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Projection of Old Age in Selected Contemporary Nepali Short Stories

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By

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Letter of Approval

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work. It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree in any institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published anywhere.

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Abstract

This research explores the projection of old age in eleven contemporary Nepali short stories. The research studies the elderly characters in the selected stories from the three anthologies: Durga Karki's *Kumari Prasna Haru* (2020), Nayan Raj Panday's *Jiyara* (2020) and Ramlal Joshi's *Ba Ama* (2022). The study critically evaluates how these authors depict the socio-culturally constructed status of old age, often neglecting the elderly people's needs for agency, identity, and intrinsic value. Using the sociocultural lens of aging literature, Margaret Morganroth Guellente's concept that sociocultural perceptions guide progressive or declining narratives of old age is central to this study. The analysis shows that the elderly characters are presented with stereotypical aging that features degeneration and loss. So, aging characters in the stories are economically and physically weak, socially fragile, and politically marginalized. The study reveals the intergenerational gap, with younger characters undermining the lives of elderly people. This study, thus, unfolds the bitter portrayal of old age, which is seen only through the lens of the decline discourses in the selected short

stories. Studying aging through sociocultural dimensions that predominantly highlight negative perceptions overlooks the agency and diverse experiences of elderly people. By focusing on these stereotypes, the dissertation seeks to foreground the voices of elderly people, contributing to academic discourse and debates. This research expects to provide a deeper understanding of aging that accepts their contributions and individual agency within the broader societal settings.

Keywords: Aging literature, old age, intergenerational gap, decline narratives.

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Chapter I: Unfolding the Aging in Nepali Literature

The aging population is a severe global concern, as people live longer than before in almost every society. Many societies are undergoing a demographic transition, and Nepal has also experienced a change in the increment of the older population. Nearly 9% of Nepal's population is virtually more aged adults (Sigdel 2). Nepal is a small country between the two biggest countries: India and China. It is poor and developing and has class, caste, religion, and language diversity. However, the impacts of globalization have influenced Nepal and its society. The social, political, and economic changes have raised the community into new dimensions.

Thus, the changes that time and space bring directly affect the older generations. In the Nepali context, old age is associated with the image of someone watching from the porch as their children and grandchildren grow up, as people respect them as idols and receive blessings from them. Today, however, the views of older people have changed. Homnath K. Chalise notes, "In the Nepali Culture, still the majority of parents think having children as insurance for old age," and thus they invest every their

earnings to them in the hope they will look after them during their old age (3). However, he further claims that "with the effect of modernization, international labor migration, trends of increasing younger generation going abroad for higher education, this traditional living arrangement with children will further deteriorate in the coming days, and proportion of living alone and with spouse only will increase" (3). Thus, changes to social relationships, identities, and experiences of time and space have resulted from globalization, migration, and mobility.

Similarly, Mark Tausing and Janardan Subedi state, "In Nepal, older adults are assumed to suffer biological decline and disability, to be increasingly dependent on others for care, and to be economically dependent. "Further, they also argue that "social inequalities based on gender caste/ ethnicity, region, and wealth impact their living and the present social transformation also brings different experiences of living life to individuals and groups, mainly of older generations" (9). Old age is usually projected as burdensome as older adults depend on others to operate their daily routines. Moreover, their experiences differ due to diverse sociocultural

contexts.

While old age has become a part of academic interest, many scholars are interested in studying it from different perspectives.

Gerontologists and psychologists have studied aging from different angles; now, aging is gradually becoming popular in literary and cultural studies.

This study examines how older people are portrayed in selected contemporary Nepali short stories. It critically examines how authors portray the socio-culturally constructed status of old age while remaining indifferent to their needs for agency, identity, and intrinsic value. The study draws on sociocultural perspectives of aging literature. The researcher has selected eleven stories from three anthologies of contemporary Nepali short stories: Durga Karki's *"Kumari Prasna Haru"* (2020) and Nayan Raj Pandey's *"Jiyara"* (2020) and Ramlal Joshi's *"BaAma"* (2022) as the primary source of data.

The selected eleven stories are: "Chowmien," "Sathe," "Kalo Chasma," and "Pohil" by Durga Karki; "Sarpadamsha," "Janani," and "Jiyara" by Nayan Raj Pandey; and "Aamako Katha," "Lekhieko Katha," "Chhadieka Bhagawan," and "Chorako Sapana," by Ram Lal Joshi.

Texts and Their Contexts: A Critical Summary

The selected anthologies' context represents Nepal's different landscapes and cultural backgrounds. Durga Karki's anthology of stories, *Kumari Prashna Haru*, spots the young girls from semi-rural and semi-urban parts and their queries about life and living. In the selected narration of *Kumari Prashna Haru*, the older characters assist the young generation in their ups and downs; however, their contribution remains part of the responsibility to the young generation and repudiate space to their parents for deeds.

The story "Chowmien" depicts a middle-aged woman and her teenage daughter who live in a village. The woman is the only source of income for her daughter and mother-in-law to live. Her husband never visits them; several years ago, he went to India to search for a job and never returned to them. The story is grounded in her daughter striving for her father's love, who finds her mother's love and sacrifice insignificant. Here, the author portrays more sympathy for the daughter than the woman. The woman remains silent and tolerates the situation as the fate of her life. She has no

progressive plan; she is living her life hoping that her husband will return one day, and then she will live a happy life. The woman represents the stereotypical character of Nepalese society, who believes that a married woman should not leave her husband's house. It is to be seen as a curse to remarry and live a life with another man or to leave a husband's house and start a new life. Likewise, the grandmother possesses an insignificant representation in the story. Hardly has she managed to live by herself; she seems to be passive and a burden to her daughter-in-law.

"Sathe" is the story of a widower old man living with his son and daughter-in-law. The older man appears as an abject to his family; neither can he be a subject nor an object. The story begins in his middle-aged years. He and his wife were happy to give birth to a baby boy 'Rudra.' Rudra grew up with excessive love and care. For further study, Rudra has to come to Kathmandu. Rudra's mother could not live in the village, so the couple decided to sell all their property and moved to Kathmandu, where their son lived. Though they did not enjoy the city, they adjusted to live there. They opened the Kirana store and started to earn money for their

son's studies.

The story moved smoothly until Rudra's mother's death. After her death, the man becomes alone. With the relative pressure, the man's son married, and he started to live with his son and daughter-in-law. However, nobody understands his loneliness; he has a prostrate problem that he cannot share with his son. One day, he shared his feelings about marrying Kamala with his son and daughter-in-law. Kamala, a 40-year-old woman who works for their house owner, hoped they would understand his sufferings; in contrast, they judged him negatively, but he accepted the challenges. To execute his loneliness, he marries Kamala, a single middle-aged woman. After that, he starts living in his village. However, his son and daughter-in-law are against him and never contact him again, but he always expects their call. Though Rudra's father tried to be progressive, his family did not support him. Not only his family but also the society's people; they mock him for marrying a young woman in his old age. The story projects the current issue of aging people in Nepalese society and the youth's feelings towards older people. The young generation mostly hates the older

generation as they think that older generations should not think about being progressive after their sixties.

Similarly, "Kalo Chasma" depicts the story of an ambitious girl and her widower father, along with one sister and two brothers. The girl wants to pursue her academic career, but they are poor, and she has other siblings, too. Her father is a dutiful man who constantly works to earn money for his family to survive. He does not have any dialogue in the story. He remains silent even when a blind man comes to marry her daughter. The silent presence of the older man is unusual here. The man in the story presents the stereotypical father of Nepalese society, who continuously works hard to make his family happy. However, neither his family nor his society understands his 'silence.'

The last story from *Kumari Prashnaharu*, "Pohil," depicts a middle-aged man and a young wife. However, the man can never enjoy his married life because of his mother and father. The story represents the negative elderly who are against their daughter-in-law and always in search of to dominate her in front of their son. Though the man works hard to support

his wife from every perspective, everything goes in vain. With his old age and older parents, she could not continue her life. So, she chooses to live with another man. However, the author centralizes the wife and her suffering more than her husband. The story is also an example of a decline narrative, representing older adults' negative features.

Nayan Raj Pandey's stories from *Jiyara* are primarily based on women and their problems in the Terai context. However, women and several other characters, including older characters, are marginalized. They are poor, fragile, and weak compared to the characters from the two other anthologies, *Kumari Prashna Haru* and *Ba Aama*.

In the "Sarpadamsha" story, the snake charmers' community becomes fragile due to political influence. The story's central focus is fifty-year-old Hakka Pahalman, the chief of the snake charmers community. However, because of political instability, the opposite party killed him for not supporting his party in the election. The young generation of that community has almost stopped doing their traditional profession. They can barely fulfill their basic needs and must leave their land and move to India for work.

Along with Hakka Pahalman, other older characters remain, pleading with their children not to leave their land and traditional occupation.

Nevertheless, their pleading goes in vain. Neither their children nor society find their significance. So they remain abject.

Likewise, "Janani" depicts religious violence. In the story, the older Hindu parents of Damayanti go against Damayanti's love affair with her Muslim boyfriend. Their rigidity spoiled her life because they married her again to a Hindu man called Durga Lal, a sick man since childhood. On the other hand, Durga Lal's parents also become ready to marry her for dowry. After this, their duty ended, and they died at a religious fair. The story does not centralize them as the central characters; instead, it portrays them as relatively rigid and stereotypical.

Similarly, "Jiayara" projects the story of dowry death. Parents grow their daughters with the feeble hope that one day they can get good husbands and live happily. They have such hope because, in their community, it is expected to hear the news about women killed by their in-laws for dowries. Moreover, the daughter's parents are always distressed for

their daughters, and after marriage, if their daughter becomes a victim, they remain silent and accept it. Though the Jiyara's context differs from the other, the underlying woes of old age are similar in Nepal. These elders seem weak and marginalized from financial, health, and societal perspectives.

Ram Lal Joshi's *Ba Aama* represents the stories of archetypal fathers and mothers from the far western context of Nepal who sacrifice themselves for their children's happiness and remain apathetic to them in their old age. These stories portray elderly characters as secondary characters to assist the protagonist by advising him/her and explaining the actual meaning of the circumstances. During their middle age, while economically and physically sound and socially strong, society, their family, and even their office treat them as heroes. Conversely, later, those heroes become minor defective characters in their old age.

"Amako Kakha", is the story of a widowed old woman and her son. Maoists killed her husband, and since then, despite her hardships, she raised her son, gave him a good school education, and then, for further

education, he left his mother and village. After twenty years, he returns to his hometown and brings his mother to the city. However, she cannot adjust there as she has old age memory loss; on the other side, the son is tired of his mother and her old age disease, so he stays away for a week from his mother to concentrate on his work. Henceforth, in his absence, his mother silently leaves his home.

Similarly, "Lekhiako Katha" is the story of an old widower. With lots of hardship, the older man and his wife raise their son. Later, his wife had cancer, and his son cured his mother for a year. Nevertheless, as it is a prolonged disease, later on, their son cannot afford money for the treatment. Then they silently leave their son's house and start living in distress; sometimes, they live in the government hospital, sometimes on the road, and sometimes in old homage. Lastly, the older man takes his sick wife to his village, and she dies there; afterward, he lives alone near his wife's tomb. Likewise, "Chadieka Bhagawan" and "Chorako Sapana" depict the story of isolated parents who lament for their children. Both stories are different in settings, but both have similar kinds of plots. In both stories, elder

characters are alone, living in their village and wailing for their children in a foreign land.

The selected narratives superficially relate to older people, consequently marginalizing them in the sociocultural context. Older adults are stereotypical, physically feeble, economically deprived, and fragile; hence, these narrations represent the inflictions of old age. Accordingly, the projection of old age is declining rather than progressing, and they need more agency and identity in literature.

