosexuality norms compulsory. It defines heterosexuality on the differentiation of masculine and feminine terms. Butler suggests we deconstruct the framed view of gender roles that can change the political culture of normalizing practicing gender roles based on sexual identity. She criticizes the discourse of society that fixes sexuality and gender. Because she believes that the binary opposition of male and female, heterosexuality and homosexuality, normal and

abnormal, natural and unnatural, center and margin, and feminine and masculine creates the inequality prevailing in the society. Regarding the 'performativity of gender', Butler states:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as interior essence, the very interiority is an effect and function of decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiate inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject. (173)

Furthermore, she adds "If the "cause" of desire, gesture and act can be localized within the "self" of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from the view" (173-174). She explains that displacement of political gender identity into psychological principle prevents it from being analyzed a political constitution and fabricated of its sex or true identity. She claims that the if inner truth of the gender is fabricated and if the true gender identity is based on the fantasy of institutionalized and engraved according to body then it can be concluded that there is no true or false gender identity but a production of "effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (74).

Regarding the parodic representation of sexual identity in a performance, Butler questions:

What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of the gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the

place and stability of the masculine and feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized category of identity and desire. (174)

She explains that if the body is regulated according to the existing hierarchical notion of sexuality and gender the performance will be a cyclic representation of heterosexual gender binaries and roles injected by the patriarchal society. She adds “Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actor themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (179).

Butler argues that the tendency of imposing binary sets of identities through political discourses is problematic. She asserts:

As a part of epistemological inheritance of contemporary political discourse of identity, this binary opposition is a strategic move within a given set of signifying practices, one that establishes the “I” in and through this opposition and which reifies that opposition as necessity, concealing the discursive apparatus by which the binary is itself is constituted. (184)

She suggests that by understanding the identity as practice one also comes to know about the culturally intelligible practices. Such practices affect the rule-bound discourse of signifying practice. Furthermore, she argues that repetition of “injunction” of gender roles in hierarchical binary systems denies the possibilities of subversion of identity. She proclaims:

The injunction *to be* a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceeds and defy the injunction by which they are generated. Further, the very injunction given to

be a gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once. (185)

This injected gender role especially marginalizes the women and limits them in the role of motherhood and object for male counterparts. The rest of the identity of an individual is simply denied and ignored compelling them to follow the heteronormative role assigned by society.

According to Butler, the reason behind the affinity of imposing heterosexual gender roles in the discourse was the fear of changing the binary system engraved in social, political, and cultural practices. The motive of feminist politics was always to redefine the identity of gender in the dominating hierarchical society. She suggests:

...the identity categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics, that is, deemed necessary in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up. The tactic constraints that produce culturally intelligible “sex” ought to be understood as generative political structures rather than naturalized foundations. (187)

Butler explains that the category of identity should not be fixed and intelligence is not determined through established ‘natural gender identity. She argues that the idea of constituted identity is misconstrued through the line of “arbitrary and real” and the role of feminism is to subvert the notion of fixed ideas of gender roles. She adds “The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonist: “man” and

“woman”” (Butler 187). She suggests that the task of feminism is to locate the strategies of subversive repetition empowered by the political construction which upholds the repetitive practice of gender roles and intervene by participating in those repetitive practices that constitute identity and find possibilities of contesting those constituted gender identity.

Butler proclaims that such intervention of redefining possibilities of gender roles is necessary because “This theoretical inquiry has attempted to locate the political in the very signifying practices that establish, regulate, and deregulate identity” (188). She suggests establishing certain questions to prolong the notion of political like ways to dismantle the foundation that restrain the possibilities of gender identity other than the binary. And ways to subvert and solidify the conservative premise of identity politics.

Butler emphasizes the necessity to question the “naturalized” ideas of sex and body from both political and gender lenses. She believes,

From political analysis of compulsory heterosexuality, it has been necessary to question the construction of sex as binary, as hierarchical binary. From the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of “expression”. (188)

In the political discourses and performance, the binary of hierarchical notion of heterosexuality is depicted primarily as the primary category of gender representation. Gender roles are imposed in the social and cultural practices are based on these conservative ideas of masculine roles for men and feminine roles for women. Such tendency has denied an inclusive approach to gender fluidity. Butler defines:



If taken as the grounds of feminist theory or politics, these “effects” of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality are not only misdescribed as foundation, but the signifying practices that enables this metaleptic misdescription remain outside the purview of a feminist critique of gender relation. To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the “I” that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. (189)

There is no separate “ontology” for gender because the function of gender is constrained by the normative injunction of political contexts. Such injunction determines the intelligibility of sex appealing to the constraints of sexuality. Butler explains ontology of gender as such “Ontology is, thus, not a foundation, but normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground” (189). Butler explains that deconstructing the identity does not mean deconstructing the politics but it stands for establishing politics as the mode of articulation of identity. She encourages the kind of critique that helps to question “...the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated” (189).

