

# Portrayal of women in Nepali movies:

*An analysis of three popular romantic movies*

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Master's thesis — Department of Media and Communication

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University of Oslo

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of women in three Nepali romantic movies over a period of the last 30 years. The movies the thesis looks at are - *Kusume Rumal* (1985), *Darpan Chhaya* (2001) and *Bir Bikram* (2016). In order to study the representation of women in Nepali movies and compare the changes over time, theories on women and cinema - Laura Mulvey's 'Theory of the Male Gaze', Simone De Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' and Daphne Spain's 'Gendered Spaces' - have been used and various texts and images among other elements of Mise-en-scene have been analyzed using textual analysis. The findings suggest that there is no change in the portrayal of women in the Nepali movies at present compared to the past. Women in Nepali movies continue to be portrayed in traditional stereotypical roles as housewives, caretakers of men, objects of desire and as the second sex while the men continue to dominate the family, workplaces and public space. In an epilogue, the thesis begins to compare the findings to Nordic cinema using the available literature on women and cinema in Nordic movies to have an insight on how this representation is similar or different in Nepal and Nordic countries. The comparison shows similar arguments in both cinemas, however, there has been some changes in the portrayal of women in Nordic cinema over the years.

# Preface

I would like to thank my supervisor Timotheus Vermeleun for all the help, comments and suggestions that he provided during the thesis writing process. The thesis wouldn't have been completed without his support which has been invaluable, and I cannot thank him enough.

I would like to extend my thanks to my family and friends for having faith in me and motivating me through the process.

The topic for the thesis has indeed been interesting and something close to me personally and I would like to thank everyone who motivated me and helped me in this incredible journey.

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# 1 [Introduction]

The thesis aims at examining the portrayal of women in three Nepali romantic movies over the period of the last three decades. In order to study this, I have selected three popular movies from the last 30 years from the romantic genre: *Kusume Rumal* (1985), *Darpan Chhaya* (2001) and *Bir Bikram* (2016). By popular I mean the movies of their time who were able to become successful commercially and were able to be popular among most of the audience (thecinematimes, n.d.). I have selected the movies from the last 30 years to present, one from each decade, respectively, in order to study the portrayal of women and compare the changes over time. In an epilogue, I will further begin to compare my findings to the Nordic context to have an insight on how this representation is similar or different in Nepali and Nordic cinema.

When I talk about female representation in Nepali movies, academically, I believe I am adding a Nepali perspective to the global debate regarding women and cinema. Reviewing the literature addressing female representation in movies and media in Nepal, I found that there has been very little writing on this topic. Acknowledging this, the thesis aims at opening up a new debate on female and cinema in the Nepali context. And doing this I aim to add a Nepali perspective to the global issue of women in cinema; add a global debate on women and cinema to the Nepali perspective and look at how these classic global debates on women and cinema play out in the Nepali context.

In the epilogue of the thesis, I begin to compare the portrayal of women in Nepali movies to that of Nordic media and movies. Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland) are well-known for their high level of gender equality. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2017, a report by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which sheds light on the position of women in 160 countries, ranks Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> position respectively with very low level of GII value (United Nations Development Program, 2017). The higher the value of GII, the more disparities between male and female. Meanwhile, the report ranks Nepal in 118<sup>th</sup> position showing high level of gender gap in major areas of human development including reproductive health, empowerment and economic status (United Nations Development Program, 2017).



In this sense, comparing the status of women in Nepali movies to a region with very high level of gender equality would be useful in studying how the female representation in these two different regions of the world measure up to each other. I believe it is interesting to see how female representation in Nepali cinema compares to that of Nordic cinema, given that there is a huge difference in these movies as they come from countries with huge difference in cultural norms and values. As per the requirement of the degree, I begin to look at this comparison in the epilogue, which is also my attempt to situate Nepali film making into a broader context of women and cinema.

### **1.1 Nepali Movie Industry – Background**

The history of Nepali movies dates to 1951 when the first Nepali movie *Satya Harishchandra* was produced from India (National Film Policy Drafting Committee, 2013). The first movie produced in Nepal was in the year 1964 and was titled *Aama*, meaning “Mother” (Film Development Board, Nepal, n.d.). The first Nepali production movie *Aama* was produced by the Department of Information of the Government of Nepal. It was only in 1966 that a private company produced a Nepali movie. The first film produced by a private production house in Nepal was *Maitighar*, meaning “The birth home of a girl” released in 1966 by Sumonanjali Films Pvt. Ltd (National Film Policy Drafting Committee, 2013).

Since then, there has been a significant production and development in the Nepali movies. The number of movies increased after the Government of Nepal established an organization called Royal Nepal Film Corporation in 1971, which would contribute to the production of movies in Nepal and help enhance their quality. The film industry has been said to grow and develop rapidly after the introduction of democracy in 1990 (“Nepali Film Industry,” n.d.) as democracy secured people’s right to freedom, speech, and broadcasting. This development has been seen through the rapid increase in the production of movies, their distribution and the increase in the number of cinema halls after 1990. A total of 140 movies were released during a period of three years while more than 300 cinema halls were built after the restoration of democracy in Nepal (“Nepali Film Industry,” n.d.).

The movies in Nepal have been highly inspired by the Hindi Film industry, also known as Bollywood. Being a small and underdeveloped country, Nepal has always been dependent on its neighboring countries, India, and China, for business, trade, import and many others and has been learning from their developmental activities. The same applies to the Film Industry of Nepal. Nepali movies are highly influenced by the Indian Cinema as the culture and norms of the two countries match to a greater extent.

The influence of Bollywood is a well-known and common fact in Nepal. Everyone from a child to an old person watches Hindi movies and knows Hindi language. My childhood memories are filled with watching Hindi movies and Indian TV serials as Indian channels were freely available in Nepal during that time. I still remember how my parents and siblings would gather around the TV set on a Saturday afternoon to watch an Indian movie that would air on *Doordarsan* (a public service broadcaster owned by the Government of India). Shresthova (2010) claims that Hindi movies arrived in Nepal in the 1950s with the establishment of film theatres in Nepal and continue to dominate in Nepal's cinema halls even today (p. 311). Since then, various technological advancements including satellite television channels, privately owned FM stations, VHS tapes and digitization increased the accessibility of Hindi movies directly to the urban homes in Nepal. As Shresthova (2010) puts it,

Glossy posters of Bollywood stars adorn many tea stall walls and songs from latest Hindi blockbusters crowd clutter the airwaves of the country's FM station culture. Fashion trends from Hindi films find speedy appropriation in the city's beauty salons and fashion houses (p. 311).