Statement of Problem

After reading these selected texts, the researcher finds an abject object position of older people, which projects deteriorating old age in Nepali society. In all of these narratives, young people- either affluent or poor-treat older adults as objects, denying their agency and individuality. Although older adults suffer more during their old age as they are physically and mentally feeble and need care and help, the authors foreground to apprehend the dark and depressed old age and give a message that old age is a burden age to everyone. Therefore, the researcher has encountered a problem

regarding why literature focuses on old age's social and cultural construction, portraying it as a declining stage of life. At this point, this research attempts to answer the following specific questions.

1. What is the politics of representing old age as a passive /inactive phase of life in selected contemporary Nepali short fiction?
2. What does it imply in the narratives to represent younger characters refusing to acknowledge the space of elderly characters? Why do children not listen to the appeal of their older parents and treat them as an abject object?
3. How do the narratives evoke more of an effect on the predicament of the elderly on their old-age counterparts?

Hypothesis

The older people in the selected Nepali short stories are portrayed as objects of scorn rather than respect. They are economically and physically weak, socially fragile, and politically subverted. Therefore, as per the selected stories, old age is the mark of decline, not progress. As per this dissertation, such narratives of old age are shaped by traditional sociocultural

values and practices relevant to the aged people existing in Nepali society.

Objectives

The main objectives of this research are:

-) To examine the politics of signifying old age as a passive /inactive phase of life in selected contemporary Nepali short fiction.
-) To explore and analyze how younger adults negate the voice of elderly characters and treat them as abject objects.
-) To analyze how the narratives evoke more effect for the predicament of the elderly on their old-age counterparts.

Delimitations of the Study

The study will be limited to the interpretation of eleven stories:

"Chowmien," "Sathe," "Kalo Chasma," and "Pohil," by Durga Karki; likewise, "Sarpadamsha," "Janani," and "Jiyara" by Nayan Raj Pandey; and "Aamako katha," "Lekhiako Katha," "Chadieka Bhagawan," and "Chorako Sapana," by Ram Lal Joshi. Although the researcher has read other stories from these three anthologies, she could not include them in the analysis due to various constraints and left them for other researchers to do the research project.

The researcher limits her research only to identifying the projection of older characters in selected Nepali short fiction. Notably, the study will be limited to identifying and analyzing how social and cultural context matters in articulating old age and how the selected narratives portray older people and their adversity in old age. The researcher also selected stories from three geographical and cultural contexts for inclusiveness. Thus, the researcher does her translation to analyze the text. Moreover, the study also uses Margarete Gullette and Kathleen Woodward as Key critics while analyzing the selected texts.

Significance of the Research

The selected short narratives have yet to be conducted in any research from the perspective of literature and aging studies. Aging in literature is an emerging topic at present. The study will add the new concept that older people are oppressed and have agency crises. Similarly, this study will emphasize that positivist/empiricist research is not only enough to understand the state of old age; instead, relativist research is also necessary. The research conducted through statistics and other public data

might give only a partial picture of the subject; therefore, the research done through such literary documents can help to address the socio-emotional state of older people. The study is new, fresh, and innovative in Nepal because all existing scholarship in Nepali literature is limited to the study of social, psychological, cultural, gender, and class issues. Thus, this study indicates a hitherto unexplored aging and Nepali literature domain for giving a voice to older people.

Moreover, it is the leading research in the academic discourse analyzing old age in contemporary short Nepali fiction. It adds new knowledge that older people are marginalized in societies, and society should treat them ethically, respecting their rights. Further, this study will add new knowledge to the ongoing scholarship of gerontology that deals with aging and older adults. Due to the impact of modernization, many people thrust modern life, and hence, in search of good lifestyles, they migrate, leaving their parents and homeland. Thus, older people suffer from isolation. Therefore, this study will help the government form policies on assisting older adults. This study is expected to help families with more senior

members in their homes to maintain the bond. Hence, it will be an innovative approach in the history of Nepali academic research as it thoroughly analyzes the foundation of the agency of older people and old age in Nepal.

Methodology

The main objective of this study is to examine the projection of old age in contemporary Nepali short stories. The researcher has translated the extracts from the selected eleven stories to analyze how older adult figures portray old age as an abject object in modern Nepalese society. For the study, the researcher will focus on narrative parts of the selected texts that depict the declining old age in society. The researcher has further delved into numerous reviews and criticisms with extensive library research and guidance from the supervisor to enhance the quality of the collected research. To explore the position of old age, the researcher has used the theoretical parameters of Aging literature propounded by Margaret Gulleter and other scholars such as Kathleen Woodward, Simon de Beauvoir, and Stephan Katz. Gulleter's framework of the 'decline or progress' theory of old

age in *Aged by Culture* will be the central theme line to understand what it means to be old age in Nepali literature and how aging lore and cultural urgencies exist in society impact age ideology to treat older adults as an object in the society. The researcher has also brought scholars' ideas from gerontology and others when necessary.

Arguing against the refrain that old age means nothing to do; instead, waiting for death, the Aging critic Margaret Gullette wrote the "Creativity, Ageing, and Gender" essay and constituted the concept of aging into a theory. She says, "Age is subject to history like any other body-based attribute. The forces that promote narratives of either decline or progress in later life are not in the same equilibrium, or rather an imbalance . . ."(11). So, the projection of old age depends on societies' social and cultural constructions. Observing the importance of older bodies in literature, Kathleen Woodward states, "The aging body in literature, which is distant from where it should be, gives a more accurate form of realism" (Barry and Skagen 2). Therefore, aging literature helps build integrity and identity for older adults.

Plan of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into four chapters to study context and data systematically. The first chapter presents the principal claim, research questions, rationale, theoretical perspective, delimitations, and significance of studying old age through contemporary Nepali Short stories. The same chapter introduces fundamental concepts, theories, and data.

The second chapter focuses on reviewing contextual and theoretical frameworks. It is divided into four sections: first, it offers a critical review of scholarly viewpoints on aging studies across psychology, sociology, and biology while contrasting these with approaches in literary studies. Second, it provides an overview of portrayals of old age within Nepali literature. Finally, it presents various analyses of selected short stories from different interpretive angles, highlighting gaps in current research that the study aims to address.

Similarly, the third chapter depicts a detailed textual analysis that reveals a declining portrayal of old age. The narratives increasingly depict elders as burdens to their families, emphasizing their perceived lack of

productivity and contribution. This trend is particularly notable in how men and women are portrayed as less productive as they age. The conclusive chapter is in the fourth and final chapter; I draw conclusions based on the findings from the previous chapters. I summarize the key insights gained from analyzing contemporary Nepali short stories concerning the portrayal of old age. Additionally, I discuss the implications of these findings for understanding societal attitudes toward aging and the representation of elderly individuals in literature. Finally, I propose avenues for future research to explore further and address the gaps identified in the study.

Chapter II: Age, Aging, and Literature

Chapter Overview

This section of the research incorporates the theoretical framework of Aging Literature Studies in light of various intellectuals' emerging trends in aging, emphasizing mainly gerontology and other humanist discourse. Under the umbrella of gerontology, several other critics and scholars from psychology, biology, and sociology have studied the aging and aging process. This work first discusses the various theories on aging studies and shows the gap in the emphasis of aging literature. Then, in the second section, the work will review the critics' and scholars' views on the selected narratives.

Theoretical Review

Until the 1970s, aging was the topic of science, medicine, sociology, and psychology. Simon De Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* (1972) is the first book on elders. The book discusses society's secret shame that the old must be separated and distanced from our communities and that they must suffer and endure. Since the 1980s, interest in literature concerned with old

age has gradually developed among literary critics and researchers in related disciplines. Now, contemporary authors have directed their attention to the intriguing life stories of older people.

Aging is ubiquitous, intrinsic, and ongoing. However, it has become challenging to threshold the age to spot old age in different studies. From when does old age start? Ian Stuart-Hamilton states, "Falling on custom and practice, we can state that old age is defined as the final segment of the life span, and for those who must have a number to attach to this, it is further defined as beginning at around sixty years of age" (2). Here, old age intersects two perspectives: chronological old age and old age according to social and cultural values and assumptions.

Further, the Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet mentioned in his book *Treatise on Man* that "from sixty to sixty-five years of age viability loses much of its energy, that is to say, the probability of life then becomes very small" (Stuart 3). Hence, the study of old age explores the groups of older people in their sixties and physically weak (exceptional) in the final segments of life. However, in Nepal, aging starts with responsibility as a father and

mother. There is no specific aging number to specify their old age.

Concerning a global phenomenon, theorists from various perspectives are studying aging. Scholars and critics from bio-gerontology study the physiological process of the aging body. They search for causes of disease in old age and its consequences and prevention; however, their scientific invention will help to diagnose measures for an untimely death and longevity of ages. Scholar Joao Pedro De Magalhaes mentions, "Ageing . . . as a progressive deterioration of physiological function accompanied by an increase in vulnerability and mortality with age" (24). Thus, bio-gerontologists mainly study the aging body and its problems in aging studies.

Likewise, psychologists in gerontology study aging as behavioral changes to the person's engagement. They mainly study old-age mental health issues. According to the psychological life-stage- theory offered by - the development of psychologist Erikson, beginning with birth, a person passes through eight developmental stages and has to resolve the conflicts in each phase for a healthy personality. The last phase of life starts around sixty-five and ends at death. This later stage is the phase of life review

when the conflicts of a lifetime are treated and resolved. If achieved, "the person attains a real sense of fulfillment" (Stuart-Hamilton 13). For Erikson, every eight stages of life are equally important, and living them in progress in every stage of life emphasizes the successful living of life.

Addressing Erikson's views, Lipsky and Werner argue that "human development and learning are lifelong processes and not restricted to childhood and adolescence," emphasizing the continuous nature of growth throughout an individual's life (13). They assert that "aging is not a dimensional process of declining; gains are possible even in older age" (13). This perspective challenges the conventional view of aging as a period of inevitable decline, suggesting that older adults can continue developing and achieving new capabilities. This framework is crucial for understanding the representation of old age in contemporary Nepali short stories, where older characters are often portrayed as passive and inactive. By recognizing the potential for growth and development in later life, this study aims to question and critique the cultural and social constructions that depict old age predominantly as a phase of deterioration.

Similarly, sociologists Elaine Cumming and Warren Earl Henry oppose the psychological life-stage theory and argue that "a natural feature of aging was to prepare for death by gradually withdrawing from society" (Stuart- Hamilton 14). Therefore, social intellectuals in aging studies search for the roles and relationships within individuals who engage in later life and how they detach from other members of society. A basic understanding of aging in social science depends on the following definition by Cumming and Henry:

Aging is an inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social system he belongs to. The process may be initiated by the individuals or others in the situation. The aged person may withdraw more markedly from classes of people while remaining relatively close to others. His withdrawal may be accompanied from the outset by an increased preoccupation with himself, and certain institutions in society may make the withdrawal easy for him. When the aging process is complete, the equilibrium that existed in middle life between the

individuals and society has given way to a new equilibrium characterized by a greater distance and an altered type of relationship.

(qtd. in Davidson 231)

This theory posits that older people eventually disengage from their relationships with family and society during their old age. The individual can initiate such withdrawal or those around them, often facilitated by societal institutions. As the aging process progresses, individuals may focus more on themselves, leading to a new type of equilibrium characterized by increased distance from society.

In this context of contemporary Nepali short stories, this framework is essential for analyzing the portrayal of older characters. The narratives often depict older adults as experiencing significant social withdrawal and decreased agency, aligning with Cumming and Henry's theory. However, this study aims to critically examine whether such representations reinforce stereotypes of aging as a period of inevitable decline or if they acknowledge the potential for continued engagement and development, as suggested by Lipsky and Werner.