Likewise, she elucidates that aim of such critique is to re-describe the already existing possibilities of identity categorized as impossible and unintelligible. Butler analyzes:

If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely reemerge from the ruins of old. Cultural configuration of

sex and gender might then proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might become articulable within the discourses that establishes intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binary of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness. (189-190)

The shift in changing the “naturalized” role of gender-based on political syllogism has been denying the already existing possibilities of gender. A single-gender was able to enjoy the power and dominate the rest of the gender in the cultural and social practices because of the preference of hierarchical binary to certain gender as the most intelligible one. But the redrawing of the political discourse of identity will help to redefine the power structure and dissemination of power to the rest of the genders as well.

Williams in *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, analyze closely the development of culture as the tool to study the shift in social, political, and economic life. Among the five key points industry, art, democracy, class, and culture, Williams finds culture as the ‘special kind of map’ for studying the transformation in society. He explains “The development of word *culture* is a record of number of important and continuing reactions to these changes in our social, economic and political life, and may be seen, in itself, as a special kind of map by means which the nature of the changes can be explored” (xv). He argues that culture was the core of his study but it could not be studied separately from political, social, and economic factors during a change in personal and social relationships.

However, Williams argues that the term culture has a wider movement of thought and feeling. He claims:

I wish to show the emergence of *culture* as an abstraction and absolute: an emergence which, in a very complex way, merges two general responses first,

the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second, the emphasis of these activities, as a court of human appeal, to beset over the process of practical social judgement and yet to offer itself as mitigating and rallying alternative. (xvi)

However, he explains that culture was not the sole response to both of these responses but also to new kinds of personal and social relationships during new political and social development. He clarifies that the idea of culture would have been simpler if it was only associated with the response to industrialism but it is more complex and also related to the reaction of political and social development of democracy. He elucidates that human's identity is dependent on the community and society in which one is born and thus, it cannot be separated from their historical community as well as the present community they are living in. He explains that culture depends on social and political theory. For him:

Social reform is a matter of liberation, through the kind of organization described, although the process will not be primarily conscious or planned. The importance of literature and the arts is that they offer supreme examples of such organization, and that in doing so they provide 'values' (not prescriptions or messages but examples of a necessary common process). (264)

He argues that art and literature provide us with the tool of interpreting our common experiences and the new interpretation of changing them according to the changes around us. Liberal literature and art provide people with the values through which social reformation can be formed. Likewise, Williams describes that the major hypothesis of the culture's development any art of a certain period is related to

'prevalent way of life'. Furthermore, he explains that social, moral, and aesthetic judgments are interrelated with each other. He claims:

The history of idea of culture is a record of our reactions, in thought and feeling, to the changed conditions of our common life. Our meaning of culture is a response to the events which our meanings of industry and democracy most evidently define [...] idea of culture 'is a general and major change in the conditions of our common life. Its basic element is its effort at total qualitative assessment. The change in the whole form of our common life produced, as necessary reaction, an emphasis on attention to this whole form. (338)

He explains that such changes can transform the 'habitual discipline' and 'habitual action' and contemplate our learning and thinking every time.

Jill Dolan explains that society has categorized everything else as "radical" which does not fit into the gender binary system of the society, for example, lesbian and gay and other gender identities which do not follow the rigid classification of man and woman. Taking the idea from Fuss, Dolan elucidates that our identity is fluid and it can be segregated into inside and outside clearly. She says that setting up boundaries for inside and outside is marginalizing the alternative sexual/gender identities. Identity is not something that can be framed into a single box. One has to look at gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, geography, and more intersectional dimensions which have always been either excluded or dominated by the ruling class. The rigid approach of accepting the single binary definition for one's identity and classifying them as first-class, second class, and others being is a totally anarchic and orthodox practice that should be readdressed through critical reading.

Dolan believes that this struggle of “Poststructuralism versus Identity Politics” in feminism has provoked the tendency of opposing the “feminist theory of self”. She defines:

Identity politics claims to define women’s subjectivity by their position within race, class, or sexuality that the dominant culture – and often the dominating voices in feminism – have effectively squelched. Poststructuralist practice suggests that any such coherent conceptions of identity are specious, since even race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender, are constructed within discursive fields and changeable flux of history. (87)

The subjectivity of post structuralism is not fixed but “decentered” and continuously changing of the claimed identity according to Dolan. She claims that the argument of the camps opposing feminism is based on old refrains like “The Personal Is The Political” which keeps recurring constantly in unexpected ways. Dolan describes “Feminism at this historical moment seems caught between reifying experience does dictate a certain material reality, it’s totally constructed and is not the basis of objective truth” (87).

The two camps feminist theorists; radical feminists and materialist feminists differ in the issue of identity. Dolan further writes “Radical feminists propose that female identity is coherent and whole and defined in opposition to male identity. The politics that stem from this position carved out places in gender, race, and class that are solipsistically unified and that elide the differences within and between women” (87). The female identity is romanticized on the assumption that the female self can be “mirrored” in “women-identified” theatre.