This is how much Bollywood has its influence on Nepal, on the lifestyle of Nepali people and also on Nepali movies. As I mentioned earlier, the first Nepali movie *Satya Harishchandra* was produced from India, and the first Nepali movie produced in Nepal titled *Aama* was created with the support from the Hindi film industry (Shresthova, 2010, p. 314). Today, Nepali cinema still lives in the shadow of Indian movies and struggles to find its existence (Shresthova, 2010, p. 314). Even today, the release of a Hindi movie becomes the topic of discussion among the youths and the old people and the posters of Indian movies dominate the theaters in Nepal as these movies are popular among the Nepali audience.

Meanwhile, when I talk about the Nepali movie industry, the majority of the movies at present are privately funded and the profit made is distributed among the production team. Based on my observation, the preferred language used in the movies in Nepal is Nepali, the national language of Nepal, as it is the language used by most of the audience, however, some of the movies at present have started to include subtitles in English.

## **1.2 Theme and Scope**

Based on my experience of watching Nepali movies, most of the Nepali movies of the past have significantly smaller number of female characters compared to that of the male characters and the female characters are presented mostly in the roles of a mothers, housewives and caretakers of the family. Male characters have been dominant in the movies of past and are presented in professional roles, while women are supposed to please their husbands physically and support their in-laws by cooking and taking care of the cleanliness of the house and their children (Mishra, 2013). Karki (2017) argues that Nepali media's imagination of women is limited as women are dominantly featured in traditional gendered roles, as decorative objects to sell products, objects of sexual desire and victims of gendered violence and this has been verified by several research works published in *Sancharika Samuha*, ASMITA publishing house and regular global media monitoring. This representation is also seen in the movies I am studying in this thesis which I will be discussing in detail later in my chapters.

The stereotypical notion in Nepal is that the husband is the breadwinner who deals with difficulties outside the house and this is what the movies have presented. The portrayal of family life and roles regarding womanhood explored no other possibility than value of the traditional family model, thus, reinforcing existing societal norms and stereotypes. Along with this, gender differences continue to be prevalent in Nepali societies which is reflected in most of the media content including the movies. Men have been traditionally considered the "providers" for the family, while women have been expected to assume almost every other responsibility, to take care of the child and to attend to household duties (Mishra, 2013).

For a long time, the role of women in cinema has revolved around how physically attractive she is, and Nepali cinema is no different than that. As Thornham (1999) puts it, "I do

not think anyone will deny that when a female's body is the focus of attention the action is aimed at male viewers" (p. 17). This representation is common in Nepali movies even today. Even if a woman is the lead character, she is often portrayed as helpless, passive, confused or in danger and she is often rescued by a male character. Contrary to this, male character is represented in a wide variety of roles where he is always trying to prove his manhood (Thornham, 1999, p. 14). The movies in Nepal portray the similar arguments presented by Thornham and many of other scholars like Mulvey, Beauvoir, Basinger, Haralovich, Basri and Ibrahim among others who have written and talked about female representation in the movies and media. The thesis is my attempt of studying these representations in the three Nepali movies and see if the representation of women characters in these movies have changed over the years and analyze in what way they have changed or remained the same as the past.

Meanwhile, I have also observed other factors including caste and class in Nepali movies. Even though, these factors have been the key issues in some of the movies in Nepal in the past and the present, I will not be discussing them because of their irrelevance in the movies I have selected. However, I believe this could be an interesting topic for further research in the Nepali context.

Following is a brief description of the movies that I have selected for analysis in the thesis.

*Kusume Rumal* (1985): *Kusume Rumal* is a romantic movie which revolves around three youngsters and their love lives. The story is based on the love story of two collegemates Suniti and Amar. It also features another male character Arjun who is in love with Suniti. As the story progresses the antagonist in the movie, Rakesh tries to separate Suniti and Amar by trying to marry Suniti by force. The story centers on the lives of these characters who love the same girl and want to marry her.

*Darpan Chhaya* (2001): *Darpan Chhaya* is a Nepali romantic movie about love and friendship between three collegemates, Raj, Abhishek and Smriti. The female lead character Smriti is ill and is dying soon, she knows about her illness and wants to spend the rest of her life making good friends. She meets the male characters, Raj and Abhishek and becomes friends with them, however, they are unaware of her illness. As the movie progresses, both the boys fall in

love with Smriti and want to marry her. The story revolves around the lives of these three characters, their friendship and love.

*Bir Bikram (2016): Bir Bikram* is a romantic movie about two male characters and best friends, Bir and Bikram, who get separated from each other in their childhood. The movie also focuses on the female protagonist Joon, a beautiful and sexually attractive character who is desired by the male characters in the movie. This movie circles around the love and friendship between these characters and the struggle of the male characters to possess and marry Joon.

Various scholars over the years have discussed the female representation in the global media including movies and advertisements. Many of the discussions and debates rely on three major focal points: Women as objects of desire for men, Women as the second sex; Women and space. These focal points are also the basis for the analysis of the movies selected for the thesis. The analysis of the three movies has been divided into three chapters, one for each movie. Each chapter has a theme on the basis of which the movie is analyzed. Similarly, each theme is based on a theory about women and their representation. The three chapters are: Women as objects of desire for men; Women as the Second Sex; and Gender and Space. Studying these key issues using the theories would allow to provide a Nepali perspective to a global debate of women and cinema, which would further provide a basis for understanding the status of female representation in Nepali movies and media.

In the first chapter, 'Women as objects of desire for men', I will be using Laura Mulvey's 'Theory of the Male Gaze and Fragmentation'. I have selected three scenes from *Bir Bikram* to show how women are presented as objects of desire for men. In the chapter, I argue that women are there to be looked-at by men, women are silent objects that can be owned and possessed by men and women are sexualized and presented as fragments. I will also be using scenes and images from the other two movies to support my arguments. Similarly, the second chapter 'Women as the Second Sex' uses the 'Theory of the Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir to argue that women are presented as the 'Other', while men are the 'Absolute'. I discuss several scenes in *Kusume Rumal* and argue that women are presented as the second sex basing my arguments in three major sub-themes: Women as caretakers and housewives; Women as the ones who wait for men; and marriage is the ultimate career of a woman.

Finally, the last chapter ‘Gender and Space’ looks at the nature of spaces women and men are in, in the movie *Darpan Chhaya*. By observing and discussing the various scenes and images in the movie including the rest of the two movies, I argue that men and women form a hierarchy on the basis of the spaces they are in, as argued by Spain (1992). I further argue that men belong to and own the public space while women are limited to the private space of home and the kitchen.

### 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

“The research question is perhaps the most undervalued part of any scholarly work: the real secret of good scholarly writing lies not in coming up with the right answer, but rather in asking the right question” (Nygaard, 2016).

Being born in a society where I have always been taught to depend on the male members of the family for my basic needs and observing the gender roles in my family - female members involve in household activities while male members take over the professional roles, I have always wondered why things are the way they are. I have always questioned the dominant patriarchal society of my country and have been interested in knowing if these traditional practices have changed over the years.