Old age does not fall into specific issues like race, caste, ethnicity, or primarily women issues or children; it is an ongoing process, and everyone has to pass through it. Kesab Sigdel claims that "senior citizens have different life experiences, physical and psychological conditions, and needs that need exploration, but until now, systematic literature has yet to exist."

(104) Then questions arise as to why literary studies mostly avoid exploring old age and aging. Likewise, Anne M. Wyatt Brown also confirms that "Aging is a missing category in current literary theory" (David Wilson 3).

Regarding the concept of aging, the literary deliberations lack giving space to elderly people and their voices. Margery Vibe Skagen and Elizabeth Barry clarify this idea in this way:

Aging eludes literary and critical representation in several ways. For one thing, it is a moving target: a process of continuous biological and biographical change rather than a discrete object of attention. Those who study age prefer to think about growing older than in terms of an absolute state of being old. It is also problematic in practice to determine and compare age categories: Chronological age does not

always align with the expected quality of health, physical capacity, or mental acuity. With greater longevity, as well as more fluidity in the shape of careers and variance in childbearing age, the idea of a fixed life stage has given way to a more relativized conception of old age, its boundaries, and its limitations. (1)

Aging is difficult to represent in literature and studies because it involves ongoing biological changes and personal experiences rather than being a simple state. Researchers focus more on "growing older" than a specific "being old." It is also hard to categorize ages accurately because chronological age does not always match health, physical abilities, or mental sharpness. As people live longer and careers and childbearing ages change, the traditional idea of fixed life stages has shifted. There is a broader understanding of old age and its impact on individuals' lives, influencing how we study and discuss aging. However, literature likely eludes old age and its critical representations, which are crucial in the present context.

Under gerontology theories, scholars have studied the positivity of old age. In this regard, Davidson explains, "Gerontology . . . suggests instead of

" what is old age means" to "this is how old age should be" eventually to the recognition of heterogeneous population that negotiates later life through the lens of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity" (245). This perspective advocates for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of aging.

However, the representation of aging in literature often diverges from the framework of gerontology. The sociocultural assumption and perception about aging become more prominent for literature to produce certain types of texts. This study focuses on the sociocultural dimensions of aging as perceived in literary writings: it attempts to explore the sociocultural dimensions and implications of aging. In line with this thought, Margaret Morganroth Guellete brought together gerontology and literature by clarifying the value of literature in reflecting on aging. According to Guellete, the perception of aging solely depends on societal narratives. She introduces the terms 'progress' and 'decline narrative' to read age culture in narration. She explains:

The meaning of age and aging is primarily conveyed through the moral and psychological implications of the narrative ideas we have

been inserting into our heads, starting when we were very young.

Artistic and technological products, like the stories we ordinarily tell ourselves, bring insights and contribute products, and the stories we ordinarily tell ourselves and one another are permeated by the pre-existing inventions of culture. (11)

The notions of age and aging are shaped significantly by the moral and psychological themes rooted in the narratives we absorb from a young age. Artistic and technological creations, such as the stories we tell ourselves, are deeply influenced by existing cultural inventions. By analyzing these narratives, this research seeks to uncover the underlying sociocultural constructs and challenge the stereotypes that depict old age primarily as a period of decline.

The two dominant narratives of aging are the progressive narrative and the decline narrative, and they determine the perspective of aging in society. Gullette further reflects:

Decline is a metaphor as hard to contain as a dye. Once it has tinged our expectations of the future (sensation, rewards, status,

power, voice) with peril, it tends to stain our experiences, views of others, explanatory systems, and retrospective judgments...One of the decline's saddest ego-centripetal effects is to obscure anything suffered by those adjacent to us, in the polity and across the globe. (11)

This demonstrates that decline narratives are deep-seated values and assumptions that only signify deterioration and loss. Narratives featuring this narrative often depict aging as a gloomy and inevitable descent into poorer health, diminished capabilities, and a general decline in quality of life. These stories emphasize the negative aspects of growing older, highlighting the struggles and challenges of aging.

Guellete argues that "age too could be different" if we could narrate progress narratives implicitly (33). She elaborates that "progress narrative" means the implicit meanings of aging run from survival, resilience, recovery, and development to collective resistance to decline forces (17). Her notion contrasts with the view held by some social constructionists, who argue that aging is inherently biological, marked by natural physical declines such as back pain, poor eyesight, and frailty rather than resulting from patriarchal or

other socially constructed issues.

The progress narrative, however, focuses on positive growth as one ages. In fiction, characters following this narrative experience personal growth, increased wisdom, and improved well-being. These stories often portray older protagonists who become healthier, wealthier, and wiser and enjoy the prime of their lives. Such narratives can be seen in coming-of-age novels where the characters' journeys lead to significant and positive transformations.

By depicting aging in terms of progress and development, literature can challenge the conventional view of aging as a period of inevitable decline. These positive narratives can reshape readers' perceptions of aging, encouraging them to view later life as a time of potential growth and fulfillment. This study explores how contemporary Nepali short stories represent aging and whether these representations align with or diverge from the progress narrative suggested by Gullette. By examining these literary portrayals, the research seeks to uncover the sociocultural dimensions of aging and their implications for societal attitudes toward older adults.

Seeing the significance of narratives, Stephen Katz mentions,"

Narrative is critical because it anchors the inside of aging, bringing together self and society and animating our biographies as we borrow, adapt, interpret, reinvent the languages, symbols, and meanings around us to customize our personal stories" (20). Katz highlights how narratives are crucial to articulate the different perspectives regarding aging. Katz argues that critical age studies analyze aging people differently despite other theories. According to Katz, one of the advantages of critical age studies is their emphasis on the "inside of aging" and the meanings associated with growing older. He notes this idea thus:

An advantage of critical . . . age studies is how they emphasize the "inside of aging" and what it means to grow older. Here, the humanities have been especially vital as they promote questions of identity, the body, experience, language and metaphor, life-course continuity and disruption, sensation, emotions, and biography. These are the subjective and everyday aspects of aging by which we live out our lives . . . (20)

Katz explains the humanities' importance in exploring aging's complexities,

such as identity, bodily experience, and emotional and biographical continuity. These aspects highlight the subjective and everyday realities, offering a deeper understanding of what it means to grow older beyond mere biological decline. This perspective is crucial for understanding how aging is portrayed in literature and how such portrayal affects people's perception of aging.

Though age studies are crucial, they have remained unidentified for a long time. Diane Wallace underlines that "the development of humanistic gerontology can be closely linked to the emergence in the early 1970s of a body of new fiction which self-consciously interrogated the process of aging" (393). Wallace further claims that this kind of development gives a new dimension to research because "artistic representations of older people have the potential to counter our ideas about age and aging (389). Wallace supports that aging through creative arts can counter the traditional notion of aging. After 1970, critics and scholars find several reasons in literature to learn about the emerging topic of age studies.

Since the inception of aging studies in humanities, Kathleen Woodward

and Gullette have made significant contributions. While some critics and scholars overlook the potential of aging in literature and research, Woodward argues that "the aging body in literature, which is distant from where it should be, gives a more accurate form of realism" (qtd. in Barry & Skagen).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several critics wrote enthusiastically about the arrival of new fictional genres that challenged the negative trajectories of aging. Margaret Morganroth Guellete, Barabara Frey Waxman, and Constance Rooke all identify alternatives to the traditional bildungsroman that only focuses on the struggles and rewards of youth. Supporting this, Maricel Oro-Piqueras and Sara Falcus assert, "During the 1980s and 1990s, both gerontologists and sociologists, as well as scholars from linguistic and literary backgrounds, argued that humanities and cultural studies had much to offer gerontology (2). Since then, the humanities have made remarkable contributions to aging and old age research.

Similarly, Critics Julia Twigg and Windy Martin argue that the growing interest in aging within the arts and humanities is due to 'demographic shifts' and the increased 'cultural visibility' of older people.' Twigg and Martin

position this development in cultural criticism as the 'cultural Turn' in the social sciences and gerontology. This shift emphasizes cultural factors and is a reaction to post-structuralism and postmodernism. Post-structuralism and postmodernism challenge traditional cultural narratives and structures and focus on the representation of aging. Gradually, many creative writers make old age their subject matter because literary texts are appropriate for rendering the complexities of aged experiences and making their analysis a worthwhile contribution to age studies.

Age studies are substantial as they provide valuable insight into the aging body and how individuals navigate and experience their lives as they grow older. Katz further argues, "The critical perspectives of aging studies also deconstruct dominant cultural narratives and give voice to suppressed and marginal narratives "(20). He states that critical perspectives in aging studies dismantle mainstream cultural stories and give voices that are often silenced or marginalized. Age studies, thus, critically analyze old age and aging, provide an accurate portrayal, and do justice to older adults. The concept of studying aging through literature is still emerging; theorists believe

this approach brings insights and contributes significantly to the field of aging studies.

The studies of novels and short fiction/stories about growing older often reveal a concern with the paths of their protagonists' lives. Traditional conceptions of later life characterized by degeneration and loss have been designated decline narratives. They are usually viewed as problematic due to their involvement in the propagation of ageist attitudes and limiting expectations of later life. Guellete clarifies this notion thus:

The body-mind is a time bomb attached to fuses of unknown length (sometimes called telomers, but the name changes). Although many old people happily seem not to act or speak as if their fuses were lit, declined fiction confirms aging-as-loss through its chosen protagonist or narrative voices. Time- lifetime -is the enemy. Anxiety and dread are the appropriate responses. We are all appropriate responses. We are all inevitably victims. (18)

In Guellete's perspective, aging is identical to a ticking time where the body and mind are connected to uncertain timelines. Despite many older

individuals living happily without dwelling on their mortality, literature often portrays aging as a journey marked by decline and loss. Time itself is seen as a hostile force, causing anxiety and fear. Guellete suggests that this portrayal reduces everyone as inevitably vulnerable to the effects of aging, emphasizing a narrative of vulnerability and inevitability in literature and life. Age studies, hence, deconstruct such notions in literature and give justice to elderly people.

Robert N Butler, too, asserts that deep-rooted societal construction negates the positive old age, and hence, older people suffer along with the sociocultural conduct. He used the term 'ageism' to describe the stereotyping of and discrimination against individuals or groups based on their age. He asserts that ageism is for older people with age issues, similar to racism for racial problems and feminism for gender issues. Butler argues:

Ageism describes the subjective experience implied in the popular notion of the generation gap. Prejudice of the middle-aged against the old in this instance and against the young in others is a serious national problem. Ageism reflects a deep-seated uneasiness on the

part of the young and middle-aged revulsion to and distaste for growing old, disease, disability, and fear of powerlessness, “uselessness’ and death. (243)

For Butler, ageism is a prejudice between different age groups, particularly how middle-aged people might discriminate against the elderly and vice versa. It reflects fear and discomfort about aging, illness, disability, and the idea of becoming powerless or useless. Ageism shows society's unease with these issues and influences how people of different ages interact and perceive each other.

About aging and old age, in literature, Budhi Prasad Bhusal is of the view that aging literature is the full description of the development of all beings, from which we can reach the history of man's evolution and civilization. He further says that aging literature is not only about the stories of older people but also the bridge to join the history from the present: "Old age literature consists of lots of knowledge regarding older people's experiences and perceptions of life from which a new generation can be guided" (32). Likewise, Wallace depicts that “aging literature may allow us

imaginatively to engage with the fact of our aging” and also help to recognize “the subjectivity of those who are already older and to understand how age and aging are culturally constructed” (389). Though aging and literature are two distinctive subjects for many theories, aging in literature allows one to see, observe, and reflect on aging and old age. The artistic representations of aging and old age in literature give a new direction to counter our understanding.