However, the materialist feminist approach does not romanticize the female identity as it is based on the poststructuralist ground. The fight for supremacy in the struggle of identity organizes and reorganizes the competing discourses:

Materialist feminist criticism uses poststructuralism to deconstruct both traditional, male-identified realism and alternative, woman-identified ritual drama and performance art for their belief in coherent, unified identities. If feminist poststructuralism is the tool of this critique, postmodernist performance style that breaks with realist narrative strategies, heralds the death of unified characters, decenters the subject, and foregrounds conventions of perception is conducive to materialist feminist analyses of representation. (88)

The radical concept of feminism believes in exactly overturning the gender role and becoming similar to the male identity. But implementing the same role as a male in the social structure is again validating and reenacting the same binary gender standards. An individual should be free to choose their identity without any set rules of hierarchical standards that privilege one and discriminate against others. The imitation of the roles of privileged gender would be a continuation of the biased tradition of marginalizing the existence of socially and culturally dominated groups and silencing their voice.

The aim of feminist postmodern performance theory is to create new meanings in the development of theatre and performance strategies which has historically outlawed or silenced women in its frame. In *Presence and desire: Essays on gender, sexuality, performance*, Dolan elucidates:

Feminist postmodernist performance theories intervene in representation to encourage spectators to think differently about their positions within culture,

differently than the comfortable conventions of realism ever persuade them to think. Feminist performance theories give critics a language that unmask the seeming transparency of performance texts and that articulates the insidious ideology of any representation that presents experience as truth. (88)

She explains that the feminist theory aims to study not only the superficial structure of performance but also the effect on culture and explore ways of effective societal change. The feminist approach of analyzing is “unflaggingly political” according to Dolan.

The current struggle of feminist criticism is “... between poststructuralism and identity politics has provoked a metadefinition over theory in feminism. Theorists who subscribe to poststructuralist analysis are accused of oppressing radical feminist identity politicians with privilege of an elite language” (Dolan 89).

Dolan explains that the power of language is influential over whose representation is going to be depicted as central and marginal.

Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance* depicts the notion of “radical humanism” which can let one reclaim the progressive, political, common, and critical ground across identity affiliations without having to return to the conservative humanism of Enlightenment. In the first chapter, Dolan quotes *Verbal Arts on Performance*, Richard Bauman:

The consideration of the power inherent in performance to transform social structures opens the way to a range of additional considerations concerning the role of performer in society. Perhaps there is a key here to the persistently documented tendency for performers to be both admired and feared—admired for their artistic skills and power and for the enhancement of the experience

they provide, feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. (1)

Dolan believes that the role of theatre is not limited to entertainment but it also teaches us. Any theatrical performance creates a platform for sharing experiences of people in one space that inspires people to come together and “...reinvest our energies in a different future, one full hope and reanimated by a new, more radical humanism” (2). Theatre provides inspiration to the audiences to feel connected with each other and explore the possibilities to change the social discourse. For Dolan “...performance and politics have always been intertwined [...] devising a critique of the racism that rounded me and soon developing an awareness of gender and sexuality that later articulated by feminist and queer theory and practice” (3-4). Theatre gave Dolan a perspective to speculate and raise her political awareness about the existing yet marginalized cluster.

### **Women Characters of Jha and Malangia**

This study now moves to make an analysis of drama, as conceptualized by Judith Butler and Raymond Williams. To be more specific, William’s concept of transition in individual roles as per the change in art, culture, class, and economy. He argues that the exploration of the potential for performance strategies and theatrical intervention in normative constructs of sexuality and gender can provoke culture to examine and reimagine its social relations.

Similarly, the concept of *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, conceptualized by Judith Butler is applied as a supportive methodology. Butler criticizes the familiar cultural-theoretic assumption that gender is socially constructed because of broadly conceived socialization. She believes that the aim of the conventional notions of gender and sexuality is to serve to perpetuate and justify the



traditional domination of women by men. Butler's theory has influenced both society and politics where she questions the reason of heterosexuality being viewed as 'normal' and the reason behind people being forced to behave, move and talk according to what is expected from their gender. She questions the tendency of a patriarchal society that subjects the women who behave in masculine ways and the men who behave in feminine ways to prejudice and even violence. The only way that we can change society is by deconstructing the concepts of gender.

Since the major objective of the study is to demonstrate the relationship between Maithil women characters depicted in the Maithil dramas *Tutal Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]*, *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]*, *Domkachh*, and *Sakhi* and the women's identity they represent. This dissertation is limited to the text and manuscript of the selected dramas of Malangia and Ramesh Ranjan Jha and does not analyze the performance of the dramas. It solely depends on the text and manuscript of the drama for the research due to the time limitation of the research.

The portrayal of the characters differs according to the variation in the political timeframe and change in Maithil society and culture of the written dramas of both dramatists. There is a clear difference in the depiction of the characters; especially of women characters in the drama of Malangia and Jha.