Having experienced these, I have been curious to know if women and their roles in their families are changing as the entire world including Nepal is focusing on modernization and prioritizing gender equality at present. Hence, through my research, I aim to find some of the answers to the questions that I have been asking about the status of female and their roles for a long time now. And I plan to do it by studying the media portrayal of female, as media reflect the ideas, views, and attitudes of the society. Also, I believe this thesis would help me add a Nepali perspective to the global debate of women and cinema.

Because I am looking at the representation of women in Nepali cinema, referring to the writings on women and cinema in a global context and comparing this representation to that of the Nordic cinema, I believe, this would help understand and compare the representation of women in Nepal, Nordic cinema and in the global context. Comparing my findings to Nordic movies is relevant to understand whether the representation is similar to or different to that of

Nordic movies to have a better understanding of female representation of two totally different regions of the world. I believe this comparison would provide both the cinema industries a reference to learn from each other in terms of women and cinema.

The thesis is focused on finding answers to the following research questions.

How are female characters represented and portrayed in Nepali movies at present?

Has the portrayal of women and their roles in Nepali movies changed over a period of three decades? If yes, how and if not, why not?

In an epilogue, I will attempt to begin thinking about the sub-question:

How is the status of female representation of Nepali movies similar to or different from that of Nordic cinema?

This is however, just the beginning of the comparison on women and cinema in Nepal and the Nordic context. The epilogue is my attempt to open up a debate in women and cinema in Nepal and Nordic context that I believe would be a basis for further studies and research.

## **1.4 RESEARCH AIMS**

As I already discussed above, this thesis aims at studying how female characters are portrayed in the movies of Nepal at present. The thesis compares this representation in popular Nepali romantic movies over a period of three decades. Three popular movies from the last thirty years are taken as samples to study the portrayal of women in these movies to see if this representation has changed over the years. In the epilogue, the thesis begins to compare the female representation in Nepali movies to that of the Nordic movies.

I have already mentioned in the earlier sections about my research aims and I know this section overlaps with most of the things I already mentioned about earlier in the thesis. However, in this section I aim to highlight my research aims and clearly map out the issues I want to cover in the thesis and why I do this.

The study and comparison of the role of female characters in the movies of three decades will help explore a broader idea of female representation in Nepali media. As Thornham (1999)

explains that film reflects social changes and also shapes cultural attitudes (Thornham, 1999, p. 11) and because media are believed to be the mirror of society, I believe that the study will provide a larger picture of the status of female in Nepali societies.

The research will be beneficial to study the present situation of media representation and portrayal of women in the media of Nepal. Also, comparing these representations to the past can help understand the change in perspectives of media and society on women and their roles. Furthermore, I believe that as I begin to compare it to the Nordic cinema, it would help understand the differences and similarities on female representation in the movies of two completely different regions of the world. As Nordic countries are known for their gender equality and equal participation of both male and female in all the sectors, I believe it is interesting to look at how movies from a under developed country like Nepal compares and measures up to the Nordic media model.



## 2 [Methodology]

The research will be using qualitative research methods to study the representation of female and their roles in movies. I will be using textual analysis for studying the media texts that I have taken as samples for the study. Similarly, I will be studying the various elements of Mise-en-scene in these movies as discussed by Gibbs (2002) including the lighting, costume, spaces the actors are in and the actors themselves. The unit of analysis would be spoken and written text, as well as expressions, gestures, costumes and the characters in the movies.

### 2.1 Textual Analysis

For Alan (2001), “When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (p. 3). Simply put, textual analysis is a method in academic research used to interpret and make meanings out of texts. In applying textual analysis to a text, the aim is not to find a correct interpretation to a text because as Alan (2001) argues, there is no such thing as a single correct interpretation of any text (p. 4).

Everyone is bound to their own interpretations and a single text could have multiple interpretations based on several circumstances. To present an example of a glass filled with some water, some people would claim that it is half-full, while some could say it is half-empty. The example provides the ground for interpretation for people, and it doesn't mean that any one interpretation is correct. Multiple interpretations can be valid in analyzing a text, object or any article as Alan (2001) argues that audience research has shown that media texts, film, magazine or newspaper article have been interpreted in many ways by viewers based on several circumstances (p. 4). He presents an example of David Morley (1980) who reports the findings in his book ‘The Nationwide Audience’ of how different groups of people interpreted an episode of the British current affairs television show ‘Nationwide’ differently (Alan, 2001, pp. 4-5).

One of the most important reasons for me choosing textual analysis for analyzing the movies is to understand how different meanings can be drawn from these media content to have a closer picture of how people make sense of these texts. Alan (2001) claims that because there is

no single interpretation of reality, it becomes very important for us to understand how media texts might be used in order to make sense of the world we live in (p. 8).

## 2.2. Mise-en-scene

Mise-en-scene is used in film studies to study the visual style of the movies. As Gibbs (2002) puts it, it is the study of contents of the frame including lighting, color, costume, décor, properties and the actors themselves and the way these contents are organized (p. 5). Looking at these elements in the movies I have selected would help me look closely at the relationship of the characters to the decor and the camera and how the audience view the content of the frame. As Gibbs (2002) claims Mise-en-scene covers both what the audience can see and the way in which they are invited to see it (p. 5), looking at the elements of Mise-en-scene would help me understand the way the content is viewed by the audience and the way certain content in the frame makes meaning to the audience.

An example of how the content of the frame includes what the audience can see and how they are invited to see it is presented in an example by Gibbs (2002) which he uses to argue how color is an expressive element of film-makers and can be modified with the use of costume that presents a direct association with a certain character in a movie. In this example he quotes Richard Dyer, who has written about the use of color in *Home of the Hill* (Vincente Minnelli, 1959, as cited in Gibbs, 2002, p. 8):

The film revolves around a conflict between a man (Robert Mitchum) and his wife (Eleanor Parker). The husband's den in the film is painted a deep, blood red all over and is furnished in a 'masculine' way, with leather armchairs, rifles and hunting trophies. The rest of the house is the woman's domain - it is decorated in off-white, with chintzy patterns and in upper-class good taste; she wears pastel colors that blend in with the setting. The house is thus divided dramatically between the male and female parts, as is the family itself. The use of color, however, goes beyond this, through the way it relates to the blood symbolism that runs through the film. He is associated with the blood, with hunting, with death, whereas she is aloof from this, cold and bloodless. Their son (George Hamilton) has to choose between these two sets of values and life-styles. The blood

connection goes further still, to subconscious associations of blood - and fear – with maleness and femaleness. Thus Mitchum's room is engorged with blood, as an erect penis, whereas Parker's domain is drained of blood as in menstruation. (1981, 1154-1155).

