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Subversion of Gender Roles in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*

**Tribhuvan University**

**Subversion of Gender Roles in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
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of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

This thesis entitled “Subversion of Gender Roles in Sheeba Shah’s *Facing My Phantoms*” has been prepared by Bishnu Kumar Sharma under my supervision in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in English. I recommend this study to the research committee for viva-voce.

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## **Abstract**

The present thesis studies the subversion of traditional concept of gender roles by the female characters in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*. It presents women as active, domineering, independent, rational, courageous. The male characters are passive, helpless, dominated, dependent and hence, they can not accomplish their assigned masculine trait. So, their masculinity falls into crisis and then is subverted. But the major female character, Sanjeevani is bold, active, rational and self-reliant to handle the bad situation of her family. The way she behaves in her family, holds talk with Maoist cadres, breaks rules and regulation of patriarchy are noteworthy here which are strong evidences to subvert the traditional notion of gender roles.

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## **I. Sheeba Shah, Her Work and Subversion of Gender Roles**

This research paper mainly depicts the major issue of the subversion of gender roles and aims to present the possible causes and consequences of subversion of gender roles in the novel *Facing My Phantoms* by Sheeba Shah. The male characters are unsuccessful to accomplish the assigned traditional masculine traits and it is the females who have occupied that role which ultimately lead to subvert the traditional gender roles. These male characters have not been able to confirm the male values, practices and traits. Rather they have adopted and exposed the feminine qualities like emotional, irrational, timid, dependent etc. Hence, consequently, some of them are killed and chased away from their home. But, on the contrary, females are bold, courageous, independent, rational and so on. By highlighting the condition of reversal of traditional gender roles, this research paper aims to prove that females are no less than males. They also can lead the society, family and even the nation in absence of males. To prove the hypothesis, this project borrows some ideas from the critics like Judith Butler, Chris Baker, Roger Lanchester, Kate Millet, Judith Halberstam and so on.

The novel clearly displays the powerful, active and independent position of female characters. The males are shown as the timid, cowardice and dependent. Though they are the head of the family, they could do nothing to help and save their family. But it is the female characters who always tend towards the welfare of their family and society as well. The subversion of gender roles does not take place due to the strong resistance of the female characters rather to some extent, the males fail here to complete their tasks as male assigned by the patriarchal social system. As patriarchy has given them the certain traits superior than the females, they need to take bold decision to handle the bad situation of a family, society or even of a nation.

But in the novel rather than male, it is the female characters who take that responsibility of helping and saving the family dignity and prestige. On the other hand, to some extent, females' resistance and their rising consciousness about their rights and duties in patriarchal oppressive society, has played the role to push the notion of masculinity and femininity into crisis and subvert it.

Sheeba Shah, the novelist presents Sanjeevani as the major figure of the novel. Sanjeevani's activities are presented as the main cause of subversion of masculinity. She, being a female, is able to handle the bad situation of her family. Her family is chased away by Maoist cadres from their home and now they live in capital city as an internal refugee. In the name of feudal lord, her father, Mr. Prashant is threatened of murdering by Maoist cadres. So, he flees to the capital city to save his life. He is so selfish that he does nothing to save the life of his only son, Sanjay and his family. He himself escapes to save his life. But one night Maoist cadres kill his son accusing him of the feudal lord, exploiter, *samanti* and the detective of the police against the Maoist activities. Prashant, being a male and the head of the family and father as well, should have saved his son's life. It is male's duty in patriarchal social system to save the family when it is in danger. But he is unable to do so, hence, consequently, happens to lose his only son. In this sense, he is not a protective father. Traditional masculinity demands a male to be protective towards others to be masculine. If one fails to do so, he is lowered to the feminine. In this sense, Prashant is also unsuccessful to accomplish the assigned tasks of masculinity, so he is lowered to be feminine. A male lowered to be feminine means to say that his masculinity is subverted here.

Similarly, Sanjeevani's elder father Prabhat is a Home Minister of the nation. Being a Home Minister, he should provide everybody with the security. But he can do



nothing. He even can not save the life of his cousin, Sanjay, who is killed by Maoist cadres in the accusation of feudal lord. His family along with his brother, Prashant's family lives in Kathmandu as internal refugee but he is unable to handle the situation. He urges the king to overcome the nation, all the political circumstance and solve the problem of Maoist insurgency. He depends upon king and hopes that he is the ultimate source to solve the problem. He, being a male, head of the family, and even the Home Minister, depends upon other to solve the problem, rather than being a person whom others can trust and should depend upon and get shelter. In this sense, he is also failure to play his role as the male, so his masculinity is also subverted.

On the contrary, Sanjeevani, Sanat, Sharmila etc. are some of the female characters who work not for themselves only but for other members of the family and society as well. Sanjeevani is living now in Kathmandu with her family as an internal refugee. After her brother, Sanjay is killed, they all leave their home and now live in Kathmandu. They have rented an apartment there. She feels suffocated while living in the apartment. So, she decides to go back to her homeland in Kailali district, Far Western part of Nepal. There she sees the ruined house of her family which shocks her very much. She vows to reconstruct it. She meets and holds talks to the area commander of Maoist in Ganeshpur for returning back her seized land. The Maoist cadres are reluctant to her request at first, but her frequent request, activeness, boldness, rationality, logic, self-consciousness, self-reliant, patience etc. compel to them to return back her homeland. They are so impressed that some of the cadres become her fans and promise to help her in the mission of community farming. She is able to get back her homeland which her father could not have done. Here, the words like: active, bold, rational, logic, self-conscious etc. refer to the traditional masculinity

that belong to the males. But opposite of that notion, Sanjeevani, a female, possesses these qualities. Possessing all the masculine quality within her, Sanjeevani has created crisis in the traditional notion of masculinity and femininity and this crisis further steps to the subversion of gender roles.

Sheeba Shah is well known personality in the field of Nepali English literature. She is especially famous for writing historical fiction. She has proved the fact that the history is not only the interpretation of a single protagonist and events and activities surrounding them. She also writes the stories of promoting the status of the women in Nepalese society. She has written the story of internal conflict in Nepal and displacement aftermath of the conflict run by Maoists. Her stories are filled with the issues of patriarchal oppression on women, effects of poverty, ignorance and so on. Her stories have been able to get the praise of the readers from the different parts of the world.

*Facing My Phantoms* is also one of her famous novels. It has drawn the concentration of various scholars and critics since its publication. It is highly prosperous in achieving the scholarly criticism from multiple perspectives. One of the renowned critics, Rishi Raote, in the newspaper *Business Standard* writes:

Shah tells the stories of two fictional women. The main narrative is about Sanjeevani, Sanat's granddaughter. The lesser narrative runs from the 1930s to the present and is about Sanat, the wife of a minor raja. Shah traces the declining fortunes of this feudal family, from absolute authority in their village to relative decrepitude in Kathmandu once mismanagement and the Maoists- former feudal dependents- Strip the family of their ancestral land and power. (7)

Raote notices that the novelist traces the declining fortunes of a feudal family from its absolute authority. All the villagers had to depend upon that family for their hand to mouth in previous time. They had got the absolute authority and power to run the society according to their will. But now the time has changed. The Maoist cadres, once who were slave of that family, have seized their ancestral land and power. So, this family, losing all the power, authority and even the ancestral property, lives in Kathmandu as an internal refugee. In this sense, Raote reads this novel as an account of declining fortunes of a feudal family.

Amar Bahadur Shrestha reviews the novel from political point of view and writes, “The book ends at the point in Nepal’s history when the king has been overthrown and the parties are celebrating at the Tundikhel” (8). He means to say that the novel deals with the political circumstances of the nation. The nation has welcomed the new republican system and the political parties are celebrating their victory at the Tundikhel as they have overthrown the king. There has been a long conflict between the king and the political parties for power. At last, the political parties have overcome the king and they are celebrating their victory at open space, Tundikhel. So he deals the novels from the view of political scenario.