#### ***Tutal Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]***

*Tutal Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]* written in 1973 A.D. during the Panchayat period of Nepal by Malangia. Similar to many dramas of Malangia, this drama also is a one-act play written about the complexity of human emotion. The opening scene of the drama is set at night where a woman is standing at the gate of a house. In the past, she had left her husband's house because she was blamed for theft

by her in-laws and she remarried. Now, she has returned to her ex-husband's house because she has no child with the current husband and she misses her son. But her ex-husband maintains a sarcastic tone throughout the drama. He insults her that she managed to come to his house at night as she has no fear of losing her honor because she does not have one according to the patriarchal norms:

Man: Twelve o'clock! Were you not scared while coming here at this time?

Woman: No.

Men: Oh! You don't have that thing that you should fear losing anyway. It does not matter whether the clock strikes one, two, three, or four. (Malangia 11)<sup>14</sup>

Janakpuri points out that the woman character of this drama is not oriented towards any transformation. He argues:

Her action of leaving the house of her husband after being accused of theft by her in-laws seems to be a radical transformation in the first instance because women of the Panchayat era would not have ever imagined leaving her husband's house. But the dramatist again drags the woman back to the same house<sup>15</sup>.

He expresses that in this drama, Malangia portrays a woman character who has rebelled against her husband and in-laws but the rebellion is "silent feminism". It does not liberate the character of a woman but chains her back to the established gender role of being a submissive woman. He states:

A woman's identity is associated with the male members of the house in the community that practices patriarchal culture. Likewise, the woman in the *Total*

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<sup>14</sup> All the dialogues from *Total Taagak Ekta Ore* quoted in this thesis are my translations.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.

*Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]* is pressurized to return back to the same house for her son. Because the identity of women is incomplete without a son in the patriarchal society. Malangia depicts a woman rebelling against the autocratic norms of the middle-class family but the rebellion does not lead to any transformation in the woman of this drama.<sup>16</sup> (Janakpuri)

According to Janakpuri, this drama portrays the story of a middle-class family from a rural setting. Though the dramatist presents his characters as closer to social reality they are not evolving. He states that the character of “*Tatal Taagak Ekta Ore*” keeps flowing in the direction of social norms set by the society. There is no friction among the characters and plot of the story. As if they have accepted to be a mere puppet of the systematic domination imposed by the patriarchal society in the society they are living”.

Similar to Janakpuri, Jha agrees that the characters of this drama seem to be very modern in the context of the 1970s because the society was conservative and the people of that period were not much politically aware. He expresses that this drama depicts the characters with ‘modern thought and exemption’ during the Panchayat period. However, he claims “Though Malangia’s drama presents the character with modern thought and freedom the characters do not use this liberty to develop and change their life. The essence of the characters remain the same”<sup>17</sup>. He proclaims that the woman character of the drama makes her own choice but she is further victimized by the ego of the male character of the drama. The Man in the drama brutally satirizes her with sexist and humiliating remarks. He blames “The dramatist being a male himself cleverly imposes his own male biases and establishes the male character as the pitiful character to arouse sympathy. But he intentionally depicts the Woman as

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<sup>16</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

negative and someone who is responsible for the ‘suffering’ of the Man in the drama” (Interview self-translated). The Woman leaves her husband’s house and is blamed for theft because she belongs to a poor family. She leaves the husband’s house because of this incident, which according to Jha, is a rebellious move for the women of that time. But Jha states that the incident of theft is not highly dramatic but a trivial one.

Furthermore, the dramatist punishes her for leaving the boundary of her husband’s house because that hurts the prevailing male ego of the-then society. According to Jha “This act of the dramatist shows the clear motif of him to reinforce the patriarchal norms on the woman. The punishment for the woman who leaves her husband's house is that she cannot re-enter into the same house because she has once crossed the designated boundary set for her by the agents of patriarchy that is, male”<sup>18</sup>.

The Woman in the drama is not only made to return back to that set boundary but also accept her mistake and apologize to the Man. She accepts “No, I had gone insane at that time. I had lost the sense of thinking. That incident.....turned me into an animal being” (Malangia 18)<sup>19</sup>. Jha blames the dramatist to be reflecting the masculine ego of his own in the male character. He argues “The Man in the drama is vomiting out the conservative thinking and masculine ego of the dramatist himself. Despite the apology to the Woman, his tone is extremely cruel to Woman and he does not let her inside the house. This reflects the masculine aggressiveness and ideological nudity of the dramatist himself” (Interview self-translated). The dramatist mocks the woman character in the drama for choosing dignity and freedom over the dominating husband. The intense satire in the tone of Man in drama replicates the masculine prejudices and hostility towards the Woman. The Man indirectly calls her a prostitute

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<sup>18</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

in the drama when he is showing her the two paintings of the same Woman. One painting is made before the Woman left the house and another is made after she leaves the house:

Woman: The woman in both of the paintings are the same.

Man: You can say so, but I am portraying the second one as a prostitute.