In this explanation, Dyer emphasizes on the classification of color in terms of gender; deep, blood red as masculine and off-white as feminine color. He also talks about how various elements belong to masculinity and femininity - leather armchairs, rifles and hunting trophies define a man while chintzy patterns compliment the upper-class good taste that is expected in a female. The use of colors and various so called masculine and feminine elements in the house divide the male and female and this division is presented to compliment to the story of the film that revolves around the conflict between the man and his wife.

This is just an example of how the elements of Mise-en-scene including color and costume is used in the movies to make meanings of certain scenes and themes. The use of various colors, costumes and furniture among others in this movie has helped the filmmakers to use the visuals and elements of Mise-en-scene to provide more strength to the story of the movie. Hence, using Mise-en-scene would allow me to explore the various meanings connected to and generated by the lighting, color, costumes and decor presented in the movies. Because the use of color, costumes and other elements of Mise-en-scene in the movies is to build up the story, studying these elements would further allow to understand why things are presented in certain ways in the movies.

In order to study and analyze female representation in the movies, I will be writing one chapter each with a certain theme for each of the movies. In each of the chapter, I will be talking about the movie in accordance with the theme, I will be using relevant scenes, images and plot to discuss the female representation and will be using relevant texts and images from the rest of the movies to support my argument. I believe that one of the most important ways to analyze the representation of female in these movies is by studying the compositionality of images as Rose (2001) assumes that the formal arrangement of the elements of a picture dictates how an image is seen by the audiences (p. 25). She believes that it is very important to carefully consider the organization of the image as it has some effect on the spectator (Rose, 2001, p. 25) and this is what I will be doing in the analysis chapters.

I will be analyzing various images including the texts from the movies in the chapters. Each chapter aims to present and discuss various relevant theoretical perspectives to study the images, texts, characters, and representation of female in the popular Nepali movies. I have divided the analysis of the movies into three chapters, one for each movie. Below is a brief discussion of what I will be doing in these chapters, their themes and how I will discuss and analyze the portrayal of female characters in these movies.

### Chapter I: Women as the objects of desire for men

In this chapter, I discuss how women are portrayed as the object of desire for men. The movie that I base my analysis on in this chapter is *Bir Bikram*. I have selected three scenes from *Bir Bikram* to support my argument of how women are presented as objects that can be owned by men. I base my arguments on the ‘Theory of the Male Gaze and Segmentation’ by Laura Mulvey (1975) and use other scholars and their arguments to support my statements in this chapter. In the first scene, my argument is that women are there to be looked-at by men. I present several examples of how this is portrayed in the movie and argue how it is a problematic issue in terms of women and their representation. Similarly, the second scene presents the idea that women are silent all the time and often cease to speak against wrong situations or are made to remain silent and not revolt against bad things happening to them. Finally, the third scene talks about how women are presented as fragments and not a complete individual. By fragments I mean that it is either the lips, eyes, moving hair, breasts, waist and legs among others of women that is the major focus in the movies. I will also be using relevant scenes and arguments from the other two movies to support my statements.

### Chapter II: Women, the second sex

In this chapter, I use the theory of Simone De Beauvoir (1949/2011) as presented in her book “The Second Sex” to see how the movies present women as the second sex or secondary characters that are dependent on men and have no autonomous identity without men. I have selected some scenes from the movie *Kusume Rumal* to see how women are presented as the

second sex and I will be using relevant scenes and plot from the other two movies to support my arguments. The reason for me choosing this theory is because of the relevance that I find in the various scenes of my movies with Beauvoir's theory. I believe that using this theory to analyze this movie and argue that women are presented in relation to men would allow me to add to the debate of how women have no meaning and existence without men. Using this theory would further help me make sense of the representation of female characters in Nepali movies from the past 30 years. In order to discuss women and the second sex, I have divided the chapter into three sub-themes: Women as caretakers and housewives; Woman, the one who always waits for the man; and Marriage as a woman's ultimate career. I will be closely observing and analyzing various scenes from all of the movies to argue how women are presented as the 'Other', in relation to the men and also discuss why this representation is problematic for female characters and their representation.

### Chapter III: Gender and Space

This chapter is my attempt of analyzing men's and women's spaces in *Darpan Chhaya* and studying the representation of women by analyzing the spaces they are in. I will also be studying the spaces of men and women characters in the other two movies to compare the spaces these characters are in, what the spaces represent and how the spaces affect the portrayal of male and female characters in the movies. I will be using the theory of Gender and Space by Daphne Spain (1992) in the book *Gendered Spaces* as my major text in this movie, and also discuss the various literature on gender and space. My major argument in this chapter is that men own the public space and women are presented mostly in the private spaces such as the kitchen. I also discuss about women in cluttered spaces and what this portrayal means for women. Similarly, I will be looking at the various workplaces of men and women to see how they are different and how this difference affects the overall representation of male and female characters in these movies. Using the 'Theory of Space and Gender' for this chapter is relevant to understand and make sense of these spaces men and women represent, further analyze the differences in these spaces and how meanings can be created out of this representation.

Using these theories for analyzing my movies is important as there have been huge discussions about these theories on female representation. For example, using the 'Theory of the Male Gaze and Segmentation' to analyze my movie is important to show how women have been objectified over the years in movies and as there has been a huge discussion in this regard, I believe this discussion would further help me make sense of these media texts in the global context of women and cinema.

### **3 [THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW]**

Over the years, many scholars and feminist writers have written and discussed the portrayal of women in media including movies and advertisements among others. Garcellano (1991) claims that women are mostly invisible in various sectors including politics, economics, religion, science and technology, however, in case of media and advertising, it is different as women are made highly visible yet 'powerless' (Basri & Ibrahim, 2004, p. 12). Men and women have been portrayed in stereotypical roles in the media over the past decades. Basri and Ibrahim (2000) argue that the messages that Hollywood, Bollywood and Malaysian movies have disseminated over the past decades include women as properties and objects available for sexual use. They further claim that women characters are often presented as gentle, caring, beautiful, silent, passive, dependent and someone who needs protection, while the male characters are strong, independent, aggressive, successful, demanding and much more (p. 12).

Much of this discussion on women and media present a number of gender stereotypes which include women are dependent on men, a woman's place is in the home, women don't make important decisions or do important things and men regard women as sexual objects. As I already mentioned in the earlier sections, many of the discussions on women and cinema rely on three classic debates which also build on the three themes that I argue: Women as objects of desire; Women as second sex; and division of male and female in terms of space. In order to discuss this representation, let me discuss in detail two radically different studies, one on crime serials in American TV and the other on Disney Princess movies.