The next critic, Subhojit Kumar praises the artful technique of the novelist for presenting the factual history of Nepal and the then socio-political circumstances. He writes in the newspaper *Article Base*:

Sheeba Shah writes about the most turbulent times of Nepalese history. In her book, *Facing My Phantoms*, she offers us a rich insight into the period of the 1930s, perhaps the moment of history which defined the changing face of Nepal. She weaves the magical tale keeping a historical transformation in the backdrop and wonderfully

spins fact through the threads of fiction and allows the readers to make his or her own interpretation of the unending mysteries of life. (8)

Subhojit Kumar, in this way, praises the technique of Shah to present the factual history of Nepal. For him, she has presented the historical transformation of the country in a magical way. She tells the story of Nepal since 1930s to the present time in the form of fiction. He further praises the technique that she sets free the readers to make his or her own interpretation of the unending mysteries of life as the most of the postmodern readers prefer this technique.

Similarly, the next critic, Archana Thapa, in her article “Redemption and Beyond” writes:

Shah's fiction successfully synthesizes the national and personal traumas of an affluent family that experiences a socio-economic fall because of the conflict. It also recounts how their sufferings deepen as the country moves forward towards an uncertain future. (6)

Thapa from this extract notices that the novel depicts the national and personal traumas due to the conflict run by the Maoists. The country is drowned into the blood and its people are traumatized as they are killed either by Maoists as or the government. She says that an affluent family has experienced the economic downfall because of conflict. The novel also deals their deep sufferings as they find no certainty in their lives as the country moves towards no certain destination.

Similarly, the next critic, Krita Raut in her article "Reflection of Her World" reviews the novel from the autobiographical point of view. She finds that Sheeba Shah has created the characters from her own life. She asserts:

Along with Sanjeevani, Shah has created two other characters - Sanjay and Sanat - from those in her family. Sanjeevani's brother, Sanjay, represents Shah's brother, who was killed by the Maoists while she has inserted some stories of her grandmother's life in Sanat's story. She has even kept the same name for these characters. (5)

From this extract, it is clear that Krita Raut finds the autobiographical elements in the novel. She means to say that the author has presented her whole life history through the medium of the novel. She even takes the characters for her novel from own family. Sanjeevani represents the novelist herself. Likewise, Sanjeevani's brother, Sanjay represents her own brother who was killed by Maoists. Similarly she weaves the story of her grandmother through the character, Sanat. Shah even gives the name of her characters from her own family members. So, in this sense, Krita Raut reads the novel from autobiographical point of view.

Biswas Baral in his article "Facing Our Phantoms" reviews the novel from the perspective of defeated psychology of the Royal family's insiders. He says that the monarchy eventually got defeated and dethroned which created the difficulties to the courtiers of the Royal family. He writes, "*Facing My Phantoms* can be read as an insider's take of the difficult lives of the stalwarts of monarchy in the lead up to its eventual demise in 2006" (7). He means to say that the insiders of the Royal family were very much affected after the dethrone of the Nepalese monarchy. They felt orphaned, helpless, powerless and so on as they happened to lose their earlier position in the society.

Similarly, Amish Raj Mulmi reads the novel in this way:

Shah's works, thus, can be read as an expression of the tumultuous times Nepal has seen in the last decade. She is a member of the very

class that the 2006 revolution sought to overthrow, but she understands the revolution as a historical process. She has been wronged as well; her ancestral lands were taken away, while her brother was killed. Yet, she takes these events as being a conclusion to the larger nature of Nepali feudal history. Still, her writing reflects the personal anguish felt by the class during the days of the insurgency and the subsequent Jana Andolan. (5)

Mulmi reads the novel as the account of transitional period of Nepal. He finds that the novel has presented the most tumultuous times of Nepalese history. The writer is in dilemma as she is in the verge of two oppositional thoughts. In one side, she takes the changes as the historical process and at the same time, she feels puzzled and is anguished to the changes occurred in the country. In this way, Mulmi finds that the writer is in confusion whether to assimilate the new changes or stay being status- quo in the name of saving their family pride and prestige.

Through the quick survey upon the issues discussed by the various critics, it can be said that *Facing My Phantoms* has been able to achieve the multiple perspectives within the single novel. This research paper has attempted to add one more issue depicted in the novel which is no more noticed by anyone. In short, this research paper, studying the subversion of gender roles, its causes and consequences, claims that it is a different and absolutely a new kind of research. It is because no critic has raised the issue of subversion of gender roles so far. They could not find out the issue of subversion in gender role which this project attempts to prove. From the different activities of females which challenge the traditional notion of masculinity and femininity, it attempts to prove the subversion of gender roles. As the male characters such as Prashant, Sanjay and Prabhat fail to correspond their assigned role

as masculine given by patriarchy, it is the female characters such as: Sanjeevani, Sanat and Sharmila etc. who occupy that position and complete the tasks. Male's cowardice nature, irrationality, dependency and so on and the female's rational behavior, independent activities, courage etc. are documented as the strong evidences of the subversion of gender roles in Sheeba Shah's novel *Facing My Phantoms*.

This project work especially based upon the theory of masculinity and femininity along with the gender studies pays the deep concentration upon the subversion of gender roles in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*. With the purpose of projecting the subversion of gender roles, this research paper goes with the theory of masculinity and femininity and gender as well. Here, the concept of masculinity is the outcome of the feminist movement. Excessive male domination in the society gave birth to feminism and the rise of feminism gave birth to masculinity in turn. It means to say that when the women came up with an enlightened sense of their identity, rights and freedom, masculinity got threatened and males were alarmed to hold up their patriarchal ethos about men. As a result, masculinity came as a theory just opposite of the theory of feminism. The term 'masculinity' refers to the quality of being male means having the male characteristics i.e. rational, protective, leading, domineering, aggressive, active, independent, competitive, factual, judgemental, self controlled etc. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines masculinity as, "a noun which means the quality of being masculine" (942). It refers that masculinity is positive term and it is taken as having masculine quality. Both the masculinity and femininity are not innate but they are based upon social and cultural condition.

Traditionally, masculinity belongs to the male in which all the positive attributes are given to him such as rational, protective, active, aggressive, factual and so on. On the other hand, femininity belongs to female in which all the negative

attributes are given to the females. They are termed as emotional, protected, passive, dependent, cowardice and so on. Masculinity worked with coercion from the very beginning to suppress the femininity. Masculinity and femininity are not the innate terms as such, but they were created as per the social and cultural condition. So, these are the constructed ones.

Edgar F. Borgatta and Rhonda J.V. Montgomery in the second volume of *Encyclopedia of Sociology* say about masculinity and femininity in this way:

Femininity and masculinity, one's gender identity refers to the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in the society. Femininity and masculinity are rooted in the social (one's gender) rather than the biological (one's sex). Societal members decide what being male or female means (e.g. dominant or passive, brave or emotional). All males will generally define themselves masculine while female will generally define themselves as feminine. (977)

They mean to say that the categorization of masculinity and femininity is nothing more than the social construct. In this categorization males have been given some certain features like dominant and brave and labeled with masculine. In the contrary, females have been given the features like passive and emotional and labeled as feminine.

Judith Halberstam in her essay "An Introduction to Female Masculinity", further gives the similar view to Borgatta and Montgomery about the construction of masculinity. She says: "If masculinity is not the social and cultural and indeed political expression of maleness, then what is it?" (335). Halberstam in the form of question asserts that masculinity is nothing more than the social, cultural and political expression of maleness.