This research incorporates the concept of sociocultural construction of old age as the core aspect of Aging Literature Studies, along with political and materialist-affective modes. The sociocultural notion under old age studies proposes that old age does not cross the equal bridge in every culture and society. Paul Johnson posits:

The representation of the elderly in art, literature, and popular culture, whether as witches or as sages, shows how different societies order, categorize, and compartmentalize different social groups. The articulation by older people of beliefs about their rights, duties, and status reveals the multiple manners in which they have ascribed

meaning to their life course. (2)

Johnson assures that the portrayal of the elderly in creative arts determines how older people are treated through social and cultural construction. In Nepali culture, the elderly are wise and experienced people who are a reflection of God. During the Dashain festival, people put on Tika and blessings from older adults, which reflects the significance of older people in Nepalese society. However, due to the changes in family structure and lifestyles, a detrimental impact has been seen in inter-generational relations.

Researching elderly and old age in the Nepali short stories, Komal Phuyal concludes that "aging has emerged as an issue requiring critical attention in society and people have not been able to positively experience old age. The complexities of old age and the experience of the elderly population have been greatly affected by the age of migration in Nepal"(80). This study, thus, portrays how sociocultural dimensions change the perception of old age and aging people in contemporary short Nepali stories.

Setting the Scene

Literature is an excellent platform for revealing societal issues through imaginative narratives. It is the foundation of creativity and creation and a comprehensive source of a historical period. Analyzing Nepali literature from the past to the present reveals a predominant focus on themes such as gender, race, class, and ethnic issues. Keshab Sigdel claims that "there are organized bodies of literature about and for a specific population group that includes children literature, young adult- literature. However, no such organized body of literature describes aging people's unique life experiences, physical and psychological conditions, needs, and personal and social relationships" (Sigdel 104). Similarly, Phuyal notes that "critics have not been able to conduct research in creative writings as such even though literature possesses the potential to contemplate the issues of elderly people and weaving the narrative of the people undergoing certain complexities, arising

from aging" (Phuyal 70). Research into elderly people, thus, has not yet effectively come into the academic domain.

Dhakal supports this line by asserting, "Literature bridges the gap between past and present, enriching different eras with additional content" (68). Literature records historical and contemporary issues and connects various periods by incorporating new themes and perspectives that were previously overlooked or underrepresented. This process ensures that literature remains dynamic and evolving, reflecting society's changing concerns and experiences. In this context, the development of Nepali Literature is divided into three phases: Primary, Medieval, and Modern.

Literary works are in the Sanskrit language during the primary time of Nepali Literature. People mostly read the religious books *Mahabharat*, *Ramayan*, *KrishnaCharitra*, *Swosthani*, *Panchatantra*, *Divyapadhosh*, *Prayaschit Pradeep*, etc., throughout the period. It was found that more than their creation, people read translated Nepali literature like *Mahabharat Birat Parva* of Shakti Ballav Arjyal, *Lankakanda* of AdhyatmaRamayan of Siha Bir, *DraupadhiBilap Kavya ra Krishna Charitra* of Birshali Panta, etc. Almost all

of the books are related to aging subjects. Literary works of the time emphasized moral teaching to live a good life in every phase of human life. The older characters preach to others about life essentials provisions; famous older characters like Guru Bashistha and Dasratha in *Ramayan*; Shantanu, Dhrita Rastra, and Bhisma Pitamaha in *Mahabharat*, likewise, Bausdev, Nanda, Akur in *Krishna Charitra* (Dhakal 69). According to the literature, during the last stage of life, humans should leave all kinds of love and attachment and be ready for death. Accepting such religious content, people still believe that older people should read religious texts only as they are dying soon; therefore, they must hymn for God.

In the medieval period, people read more creative literary works than translated: even the context changes, and the content of the works is related to social issues of the time. In Bhanubhakta's *Ramayan*, *BadhuShikshya*, *Krishna Charitra*, and *Gopiniko Shlok*, we find the context of old age and older characters. Similarly, Shambhu Prasad Dhungel's *Chandra Pratap Barnan*, *Chandrawati Katha*, *Malati Madhaba*, and *Shakuntala* also have age-related contexts and characters. Likewise, in Motiram

Bhatta's *Pikkudut*, *Gajendra Mokshya*; Lekhnath Paudyal's *Bhisma Bhabityaba*, *Tarun Tapasi*, *Parvati Pranaya*; in Balkrishna Samma's *Prahlad*, *Mukunda Indira*, *Bhanubhakta*; in Dhanbir Mukhiya's *Rukmini Haran*, *Raja Harish Chandran* are some of the famous literary works on the aging of the medieval era.

Similarly, Jagadish Sumsher's *Narasimha Avatar*; Madan Madi's *Madhavi*, *Bhumisukta*; Bisheshwor Prasad Koirala's *Sumnima*, *Modiain*, *Babu Aamara Chora*; Ramesh Bikal's *Abiral Bagdacha* *Indrawati*, *Naya Sadakako Geet*; Jagadish Ghimire's *Antarman ko Yatra*, *Aahutiko Dalan*; Krishna Dhara Basi's *Radha*, *Sharanarathi*, *Adhabato*; Neelam Karki's *Yogmaya*; Amar Neupane's *Seto Dharti* are some of the famous modern Nepali texts that include old-age related contexts. However, Nepali literature shortages separate literature from aging literature, and there has yet to be any academic research on old age literature (Dhakal 71). Therefore, like in other fields, academic work is required to give voice to aging people.

Empirical Review

Several critics offer their criticisms regarding the selected primary texts

from different perspectives. Many critics have acknowledged that all three anthologies of Nepali short fiction have in them the theme of social realism.

All these stories have intended to expand and express social problems.

Durga Karki's anthology of short stories *Kumari Prasna Haru* is young-adult

literature. Critics have analyzed the text from gender perspectives. Bhusita

Vasistha of Nepalaya in *The Himalayan Times* claims that Karki skillfully

goes through 'social justice issues' and 'gender discrepancies' through the

lens of female characters coming of age (n.pg). Likewise, PradikaKoyu in

Setopati writes that the title 'Kumari Prashnaharu' attempts to create space

for females with the meaning that society should give them the right to ask

and listen to their queries (n.pg). Often, the contexts of Nepali literature

concern gender issues and discuss impartiality on them but lag in giving

agency to expose their implicit interrogations, which Durga Karki exposes

through her female characters in the stories. Agyat Luitel posits sexuality as

the main theme in the stories (n.pg). Jeevan Chhetri claims that the author

artistically presents love and sex-related subjects in the narratives, and he

praised the literary maturity that the writer achieved in her debut work. He

also mentions that melancholia is the central theme in narratives; almost all women characters are suffering and searching for a way out. He even mentions the setting of narratives; he says, 'It feels like the city has entered the village and vice versa.' Therefore, stories have mixed tastes; stories like Chowmien, Sanghar, and Pohil have rural taste, whereas 'Nirdista part 2' and 'Paach Second' have urban settings, and some stories combine both (n.pg). The critic, Sabita Acharaya, finds the relationship between humans and love. Love in her narration does not indicate the love affair but also the love between parents and children. 'Saathe' captures the intense love of a mother for her son. "Family Photo" and "Chowmien" portray how a daughter strives for love from her father (n.pg). Similarly, texts have advanced elderly characters like the divorcee mother of Nayantara in 'Sanghar,' and weak and traditional like the mother of the protagonist in Chowmien, who stands every time for their daughters; however, neither of their love remarks in the family and society.

In the same way, scholars study *Jiyara* from the feminist perspective.

Bista claims, "In Jiyara, major female characters get victimized by patriarchal

social system” (1). She furthers that *Jiyara* portrays women's anguish, distress, and frustrations when the male family members suppress their aspirations, wishes, and happiness (6). Here, she underestimates the pathetic condition of older adults, highlighting women's suffering. In *Jiyara*, Saguna Shah spots Madhesi women's plight and urges the concerned authority to give space to these women (13:08-13:14). Similarly, Krishna Kandel posits subaltern issues in *Jiyara* and praises for providing space for Madhesi subaltern (n.pg). Likewise, the editor of Fine Print states, based on magic realism, *Jiyara* has come as an epitome to criticize capitalism, corrupt politics, and patriarchy (n.pg). Renuka G.C depicts political influence in *Jiyara*. She says *Jiyara* posits the condition of Madhes after People's Movement II (n.pg). Analyzing the work from women's perspective only, critics undervalue the roles of older people in stories.

Scholars have analyzed *BaAama* from regional, economic, and political perspectives. Ram Lal Joshi's *BaaAama* reflects the tragic stories of a father and mother from the rural part of far-western Nepal. Maheshwor Poudyal praises the regional ambiances in the text. Further, he says the use of

regional lexical terms and honest representation of regional issues in *Ba Aama* have given justice to his society. He mentions that *Baa Aamais* all about the father and mother. It presents older parents' love, struggle, sacrifice, innocence, dedication, intense love for children, patriotism, frustration for life, dreams, sorrow, pain, and escape. He asserts that their pain brings tears to our eyes (n.pg). Despite these positive outlooks, he discerns the critical flaws in the book. He satirizes the author's lexical terms, word choice, characters, and dialogues.

Nevertheless, he does not comprehend that older adults are marginalized characters in the stories. Similarly, critic Anita Koirala states that due to social transition, the elder characters have loneliness, suffering, hope, and strive for love . . . (n.pg). Likewise, Neeraj Lawaju asserts that despite other issues like political conflicts, widowed life, marital life issues, and foreign work issues, *Ba Ama* emphasized the impact of intergenerational mobility on the relationship between parents and children (n.pg). In the present context, younger generations are busy with their daily work and cannot care intensely for their parents; consequently, older parents undergo

adversity. Joshi's older adults' are stereotypical and struggle every time for love and attention from children. Critics are concerned about older adults' pain; however, they do not remark on the identity crises of older adults in the stories.

Departure

While most critics have analyzed *Jiyara* and *Kumari Prashna Haru* from gender and ethnicity perspectives, they have studied *Baa Aama* from parents-children relationships. However, they have yet to study the agency of elders and their representations in literature. Of the three books, Joshi's book mainly concerns old age and older people. Despite that, his notion of focusing on old age is the process of degeneration and decay. He has only presented dark and unpleasant pictures of old age, negatively impacting society. Likewise, in *Kumari Prashna Haru*, critics are more concerned with feminist reading than other issues and, hence, almost overlook the significance of older people. On the other hand, *Jiyara* centralizes the social, political, and cultural impact on Madheshi women and lower caste people but does not directly concern old age and their sufferings. Hence, old age

and older people have an agency crisis in Nepali literature. The study will use the discursive analytical method to study old .

Chapter III: Passivity and Inaction in Selected Nepali Short Stories

This part of the research critically examines how authors portray the socio-culturally constructed status of old age while remaining indifferent to their needs for agency, identity, and intrinsic value. The representation of older characters as passive and inactive can be attributed to sociocultural attitudes. "Age is a cause," Gullette says, "like race and gender—that rightfully allies itself with principles of narrative freedom, economic justice, and human rights" (196). These attitudes perpetuate stereotypes that associate old age with declining dependency and diminished capabilities. As a result, older individuals are often sidelined in various aspects of life, including literature, where their roles are minimized or confined to traditional gender roles.

The selected eleven short Nepali fiction stories follow the decline narratives, reflecting Nepal's prevalent cultural ideology on aging. The older

characters in these stories are portrayed in stereotypical gendered roles, and old age is the dark age of life. The older characters in the stories can be categorized into four groups: middle-aged males, middle-aged females, older people, and widows. In the stories, middle-aged male characters are depicted as either working abroad or at home as breadwinners, while middle-aged females are responsible for house chores. Widows face the hardship of performing both roles and living in loneliness. The elders in the narratives are often disregarded, dismissed, and discarded, signifying the challenges and negative aspects of aging within the cultural context.