A study carried out on the portrayal of male and female characters in a total of 157 crime serials in American television between 1976 and 1977 showed that women were presented as passive, inefficient, unintelligent, mentally, morally and physically weak and dependent on men while the male characters were portrayed as the ones who saved the women (Simson, 1978, as cited in Basri & Ibrahim, 2004, p. 12). Culley & Bennett (1976) reported that women were still being portrayed as housewives in the year 1974 (Culley & Bennett, 1976, pp. 160-174, as cited in Wiles, Tjernlund, & Wiles, 1995, p. 39). Similarly, studying the 1928, 1956 and 1972 issues

of *Saturday Evening Post*, *Cosmopolitan*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Poe (1976) found that there were more advertisements in 1928 picturing women in sports and physical activity rather than the later years which suggested that there was very little change in the portrayal of women in advertisements over a period of 44 years. In her paper, she concluded that there was a very little progress in the media regarding the portrayal of women in roles different than domestic or family roles (Poe, 1976, pp. 185-192, as cited in Wiles, Tjerlund & Wiles, 1995, p. 39).

Meanwhile, a study examining gender role portrayal in nine Disney Princess movies released between 1937 to 2009, showed that gendered stereotypes and behavior are still prevalent in these movies, although this portrayal has become complex over the years reflecting the changing gender roles in the American society (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011, p. 563).

In the first Disney princess movies gender expectations were less complex compared to the recent times where they have become more complicated (Fererr et al. 2007, as cited in England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011, p. 563). The first movies present women in the roles of housewives and taking care of the children, for example, Cinderella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, while, the women now are expected to have both feminine and 'male' characters such as assertiveness, for example, Mulan and Pocahontas (Coltrane & Shih, 2010; Coltrane, 2004; as cited in England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011, p. 563). In the recent Disney Princess movie, *The Princess and the Frog*, the princess was career-oriented and wasn't concerned in socializing and dating, which was presented as somewhat problematic in the movie, however, at the end of the movie, she was able to become both successful and marry the prince. Based on my observation, one of the expectations that the society has for a woman is that she should not only have a successful career, but also should be able to have a successful marriage or romantic life, which is also presented in the recent Disney Princess movies.

The Disney princesses including Cinderella and Snow White are often seen doing domestic work while the men were not expected to do domestic work in these movies (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011, pp. 563-564). However, by the 1980s and 1990s, Disney movies didn't present women doing domestic work until the recent movie *The Princess and the Frog* where the princess played the role of a good cook and waitress. England, Descartes & Collier-Meek (2011) argue that there are both stereotypical and non-stereotypical gender role portrayal in the Disney Princess movies, however, the gendered messages didn't move away from the traditional themes



about women in the kitchen, women as caretakers and housewives among others (pp. 565-566). They further argue that the gender roles of male and female both changed over time, however, the roles of male characters went through less change than the gender roles of female characters which retained its femininity over time (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011, pp. 565-566).

Likewise, in a study which studied metaphors of 'the female' in some selected movies of the 1950s and 2000s in Malaysia, Basri and Ibrahim (2000) argue that although female representation in Malay movies has transcended through time, however, the portrayal of images is still the same (p. 19). They further claim that the metaphors of being a woman is defined in relation to home and domestic space. Women are mostly presented in the traditional stereotypical roles of housewives and caretakers (Basri & Ibrahim, 2004, p. 19).

Much of these discussions on women and cinema present the arguments: Women as objects of desire for men, women as the second sex and Spatial segregation in terms of gender, which are also the three central arguments in this thesis. As I already mentioned earlier, I will be using three major theories based on these arguments as the central texts to analyze the movies. The theories include: "The Theory of the Male Gaze and Fragmentation" by Laura Mulvey, "The Theory of Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir and "Gendered Spaces" by Daphne Spain. The major reason for using these theories for the analysis of the movies is because of their relevance in discussing the portrayal of women in these movies. I will be using each theory for one of my movies with relevant examples from rest of the movies to support my arguments.

First, I will present the Theory of the Male Gaze and fragmentation by Laura Mulvey (1975). Laura Mulvey is a British feminist film theorist. She is best known for her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' published in 1975, where she discussed about how mainstream cinema operates and presented a picture of how male and female characters are portrayed on screen. In her essay, Mulvey uses the term 'Male Gaze' only once but the relevance of the term at that time has brought about a huge revolution in terms of representation of gender in cinema. The notion of the 'Male Gaze' discusses the centralization of the male figure and how Hollywood sets up the male character as the active figure and the audience make sense of the events based on the male character's viewpoint. Mulvey further talks about how women in cinema are presented as images, her important argument about female representation is that women are there to be looked-at, and men are the bearers of the look. I will be using several concepts of Mulvey's

theory in the analysis of my movies to make a better understanding of how the female characters in my movies are portrayed as Mulvey talks about in her theory, which I will be discussing in detail later in this chapter.

As the aim of the research is to understand how cinema portrays the female characters, the use of Mulvey's theory of male-gaze, to-be-looked-at-ness and pleasure of being looked at is relevant because of the similar events I have observed in my movies. Even though Mulvey's theory is dated, it is still relevant today for analyzing the movies I have selected because of the similar kind of portrayal of female characters in the movies. The notion of active-male and passive-female is prevalent in all of the movies I have selected for my analysis, which is what Mulvey has emphasized in her theories and I will be discussing about this later in the chapter.

I would further be discussing about how women in the movies are portrayed as fragments as discussed by Mulvey in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' (1975). According to Mulvey, the popular cinema isolates fragments of women's body focusing on specific parts of their bodies such as legs, breasts and lips among others, which I will be discussing in detail later in the chapter. In most of the scenes in the movies, whenever the female characters are shown, it is mostly the fragments of their body parts including breasts, legs, lips and waist among others that are emphasized to present them as sexually attractive objects. As Mulvey has discussed this concept in her essay, using her arguments and theory about fragmentation would be relevant for my study to argue how the representation of women in narrative cinema that Mulvey talks about more than forty years ago is still prevalent in the movies I am studying.

The second theory that I will be using for my analysis is 'The Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir. Simone de Beauvoir was a French feminist, social theorist, writer, political activist, and philosopher. Her book 'The Second Sex' (1949) is one of her most remarkable writings about female oppression and how women are treated throughout the history. Even though the book was written in 1949 and is dated, most of the arguments she makes in her book are relevant for me to study the representation of women in the movies in Nepal at present. I have selected some of Beauvoir's arguments made in the book to discuss how women are treated and presented in the various scenes of the movies. As I went through the different chapters of Beauvoir's book, most of her arguments are relevant to the scenes and plot of my movies that I have selected for my analysis. This relevance is what made me choose this theory as one of the key theories for

my thesis. I am focusing on three arguments of Beauvoir as key focal points to discuss how women characters in my movies are presented as the second sex: Women as caretakers and housewives; Women as the ones who wait for men; and Marriage is the ultimate career of a woman. I will be discussing in detail about these arguments and Beauvoir's theory later in the chapter.