Masculinity and feminity function as the gender identity. One's gender identity is influenced by their gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender attitudes. This gender identity as masculine or feminine is based upon the meaning of individuals have internalized from their association with the role of male or female in the society. A person with more masculine identity is expected to act more masculine such as behaving in a more dominant, competitive and autonomous manner. Similarly, a woman in the society is expected to act as per the stereotypical identity such as: emotional, nurturing, sensitive, irrational, dominated etc. In this division of human qualities, all the positive qualities are given to males and defined as masculine but all the negative qualities are given to women and defined as feminine. Thus, feminist theorists claim that masculine mode of thought has been the root cause of oppression on female. In this regard, Anne Cranny - Francis and Wendy Waring in *Gender Studies: Terms and Debate* say: "Women are stereotyped as emotional, nurturing, sensitive whereas men are taken as rational, responsible and authoritative" (145). These lines too explicitly display the way of labeling of male and female qualities where males are labeled with something positive and women are that of negative. In the society, boys are introduced with the numerous masculine traits and girls are with the feminine traits since their childhood. In this sense, masculinity is deep rooted in the psychology of males and they always tend to perform as per the masculine standards but when they fail to confirm the masculine traits, they suffer from the crisis and subversion of masculinity.

To prove this point, the statement by Roland F. Levant in *The Journals of Men's Studies* is significant. He states:

The masculinity crisis involves the collapse of basic pattern by which a man can have traditionally fulfilled the code for masculine role,

behavior, namely the good provider role. The loss of the good provider role has been the central factor in the development of masculinity in crisis. (2)

This extract clarifies that the responsibility imposed upon man because of being male, should be concretized to be masculine. When the man can not confirm the role as good provider his masculinity falls into crisis and then is subverted.

Tim Edward defines crisis of masculinity as, “The position of man, often perceived as being is related to institution such as the family, work, education or even representation. On the other hand, the crisis of masculinity refers more precisely to men’s experience of these shifts in position” (14). He also opines that men have been considered to carry out the certain roles in terms of family, work, education and representation. When they fail to correspond with those assigned roles, their position of masculinity falls in crisis and the crisis in masculinity paves the way to the subversion.

In this sense, if males fail to accomplish the role given to them as masculine, the females come to replace them. If the females take the responsibility of providing and guiding others, then the traditional definition of masculinity works no more. If so, it should be defined from new parameters. In this research, it is attempted to justify that the traditional definition of masculinity and femininity has become out dated. These are the terms carried over to dominate one and promote the another. The masculinity as a terminology, does not belong to anyone, male or female. Anyone can be masculine irrespective of gender or sex. So, it is just constructed to oppress the women and privilege the men. So, as this research attempts to redefine the term ' masculinity' from new parameter in which females can also be the masculine, the traditional notion of binary between masculinity and femininity is subverted here.

This project work especially based upon the theory of masculinity and femininity along with the gender studies pays the deep concentration upon the subversion of gender roles in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*. In order to make research convenient and to expose the theme of subversion of gender roles effectively, this research work has been divided into three main sections. The first section of this research paper presents an introduction which gives the overall outlines of the research work. It begins with the introductory paragraph, general introduction to the text, literature reviews upon the novel, point of departure, hypothesis, introduction of the tool and the concluding paragraph. Similarly, the second section contains the textual analysis with the application of the methodology. It depicts the sufficient evidences from the text and presents how gender roles is subverted. The third chapter concludes the whole project in short and aims to offer a new parameter to look upon the position of male and female. It aims to redefine the traditional notion of masculinity and femininity.

## II. Subversion of Gender Roles in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*

This section along with the critical conceptual tool 'masculinity' analyzes the novel *Facing My Phantoms* by Sheeba Shah in order to expose the issue of subversion of Gender Roles. The protagonist of the novel, Sanjeevani's activities tend towards the subversion of the traditional notion of masculinity and femininity. Traditionally, it is considered that males do have the masculine quality and females do have the feminine quality. Males are supposed to be more rational, powerful, sensitive, judgemental, independent, firm and so on, whereas females are termed as irrational, powerless, emotional, submissive, subjugative and so on. Due to such suppositions, the females are not given the rights equal to males. But, rupturing this binarity between man and woman, the protagonist of the novel, Sanjeevani proves that females also can have the masculine quality.

This research mainly focuses the subversion of binarity between masculinity and femininity. The character, Sanjeevani proves to be the wrong the notion of masculinity which is supposed to be with males only. She, being a female, is able to handle the bad circumstances of her house. She acts rationally, patiently, courageously, judgementally and is able to get back her homeland from Maoist Seizures. In Maoist insurgency period, her family is chased away from their home and now they live in Kathmandu as an internal refugee. Her father, being a male, is unable to get back his land from Maoists. In the accusation of being feudal lord, Mr. Prashant, Sanjeevani's father is chased away from his house in Ganeshpur of Kailali district, Far Western region of Nepal. Prashant, the land owner is helpless in front of Maoist cadets and flees to the capital city. He even could not save his only son, Sanjay, who is killed by Maoist cadres in the accusation of feudal lord, exploiter and

detective of the police against Maoists activities. But, Sanjeevani goes back to her homeland after years of departure from there and is successful to get back her lost homeland. In this sense, she breaks the hierarchy between man and woman constructed in the name of gender.

In the society, only males are given good attributes as powerful, rational, judgemental, protective and so on. But the females are considered just opposite as powerless, irrational, submissive, emotional and so on. But just opposite of this notion of masculinity, Sanjeevani proves that not only males but females also can have the masculine power. They are also equal to men. So, by showing the masculine quality of female characters such as: Sanjeevani, Sanat, Sharmila and so on, this research tries to prove the subversion of the gender roles.

As the gender, these two words masculinity and femininity are social and cultural constructs carried over for the exploitation of women. For that, they created two clear dimensional category of males and females. In one category, they kept masculinity' having the quality such as: rational, protective, leading, domineering, aggressive, active, independent, competitive, factual, judgemental, self-controlled, courageous etc. and gave it to the males. At the same time, the next category they made as 'femininity' having the quality such as: emotional, irrational, dominated, protected, passive, dependent, coward, submissive, powerless etc. and gave it to the females. After dividing the human qualities into two binary categories males started to exercise with the masculine qualities. They suppressed females and restricted them within the four walls of a house. But in some cases, they fail to sustain their self created/constructed masculinity due to their own faults and sometimes due to females resistance and to some extent their rising consciousness. In the novel too, Prashant,

being a male and head of the family, is powerless, timid, cowardice in front of Maoist cadres and flees away to save his life. He does not care about his family members. As a result, his only son, Sanjay, gets killed by the Maoists. But Sanjeevani, a female is courageous enough to get back her lost homeland. She goes back to her home in Ganeshpur of Kailali district, holds talks to Maoists commanders and cadres frequently. At first, they were reluctant to her request. But latter, her logical power, boldness, activeness, self controlled decisions compelled to the commander to return her homeland.

Masculinity is a social definition given to boys and men by societies; like gender is a social construct. After the 1960s, the margins were also able to get right equal to males. The margin has been redrawn because of the emergence of methodologies which brought crisis in the traditional concept of masculinity. Because of many causes and consequences that are developed in the post war period such as : late capitalism, radical feminism, practice of homosexuality and decolonization, strike the normative masculinity into the state of crisis and subversion. This crisis threatens to transform or even overthrow the whole concept of gender identity, till the present time the scholars are trying to deflate the traditional notion of masculinity. Many scholars after the 1960s, have been trying to define masculinity as the social construct. It does not have any innate quality. It was brought into use to create binary opposition between male and female. In the development of masculinity studies, there is greater role of second wave feminist of 1960s. This movement brought a shift from women to gender as the primary object of study. This study of gender authorized the critics to study as that of feminity. Both of them are social constructs.

Masculinity and feminity are social constructs. They are culturally constructed to distinguish male and female. These terms are contingent too. They keep changing as per the situation of the socio-cultural aspects. Regarding the notion of masculinity, Kamala Bhasin in her book *Exploring Masculinity* says, "Masculinity is not static, like gender, it is constantly reconstructed. It may keep changing in response to community and economic pattern" (6). In this sense, we can say that the term masculinity and feminity are social and cultural constructs. They can be changed as per the society. In the novel, the characters have also shown the very characteristic of upheaval in their life. The male characters such as : Prashant and Sanjay are helpless but female character such as : Sanjeevani, Sanat and Sharmila are powerful enough to get back their homeland.