(The woman puts back the painting on the table. Silence)

It is sad that a prostitute also belongs to the same community of women. So, god should have apportioned horns and tails to the prostitutes. (Malangia 6)

The choice of language used by the dramatist is derogatory and demeaning of the woman throughout the drama either it is comparing her to a prostitute or naming her a characterless woman. Moreover, the woman is mostly silent throughout the drama which refers to the fact that she has been denied the right to speak after she went against the patriarchal norms. The same man who smokes in the drama justifies it as a way to release tension but he blames the woman as characterless who does not even smoke making presumptions about her that she must be smoking as a bad woman who leaves her husband would have done so because she is characterless. The Man is ignorant of the Woman and even refuses to listen to her. He keeps on satirizing her as a 'modern woman' for making her own decision in life. He comments on her dress and hairstyle and just assumes that she must be smoking, drinking, and going to parties because according to this Man, that is the only thing done by a modern woman. The Man has all these prejudices and is persistently ignorant of the Woman.

Jha in the personal interview, proclaims that the dramatist tries very hard to arouse sympathy for the male character until the very end. He quotes the last dialogue when the man slams the door in the Woman's face and goes to his sleeping son and expresses "Did you see? Your mother was here"<sup>20</sup>. He remarks this dialogue of Malangia's drama as fake and imprudent. He argues "The dramatist is forcefully trying to establish the Man as the victim who did the right thing by not letting the Woman come back to the house. The Woman is deliberately presented as a villain who deserved to be separated from her child"<sup>21</sup>.

In this drama, the Man simply does not represent an individual but he reflects the mentality of men existing during that period. He is the man who is turning a blind eye to his mistake and bluntly blaming the woman for all his sufferings. He is not sad but angry because the act of leaving the house by his wife has hurt his masculine ego. He is more interested in venting his anger by passing rude comments throughout the drama to the woman. He behaves like a man-child who is grumbling over the past incident and using every opportunity to get revenge on this Woman for hurting his petty pride. This expression does not solely belong to the character but this reflects the masculine biases of the dramatist himself. He, himself, being a male initially tries to present a modern-strong woman who is an independent being. But gradually as the drama moves on, the dramatist turns out the woman into an immoral and characterless being who should be punished for rebelling against the patriarchal Maithil society. The dramatist denies space to the woman who doesn't fit into the frame of 'yes-woman' and 'good-woman' made by the male of the Maithil society which is why she deserves severe punishment. He tries to re-establish the patriarchal norms by valorizing the male character and punishing the female character who crosses the

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<sup>20</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

boundary of the house for her dignity because according to patriarchal standards women should stay within the limits of the household as decided by the male of their family and society.

***Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]***

*Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* is another one-act play written by Malangia in 1974 A.D. The drama starts with the conversation between Birju, a rich man, and his wife whom the dramatist refers to as *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law]. Birju has returned from Kolkata and brought gifts for everyone. *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] insists on not opening it in the front yard of the house. Furthermore, she takes the vest that Birju has brought for his brother Biltu, who is poor. The father of Biltu and Birju- Babu lives with the family of Birju. The dramatist from the very beginning establishes *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] as a negative character who is against Biltu, his wife, and his son. In such a rural society and setting, *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] has the power of freely expressing her thoughts but the dramatist has portrayed her as someone who has the power to control and influence her husband's thoughts but she is a 'bad character'. *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] is given more space in terms of dialogue in this drama but she is shown as an immature woman who fights over trivial things. However, the wife of Biltu (unnamed), is assigned few dialogues which give an impression that she is not very vocal but she is shown as a mature woman who does not question her husband. She simply accepts every decision made by her husband and tolerates all the indirect verbal tortures implicated by *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law]. At the end of the drama, Babu leaves Birju's house with the ancestral land to live with Biltu and his family. Jha evaluates:

This drama of Malangia is typically presented in a filmy style. It describes the story of one rich brother and one poor brother. The wife of a rich brother is a

bad woman and the wife of a poor brother is a good woman. The drama ends with punishing the bad woman and rewarding the good woman in the name of social justice.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, he asserts that *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] is established as a strong character but she is attributed with evil thoughts. She is the one who can express her thoughts without any fear but she is filled up with wicked intentions. Jha claims “The dramatist presents a character with a bold personality but the woman who is bold is bound to be evil according to the patriarchal notion”<sup>23</sup>. The established notion regarding powerful women has always been portrayed as destructive characters. They do not fit into the frame of ‘ideal woman’ constructed by patriarchal norms. Janakpuri states “If *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] is compared to the real women of the political timeline of 1970s, she is portrayed as the strong one who argues with her husband and tries to control him. But in the end, she again is static. The character does not bring any change to her life through her strong personality”<sup>24</sup>.

Moreover, they are deliberately created from the perception of dislike because it will influence other women to be strong and assertive if such women will be depicted as ‘good women’. *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] exercises her rights and makes her own choice but she is propagated as a hateful woman. In this drama, *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] is designed according to the perception of masculine societal discernment, where a woman with a bold and strong personality is malevolent and deserves punishment and hatred. The gender role of women being submissive is broken by the *Bhauji* [Sister-in-law] which is why she is punished by the male figure of her house and portrayed as she did not deserve the happy ending.