Finally, I will be using the theory of 'Space and Gender' presented by Daphne Spain in the book 'Gendered Spaces' for the third chapter to discuss the spaces men and women are in and to analyze the portrayal of women and men in terms of spaces in the movies. Spain (1992) argues that men and women form two different groups in terms of space where men dominant the public space and female are confined to the private space. When I observe the spaces men and women are in the movies, I find the notion of private and public space belonging to women and men respectively as discussed by Spain (1992), relevant to my study. So, my aim here in this chapter is to make sense of the spaces men and women are in and create a bigger understanding of their representation, by using the theory of 'Space and Gender' by Spain (1992).

I will be discussing into detail of all these theories further. Also, I will be using the major arguments relevant to my study from each of these theories in my analysis and will be explaining why I am using a specific concept.

### **3.1 The Male Gaze Theory – Laura Mulvey**

Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), draws on psychoanalytic theory to explain how the experience of film watching is shaped by the patriarchal culture of the society. The major argument of Mulvey is that male and women are differently positioned by cinema, and women in Hollywood narrative cinema are used to provide pleasurable visual experience for males. She explains how cinema offers several possible pleasures including scopophilia (pleasure in looking) and identification of with the image seen (Mulvey, 1975, p. 60). Mulvey's theory and ideas questioned what was simply accepted in 1975, regarding patriarchy and male dominance. According to her, one of the pleasures among the various possible pleasures offered by cinema is scopophilia, which she argues, according to Freud, 'was associated with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze'

(Mulvey, 1975, p. 60). Another pleasure, she argues, comes from identification with the image seen, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego (Mulvey, 1975, p. 62). And, Mulvey further puts it “The look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox (Mulvey, 1975, p. 62).

Mulvey uses the term ‘The Male Gaze’ only once in her essay, however, this term became an important theory for understanding the representation of women in mainstream cinema. Chaudhuri (2006) argues that the concept of the male gaze, became the major point of discussion and talking in feminist film debate (p. 31). On discussing the concept of the male gaze, Mulvey argues that the pleasure of looking has been split between active/male and passive/female in a world full of sexual imbalance. As Mulvey (1975) puts it:

The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (p. 62).

According to Manlove (2007), Mulvey’s work concerning the patriarchal structure of an active male gaze has been successful in spreading its influence beyond film and cultural theory, theory of perception to feminist film critiques of Alfred Hitchcock and Hollywood (p. 83). More than forty years have passed since the revolutionary essay of Mulvey, however, her insights and arguments still apply today to study how popular cinema works. Mulvey (1975) argues that the mainstream cinema is constructed of a controlling male gaze and for their pleasures while a woman is defined as object of desire in terms of sexuality. On talking about Mulvey’s essay, Chaudhuri (2006) writes ‘Uncovering the voyeuristic and fetishistic responses of male spectators to images of women, the essay was the first attempt to consider the interplay between the spectator and the screen in feminist terms’ (p. 2).

Talking about the female representation in normal narrative film, Mulvey (1975) quotes American Film Director Budd Boetticher as he puts it:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who

makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance. (Boetticher, as cited in Mulvey, 1975, p. 62).

This explains how a female character in a movie is only important to provoke the male character and help him act. She is always presented in relation to the male character and has no importance on her own. According to Halberstam (2015), Mulvey diagnosed the problem of dominant cinema in terms of a male gaze and a female figure talking about the ways in which the pleasures of looking and being looked at have been clearly divided into male and female roles. For Mulvey 'the gaze is male, and the image is female.' When I apply this theory to my movies, clearly, the controlling gaze is male, and women are presented as the passive objects. In *Bir Bikram*, it is always the male character staring at the female, her body and her body in fragments, presenting the woman character as the object of sexual desire for the man.

Mulvey further argues that traditionally the woman in cinema functions on two levels: as erotic objects for the characters within the screen story who look at her; and as erotic object for the audience in the auditorium who watch her, and there is a shifting tension between both the looks on either side of the screen (Mulvey, 1975, p. 63). Also, as the male character is the one who is gazing, spectators are encouraged to identify with the look of the male character making the woman, the bearer of the look, a passive object, or a mere object of desire (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 31). Mulvey (1975) talks more about this Male Gaze in two movies *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have not* as she puts it:

Thus both in *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have not*, the film opens with the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized. But as the narrative progresses, she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalized sexuality, her show-girl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too (p. 65).

I have observed a similar phenomenon in *Kusume Rumal* where the main female character Suniti is on display, she is sexualized, glamorous and an object of combined gaze of

male protagonists and spectator and soon she falls in love with Amar, the main male protagonist and becomes his property. I will be discussing this in more detail in the later chapters.

Similarly, Mulvey argues that female body in the narrative cinema is divided into several fragments and a woman is never a whole person. As Mulvey (1975) puts it:

Conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism (p. 63). The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylized and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film, and the direct recipient of the spectator's look (p. 66).

It is either the legs, breasts, waist or lips of a woman, which is in close-up in these movies, the use of such close-ups for the female character, as stated by Chaudhuri (2006), means, unlike the male character, she is valued for her appearance, her beauty and sexual desirability (p. 37). The examples in *Bir Bikram*, *Darpan Chhaya* and *Kusume Rumal*, where the camera highlights the fragments of the body of the lead female characters Suniti, Smriti and Joon, clearly show that these women in these movies are valued for their appearance, beauty and sexuality and this fragmentation is the center of the male gaze. Woman, in fact, is a product, whose body fragmented by close-ups, is the major content of the movies and the direct recipient of the spectator (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 39). On the contrary, it is unlikely to find similar shots or close-ups of bodies of male characters, as men are those who look at women and are not the objects to be looked-at.

Meanwhile, there have been several criticisms and various reactions countering in Mulvey's theory of the Male Gaze. I will further be discussing these criticisms and arguments regarding Mulvey's, Beauvoir's and Spain's theory. By discussing the criticisms, my aim here is to show that these theories aren't perfect, however, because they are relevant for me to analyze the movies, I chose to use them despite the criticisms. Part of my purpose to discuss these criticisms is also to show their relevance for my movies, contrary to the various arguments against these theories.

Manlove (2007) argues that within ten years, many feminist film critics have questioned and redefined Mulvey's focus on three major issues, which include, gender positions in the gaze,

heterosexuality of the gaze and seeing the gaze as exclusively (male) pleasure in voyeurism (p. 85). Chaudhuri (2006) argues that many scholars gave direct responses towards Mulvey's theory on Male Gaze (p. 39). In particular, the theory was felt to ignore circumstances of the female spectators. Chaudhuri (2006) gives examples of melodramas including *Stella Dallas* (1937), *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) that have female protagonist as the center character whose viewpoints guided the movies with feminine experiences and concerns (Gledhill, 1987; Doane, 1987 and Kuhn, 1994, as cited in Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 40).