Gender is not natural. Nature does not have any role to distinguish between male and female. It is socio-cultural practice that creates distinction between male and female. Appropriating this point Bhasin further remarks, "culture makes us male or female. It gives our biological definition. It defines how boys or men should behave, dress appear, what attitudes and qualities they should have, how should be treated" (3). She means to say that masculinity as a characteristic is socio-cultural. That is why it can and often does differ from community to community, and time to time. Masculinity, like gender is not static. It is constantly reconstructed. It may keep changing in response to the changes in economic patterns, natural or man made disaster, war or migration.

In this regard, in the novel *Facing My Phantoms*, Sanjeevani talks with her mother in a dispute about her wedding and says, "That was in your days, these are different times, we are different people, we have different expectations and we think

differently” (37). In these lines, Sanjeevani means to say that her mother's days have gone. In her days, females were compelled to obey whatever the males said. But Sanjeevani is not agree with her mother that these are her days different from her mothers. They have their own expectations, beliefs and interests. They (females) have equal right to put their argument about choosing their suitors. Gender hegemony does not work anymore in her days. Gender role has changed now and there is no more hierarchy in the name of gender.

Regarding gender, Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* takes gender as the social performance. She asserts, “Gender reality is created through sustained social performance” (141). She means to say that gender has performative role in the society. It is performed in the society to create the clear binary between male and female. It has no innate quality as such. The term ‘gender’ is in practice to dominate women and promote the men.

In this regard, Sanjeevani takes gender role in a performative way in the novel. Traditionally, men and women have to perform according to the role assigned to them in the society. Males have to perform differently than the females. They have to wear different clothes from women. But, challenging this notion, Sanjeevani performs as the man in the novel. She wears male’s clothes and keeps interest in male activities. She says: “I would want others to think I was a boy. I liked my hair short, wore only pants, and completely stayed away from female fancies” (32). She, performing the male activities, wants to show that gender is not the demarcation between male and female. It does not create any distinction between them. It has only performative function in the society. Performing as males, she wants to prove that gender is constructed after the birth of a person. When a person is born his or her gender is categorized as per the performance he or she does or shows in the society.



Similarly, the next critics Richard P. Appelbaum and William J. Chambliss in the book *Models of Society* further take gender as the behavioural differences between male and female. They assert, “The term gender is used to refer to behavioural differences between males and females that are culturally based and socially learned” (146). Through this expression, they mean to say that gender refers to the behavioural differences between male and females. Male has different types of behaviours to perform and so on by females. This types of division is not determined by birth but by socially and culturally.

The females in the beginning were forcefully imposed the binary opposition. But slowly and gradually, they internalized it and started to think that males were really superior. In this regards, Simon de Beauvoir appropriates this notion in her book in *The Second Sex* and says, “A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man” (1). She means to say that the concept of masculinity is dominant and hegemonic. This sort of compulsion hardly emerges from sex; instead it is from the culture and its interpretative strategies that the society inherits. A male or female has to adjust into the prescribed framework of masculinity and femininity already established by society.

In this regard, in the novel, the conversation between Sanjeevani's grandmother and her mother clearly displays the hegemonic effect of masculinity upon females. Her grandmother says to her daughter-in-law, “Teach her to sit, Kanchi Buhari. No girl from a proper family sits with her legs stretched apart the way Sanjeevani does, as though she were a man and has nothing to hide” (32). These lines spoken by Sanjeevani's grandmother display that the females in the Nepalese society

have internalized the hegemoization of patriarchal ethos. They are to be careful in every aspects of their life. Sanat, Sanjeevani's grandmother orders her daughter-in-law to teach Sanjeevani the manner of sitting in the family, to behave in a way prescribed by the masculinity. From these lines, it is clear that the females are the patriarchal agents and they are artificial beings. They don't have any subjectivity. They do not have any existence but are performing the role prescribed by the patriarchy. They are the puppet in the hand of patriarchal masculinity. So, from this evidence, we can say that the gender or the masculinity is not innate but the social construct.

The cultural property of masculinity has been emphasized by Mike Leach. For him, unlike the biological state of maleness, masculinity is constructed, socially, historically and politically. Most importantly it is not natural. Masculinity is based on gendered binary division of culture. It is not static, rather it is contingent as per the cultural changes. Appropriating this view, Kamala Bhasin talks about the interdependence of the construction of masculinity and femininity. If one does carry the masculine behavior, the other is expected to carry the feminine. She further asserts:

Men are commonly described as aggressive, assertive, independent, competitive, intensive and so on. These attributes are based on the idea that there is something about men which transcends their local situation. Men are seen as having natures which transcends their local situations. Notion of masculinity may change, men may dress differently, the "bread winner ethic" may collapse. Masculinity is always local and subject to change. (9)

From these lines, we can say that masculinity is culturally constructed and it is contingent and goes on changing according to the situation. The notion of masculinity

such as : aggressive, intensive, competitive etc. are not innate rather constructed, so these can transcendence with the local situation.

In this regard, in the novel, Sanjeevani's words are noteworthy to confirm the transformation of the definition of masculinity. She says: "I remember sauntering into the courtyard, where all the females of my family spent their idle afternoons; chest held back, arms swinging in the air and wanting each woman there to feel my manly presence" (32). These lines spoken by Sanjeevani clearly show that the very term 'manly' has been used for woman. Here, it can be claimed that the traditional notion of manly or masculinity is subverted in which masculinity is related with men only. The protagonist of the novel, Sanjeevani subverts the notion of masculinity and proved that female also can possess the masculine quality. The very phrase "manly presence" indicates the presence of female character in place of men. Traditionally, the word 'manly' is used to denote the men, but now the situation is different, the context is different, so it indicates the female. Thus, it is clear that the issue raised by this research "subversion of gender roles" is proved here.

Conventionally, masculinity is equated with reason, control, power, independence etc, and to be real man is to regard the feminine characteristic in contempt. A male showing the features traditionally regarded as feminine type is considered as lacking masculinity. Appropriating this notion, a notable cultural critic, Chris Barker in his book *Cultural Studies Theory and Practice* says, "Traditionally masculinity has encompassed the values of strength, stoicism, action, control, independence, self sufficiency, male comreadire/mateship and work amongst others. Devalued were relationship, verbal ability, domestic life, tenderness, communication, children and women" (302). In this sense, Barker means to say that masculinity is linked with the value like strength, stoicism, action, control, independence, self-

sufficiency, male, comradeship and so on. All these qualities are possessed by male and the qualities like domestic life, tenderness, cowardiceness etc. are related to the female, but, just opposite of this expectation of masculinity, Prashant, in the novel *Facing My Phantoms* acts unmanly. Prashant, being a man or a male should have acted with 'manly' power such as strength, stoicism, action, self control etc. to fight against the Maoists. But, fearing with them, he flees to the capital city to save his life.

The lines spoken by Prashant in the conversation with Sanjeevani are remarkable here. He says: "This is temporary, I had a word with Maharajdhiraj. He says the time is not right but when it will be, he will resume authority and then that shall be the end of this people's war nonsense and then we can all go back to our homes" (10). These lines spoken by Prashant clearly show that he is no more masculine. He is not able to get his home back himself. Rather he depends upon the king for getting his lost home back. Just opposite of the expectation of masculinity that demands males to be strong, self sufficient, dependent, Prashant here becomes helpless, powerless, dependent and so on which are regarded to be feminine traits. Here, male is failure to fulfill his duty as masculine superiority. Hence, the issue of this research 'subversion of gender roles' is proved.

Traditionally, the males in the society should be masculine. He should protect the family members. He should act independently, courageously, intelligently, actively and so on. If he fails to do so, he is considered to have feminine quality.