Old Age as an Age of Burden

The story "Amako Khakha" from Ram Lal Joshi's *BaAma* presents the story of a widowed mother and her abject object condition during her old age. Joshi's narration strongly features the decline story, supporting Guellte, who claims that "aging by culture means accepting decline as inevitable" (38). The story represents the widow, her prime middle age, and her declining old age. The story focuses on how her only son was dependent on her when she was in prime time of her middle age and how she was

abandoned during her old age. The story highlights how she devoted her life to providing for her son, working tirelessly to ensure he received everything desired, and how pathetically she had to escape from her son's house during her eighties. The narrator reflects:

My mother sometimes planted rice in other people's fields to buy sandals. For books and copies, she went to cut wheat. Likewise, for the pajamas/ the geometry box, and so on, she went to work in 'parma'; in Nepal, parma is related to labor or services that people exchange with each other to work respectively. She bought everything for him, unlike other children's fathers who bought them. (36-37)

This shows her activity and her accountability during her middle age. Though uneducated and unskilled, she devotedly fulfills her son's needs. However, as the years went by, her son grew up and pursued his paths in life. He starts to live in the city, whereas his mother lives in the village. Her concern for her son deepened; therefore, she hesitated to burden him with her worries, knowing he had his own life to lead. Hence, for 32 years, she lived in the village without burdening her son. During this long period, her son

married and built a house in the city (40). This shows that parents work tirelessly until their bodies support them, and youth also take advantage of them. When time shifts, elders cannot be as active as they used to be, so they depend on their children.

She has lived alone in the village for 32 years. She struggles to live. After 32 years, her son visits her in the village, she is not like before. He reflects, 'My mother has grown old' (41). At first, her worst physical appearance destroys the protagonist. Her skinny body, shaggy jawline, faded face, bloated eyes, and shabby face. Aging transforms her active body into a passive and weak one. Such physical descriptions negate the old age to make it premium time. The protagonist urges her to share her troubles, assuring her he is there for her, just as she has always been there for him. Then he takes her to the city. She is boundlessly happy seeing her son's house and family. Parents feel proud of their children's progress. They participate equally in their children's happiness and sorrows, but their children underestimate their values as they age. The children feel their parents are a burden, and soon, they leave them to suffer without hesitation.

The story further depicts how elders gradually become a burden to the family. During the first few days, the protagonist and his family are happy to be with his mother. Later, slowly, all of them become tired of living with her. The mother realizes this, so she plans to return to her old, tattered house in the village. His mother readily accepts the challenge of living alone in the village. She returns to her village, but she falls sick.

Elders dedicate their lives to the longings of their children. In return, they often endure suffering during their old age. The protagonist receives a call from their village friends about his mother's sickness. He brings her to the city and cares for her. She is in her 80s, and the doctor diagnosed her with dementia - memory loss, a typical disease that happens during old age. Soon, her son's reaction changes upon her. As he narrates, "My mother has become senseless. She enters the home with the stool under her feet. When I touch her hair with love, stool particles tangle in it. Witnessing this, the children and my wife are driven to madness" (45). Dementia and her senseless activities in the story highlight the prevalent misconception about aging and the challenges they face in their later years, as well as the

perception regarding old age as a burden age.

The story represents old age, equating to the Dark Ages, as one faces health issues and lifestyle changes. However, aging can also bring wisdom, experience, and a sense of fulfillment. Each individual's experience of old age varies, and it is essential to recognize the value and diversity of life experience at every stage. The protagonist's mother's condition is getting worse day by day. Now, she is completely ignored by her family. Having been discarded by her family, hardly could she live with them. Most surprising is that her son himself wished for her death. "I wish for my mother's death"(46). His wishes for his mother's death reflect the bitter truth about old age. Here, aging equates to death, the ultimate expectation society sees upon aging people. The protagonist avoids his mother when she needs him the most.

She expresses how much she wants to embrace him with love and care. She explains, "You possess all the qualities of your father, so I feel drawn to be with you all the time. Yet, you seem to prefer being away from me. You do not talk to me--- Do you think I am mad?" (47). However, he

feels annoyed to be with his mother every time. Hardly could he manage time to work and be with her, and he took her as a barrier to his progress. So, he remains away from his home and mother for a week. Knowing this, his mother silently left the house. He and his family could not find the mother (48). It shows that youth do not authorize their parents during their old age, meaning that old age is more dangerous than death.

The story portrays her role within the negative sociocultural notion that reaching old age inevitably makes one a burden to the family. Even the family members want to ex-communicate them. Further, the narrative shows feeble bodies, disease, loneliness, and frailty as intrinsic parts of old age.

The most pitiful aspect is the forced disengagement from the family.

Throughout her life, the woman has demonstrated excessive strength, enduring an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. However, she does not share the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other aging women. She believes herself to be and is, in fact, stronger emotionally than most men. She is less feminine and helpless; she is more of a woman, in other words, a superwoman. However, age captivates her power,

strength, and integrity, leaving her to survive alone in distress.

Elders on the ice floe

This part of the research highlights how the stories may overlook the potential and contributions of older characters, reinforcing that their value lies solely in their role as parents or caregivers for their children. This limited portrayal denies their agency and overlooks the diversity and richness of experiences that older individuals possess.

Elders can be shown as wiser than the younger generation. Despite academic education, they have a pearl of wisdom about living life.

Supporting this, Cicero believed in three things about older age. "First, 'dedicated to service,' the second is 'wisdom to enrich others,' and the third is 'counsel': mentoring, advising, and reaching others in a way that does not amass worldly rewards of money, power, or prestige" (31 qtd in Brook).

Despite being dedicated to service and having extreme knowledge regarding life, elders in "Chadieka Bhagawan," "Chorako Sapana," and "Lekhioko Katha" suffer the most in this glorious phase of life. They are abandoned and discarded.

They are abandoned parents left on the ice floe. The ice floe story is about younger people sending older people out to die in the cold. The myth is that Eskimo elders walk out willingly or are left behind, and their duty is to die (Gullete 20). The images of elders shown in the plot are helplessness, decrepitude, pain, abuse, and demeaning death. Similarly to Eskimo parents and their sacrifice for their children, characters in these stories make sacrifices for the sake of their families. However, as in the ice floe story, Eskimo aging parents have to leave their children's house to die alone. Similarly, children in the above three narrations compel their parents to live alone in the village to die. Gullete argues that "presenting old age is terrifying because such literary narration shows that aging leads to death" (25). It shows that the elderly should accept death as a part of their life. She further agrees that "aging is the new fate worse than death" (25). Though death seems to be the ultimate option for elders, they face old age more death-defying.

In "Chhadieka Bhagawan," Ram Lal Joshi narrates the story of a village called Kotila, where elders are left to lament and die. Kotila, like

many villages in rural Nepal, grapples with the challenges of modernity and the exodus of its youth in search of opportunities elsewhere. At the heart of Kotila, Ramnath's maternal uncle resides a weathered yet resilient elder who has spent a lifetime tending to his family and the land they call home. With deep lines etched into his weather-beaten face and silver strands woven through his hair, he embodies the wisdom and strength of his ancestors.

Ramnath visits his uncle and the village after a long time. Neither his uncle nor the village is like before. His uncle is old and weak, whereas the village has fallow lands, bare hills, and withered elders that almost resemble a dead village, where all the elderly live without their children. Along with the protagonist's uncle, other older characters are compelled to live lonesome. They are BBC Bajai (Granny), Dhami Ba (Grandfather), Naulahari kaki (Aunty), Lahureni Amai (Granny), and Tripura Kansi. While talking to Ramnath, BBC Bajai assures that in the village, there are no young people and no signs of children (167). It signifies that children secluded their older parents to live alone until death knocks them.

Weaken by life's trials and tribulations, these characters find

themselves contending with the poignant realization that their children will never come, and they are left to die alone. It is hard to ignore the bitter truth: the older characters in the story yearn to be with their children.

Despite their stoic facades and attempts to suppress their emotions, the yearning for familial closeness seeps through their actions and dialogue, adding depth and poignancy to the narrative. Ramnath's nieces and friends have settled abroad and rarely visit their parents in the village (168). The story is the epitome of the present context of Nepal, where the young generation runs behind in money, success, and prosperity and leaves their parents alone to die.

The gloomy description of the elderly characters features the declining narratives of aging. Decline narratives block alternative focuses, happier conclusions, more optimistic planning, and mixed emotions (Guellet 133). The elders in the story happen to be the victims of mental torture meted out to them by their children, compelling them to seek to live alone, being weak, feeble, dependent, and lonely.

Chhorako Sapana resembles the story of the elderly parents whose sole

motive was to devote their lives to their only son. In the story "Chorako Sapana," the wife dreams of giving birth to a baby boy. After thirteen years of marriage, they gave birth to a baby boy. Their dream was not significant; they dreamed for their son. While her husband is earning a living, the woman nurtures the son. Here, the woman's role is to look after the house chores and her family members, whereas the husband manages the financial issues. They were happily living together. Their only son could not live without his parents during childhood. Once the couple went to Lakhanu for treatment, he could not eat anything. Their daughter explains, "Brother hasn't eaten anything since you guys have gone"(216). This shows the deep connection of the couple over their son. The couple, thus, believe their son is the strongest pillar of their future. Therefore, they live for him; they work for him, smile for him, and die for him.

After graduation, their son seeks an appropriate job. While it is normal for graduates to search for a job for future settlement, the couple's dreams are confined to the traditional concept of marriage. One day, his frustrated son complains to his father:

"...I remain educated and unemployed.

"Baba!"

"What happened, Babu?"

"Why did you give me birth on this earth? I'm only the burden for this land. Why did you nurture me to live like idle?"

The father remains unanswerable and bewildered. "He asks why Babu? Why did you feel so? Does your mother say anything? "

"Who has to say what, Baba? I know it by myself. I am jobless; I'm workless. How to survive in this country?"(218)

The dialogue between the son and the father represents the condition of the young generation in Nepal. Due to political instability and unemployment, most youths in Nepal feel insecure. Therefore, they seek a better future in a foreign land. Consequently, elderly parents have to suffer during their old age.

Further, the father explains, "In our times, our dream was only this son, but in his days, but in his days, his only dream was going to the USA or Europe" (219). Then, one day, their son returns home with the news that

he has won the DV lottery. Now, he is happy to go to the USA. He leaves his elder parents and his homeland, but he never returns. This saddened his parents. They waited for him all the time. Although they have money to survive, the mobility of their son causes them to live alone. They live for their son; later, their son leaves them, moves to the USA, and never returns.

Likewise, *Lekhiako Katha* portrays a story about a frail couple abandoned to die during their old age. The plot resembles a familiar story where a couple works hard to raise a child, and during their old age, not to feel a burden to their son and daughter-in-law, they secretly leave their home. According to Brooks:

"In Hindu culture, a proper life must be lived in four stages, each lasting twenty-five years. The first stage is brahmacharya, the youth and young adulthood period dedicated to learning. The second is grihastha, when a person builds a career, accumulates wealth, and maintains a family... and people become attached to its earthly rewards—money, power, sex, prestige—and thus try to make this stage

a lifetime... but that never satisfy. Hence, breaking the attachment to these idols requires movement to a new stage of life with a new set of spiritual skills. And that stage is called vanaprastha, which comes from two Sanskrit words, "retiring" and "into the forest," that occurs, if we are diligent, around age fifty."(150)

This segment suggests two perspectives of old age in Hindu society:

disengagement from society and the beginning of a journey to spirituality.