According to Chaudhuri (2006), Doane has led debates regarding female as spectator and has expanded Mulvey's arguments in several different ways (p. 41). One way she has done this is by defining the structure of gaze in terms of proximity and distance in relation to the image than as active/male and passive/female notion presented by Mulvey. She further argues that Doane claims that the problem posed by the female spectator lies on the fact that women are presented and function as the image, which results in the failure of distance between screen and spectator (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 1). Doane claims that the female spectator has two options, first, she over-identifies with the woman on the screen by being emotionally over-involved with her, and second, she takes the heroine as her own narcissistic object of desire (Doane, 1991, p. 31, as cited in Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 41).

Similarly, Mulvey's definition of male subjectivity and the desire for visual pleasure was questioned by Kaja Silverman in 1980, as he argued that Mulvey 'leaves unchallenged the notion that for the male subject pleasure involves mastery' (Silverman, 1980, pp 2-9, as cited in Manlove, 2007, p. 85). However, in 1981, in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" Mulvey has reconsidered the role of the female spectator (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 40). She writes:

Hollywood films "allow a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of sexual identity, the never fully repressed bedrock of feminine neurosis"; feminine spectatorship in Hollywood cinema is thus characterized by nostalgia and repression. (Mulvey, 1981, pp. 12-15, as cited in Manlove, 2007, p. 85).

Chaudhuri (2006) argues that while Mulvey had earlier maintained that narrative cinema didn't offer a place for female spectators, however, in 1981, she argues that the female spectator

can cross the lines of gender in her identification of the male hero and might enjoy the fantasy of freedom and control over the narrative world because her gender is itself divided (p. 40).

Likewise, Manlove (2007) claims that two books refined and extended Mulvey's theory, first, E. Ahn Kaplan's *Women and Film* which questioned if the gaze is essentially male, and second, Teresa de Laurentis's *Alice Doesn't* questioned the gender roles of the gaze (p. 86). Kaplan, in his book, has further analyzed how a feminine gaze creates by discussing its portrayal in a number of independent feminist films (Kaplan, 1983, pp. 23-35, as cited in Manlove, 2007, p. 86). Similarly, Teresa de Laurentis on gender roles of gaze, asks "What happens, I will ask, when woman serves as the looking-glass held up to women? (Lauretis, 1984, pp. 6-7, as cited in Manlove, 2007, p. 86). Through this question, Lauretis argues that real women need to analyze the texts that misrepresent women in popular culture.

### **3.2 The Second Sex – Simone de Beauvoir**

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 283). Although the book predates the movement itself, Chaudhuri (2006) claims that Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is the starting point for all Second Wave feminist thoughts (p. 4). Even though the text is dated, for me, most of the arguments of Beauvoir are still relevant to analyze the status and portrayal of women in Nepali movies in the past and at present.

Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that man is universal while woman appears as his Other, who is defined in relation to man in all respects. She talks about different issues related to women and their freedom in her book. However, I will only be using three of her insights in order to analyze the representation of women in my movies. First, I will be looking at how women characters in my movies are presented as housewives and caretakers of men. Second, I will be talking about how woman is always the one who waits for the man and third, I will be arguing that the ultimate goal of the movie is to present the female characters get married giving an idea that marriage is and should be a woman's ultimate career. I will be using Beauvoir's ideas and theory to support my arguments and show how women are presented as the second sex in these movies.



Talking about women as a gender, Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that for a woman to introduce herself, she has to start by saying 'I am a woman' while this doesn't apply for a man because a man needs no introduction (p. 5). In the sense that a woman has to remind the others saying that she is a woman in order to define her suggests that the woman is the 'Second Sex'. Beauvoir (1949/2011) further argues that humanity is male, man defines a woman as she is not considered an autonomous being and is defined in relation to the man (p. 5).

Many theorists consider Beauvoir's book as revolutionary masterpiece. According to Dietz (1992), Shulamith Firestone, in 1970, declared 'The Second Sex' "the definitive analysis of sexism" while Dorothy Kaufmann claimed that it is where contemporary feminism began (Firestone, 1970, p. 7; Kaufmann, 1986, p. 128, as cited in Dietz, 1992, p. 74). Even though feminist movements started long after the book was written, many theorists claim that the book was the starting point of the movement as many feminist writers referred to Beauvoir's book on their writings. Evans (1985) argues that Beauvoir's work was discovered by second-wave feminism rather than having played any key role in its development (p. 127).

Discussing how a woman is the one who waits for a man, Beauvoir (1949/2011) writes:

In a more or less disguised way, her youth is consumed by waiting. She is waiting for Man. Surely the adolescent boy also dreams of woman, he desires her; but she will never be more than one element in his life (p. 341).

I will be discussing some scenes from the selected movies later in my analysis to show how the female characters in the movies wait for men who are the key to their happiness while these women are just an element of the lives of the men even though they want and desire them. In the men, these women see their protectors, their happiness and their happy endings as they have always been convinced of the male dominance of the society.

In my analysis in the movies, in one of my arguments I talk about how marriage is the ultimate career for women. Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that marriage is not only an honorable career for the woman, but also the path which alone enables her to attain her complete social dignity and allows her to realize herself sexually as lover and a mother (p. 342). She further argues that unanimously everyone agrees that catching a husband, a protector in some cases, is for the woman is the most important of undertakings (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 342). This

argument, I discuss in detail in the chapter ‘Women as the second sex’ where I discuss how getting married to the perfect man is important for the female characters in the movies.

Even though the women constitute half of the human race, Beauvoir in ‘The Second Sex’ examines the reasons that women have been forced to accept a place secondary to that of the men in the society. She has documented the status of women throughout history. In the chapter ‘The Married Woman’, Beauvoir writes:

In marrying, a woman becomes a man’s vassal. He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society’s eyes. She takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, she becomes his other ‘half’ (p. 442).

While *The Second Sex* is considered remarkable in many ways, there are however, several criticisms to it. As I already mentioned above, discussing these criticisms is important for me to show the relevance of the theory in analyzing my movies regardless of the criticisms. Feminist philosopher Margaret A. Simons remarks “Why read *The Second Sex*? It’s out-of-date, male identified and just Sartrean anyway!”, while another feminist philosopher argues that “a misogynist biological explanation” guides *The Second Sex* (Simons 1986, p. 137; Seigfried, 1990, p. 308, as cited in Dietz, 1992, p. 74). According to Dietz (1992), although the book was taken seriously by a handful of American intellectuals including C. Wright Mills, Elizabeth Hardwick and Irving Howe, the book was too dense and demanding to gain sustained attention in the United States (p. 75). She further argues that the response of *The Second Sex* in the United States and Canada was less intense compared to France where public reaction was immediate.