Appropriating this notion, Roger Lanchester in his essay, "Subject Honor, Object Shame" writes:

Every act is, effectively, part of ongoing exchange system between men in which women figure as intermediaries. To maintain one's masculinity, one must successfully come out on top of this exchange.

To lose in this ongoing exchange system entails a loss of face and thus a loss of masculinity. The threat is a total loss of status. (qtd. In Adams and Savran. 42)

From these lines Lanchester means to say that traditionally, the concept of masculinity is related to the success. One must come on the top in every acts to maintain his masculinity. If one fails to do so, or if he escapes the problems then he is no more muscular, hence falls on feminine quality.

In this regard the conversation between Sanjeevani and her father in the novel about the transformation of room is remarkable. The speaker asserts:

My parents had moved lodgings three times last year. 'Not for long should our whereabouts be known.' My father's fear of being followed by the Maoists even in Kathmandu. We keep changing our lodgings and they will never trace us. 'But Bua, they are not after you'. I would try and make him understand. 'Yes! Why do you think they killed my son?, indeed they are after me'. He would shout in anger. (66)

This conversation between Sanjeevani and her father and its narration by Sanjeevani shows that being frightened from Maoist, Prashant changes the rooms in Kathmandu. He, in fear of being noticed by Maoists about his residence, goes on changing his rooms. He even transforms three times within one year. He escapes to avoid the problems in his life. In this sense, he fails to maintain his masculinity. To escape from responsibility and problems indicates the cowardice nature of Prashant. Hence, Prashant acts unmanly and just opposite of the expectation of the masculinity to prove the issue of this research, subversion of gender roles.

Traditionally, human society is rooted in male values and values of women are suppressed. Patriarchal normativity exploits the women. Patriarchy or masculinity

takes males to be protective towards females. They boast being males as they are wise, intelligent, independent, protective, rational and so on. One, who lacks these qualities, is lowered to the femininity. Masculine is one who should be doner, giver, bold enough and the qualities opposite these are considered to be feminine. In this regard, to support this notion, Roger Lancaster further asserts:

To give is to be masculine, to receive is to be feminine. To take by force, to seize, or to grab hold of is to be masculine, whereas to surrender, to yield, or to give up is to be feminine. In any case the one who initiates action, dominates, or enters is to be masculine. Whoever is acted upon, dominated or entered if is feminine. (46)

Here, Lancaster from these lines argues that to be masculine, one should be dominant, bold and initiators of the actions. One should be giver or seizure. He should have 'to grab hold of' the situation. But if one does surrender, yield or give up the attempts is considered to be feminine. Moreover, who is dominated, acted upon or entered is feminine.

Regarding this notion of masculinity, in the novel, the character, Prashant seems to be failure one to hold up the masculine qualities. He is a male and the head of the family. He has the responsibility of taking care of his family members. But, just opposite of that expectation, he becomes the coward and escapes from his home to the city to save his life. He does not have masculine power to take action against injustice done upon him and his family. He sometimes returns back to his home hiding his face by the helmet so that he could not be known by anyone or the Maoist cadres. The lines of Sanjeevani about her father justify his timidness:

That day my father had sneaked into Ganeshpur, riding pillion on a neighbour's motorcycle. He had come to Ganeshpur to retrieve some

necessary land papers that were locked in my mother's grey aluminium cupboard in their bedroom. But he had left shortly after a lunch. 'Not too safe to travel in the evening', he had said, masking face with the helmet. (5-6)

This expression of Sanjeevani clearly reveals that Prashant is coward, dominated and acted upon. He does not have power and courage to be in the village of his own and hold talks to his villagers and Maoist cadres. He comes his home in disguised form by hiding his head or face with the helmet so that nobody notices him. His masculinity is threatened by such activities and here he is lowered to be feminine. To lose masculinity in the patriarchal social system is to be feminine. His feminine quality subverts the notion of masculinity and pushes it into the crisis.

Masculinity is the product of patriarchy. It usually undermines women's empowerment. It always looks the women through the eyes of patriarchy. It aims to impose the patriarchal norms, values, system, rules and regulation in the society. The males give no any respect to the females. They think that the males should be autonomous in their decision, independent in their action, bold enough, rational, intelligent and so on. They should have masculine power and should be superior to the females. In this regard, Patricia Sexton in her widely quoted book *The Feminized Male* asserts:

What does it mean to be masculine? It means, obviously, holding male values and following male behavior and norms. Male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, commanding power, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body.

(104)

From these lines of Patricia, it is clear that to be masculine one should be a male. He should hold up male values such as; courage, inner direction, aggression, autonomy, command, dominating, leading, technological skills to move others according to his choice. If one loses command upon others, he no longer becomes masculine rather lowered to the feminine. His mind and body should be tough enough so that he can be firm and steady in his status. If he fails to handle all these things, he is no longer masculine but feminine.

Focusing on this notion of masculinity, it can be claimed that masculinity is related to male and his activities in the societies. If he loses his status or command in the society, he no longer is masculine, and as a result, his masculinity is threatened and falls into crisis. Prashant, in the novel, in a conversation with his son, Sanjay, says:

You mean to say, you will blatantly join hand with them, call them to my house and have them eat my grains and sleep on my cots? Have you heard their slogans lately? Does it not insult you in any way? Walking down the village, not one Tharu comes to greet me these days. They all stand in their courtyards, shameless and indignant. (6)

Prashant, through these lines, reveals his cowardiceness. He, once who had power all over the village of Ganeshpur, is losing his command slowly and gradually now. The Tharu community does not even greet him while he goes past to their house. They were once his slaves. They had to depend upon him for their hands to mouth. But now they think that he is no more respectful person. Prashant fails to secure his position as the protective of others in the village. He loses his command and status. He feels shame to be in front of them. So, he escapes to the city. By escaping to the problem,



he reveals his feminine quality just opposite of the expectation of masculinity. His masculinity is threatened and pushed aside into crisis and subverted.

Males always want that their self-constructed rules and regulations be implemented in the family, society or in the nation. They think that they are only capable of this. They in the name of patriarchal normativity give priority to the one of one sexual relationship. It means they prefer to have sexual intercourse with one person. If one keeps sexual relation with many persons, it is against the patriarchal normativity. The patriarchy can not tolerate commercialization in the sex. Karl Bendarik in his book *The Male in Crisis* says, "Alienation at work, bureaucracy in politics and war, and the commercialization of sexuality all undermine masculinity" (104). Bendarik from this statement says that if sexuality is commercialized then it threatens the patriarchal normativity. Patriarchy demands for the secret and one-to-one sexual relationship between male and female.

On the basis of this view of masculinity, we can observe the activities of Sanjeevani in the novel. She commercializes the sexual relationship in the name of going against their family decision to wed to a man of same caste to her. At first, she has sexual relation with Hemanta, then with Razat and at last with Chandra, Maoist commander. The line of Sanjeevani in the novel says, "Razat, my Shyam, I weep in my soul before I begin to cry as Chandra releases me from himself" (127). This line proves that Sanjeevani goes on changing the sex partners after she breaks the engagement with Nabin. In the name of her freedom of choice about her suitor, she keeps sexual relationship with Hemanta, Razat and Chandra. Her activities are against the social norms of patriarchal social system. The masculinity which demands patriarchal norms to be implemented, is threatened here and pushed aside to the corner, hence the subversion of masculinity takes place.

Sheeba Shah, the novelist, in order to rupture the hegemonic power of masculinity, presents a character who prefers for the homosexual relationship. To be homosexual is to go against the patriarchy. In the novel, the narrator narrates: “When Sanat entered her husband's room with a glass full of hot milk, without which her husband did not go to bed, she found him standing by his bed, his pants down, and Laata's face buried in his groin” (103). These lines clearly show that Raja Saheb, Sanat's husband is homosexual. He, despite having a beautiful wife, Sanat, goes for the homosexual preferences. He compels his own servant Laata (a dumb boy) to suck his penis for his sexual satisfaction. A homosexual man is not satisfied with his wife and the proof is Raja Saheb.