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<sup>22</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec. 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.



## Domkachh

Jha's *Domkachh*, replicates the folk, farce song, and dance performance in which most women are the one who participates on the night of the marriage in the bridegroom's courtyard in order to display group strength to resist thieves and robbers. This performance is similar to *ratyauli* which is also performed by the women in some caste groups of the Pahadi community. Contradictory to the folk drama, where women are only presented as the performers who are searching for a space to relieve their daily experience of sorrows and pain through adult songs and conversation, Jha's dramas point out the class and caste discrimination existing in the Maithil society. Janakpuri expresses:

Ramesh Ranjan Jha introduces us to the two different lifestyles, beliefs and morals of Maithil society. Despite the suppression and domination of women's desire and low class-caste community, people in the aristocratic class community where the domination of arbitrary men is pertinent, exists- freedom, love and faith. Domin is not made to jump into the fire as an ordeal. Domra accepts her with complete love and faith. The playwright depicts the greatness of the trust and faith between husband and wife.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike in the drama of Malangia *Tutul Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]* and *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* where there is a lack of faith and love in the relation of the husband and wife, Jha in both of his dramas *Domkachh* and *Sakhi* depicts the strong connection between the man and woman who understands each other.

This drama of Ranjan starts with the Malkain (landlady) calling out the women in the house to come and start the performance of *Domkachh*. The drama is

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<sup>25</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.

set at night in the courtyard of the bridegroom's house. Similar to the folktale, all the men except children and elderly men (physically weak) are out of the house in the *barat*<sup>26</sup>. The women in the house all come out and they start the conversation.

Furthermore, the conversation gradually turns into a luscious one after the continuous prodding of Malkain. But then enters Domara to perform and the plot moves ahead.

The central story of the folk drama revolves around the women and the expression of their suppressed desire. But Jha skillfully establishes Domara and Domin as the central figure of the drama. The drama deviates from the folk drama and the dramatist points out the social discrimination based on caste and culture existing in Maithil society. Janakpuri adds that traditional folk drama is full of farce where the women characters enact as the other characters including the male characters and Domin. But Jha includes male actors in the drama. He states:

Though the women of the higher class in the play belong to the higher caste and aristocratic class they are considered secondary to men. But these women feel close to the Domin who belong to the lowest class (fourth) in terms of caste in comparison to these secondary class women. However, Jha gives the same space to the Domin but she still belongs to the second class.<sup>27</sup>

The plot of the drama moves forward and Domra goes to Kolkata, India to earn money leaving Domin alone. Meanwhile, the King abducts the Domin and takes her to his palace. Domra returns and fights with the guards of the palace. Jha provides Dom with the rebellious and powerful voice:

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<sup>26</sup> *Barat* means a procession on the wedding day to the house of bride. Mostly, male members from the groom's family and kinship participate in this process.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview. 23 Dec.2020.

Domra: I will not only scream but tear down this earth and destroy this palace.

Gatekeeper: Do you want to be beaten up?

(Domara becomes more enraged)

Gatekeeper: Your wife is an object of pleasure for the King; He has got license for such things. Why are you making this an issue and crying?

Domra: Is he a king or a devil? Why has he abducted a wife of a poor man?

Gatekeeper: Look, what a fool! Why is he king then?

Domra: To abduct another's wife.

Gatekeeper: Yes, you have understood it quite well.

Domra: I will settle this issue today.<sup>28</sup> (Jha 59)

The dramatist provides a Dalit character with a voice to question the autocracy of the king and fight evil. The character Domra is well aware of his rights and he knows that he has to stand against the autocracy of the society. The portrayal of this character matches with the political timeline of that time (2014) which was the time after second C.A. elections and different movements like the Citizen's Movement for Peace and Democracy (CMDPO, the Madhesh Movements, abolishment of the monarchy, and other political and social movements. Jha tries his best to make his woman characters in the two dramas match with the social, cultural, economical, and

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<sup>28</sup> All the dialogues quoted from *Domkachh* are my translations.

political shifts in the Maithil society post-1990s. The changes in the political, cultural and social scenario could be seen in the woman character in this play.

Furthermore, the plot moves forward and Domra is successfully able to rescue Domin from the palace. Domra starts questioning Domin why she went to the palace of the king. Unlike the shy and submissive women characters in the traditional drama, she raises her voice. She questions Domra why he left her alone and she has to go through all this suffering:

Domra: Why did you come to the king's palace? You have caused us shame; do you know what are villagers calling me?

Domin: They have no right to say anything. Did I go there according to my will?

Domra: Then?

Domin: The sentry of the king forcefully abducted me. I cried and begged but did any villager come to my rescue? And what rights do they now have to say anything to us?

Domra: No one came?

Domin: No. They all covered by the name of the king. I stopped you so many times from going abroad. But you didn't listen to me.

Domra: Should I have tied my stomach?