However, the old couple leaves the house, believing they have entered the last stage of their lives. They become detached from all material pleasures but cannot be in the spiritual world. With cultural influence, they believe their life is declining compared to their son. In return, they experience lots of pain because, in reality, they are disregarded and discarded from society.

The story begins by describing the present condition of the protagonist, who is in his old age and the worst condition. He is living near the bank of the Shivaganga River. The narrator meets and becomes curious to know about his life. How can one be in such a measurable condition? He lives in an old, tattered hut. His wrinkled forehead, fuzzy face, dirty shirt,

and torn pajamas portray the miserable state of his life (100). The narrator asks, "Where are you coming from, Ba?" He could not reply because he had lost his sense of hearing and understanding. So, he answered unnecessarily. He shouts, "Somebody asks me about my son, and somebody asks me about my daughter-in-law and some about my wife. Neither of these people matters to me. All of them have gone in vain" (101). This shows that life has already shattered him; therefore, he appears feeble and lacks interest in life.

Being lonely in old age is worse than death. His wife dies of cancer, and he buries her near his hut. Then, all alone, he lives there. Ernest Becker argues that "the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else" (97). However, the old man's sufferings have overlooked the fear of death. He explains, "I want to die in the same place where my wife took her last breath. I do not have any big desire to live a life nor any interest in returning to my son's house. Now, the only desire I have is death" (101). Therefore, when one has already overcome the fear of death through loneliness, the person has no more fear of dying.

Despite the progress in society and technology, elders remain fragmented. Elders are pushed towards isolation and loneliness against their will. Is it their duty to wait for death? It is seen that elderly characters endure all sorts of exhausting activities without complaining, and as per their ideology, they remain supportive as younger parents and loathsome as older parents. Almost all older people are seen as responsible for their duties as parents and caregivers to their children. What did they achieve at last? Ignorance, solitude, and disregard! Hence, neither of them is seen as progressive. Eventually, aging undermines their solace in living with their children. Such a gloomy presentation of old age demeans the value of old age.

Aging Widower and Challenging Masculinity

In this part, the research delves into the challenges of masculinity as men age. While males usually appear to suffer less than females, aging tussles equally for both genders. Gullette argues that "generally, there is much less detail about men or about how differently situated men and women learned age" (155). However, the concept of aging guided by culture

asserts: "Old age is a problem, and hence, "aging equals decline"(7). The stories "Kalo Chasma" and "Sathe" from Durga Prasai's book *Kumari Prashna Haru* depict two widowed elder male characters striving to uphold their masculine roles as fathers within their families. However, these narratives also reveal their inability to keep their male status as they age, leaving them disregarded, frail, and mostly powerless. As they age, society and their families expect them to become dependent, weakened in decision-making, and limited in their ability to make new life choices.

"Kalo Chasma" is the story of a widowed man, the father of three children, who constantly remains silent. His family members realized his presence after listening to the radio he played. "The 7 pm news has been played on local FM. Now, the father has come" (99). His silence symbolically represents his intense grief and his struggles to express it due to his traditional masculine norms. The loss of his wife has led him to profound loneliness, but societal expectations prevent him from seeking emotional support because he is a man, and men do not cry.

Nobody in the family understands his silence and agony. Instead, they

accuse him of being silent. Brooks, in his essay "Cultivate your Aspen Grove," mentions that "Loneliness is not the same as being alone . . . because one can be emotionally socially connected to others while alone, rather they feel lonely in their very loneliness" (118). The man is a retired soldier of the Nepal army and is responsible for his family. His family includes four children- three daughters and one son - and his eighty-year-old mother. He is the only source of income for the family, and relying on his pension, the family hardly meets its needs. He had to sell his father's inherited property to pay for his wife's breast cancer treatment. Once, he considered going abroad to earn more money, but he could not leave his sick old mother and small children (101). Therefore, he remains content despite loneliness and continues working silently as a traditional, responsible father.

Men who have adhered to traditional gender roles may find themselves unprepared for tasks their spouse once managed, such as household chores and emotional labor. Pooja, the elder daughter, feels jealous when she sees her friends' modern houses and kitchens in the

lowlands, and she compares and complains about her life in the village (99).

Pooja dreams of marrying soon and expresses her frustration that her father

is delaying her marriage. Most of her friends have already married and

settled down, but she is in a dilemma about her life's decisions. She

agonizes over her family's circumstances and often cries because she

misses her mother and feels overwhelmed by the responsibilities left behind.

Especially when her brother struggles to eat and sleep properly, when her

middle sister struggles to cook correctly, and when her father is unable to

express himself verbally. Seeing her father in pain, she sometimes wants to

express her love towards him by saying, "Father, how much pain will you

bear for us?" (102). The story shows that after the death of a spouse, the

widowed man remains half-paralyzed in house chores.

As males age, they often find it challenging to make decisions on

time, and society takes advantage of their diminished abilities. In the story,

the silent father remains passive even when his sister silently tries to marry

his elder daughter to a blind man. His sister, who lives in Kathmandu, is

affluent and modern; therefore, she denies visiting her brother in the village.

He always visits her during Tihar in Kathmandu. This time, she has requested that he also bring. She wants Puja to marry her off to a man in Kathmandu. Finally, the day comes when a man wearing black goggles arrives with his family members to meet Pooja. Puja's father remains silent throughout this process, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with his sister's arrangement. The most exciting part is that neither Puja nor her aunt consults him about it.

Puja is initially impressed by the man's appearance, but an incident on that day raises doubts. When Puja and the man are alone to talk in the room, the lights suddenly go out. In the darkness, she feels an unexpected touch on her back that makes her reconsider making decisions. She feels alone and helpless. She knows her father will say nothing about it, so she remains indecisive when her aunt asks for decisions. Two days later, Puja's cousin discovers the truth about his touching. He has an eye problem; he barely sees in the dark. After that incident, Puja and her father return to their village without speaking on the bus. Luckily, she saves her life (107). Hence, the father's lack of active, decisive actions allows others to make

critical decisions for his daughter. His silence in such situations reflects his weakened masculinity, as society expects more proactive behavior from male characters.

Heroic Yet Disregarded Elder

Likewise, "Saathe" depicts a 65-year-old widowed man whose life transforms completely as he ages. In their article, Irit Erhart and Harde Eslon Ziya assert that a man no longer meets the standards of hegemonic masculinity; he is gradually deemed marginalized, dissident, excluded, or subaltern"(160). After his wife's death, the man lives with his son and daughter-in-law in the flat. Now, his life as a father is not as it used to be.

The man was active in his early middle ages and made decisions on every critical issue in the family. While his wife Parvati used to manage household chores, he managed financial responsibility. The son felt safe and glad to have such parents. Their son passed the school exam. Now, he has to be in the city to study further. The man happily sent his son to Kathmandu city, where he settled down properly and assured him that he would solve everything for him as a father. Their son happily continued his

studies in the city, but in the village, his mother could not live without him. So, they shifted to the city where their son lives by selling everything from the village. The couple opens the shop and starts to earn there. The son is also happy to have his parents living together.

Now, he laments thinking of his past life. How happy he used to be when he was in the village with his wife, Parvati. How blissful they were when they gave birth to their son, Rudra, and how devotedly nurtured their son. Nevertheless, now, he is alone in the room, and both his son and daughter-in-law go for earnings while he lives at home. He reflects, "In the morning, they would leave on the same motorcycle and return together in the evening! During the day, I would be all alone! Even watching TV felt boring!" (123). He finds no one to talk with him. Deep loneliness is killing him within, but his son and daughter-in-law remain unaware. Brooks argues that "loneliness is the experience of emotional and social isolation . . . and lonely people feel like they are the only ones who feel lonely" (118). As an old father, he has to depend upon his son, Rudra, because he is the breadwinner of the house. Neither the man can share his problems nor can

go somewhere without permission. He even feels awkward speaking with daughter in law. In the kitchen, I feel like saying, "Shall I peel the vegetables?" but I hesitate, thinking she might say, "This old man is so annoying and useless, always around. . ." (123). His masculinity and power have been weak. The societal expectations have made him silent and stoic during old age.

It is commonly observed that various health issues accompany aging. Dementia, Parkinson's disease, insomnia, and prostate are common diseases during old age. The man also suffers from prostate problems, which affect his ability to urinate properly. However, he feels uncomfortable sharing with his son. Then also he shares: "I couldn't urinate properly, and even when I could, it wouldn't pass freely. I couldn't tell my son, but he noticed me going to the toilet frequently and asked, "Are you fine, Baba?" (123). Rudra takes him to the hospital. However, he suffers mentally rather than physically.

The story illustrates the inseparable connection between aging and loneliness, particularly after the death of a spouse. Seeing his father's

loneliness, Rudra approaches his wife to conceive a baby. He says, "Baba has become very lonely. If we can have children, it would be easier for him to pass the time!" (124). Nevertheless, his wife rejects the proposal by saying, "I got married hastily without being fully prepared, and now, I can't have children right away for father's sake. . .I do have a life"(124). It reflects the young generation's difficulty understanding the old generation and their sufferings. Rudra believes that his father is old and that his role as a grandfather will mitigate his loneliness, but he does not consider the alternative. The discourse created by Rudra and his wife is influenced by the socially constructed narratives that suggest an older man has no more progressive life.

Suffering from loneliness differs from person to person; despite age and gender issues, marital status matters, as married men feel less lonely than those who are divorced, widowed, and never married. The married but with an "absent spouse" is the loneliest person in the world (Brook 120). However, when some elders take steps to overcome this loneliness by remarrying, society still rejects them. Rudra's father has a feeling for

Kamala, a 40-year-old single woman who works in their landlord's household.

She arrives daily at 3 pm to care for a 70-year-old woman, the landlord's mother. She looks after the old woman and does all the house chores.

Kamla even talks to the man, asking if she can help him(125).

While having dinner, the man, with all his efforts, shares his feelings about Kamala with his son and daughter-in-law, but their reaction is unpleasant. His son pushes aside his food and washes his hands while his daughter-in-law abruptly leaves the kitchen without offering him rice. The man feels great regret about it."I couldn't sleep the whole night because of the worry that I did wrong by sharing it," he recalls, but his unease deepens when he overhears his daughter-in-law's words while he is going to the toilet around 11 pm. His daughter-in-law shouts. Even at 65, why does he want a young woman. . . it's so shameful" (126). This sentiment reflects the prevailing narrative often used for older men in the Nepali context. In Nepali society, he is turning 65, which means that one should be expected to detach from family life and enjoy his time thinking of God and being a pilgrim. Remarrying and starting a new life at this age is a shameful act,

and it is ended with disapproval by society.

Sexual inability is often associated with aging and representing it as a declining phase of life, and marrying at this age means a great shatter to the man. He cannot tolerate his daughter-in-law's words. He cries a lot; he misses his wife, Parvati, deeply. He wishes he could face his late wife, Parvati, and ask, "Parvati, do you also think that I need a young wife?"

(126). In reality, nobody understands his suffering from loneliness. He needs a partner not for pleasure but to battle loneliness. From that incident onwards, he speaks less with his son and daughter-in-law and lives his life as a dead living body. Observing his condition, Kamala dares to speak to him," How long will you live like a living dead body? If you don't marry me, it is okay, but find someone as a partner. Nobody understands your pains and feelings"(127). Inspired by Kamala, he decides to take risks. They get married in a nearby temple and move to the village without Rudra and his wife's informed consent.

Although his step is groundbreaking, he cannot escape from the society and culture he belongs to. The villagers use unbearable rhetoric

about the relationship between the old man and young Kamala. "When the villagers see me with young and muscular Kamala, they exchange knowing glances with each other. If someone meets him alone, they dare ask, "Where did you find such a perfect woman?" (127). Although he dares to challenge society, people frequently criticize him. He hopes that one day, his son and society will understand the trouble caused by loneliness and accept his decision. He is seen as a man lacking manhood, which is a dichotomy. Thus, his striving to mitigate loneliness and distress highlights old age as a social infliction.