The narrator further asserts these lines to prove the homosexuality of Raja Saheb:

For days, he had stared at the boy. He used to ask for him to be sent down to fill his hookah, massage his feet and even pluck out the grey hair from his scalp. And when the fire in his groins refused to subside, enflaming his carnal passion obliterating his sense of right and wrong, the Raja Saheb grabbed the creamy white hand of Laata and forced it upon his pulsating penis. (103)

Raja Saheb being unsatisfied with the heterosexual relationship with his wife, Sanat, goes for homosexual activities with Laata. He even kisses Laata's face, chest, navel and penis as well. He is indifferent to his wife but wants Laata, which proves his homosexuality. He goes against the norms and values of patriarchal masculinity of heterosexual lifestyle, and thus subverts the traditional notion of masculinity.

In an anthology, *Boys in Contemporary Culture* edited by Paul Smith, he suggests, “Masculinity must always be thought of in the plural as masculinities are

defined and cut through by differences and contradictions” (32). Smith notes that masculinity is not the singular essence related to male only. Rather it should be understood in its plural form which reinforces activeness, strengths, rationality and so on. Thus, masculinity is not only the property of male but also of female and others as well. Female is independent being like male who can perform anything equal to male. Not only independent they can exist in the world without male.

The destabilization of gender categories, identities and roles, pave the way for the liberation of female from the clutches of male ideology. It in some sense can be termed as the empowerment of female. This concept of empowerment of female is closely related to the concept of female masculinity. Female masculinity is against the male masculinity, meaning, the domination of male no longer prevails. It is the females who were having an active role inside the house, and traditionally sex was the weapon of male to prove his ultimate supremacy; however which is fast collapsing.

Femininity is also called womanliness or it refers to qualities and behaviors judged by a particular culture to be ideally associated with or especially to women and girls. Distinct from femaleness, which is a biological and physiological classification concerned with the reproduced system, femininity principally refers to secondary sex characteristics and other behaviors and features generally regarded as being more prevalent and better suited to women, whether inborn or socialized. In traditional culture such features included submissive, gentleness, patience and kindness. These are often perceived as being associated with personality traits such as nurturing, life-giving qualities, creativity and openness or yielding, to other people. The modern stereotype of woman is perceived as the complementary opposite of a man. A feminine woman may have physical attributes different from those of a masculine male. These attributes result from the relationship between an individual's biology and

the socialization she receives as a result of that biology. However, theories of femininity explored in the field of Gender Studies propose that femininity and masculinity are essentially constructed or performed through a process of social construction.

Feminist criticism becomes the distinctive and concrete method to literature in 1970s, after the publication of *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet. According to Millet, this patriarchal system is sustained with the power gained by physical, political, government and so many other agencies. To destroy each and every thread of constructed power, females need to struggle, with hard effort. She writes:

Our society, like other historical civilization is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, sciences, universities, avenue of power within society, including the coercive power of police, is entirely in male hands. As the essence of politics is power, such realization can't fail to carry impact ... if one takes patriarchal government to be the institution where by that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male.

(54)

Millet asserts that male has upper hand in all the institutional spheres. So, he rules females for his purpose. But Millet wants to defy such system and appeals females for the collaboration. She argues that females are also equally capable to male but due to power politics they are disfigured and misrepresented. Only the way they can acquire the lost position is to fight against the male ideology and subvert it.

On the basis of this view of Millet, we can see the activities of Sanjeevani, which are stretched for the liberation of females. She opens an NGO called "Naari" and works against physical and mental abuse of women. The lines spoken by

Sanjeevani to Sharmila, one who is beaten mercilessly by her husband and, as a result, her three months pregnancy is miscarried, are remarkable here:

Sister, I work in an NGO. It is called "Naari" and we work against physical and mental abuse of women. My name is Sanjeevani. I am its regional coordinator and run the shelter for victims of physical abuse. Your husband beat you. That is wrong. It is a criminal offence and he can even go to jail for this. You must not allow that ever by anyone, not only your husband. A hand raised to beat once, can even kill you the next time. (119)

Sanjeevani invokes Sharmila to go against the abuse of her husband. She even persuades her to file a case to the police against her husband who is one of the agents of patriarchy. She says that females should not be calm against the abuse but do collaboration against the male to subvert their superiority in the society.

Feminity is also known as womanliness. The womanliness refers to the certain traits given to the female from the history long back. Such traits are submissive, gentleness, patience, kindness, dominated, dependent and so on. They depend upon men to have identity and without the help of men, they are identity less. This concept of traditional feminity can be analyzed in regard with the characters like Sanjeevani and Sanat. Sanjeevani acts just opposite of the concept. She ruptures the binary created between male and female or masculinity and feminity. She, giving birth to a illegal child, collects hopes to be alive alone. Sanjeevani, just opposite of the expectation of patriarchal society to get married to a suitable husband who could care her lifelong, involves herself in an illegal relation with many person and is pregnant and gives birth to a child. She talks with her child lifting it on her arms and says, "My baby, you have made me a mother. Now, I shall learn to own my life and earn to

appreciate it. I will value my person, my body, myself. I realize my potential as a person and will do my best to be of use to you and my nation” (174). Sanjeevani, though alone from the family, stands firm and decides to make her own identity along with the new born child. She does not expect to be helped by anyone rather keeps hopes on herself. She feels pride to be a mother of a baby without a father. She vows to value her person (identity), her body and herself. Her decision of living alone without the help of male is itself the threat to the masculinity. She is fed up of the patriarchal norms and values who uses females as sex toys. She is determinate to grow up the child though no one comes to take responsibility as the father of the baby. Through her determination of giving name of her the baby, she ruptures the patriarchal normativity of Nepalese society, where a child needs his father for his/her identity.

Similarly, the other character, Sanat also proves that the traditional concept of femininity as submissive, dependent, dominated, irrational and so on are constructed. They are not innate but constructed to suppress women. She, married to a old man as a result, becomes a widow in her early twenties. The political scenario of the nation has just changed. King Tribhuvan has regained his throne after his exile into India. It is the time when women are not given any rights in comparison to the men. Nation has started just to exercise the democracy. The environment is turbulent. The society is in the verge of old Rana regime and new democratic system. Everything is in haphazard way. At this situation, a widow to twenty, Sanat decides to move to the Terai for the better education of her children. She has to play the role both of father and the mother. So, she determines to leave homeland and migrate far away to the south, the Terai:

Sanat travels along with Chandra, past the towering hills that have secluded Kanda from the rest of the progressing world. For weeks her entourage moves, crossing one hill after another, camping at night and moving on the next morning. And thus, Sanat moves into a foreign land, ready to start a new settlement of her own. Sanat buys a total of two thousand bighas paying a total of seven thousand and gold coins. (129-30)

Through these lines it is clear that women are no longer less than men. They are also able to do best for their lives. It is patriarchy that restricts the women within four walls of a house. They are restricted with the limits of household not because they are weaker but because it is the desire of patriarchy to suppress them and rule over them and consider males superior ones. But, Sanat, being a widow of early age, instead of lamenting for her husband and cursing her fate, is determined in her decision and walks in the path of progress. Hence, she ruptures the binary opposition in which females are considered as submissive, dependent, irrational and so on, and proves that women are also independent, rational, leading, courageous and so on. By proving her valorness, Sanat ruptures the traditional notion of femininity.

In the novel, the novelist Sheeba Shah presents the female character in a different way. Born in an aristocratic family, having engaged with a person of her own caste and class, the protagonist, Sanjeevani, breaks the engagement with Nabin. Having broken the engagement with Nabin, she keeps an illegal relation with Razat, a married one and from different caste. Her behavior really socks her family, its dignity and pride. It means the pride of patriarchy is shaken. Patriarchy always supposes women to be submissive, dependent, irrational, emotional and subject of rule. In this sense, Sanjeevani also has to obey her family decision of marrying her with Nabin,

but she does not agree, getting shocked her parents. If she agrees with her parents, the concept of masculinity that the masculine power is only with men, will be proven. But her radical and revolutionary behavior subverts the expectation of patriarchal masculinity and proves that not only male but also female can possess the masculinity.