Domin: Tell me how so many people here are surviving here? Have you ever sent me money? Did you ever think about me whether I was dead or alive? (Jha 60-61)

Jha has presented Domin as an aware character in comparison to the traditional Maithili drama. She is not assigned the power to fight the king but she questions the hypocrisy of the villagers who did not help her at the time of abduction but are raising questions about Domin's character. She also blames Domra for being greedy and selfish who leaves her without thinking about her just to earn extra money. She is critiquing the rules of a patriarchal society that does not let women live freely and continuously judges her character and does not question the men's behavior. Mcfarlane in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* explains that according to Ibsen "A woman cannot be herself in the contemporary society, it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" (Qtd. in Mcfarlane, 90). Similarly, Domin is left by her husband and abducted by the king. Moreover, she is questioned by the same society who did not come forward to help her. The dramatist did not create a radical character who fights with the king but at least gives a voice to the Dalit women character who questions the set norms of patriarchal society. She blames Domra for leaving her when he knew that she is uneducated and is not economically independent:

Domin: On whose support did you leave me when you have married me as your wife? Didn't you give it a thought that I have a stomach too? That it needs to be fed with food and water. I would not survive by drinking air. That I have a body too. I feel hungry too. I could have managed the hunger anyhow but eagles like the king would not have left me. (Jha 61)

Furthermore, Domra tries to persuade the Domin but she keeps on refusing. Meanwhile, the policemen come after the Domra. But this time Domin is the one who

saves the Domra. She explains her poor situation through a song and bribes the policemen to leave them. She also makes Domra to promise to never drink alcohol and leave her alone:

Domra: Please! Don't be angry anymore. I will never go abroad, will never touch liquor, and will do whatever you tell me to. Don't be angry. If you are not persuaded by this, then people see.

(He holds his ear and starts to move up and down. Domin burst out laughing; Domra becomes happy.) (Jha 67)

Jha gives Domin some agency to change her life but it again reinforces the concept of a 'happy ending' despite the fact that Domra has left her back home without any support. Likewise, Janakpuri asserts that the dramatist gives agency of voice to the Domin. He elucidates "She questions Domra and fights with him verbally. But she does not cross the patriarchal boundary set by the male of the Maithil society"<sup>29</sup>. The dramatist presents characters from different social backgrounds. The women of middle class aristocrats and the women of lower class were divided by the upper class men to maintain the hierarchy. He argues:

The dramatist does not display any kind of change in the women including Malkain who belongs to the higher strata of the society. They simply keep flowing with the story without being affected by incidents happening around them. But the Dalit woman; Domin raises her voice towards the end of the

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<sup>29</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.

drama but she, too is unable to break the boundaries set by the aristocratic patriarchy.<sup>30</sup>

In this drama, the dramatist gives some agency to the women but he still depicted women as the property of men. Domin has some voice in the drama but yet has no agency to decide for herself and falls as the victim of patriarchy and male domination. She is abducted by a king because she is not asserted with the power to fight for herself. Domra, a male member comes for her rescue at last. But the writer provides some voice to the Domin in comparison with the traditional women character in the traditional Maithili dramas. Though she is not provided with the agency to fight for herself, she has started to question society and her husband which resonates slight change in the consciousness of women in the Maithil community after the political change.

### **Sakhi**

Sakhi written by Jha in 2018 A.D. depicts the Maoist Insurgency period. It portrays Shobha, Pavitri, Sagun, Shambhu, Gita, and Sakhi (pet lamb of Shobha) as the main characters of the drama. They are bitterly traumatized by the war going on. Shobha's family is estranged by the war and her only hope for survival is Sakhi. The normal life of the villagers is affected by the war and their life is hindered by both parties; state force and the rebellions. Lama writes:

A story of love and innocence is threatened by war, the play 'Sakhi' takes us back to 10-year-long Maoist insurgency that bitterly shook the country [...] the play is a depiction of psycho-social turmoil that the nation faced, witnessing the incidents of grief and hostility during the civil war. Many

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<sup>30</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.

innocent families suffered as they were caught in the war between the Maoist fighters and the state army. (1)

The drama starts with the scene of the house of Sagun and Pavitri. Sagun is carving a stick in *dalaan* (courtyard) and Pavitri mocks his idea of fighting armies or rebellions with sticks as it is not much use to fight anyone except a dog. Gita and Shambu (children of Pavitri and Sagun) are playing. Pavitri is preparing for dinner as they hear the sound of boots and Sagun and Pavitri close the door out of terror. Shambhu hides under the bed and Gita inside a *kothi* (mud-cell to store granaries) inside the house. The dramatist has depicted the fear of an insurgency period where people are not able to live their normal life in peace. They are living under a constant terror of war:

This play is a reflection of a conflict that claimed many lives and left and left people psychologically scarred for life. The play begins with a war-stricken aura engulfing the peace of the societies in the tarai plains of Nepal... The attacks take toll on the family when the siblings' father Sagun is unreasonably held captive by the state army. The situation gets worsened when the fighters invade Sagun's house and force Shambhu to join the fighters' group. And to stop this from happening, Shobha pays a heavy price to be left alone for the rest of her life. (Lama 1)

The dramatist has crafted woman characters like Pavitri who is strong, has her own voice, and is mature. Similarly, the central character Shobha, who is victimized by war and has lost her family but has a strong arch to her character throughout the drama. Contradictory to Malangia, Jha gives more space and dialogues to the women characters in his dramas. Sakhi has five scenes in total and most of the dialogues are



assigned to Shobha, Pavitri, and Gita. The second scene of the drama is an eight-page long monologue of Shobha which is rare in Maithili dramas.