Women and Aging

In this section, the research embodies the stereotypical representations of older women in two short fiction stories, "Chowmien" and "Pohil," by *Kumari Prashnharu*. The story "Chowmien" depicts a middle-aged woman and her teenage daughter, Kamala, who live in a village. This story is grounded in her daughter striving for her father's love, who finds her mother's love and sacrifice insignificant, though her mother is the only source of income for her daughter and mother-in-law to live. She does

household chores and sharecropping for a living. Her husband never visits them; several years ago, he went to India to search for a job and never returned to them. She feels weak when her daughter frequently asks about her father. "Aama! Where is Ba? She can't reply properly because she is unaware of where her husband is. Therefore, she answers her daughter randomly, "...Far away... in Delhi" (21). This represents her status as a stereotypical woman who is helpless and fragile and only knows how to cry in silence.

'Old woman' becomes a part of the taunt when she becomes dependent. Guellete supports Ruth Ray Karpen, a feminist gerontologist, who claims "actual old women, trivialized, ignored, laughed at holding little social value, can be regarded as "burdens,"(13). Kamla's 80-year-old grandmother has a minor role in the story. She is a burden to them because the granny sits quietly most of the time and demands. Once, Kamala complains regarding the granny's demand, "Grandmother was craving tender corn since the morning," but I. . ." (30). Granny has less value in the family because she hardly manages to live alone and seems more passive than others. All

three women in the family have a common desire to see the man in the family because they believe a masculine figure can only make their family financially and socially strong.

Once Kamala recites a poem about a father in the school, she wins the second prize. Listening to her poem, her principal asks her why she addresses her father in such powerful words; she mentions her father, who is not visible to her to date, and how deeply she misses him (24). The headmaster feels pity for Kamala, so he cares for and loves her. However, in society, people talk about their relationships and claim love affairs. This portrays that in the absence of a man in the family, society quickly accuses women. Here, Kamala's mother is too weak to defend. Without social security or a voice to oppose, she accepts a silent tolerance to empower her.

Compared to men, women quickly adapt to the situation. The man in "Saathe" could not survive alone after the death of his wife, so he remarried Kamala. However, the woman in this story lives her entire life in the liminal hope that her husband will return. The woman accepts the challenges given

by her husband as the fate of her life, although she knows her husband's bitter reality. Her husband has another family in India and lives happily there. Without any complaining to anyone, she continues her life journey.

Women are more emotional than men. They rarely counterattack the situation. Once Kamala's mother heard news of her husband's visit to the village. She remains impuissance. Once, her husband silently visits the village to see his family. Villagers talk about his presence. That day, she returns home in the evening. It is raining outside, and Kamala and Granny are waiting for her in the kitchen, but she stands outside. Granny shouted at her and requested to get inside the house, but she ignored it. As she mentions, "Your son has come to the village today," and "he might have come to see how I live without him at this old age" (30). She cannot do anything other than tolerate it. The woman replicates those Nepalese women who believe a married woman should not leave her husband's house. Remarrying, living with another man, or leaving a husband's house and starting a new life is a curse for them.

On the other hand, "Pohil" portrays how the narration of aging

diminishes family values. According to Gullette, " In age, as in gendered and racialized constructs, relations of difference depend on the din of representations, unseen internalizations, unthinking practices, economic structures of dominance and subordination" (27). Thus, these hidden social elements equally generate and withstand differences between age groups, leading to stereotypes, biases, and inequalities that affect how aging individuals are treated and perceived. The story depicts a young woman with her aged husband living with in-laws. She ends her relationship with her husband and family. The story reveals how negative narration of old age destroys family bonding.

In the story, Sunita married a man 11 years older than her in her late teenage years. She is neither satisfied with her husband nor with her in-laws. Sunita's mother-in-law always suspects her. She always passes negative messages to her son. Once, she said to her son, "You might think you would educate your wife and make her a teacher! But son, one day your wife will elope, and then you will understand" (203). She thinks Sunita is younger than her son so that she may betray her son. Sunita's husband

works in Qatar to earn. He leaves his wife at home with his family.

However, his mother goes against her daughter-in-law and is always in

search of her to dominate her in front of her son. Though the man works

hard to support his wife from every perspective, everything goes in vain.

Even villagers taunt her for marrying such an older man. They incite her,

saying, "You're so beautiful and young! How did you end up in such a poor

household with such an old husband? You could have any young man you

want" (204). Youths negate aging and aging people due to such an

anticipated narrative.

When he visits Sunita in Nepal, she never enjoys her married life.

She searches for her young boyfriend on him. She wants to go far away

with him. She wants to crack jokes with him; she wants to flirt with him, and

she wants to take a close picture with him. She claims that she searches

Rashmi's boyfriend on him. However, she only gets something from him

other than prudent advice. "She does not enjoy physical relations either. She

feels tortured inside and out. Anyone can notice her situation; one morning,

her friend Rashmi asks her, "Does your husband not let you sleep all night

or what? What happened to your face?" (205). She silently wishes for his return. She feels bothersome to be with her aged husband and mother-in-law, so she chooses another man to live with. Hence, hearing the narratives regarding older husbands and mother-in-law, Sunita creates distance from her husband. She undervalues her husband's support and care. She finds her mother-in-law as her enemy. Eventually, she ends her relationship with that family and elopes to another man. However, the author centralizes the wife and her suffering more than her husband, but the story reveals how such hidden practices can devalue aging perception. The story is an example of a decline narrative, portraying aging as a source of distress for the younger generation.

Elders from Low Land

This part of the research delves into Nayan Raj Pandey's *Jiyara*. Nayan Raj is a well-known writer who digs out the problems of lowland people in-depth and showcases them in his writings. The study searches elders from three stories: "Janani," "Sarpadamsha," and "Jiyara" from *Jiyara*. Elders from low land are marginalized and economically deprived than elders

from other stories. Although the suffering of the aging characters is evident all across the eleven stories, the pace and the level of misery that aging has brought differ significantly between the elders in these selected narratives. Reviewing Gullette's book *Aged by Culture*, M. Charlene Ball argues:

Age studies see 'age' and 'aging' in cultural ideology rather than from biology, and that ideology deconstructs dominant narratives that paint aging as ahistorical, acultural, and universal, conspiring with able-bodiedness, class, gender, race and other mechanisms of marginalization that impact everyone whether in youth, midlife, or old age. (216)

Charlene points out that age studies view age and aging through cultural beliefs and ideologies rather than biological processes. It focuses on our understanding that aging is shaped by cultural narratives and ideologies, which challenge the idea that aging is purely biological, timeless, and culture-free. These ideologies also intersect with other forms of social marginalization, such as able-bodiedness, class, gender, and race, affecting

people at all stages of life-whether they are young, middle-aged, or old. By examining aging studies, we seek to uncover and critique these dominant narratives and how they marginalize individuals based on their age and other social factors.

This research examines *Jiyara's* three short stories to explore how these cultural ideologies shape the portrayal of aging. It underscores the importance of considering cultural ideologies in understanding the sociocultural dimensions of aging, challenging conventional, biologically-centered views. These stories portray elders from different cultural contexts, but the underlying woes of old-age counterparts are significant. Loneliness and longing for children's love are universal to all old people. However, these elders are economically and socially deprived, as they suffer from an identity crisis and displacement.

In "Sarpadamsha," Pandey depicts the snake charmers' community, which is associated with traditional practices of snake handling and entertainment. People of this community are called snake charmers, whose main job is to catch venomous snakes and train them to move in the music

they play. They entertain people by playing music and making snakes to dance. This profession is a means of entertainment and livelihood for this community. A fifty-year-old Hakka Pahalman is the chief of the snake charmers community. All snake charmers depend on Hakka Pahlman for their problems because he is powerful and always keeps extra snakes with him so that whoever can not catch the snake he gives them. One day, he shouts at snake charmers from the village: "All our snake charmers are useless. They have no more power. They all depend on me. Have I taken a permanent job to manage their household? Then also, they belong to my community. I love them. Let them work" (12). He understands the value of this profession. Therefore, he helps everyone in need.

Hakkapahalman's wife has already died. He has two sons but can not persuade them to stay in the village and to continue their traditional jobs. Last year, they said, "Baba, we won't stay here for dancing snakes. We cannot survive with this occupation. We will instead do labor/ collie works in India"(13). It shattered him the most. Then, he yelled at his sons," You are not men, leaving your ancestral land to carry others' load. Now, I don't see

your ill-fated faces anymore. Even when I die, don't come to show respect"

(13). Then, his sons never returned to the village. This is the case for Hakkapahlaman and almost every old villager waiting for their sons to return.

However, only the older generation is pursuing this profession. The new generations are searching for new opportunities and leaving their village and older parents. Snake charmers belong to the subaltern group. They can hardly debate their rights; therefore, anyone plays on them, especially the political parties and their leaders. In the story also, Pandey depicts how these people are being used during the election times. These people suffer not only from being poor but also from unnecessary torture given to them by politically influential leaders. The narrator reflects: "The refusal to vote for Lal Babu in the election led his supporters to set fire to the whole houses in Jaipun Village in retaliation. Hakkapahalman died, too, during the time" (12). Along with him, several older villagers and snakes died. Now, neither villagers have their chief nor have their snakes, and villagers are in great trouble. The political leaders use them haphazardly, and they do not provide adequate health care or social services. Overall, they overlook their needs.

Due to heavy political influence and low income from the traditional occupation, the young generation is compelled to leave their homeland for good earnings in the nearby country, India. In return, the older generation suffers because they are physically weak. So they cannot catch the snakes. If they cannot catch the snakes, they cannot earn; if they cannot earn, they cannot survive. Therefore, the older people appeal to their children, especially their sons, not to leave their land and occupation. They ensure that they can survive easily in the profession. However, life is challenging for the young generation, so they skip it. Along with Hakka Pahalman, other older characters remain, pleading with their children not to leave their land and traditional occupation. Nevertheless, their pleading goes in vain. Neither their children nor society find their significance, so they remain abject. They know that without the younger generation, they have to die of starvation.

Similarly, in "Jiayara," Pandey projects pathetic elders, especially the girls' parents. Pandey's elders are provided with food and money in the story. Instead, they suffer from societal obligations. Ramawatar and Janaki are stressed to marry their eighteen-year-old daughter, Reshma. Reshma is

their elder daughter, and Parvati is their youngest. The daughter's parents raise their daughters with the feeble hope that one day they can get good husbands and live happily. Reshma loves Jagat Lal, a son of Lakhari Ram from the village. Nevertheless, her parents deny the proposal because Jagat Lal does not possess a Nepali citizenship card (219). They rejected him because they looked for the future safety of their daughter. A citizenship card is a significant identity remark for the Terai people, who always fight for their identity.

Finally, Ram Lal finds the boy who has a citizenship card. His parents proudly declare, " Our son is uneducated, so what? He has a Nepali citizenship card. Therefore, we need 50 thousand cash. Nowadays, getting a man with a Nepali citizenship card for less than two lakhs is hard. So, this is the fixed rate."(219). Reshma's parents have no issues except marrying their daughter. They accepted their proposal and married her to the man from the Koshi side. Now, they hope their responsibility is over and their daughter lives happily. However, Reshma's in-laws torture her for not giving them a motorcycle as dowry.