Did I not think of only myself when I broke my engagement with Nabin? My parents were shattered after that incident. I think it is not really the shock that makes them behave the way they do, but the fact that I went against what is called family honour. I brought disrupt to the family and this is what pinches them the most. We are a big family ... the Singh family God knows we have been a proud family, although now nothing remains to be proud of. (4)

Sanjeevani, through this expression, displays that proud of her family is disrupted. The patriarchal norms in which a daughter has to obey all the decision is dismantled here. Her family honour no more remains. Sanjeevani, in order to subvert the so called masculinity, willingly breaks the engagement with Nabin and goes with Razat to keep an illegal relation. To keep illegal relation by a unmarried girl with a married man of lower caste is really going and revolting against the so called masculine power.

Traditional notion of masculinity and femininity has created the binary opposition between male and female. It is thought that males are aggressive, hot tempered, decisive, leading and having the concept of freedom for themselves. But the conversation below between Sanjeevani and her mother clearly displays that the females also want to be free, dominant and decisive in their life.

Sanjeevani : Why can I not go out to the market? Dada is going.



Mother : Because he is a boy and you are a girl.

Sanjeevani : Why can I not stay up on the terrace? Dada is flying kites there.

Mother : Because he is a boy and you are a girl.

Sanjeevani : Why can I not go over to spend my holidays at my friend's place? You always let Dada to go Bimal Dada's place.

Mother : Because he is a boy and you are a girl. (32)

The conversation above clearly displays that the male is free to do anything whatever he likes but the female is not. Here, Sanjay, Sanjeevani's Dada is free to do whatever he likes and wherever he likes to go because he is a male. But, Sanjeevani can't do anything according to her desire because she is a female or a girl. To be a male or female is not the fate or destiny one carries by the birth which frees one and restricts another, but it is the patriarchal notion, norms and values, pride and prejudice that restricts Sanjeevani to go according to her will. But the lines 'Why can I not go out to the market?' 'Why can I not stay on the terrace' and so on clearly show that Sanjeevani feels as Sanjay feels. Both the siblings want to get freedom in their life. But it is patriarchal normativity that prevents Sanjeevani doing so.

Sanjeevani is not such a character who can be restricted by the bondage of the rules and regulations of the society. She goes against the system to seek freedom. She further asserts:

I started rebelling for being a girl and most of my teenage years were spent in forcing myself to think I was a boy. I liked my hair short, wore only pants, and completely stayed away from female fancies. While

Hemlata Dijju painted her nails and brought matching bangles for her new salwar kameez, I forced myself to say I was not interested. (32)

This expression from Sanjeevani shows that for getting freedom, she even neglects the wearings in her childhood. To show that she also has the similar importance in the family as her brother does have she forces herself to feel as the boys feel so that nobody could compel her to wear as female and to think as females do. She wears pants, cuts her hair short and stays away from female fancies only to make other understand that females also have the same feelings as males have. Her behavior as male shocked her family and they were worried about her future. Just as she does in her childhood, she also repeats the same behavior in her youth and breaks the engagement with Nabin in order to get shocked her parents. Her mother and grandmother have internalized the hegemonic nature of patriarchy and also want Sanjeevani to be hegemonized in the similar way they have been. But instead of being hegemonized by patriarchy, she threatens it and pushes it into crisis. The patriarchal masculinity is subverted upside down as she, being a daughter of an aristocratic family, even from the Singh family, breaks the engagement with Nabin, a man chosen by her father, a pride of their clan and from same caste.

Sanjeevani paves the way of freedom not only for herself but also for other female characters in the novel. She goes back to her motherland in Ganeshpur from Kathmandu and establishes an NGO named "Naari". She opens a shelter named "Naari Bishram Kendra" for the women who are abused by their husbands and for their children who are helpless. Sharmila Bhandari is one of them who becomes the member of that shelter. Sharmila, being beaten mercilessly by her husband, is admitted to the hospital. She is pregnant but her baby dies inborn in womb due to

excessive beatings. Sanjeevani persuades her to sue a case in the police against the abuse of her husband. Sharmila accepts her advice. Now, she runs a beauty parlour to earn her living. She is able to live her life happily without her husband. The lines in the novel speak “Sharmila Bhandari has now started her own beauty parlour for women and men and calls it the ‘Kathmaqndu Beauty Parlour’. Whenever she gets free time, she comes and helps out in the shelter, that has become an extended home and family for her” (232). She is now capable to run her household and outside work herself. She does not have any necessity of her husband. She is happy without the male which is opposite of the notion of patriarchal masculinity that thinks women can not live alone without the help of men.

Dhimini is another woman of seventeen years old who is involved with Sanjeevani in her Naari Bishram Kendra. She was married with a forty year old man in her childhood. But he, being a drunkard, always beats her. There are bruises and scratches in her tender face. So, Sanjeevani brings her to her center to fight against the abuses of patriarchal exploitation.

Sanjeevani is motivated with the notion that being a female one should not be limited in the space prescribed by the masculinity. She does not believe that females are powerless. She herself is a powerful, determined and self-conscious woman. Once her family is chased from her homeland, she makes determination that she will go to the path of returning back her homeland. She makes mission and goes back to her homeland after many years of exile from their home. She goes to her ruined home and feels ashamed that once it was a very nice home. She decides to hold a talk with Maoist cadres. But she is insulted by them in the name of a feudal lord's daughter. Yet, she does not lose her hope and goes on talking frequently with them. Though they were

reluctant to her request at first, they admire the bravery of Sanjeevani and tell that her request can be taken into consideration. In a conversation with Sanjeevani, one of the commanders says, “But since you have made such efforts and come down all this way, your request, if submitted in writing to the Jana Adalat, could be considered” (153). These lines clearly show that she is able to persuade the commander to think about her request. He can remain reluctant no more to her request.

Similarly, Sanjeevani convinces Kallu, Maoist cadres in her mission of lifting up the living standard of the Ganeshpur village. Kallu is ready to help her in her mission. She makes a plan to cultivate her land, once seized by the Maoists, with value-added crops that will reap the maximum returns. She gathers all the villagers and tells that they should be involved in cultivating the vegetables, flowers and fruits so that by selling these products their life style would be lifted up. The lines “we will discuss the potential of my new farming scheme. And finally, when I convince the villagers, we will commence the execution of the plan” (203), spoken by Sanjeevani display that she is convincing the villagers for the new scientific farming system in order to raise their life standard up.

The expression of Kallu even clarifies the masculine effort of Sanjeevani to make all the villagers work for their benefit. Kallu says:

Whatever you say, Maiya, the fact remains that you fought with the area commander to use this land as common ground for community farming, to grow vegetables that can be sold in the bigger markets of Kathmandu it was not easy, Maiya, for you to come down here, week after week. You were blind folded and made to walk for hours in the jungle and then sit explaining your plans even to the YCL-Cadres.  
(258)

These lines from one of the Maoist cadres, Kallu, are spoken in appreciation to Sanjeevani. Her greatness is revealed when she uses her own land for community forming. She shares all the land to the villagers and teaches them the method of farming in scientific way.

After she starts community farming the face of village changes drastically. The villagers are able to open an account in the bank and are happy now. They all give the credit to Sanjeevani. Kallu further asserts:

Remember Maiya, when we first opened an account in the Krishi Bikash Bank at Pahalmanpur, people stayed away from us at the bank. But I was proud of you when you boldly said that the account will be named under Ganeshpur village community and created a board of representative from the village to run the account and the management.