However, Janakpuri expresses that similar to Malangia's woman characters, Jha's woman characters also follow the status quo of the social norms. According to him "The only difference in Jha's portrayal of women characters is his way of presenting the women characters. He gives more dialogues to the women characters and there are more women characters in Jha's drama"<sup>31</sup>. Jha establishes Shobha as the central character of the drama which rarely can be seen in the Maithili drama. The main plot of the drama revolves around her and the subplots are connected with her story.

Moreover, the characters in this drama represent the psyche of the dramatist throughout all the scenes. As the dramatist simply puts forth the scenario during the Maoist insurgency period, he does not present any critical commentary about the Maoists or armies through any characters but focuses on depicting the suffering of that period. Janakpuri claims "The surface *Sakhi* seems to be extremely political play but once you move towards the second scene and third scene it becomes clear that the dramatist is not presenting the negative aspect of war between both Maoists and state armies but simply showcasing us the terror surrounding the war"<sup>32</sup>. He claims that the dramatist does not provide any conclusion of the situation he is portraying but just depicts the situation as it is. Though the dramatist maintains the equilibrium in terms of commenting on political scenarios his depiction of woman characters is commendable. Characters like Shobha, Pavirti, and Gita compared to the traditional women of Maithil society are more vocal and conscious about the situation around

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<sup>31</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2020

them. The dramatist gives more space to them to participate in every incident of the drama. The women are more mature and sensible compared to the male characters of the drama. Even the male character Sagun who is supposed to be strong and macho according to the gender roles imposed by society is portrayed as someone who is emotional and weak. The dramatist depicts the character opposite to the stereotyped gender roles propagated by the patriarchal structure.

### Chapter III:

#### **Change is the Reality in *Total Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]*,**

#### ***Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]*, *Domkachh*, and *Sakhi***

After analyzing these four dramas *Total Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]*, *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]*, *Domkachh*, and *Sakhi* by the two major dramatists of Maithili drama, one can clearly perceive that there is a slight change in the portrayal of women characters in the younger generation's dramatist. The characters of these dramas embody the real people of the time they were written. Malangia's drama presents two kinds of female characters. One is the typical 'ideal woman' as defined as the patriarchal structure who is subservient and simply surrenders in front of the masculine ego. Whereas, another woman character is a bold, strong woman who speaks her mind but she is an 'evil woman' who does not fit in the category of 'good woman' as defined by the Maithil society. But there is a slight change in the agency of the woman compared to the previous time. The change after the various political and social movements and incidents like the Citizen's Movement for Peace and Democracy (CMPD), Madhesh Movements, abolishment of the monarchy, Maoist insurgency, and change in popular culture with the introduction of social media has brought a change in the Maithil society of contemporary times compared to the 1970s. The shift in the culture, society, politics, and arts has helped people to realize the gender stereotypes existing in Maithil society and that can be also be seen in the shift in gender roles from Malangiya's drama *Total Taagak Ekta Ore [Broken End of a Thread]* and *Birju Biltu aa Babu [Birju Biltu and Father]* and Jha's dramas *Domkachh* and *Sakhi*.

Moreover, people in Maithil society need to realize that these gender roles set by the patriarchal system are not only affecting the women and other genders facing

discrimination but it is affecting the male of the society as well. A society that normalizes the practice of discrimination and domination over people on the basis of their gender, caste, and race needs to be changed for creating a society where everyone can exercise their rights. This tendency of categorizing some traits for people as a 'normal' (acceptable) member of society, forces people to behave in a certain way which is fixed by the society in their gender roles. An individual is subject to prejudices or violence whenever they try to break the stereotype of gender. Not only Maithil society but any community or society that practices patriarchy can be changed only by deconstructing the concepts of gender roles.

To conclude, in order to break the gender roles existing in Maithil society, one needs to have more understanding of the derogatory fixed gender stereotypes by the society. One needs to realize that the orthodox practices dominate the rest of the genders except males and try to make the environment more inclusive. The male of the society needs to realize their privileges and the negative effect of the toxic masculinity on them. There needs to be a proper intersectional feminist movement in Nepal in the future to include feminist education as a significance in everyone's life. Literature that helps individuals and the masses to rethink feminist thinking and feminist politics needs to be written and read. If we don't recreate the mass-based educational system to educate everyone about feminism the popular culture and mass media will keep reproducing the wrong notion of feminism and its impact on society. We need to let people know how feminism can positively impact our society to be more inclusive and progressive for every group of people.

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