After some days, Reshma returns to her mother's house. Excited, Parvati hugs her sister, but Reshma reacts uncomfortably. Parvati identifies lots of injuries on her face. She even questions, "How did you get so many injured, sister? However, Reshma mentions nothing. Her mother insists on her one night, and then she confesses the bitter truth. She confesses, "They beat me frequently for not giving motorcycle in dowry. My in-laws often warn me to burn with kerosene" (221). Listening to Reshma, her mother could not tolerate the pain. She feels deep pain as a cobra bites her. Parvati becomes speechless, and the father is helpless. Thus, elders remain silent and endure profound pain because their culture guides them not to intervene in such issues, regardless of what happens to their daughter.

After marrying their daughter, they feel that they have completed their responsibility, but in reality, they embrace unbearable pain. The news spreads: "Reshma died in law's house by burning?" just right after she returns from her mother's house (221). In their community, it is expected to hear the news about women killed by their in-laws for dowries. Moreover, the daughter's parents are always distressed for their daughters, and after

marriage, if their daughter becomes a victim, they remain silent and accept it. These social norms and practices within the community deepen these elders' pain. They live their life passively without going against the dowry system. They do not fight against their daughter's death. They accept such pains, thinking of the fate of their life.

Likewise, in "Janani," Pandey presents rigid elders and how their rigidity destroys their daughter's life. In the story, the older Hindu parents of Damayanti go against Damayanti's love affair with her Muslim boyfriend, Aftab. After marrying Aftab, Damayanti changes her religion. However, Damayanti's family is not ready to accept the reality. Therefore, they spread the news in the Hindu community that "Aftab's family cut the cow and ate its meat" (03). The cow's death is a great sin in the Hindu community, and such news brings chaos. One day, a group of Hindu people, including Damayanti's father and two brothers, killed Aftab. Their rigidness spoiled Damayanti's life because they married her again to a Hindu man called Durga Lal, a sick man since childhood. During the marriage day, her mother proudly declares to Damayanti, "Thanks to us because we could not kill you

as like Aftab. It was complicated for you to find a boy. Now, live your life with him. Don't come back to Naihar, not even by mistake. Consider us, your father, brothers, and everyone else as already dead. We'll also think that you have died"(4). Hardly a mother says such cruel words to her daughter. However, Damaynti's parents undermine her feelings and values. Their cultural ideology completely blinds them, so they do not regret marrying Damayanti to the ailing man.

On the other hand, Durga Lal's parents easily accept Damaynti due to the dowry offered. Raghulal, the father of Durga Lal, expresses boundless happiness for the substantial dowry. He proudly says, 'I am happy because my sick and useless son, Raghu Lal, is going to earn that much money in a dowry" (4). However, nobody thinks of Damayanti, all four elders are happy with their decisions. After their marriage, these elders think their duty is over, so they go to Illahabaad for Kumba Mela, a major pilgrimage and festival for Hindus. However, Damayanti's parents, along with her in-laws, died at a religious fair. Now, Damayanti remains alone and silent.

Thus, Pandey depicts them as relatively rigid and stereotypical elders.

Such representation of elders depreciates the youth's vision regarding old age. No one thinks of celebrating old age as the premium age of life. These elders are physically, emotionally, and socially marginalized. The central plight of lowland elders is exacerbated by unskilled professionals, unsocial practices, and deeply ingrained religious beliefs. The textual analyses conducted in this chapter reveal a complex portrayal of old age in contemporary Nepali short stories, shedding light on the multidimensional challenges and dynamics experienced by elderly characters.

One prominent theme that emerges is depicting elderly individuals as burdens on their families. The narrative of an old widower from "Amaako Kakha," who was once active in her middle age, showcases noticeable differences in her later years, where she becomes frail and abandoned. At last, how her family perceives her as a burden to the family. This narrative underscores the societal expectation of productivity and the shifting roles within familial structures as people age. Similarly, the stories "Chadieka Bhagawan," "Chorako Sapana," and "Nalekhieko Katha" depict elderly characters abandoned by their children and left to face the challenges of old

age alone. These narratives reflect not only the abandonment and neglect experienced by the elderly but also speak to broader issues of familial responsibility and social support networks.

Further, the research sheds light on the complex intergenerational dynamics and shifting familial responsibilities portrayed in contemporary Nepali short stories. Stories portray the poignant theme regarding the perception of youth towards abandoning elderly parents to face the challenges of old age alone in rural villages and how they pursue opportunities abroad. These narratives reflect geographic separation and emotional and social disconnection between generations.

The depiction of elderly characters in the stories shows the contemporary context of the modern Nepali family structure, where the young run behind the economic progression, neglecting their traditional caregiving roles. This phenomenon highlights the tensions between global aspirations and local familial obligations as younger generations prioritize economic advancement over familial duties. Furthermore, exploring youth perceptions in these narratives can provide deeper insights into the developing values and

priorities within Nepali society. The portrayal of youth who are physically absent from their aging parents' lives while contending with guilt or ambivalence highlights the complexities of modern-day migration and its impact on familial bonds.

Likewise, From 'Sathe' and "Kalo Chasma," male elders illustrate how gender dynamics play a significant role in portraying old age. Elderly men face challenges in maintaining their sense of masculinity as they transition from independence to dependency. In "Kalo Chasma," the father stops talking to his family members. He uses his silence as the only weapon to overcome the difficulties he has faced in his aging, leading to a breakdown in communication. On the other hand, the older man from "Sathe" suffers from loneliness, which his son Rudra cannot comprehend. His emotional complexities and guilt in decision-making represent the decline phase of aging. These stories explore the emotional and psychological impacts of aging and highlight broader societal issues such as family dynamics, communication breakdowns, and the changing roles and expectations within Nepali society as someone ages.

On the other hand, "Chowmien" and "Pohila" reflect the elderly women who are marginalized in raising their voices. Women in "Chowmien" often suffer without the support of a male figure in their lives. In the story, the Mother's role as the caretaker for her daughter and elderly mother-in-law reflects the intergenerational transfer of caregiving responsibilities.

Despite her husband's abandonment, the woman's handling of household duties reflects her emotional strength and adaptability. However, society undermines her sacrifices. Aging individuals can use life experiences and resilience to navigate challenging family dynamics and unexpected changes in familial roles, but weak narratives shatter their efforts. Further, the daughter's quest for fatherly love and her nature of ignorance to signify her grandmother and mother may arouse the themes of emotional neglect and longing for familial connection in the absence of a paternal figure. On the other hand, in "Pohila," Sunita's expectations towards her older husband and in-laws can be viewed through aging by examining how age-related perceptions, generational differences, societal expectations, and personal agency intersect within the narrative.

Lastly, in "Sarpadamsha," "Jiyara," and "Janani," elders are shown as physically, emotionally, and socially marginalized. Their challenges are compounded by unskilled professionals, antisocial practices, and deeply rooted religious beliefs in lowland communities. Despite their aging and suffering, these individuals navigate their sense of self and community amidst societal marginalization and neglect. Hakkapahalman from "Sarpadamsha" is a mature man who accepts old age in his fifties. The story narrates how responsible he was for his community and its people. His sociocultural context forces him to be older of all. Likewise, elderly parents from "Jiyara" passively strive for justice because they do not have the space and voice to go against societal norms. On the other, elders from "Janani" posit the stubborn elders who overlook children's happiness over their religious beliefs.

In conclusion, examining elderly characters in contemporary Nepali short stories reveals a declining depiction of aging influenced by sociocultural factors. These characters reflect a spectrum of challenges elderly individuals face in Nepali society, ranging from marginalization and neglect to

intergenerational conflicts and societal pressures. Through their stories, the narratives highlight how traditional beliefs, gender roles, familial expectations, and societal attitudes contribute to the decline in quality of life and well-being experienced by older generations.

Chapter IV: Elderly People as Objects of Abjection

This dissertation examines the portrayal of elderly people in Nepali short stories. Under the influence of aging myths and culture, elderly people are depicted as dependent, alone, confused, and miserable in the Nepali short stories selected for this dissertation. Their stories of decline lead others to perceive old age as the dark age of life. Economically and physically weak, socially fragile, and politically marginalized, elderly citizens undergo a significant transition from being central to objects of abjection. These short narratives portray old age not as a period of progression but of decline.

The selected stories from Ram Lal Joshi's *Ba Ama* present powerful

reflections on family dynamics and the challenges faced by elderly parents.

Joshi depicts lamenting parents yearning for their children's attention and love. 'Mother' from the story "Aamako Khaki" embodies the role of a caregiver and a potential 'social burden.' While she is active, she is an unpaid caretaker for her son, but when she grows old, her sons find her insignificant. It shows the intricacy and harsh realities of family relationships and societal expectations regarding elders. Similarly, elder parents from "Lekhiko Katha" and "Chhadieka Bhagwan" are compelled to do the duty of dying. Loneliness, the quest for love, and prone to death are their anticipated duty; therefore, they must undergo them because their children feel that their parents' lives are worth ending. This highlights old age as the low phase of life, and their primary societal performance is to accept death.

Likewise, the selected stories from Durga Prasai's *Kumari Prashna Haru* expose young adults who negate the old people. Kamla's mother from "Chowmien" struggles to death to sustain her family. Similarly, her granny somehow helps them, and Kamala's search for fatherly love diminishes the value of these women in the story. Similarly, in "Saathe," Rudra's weakness

in disregarding his widower father's loneliness resembles how youth overlooks the elder's longing. The fragile widower father from "Kalo Chasma" depicts the complexities of an aging father in fulfilling the family's responsibility. He remains silent every time. However, nobody in his family can comprehend his silence; his children continue complaining about him.

On the other hand, in "Pohila," Sunita is dissatisfied with her old husband and elderly in-laws; therefore, she searches for another man to begin her life. Despite her husband's love and support, Sunita disregards him. This represents how youth undermines the significance of elders in their lives and how the young generation depreciates their older parent's identity.

In the selected stories from *Jiyara*, Nayan Raj Pandey depicts the marginalized elders from the Terai region. Not only do they suffer from loneliness, but also from identity crises. They are voiceless, even from socio-cultural perspectives. Elderly snake charmers in "Sarpadamsha" strive for basic living while their offspring struggle for job security and a good life. The story projects how these socially deprived people are being used and how their miseries remain unnoticeable. Parents from the other two stories,

"Janani" and "Jiyara," are stereotypes. They perform their conventional duties and remain identical in deeply accepting old-age agonies. Such gloomy presentations of old age not only deteriorate the value of the elderly but also compel the young generation to consider old age a burden.

The selected short Nepali stories, hence, portray old age as a period of lament despite the potential for progress –the older characters in "Chhadieka Bhagwan," "Chhorako Sapana," and "Lekhiko Katha," a lament for their children's attention and love. In "Kalo Chasma," "Sathe," and "Chowmien," though older characters are dutiful and helpful, the young adults find them older and insignificant. Likewise, in "Sarpadamsha" and "Jiyara, " too many older adults work continuously for the sake of their families, but they remain worthless during their old age. Despite the regional variations, the old characters are customary and stereotypical in the selected texts; therefore, the presence of old age is declining in these selected stories.

Aging is generally regarded as a time of burden, characterized by a lack of agency and the inability to contribute to family, society, and the

nation. This idea is reflected in selected Nepali short stories. By exposing the parochial representation of aging in the Nepali Short stories, this dissertation seeks to question this stereotypical notion about aging and shed light on the idea that old age is a phase of life with the potential for meaningful contribution, personal growth, and societal impact. In this regard, future researchers can review more literature to find and analyze positive representations of aging by showing older adults' diverse roles in various cultural contexts. Taking ideas from literature, sociology, and gerontology could provide a deeper understanding of aging, emphasizing how elderly individuals continue to influence and shape society. Research can be carried out on how the positive narratives about aging help inform policymakers to support active aging, improve the quality of life for older adults, and promote their active participation in communities and, of course, the nation.

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