(259)

All these expression of the villagers promote the appraisals of Sanjeevani. She is admired and appreciated by all the villagers. Though she is a woman, she is able to handle and lead the villagers into her decision. She does have the power of leading the others. She does have the courage and rationality to make others work as her own will. In this sense, she possesses the quality of masculine. She has the masculine power. Traditional definition of masculinity that the male is masculine and the female is feminine is subverted here. From the activities of Sanjeevani in the novel, it is proved that the concept of masculinity and femininity is social constructs. So, not only male but female also can have the masculine power and traits. To be masculine power with the female is really a threat to the notion of patriarchal masculinity. Thus, she subverts the binary of the masculinity and femininity.

Judith Halberstam in her essay “An Introduction to Female Masculinity” talks about masculinity. According to her, it is the social and cultural construct. She asserts; “If masculinity is not the social and cultural and indeed political expression of maleness, then what is it?” (355). Halberstam means to say that masculinity is a socio-cultural construct constructed to suppress the women. Males constructed it distinguishing male and female to create binary opposition between these two sexes. It has not any innate quality as such but political expression created to down women and make the position of male superior in the society.

From the expression of Halberstam, it is clear that masculinity has been used by males as a weapon to suppress the women. But it does not have innate quality as such to be linked with male only. Masculinity is the quality which either male or female can possess. It has no any close connection with male only. Even the females can have this quality. In this regard, in the novel, Kallu speaks with Bhalmansa Kaka about Sanjeevani. He says: “Rising a healthy nursery is an essential aspect of good farming, Bhalmansa Kaka. So is soil preparation for tomatoes. Maiya has found out through her research that deep cultivation of land up to three feet is necessary” (258). Sanjeevani is working as a leading icon here. She suggests the villagers about the methods of cultivation and growing more vegetables. Leading others is really the masculine quality. From this expression, we can claim that masculinity is constructed one by society and culturally. It is not static but contingent one. Traditionally it is related with male but now the situation is different, so it is related with females also. Relating masculinity with female means to subvert the notion of masculinity and femininity.

Sheeba Shah, the novelist, presents Sanjeevani as a revolutionary character. She revolts all against the patriarchal norms which differentiates her from other

females. She is always in obsession of breaking patriarchal pillars. She even distorts her name Sanjeevani to Sanju, which is the gift of patriarchy. The narrator asserts:

Instantly, Sanju came alive, she pushed Sanjeevani back. Did Sanjeevani fight? No, she quietly gave in, perhaps even willingly, for Sanjeevani was tired by now. She was wary of taking lead for so long, her goodness had drained her out. She needed to rest for sometime. Sanju, the forceful one, the spirited one and the one who truly loves the self, came to the forefront. (58)

Sanjeevani is such a character who wants to challenge the notion of masculinity and femininity. She even dislikes the name Sanjeevani, which is the gift of patriarchy kept for her thinking that she would possess the feminine quality. But she even changes her name in her dire need from Sanjeevani to Sanju. She is so fed up with the patriarchal norms that she wants to change her whole identity given by the patriarchy and establish her new one. She prefers to call herself Sanju rather than Sanjeevani to be self dependent. Distorting the name of her own given by her parents is really a threat to the concept of masculinity.

Sanjeevani works in a different way in every aspects of her life. She wants to go against the patriarchal masculinity to shock it and establish female and their status in the society. To some extent, she is capable of challenging it and promote the female. She proves that not only male but also female can have the masculine quality through her different activities. Hence, she subverts the binary opposition of masculinity and femininity.

Thus, Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms* has depicted the subversion of traditional form of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. This research along with the various causes and consequences, has attempted to present the way of subversion of

gender roles. It believes that the major cause of the subversion of gender roles is the shift in men's privileged position in the family and society. Being guided by the psychology of hegemonic masculinity, males always try to maintain their position at the top in the family or in the society. But sometimes their position is captured or seized by the women because of their rising consciousness. And sometimes, the males themselves are deceived due to false belief that their self constructed norms and values can not sustain their position updated. Women overcome the social norms and values constructed by patriarchy and come into power enough to handle the society and guide it and hence, their self constructed masculinity falls into crisis and pushed aside and even subverted. And the subversion of masculinity and feminity carries no any binary categories between male and female.



### **III. Redefining the Concept of Conventional Gender Roles**

Sheeba Shah's novel, *Facing My Phantoms*, demonstrates the subversion of traditional form of hegemonic masculinity as the male characters fail to perform the masculine codes. The male characters such as Prashant, Sanjay and Prabhat fail to confirm the masculine traits. Their powerlessness, irrationality, irresponsibility, dependency etc are the causes to subvert their masculinity. But it is the female characters such as Sanjeevani, Sanat and Sharmila etc, who are powerful enough to possess the traditional form of masculinity. Being female, these characters possess the masculine power and lead the family and society towards the emancipation from patriarchal domination, poverty and ignorance which ultimately subvert the traditional notion of gender roles.

The major figure of the novel, Sanjeevani, is bold, active, courageous, rational, and patient. She is able to handle the worse situation of her family. Her family lives in Kathmandu as an internal refugee due to the fear of Maoists. They are accused of being feudal lord and exploiter. They are threatened to be killed. Being afraid of Maoists threat, Prashant, her father flees to the capital city to save his life. He even does not care his family and hence, consequently, his son, Sanjay is killed by Moists in turn. Prashant can do nothing to save his son. In this sense, he could not be a protective father which contrasts the traditional masculinity that demands a male/father should be protective towards others/ his children which is the strong evident to subvert his masculinity.

This research primarily focuses on the activities of the female character, Sanjeevani in the novel. She is expected to act with the feminine traits as submissive, dependent, and emotional. But just opposite of that notion, she is active, independent,

rational and self-reliant. She is able to get back her homeland from Maoist seizures which her father could not have done. She holds talk frequently with area commander about returning her homeland. At first, they are not interested to her request. But her rationality, patience, self-reliant compels them to return back her home land.

Sanjeevani is exposed as a revolutionary woman in the novel. She does not follow the rules and regulations of patriarchal social system. Being a daughter of a high cultured family, she is engaged with Nabin, a man from same social class. But she breaks her engagement with him as she wants to select her suitor herself. Rather she prefers to keep relation with Razat, a married man and from different caste. She is happy with him. Getting shocked her parents, she breaks engagement with Nabin and continues an illegal relation with Razat. Doing so, she wants to shock her parents means to say that she wants to challenge the traditional norms and values of patriarchal masculinity in which women are considered to be dominated, subjugated, controlled, emotional and so on. It also demands them to act as per the feminine traits. But she acts just opposite of that notion which is another cause to subvert the gender roles.

Sanjeevani is presented as the leading icon in the novel. She leads all the villagers to the path of progress. After she gets back her land, she starts community farming in Far Western region of Nepal. All the villagers of Ganeshpur village agree and support her plan. She launches community farming in her own land to emancipate the villagers from poverty. The face of village changes drastically soon after. Leading others is the notion of traditional masculinity which only men possess. But Sanjeevani, being female, possesses it which is another strong evidence of subversion

of masculinity. Along with Sanjeevani, other female characters like Sanat, Sharmila Dhimini etc. are also active and bold enough to handle the situation in their favour.

Sheeba Shah, the novelist, presenting the revolutionary female character, Sanjeevani, wants to empower women and challenge the patriarchal social norms and values. Patriarchy has dominated the women since the long past in the name of masculinity and femininity. But she, presenting the character like Sanjeevani, wants to prove that not only males but also females are masculine. They are no less than males. They also can change the society and even the nation. The definition of masculinity is wrong in itself which is constructed to dominate women. From the very definition of masculinity it is considered that a male should be masculine. He should be active, domineering, protective, rational and so on. When the males fail to correspond that assigned traits, then their masculinity is subverted. It means its definition is one of the causes of subversion of masculinity as males fail to accomplish assigned role and it is the females who occupy that very roles. So, the novelist wants to redefine the boundary of masculinity through new parameter.

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