Various mainstream newspapers and magazines in the United States reviewed *The Second Sex* as superficial and hollow. *Newsweek* described Beauvoir as “an alarmed male mind”, while declaring the book as ‘a singular mixture of pedantry, nonsense, quotations from novels, case histories, and psychological, anthropological and other works’ (*Newsweek*, 1953, 101, as cited in Dietz, 1992, p. 77).

When talking about various reactions on Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Dietz (1992) identifies and distinguishes three interrelated lines of criticisms (p. 81). First, she argues, takes up the question with which the book begins itself: What is woman? Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues

that woman is defined as the Other, in relation to man, while man is the subject and is never defined in relation to a woman. However, her notion of the Other has been criticized by 'difference' feminists who rather than transcending and assimilating female 'otherness' want to endorse it (Dietz, 1992, p. 82). Hartsock (1985) writes "the ground on which Beauvoir constructs her theory memorializes the male rather than female experience of differentiation from the mother and the male struggle to "achieve masculinity" while Dallery (1990) notes 'In The Second Sex, female eroticism is effectively and linguistically repressed and therefore, devalued in the metaphors of 'mollusk', 'bog' 'nature' 'swamp' 'hole' and 'slime'(Hartsock, 1985, p. 288; Dallery, 1990, p. 273, as cited in Dietz, 1992, p. 82).

The second line of critiques, Dietz (1992) claims, springs from "the new feminisms' sweeping suspicion of Western philosophies of the Enlightenment and their twentieth-century variants" of which Sartrean existentialism is considered as one variant where the critiques assume that whoever else Beauvoir might be, she is after all Sartre's philosophical disciple and a Sartrean revisionist (p. 82). In this regard, Le Doeuff writes:

The Second Sex is a labor of love and Beauvoir brings as one of her morganatic wedding presents a singular confirmation of the validity of the Sartrean philosophy-your thought makes it possible to think the feminine condition, your philosophy sets me on the path of my emancipation (Doeuff, 1980, pp. 279-280, as cited in Dietz 1992, p. 83).

Dietz (1992) claims that an important claim follows from this reading which is that "Beauvoir's existentialist ethic of freedom which is focused on the individual's (i.e., woman's) overcoming of immanence-posita a native conception of the transcendent subject and subjectivity (p. 83). Susan Hekman argues that for Beauvoir, for women to attain freedom, they must become like men, while another critic Walzer argues that Beauvoir simply assumed that all liberated women will become like existentialist men (Hekman, 1991, p. 44; Walzer, 1988, p. 153, as cited in Dietz 1992, p. 83). Hence, according to this criticism, as Dietz (1992) claims that the humanism of Beauvoir identifies the human with men (p. 83).

Similarly, the third notion of criticism, according to Dietz, focuses on conventions about class, race, gender and sexuality where Beauvoir's arguments on women appears to be inadequately attentive to class and racial inequality when *The second Sex* is analyzed from

diversity perspective (Dietz, 1992, p. 83). She further quotes Elizabeth Spelman's argument with regard to the problem of race and class:

Beauvoir takes the lives of white middle-class women to be paradigmatic for the situation of women—a mistake that flows from problematic assumptions about how to investigate both gender and power” (Spelman, 1988, p. 77, as cited in Dietz, 1992, p. 83).

### **3.3 Gendered Spaces – Daphne Spain**

For the analysis of the movies that I have selected, one of the most important themes for representation of female characters would be in terms of space. Using Spain's theory of gendered spaces (1992) is here relevant for me to study how the characters in these movies are different in terms of the space they are in. Spain (1992) argues that men and women are separated in ways that sustain gender stratification in spaces including schools, homes and workplaces. In her book 'Gendered Spaces' (1992), she has used cross-cultural and historical examples to argue that the spatial segregation of men and women has contributed to prevent women from gaining the knowledge that could make them powerful.

First, Spain (1992) looks at family dwellings in nonindustrial societies. She closely studies different societies and their dwellings including Islamic Purdah societies, Navajo anomalies and Balinese house yards among others to know that men and women can be separated from one another on the basis of dwellings and she further concludes that the greater segregation of the sexes, the lower the status of women (Spain, 1992). She further studies education in nonindustrial societies and argues that the knowledge which is important to public status is passed among men from one generation to the next (Spain, 1992, p. 67). Similarly, she studies workplace segregation to explore that women are more likely to work inside homes and household production while men are the ones who usually go out to work and have better jobs and status compared to that of the women.

Using Spain's theory of spatial segregation and gendered spaces, I argue that the spaces men and women are in are different in these movies, further representing that this segregation has deeper meanings. For example, women in the movies I have selected for this project are mostly shown inside the kitchen while the men go out to work in the fields and offices. This

division of space for women compared to men are limiting them inside the private spaces, further preventing them to gain knowledge to be powerful, as argued by Spain (1992, p. 3). The major concern for Spain (1992) is the implication of various spatial arrangements in homes, educational institutions and workplaces for the status of women. When I look at the workplaces of women in the movies, I see women in less important roles professionally compared to men, which limit their knowledge relative to men. At a time where we talk about equality and empowerment for all, such representation of women in the Nepali movies even today, entirely questions the notion of empowerment and independence of women. Using the theory of Space and Gender, I attempt to address the various gaps regarding the representation of women and men in Nepali movies in the past and at present.

The major argument of Spain (1992) about gender and space is that it is the space which hides the knowledge and power from women, the gender stratification of the society enables the men to use this power and knowledge to serve their interests reinforcing lower status of women (p. 10). She argues that spatial segregation enforces gender stratification and further analyzes spatial institutions including education, family and workplaces in both industrial and nonindustrial societies to prove her hypothesis (Spain, 1992).

According to Fincher (1994), Spain's book on Gendered Spaces has provided interesting examples of the ways people could plan for themselves spatially and the effects on gender relations in terms of space (p. 194). Similarly, Charlton (1993) argues that we often overlook the importance of spatial arrangements, because of which, the way we arrange space becomes invisible, natural and most importantly, taken for granted. In these grounds, for Charlton (1993), Spain has done us a significant service by making visible the relationship of space to gender, knowledge, power and status (p. 969).

However, there is a string of criticisms on Spain's theory of space and gender. Understanding these criticisms and discussing them is interesting to me to show how this theory is not perfect and is relevant to me to analyze Nepali movies contrary to these criticisms. Marston (1993) argues that Spain's theory has oversimplified the conceptualization of the tension between society and space, suspecting that many sociologists and geographers like her would agree. She writes:

Perhaps one of the most intellectually exciting interchanges for theoreticians in geography over the last decade and a half has been with social theorists. Constructive debates between geographers and sociologist social theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells have helped advance our conceptualization of the relationship between society and space much beyond what is in *Gendered Spaces*. The author, while acknowledging the existence of this literature in her review, fails to operationalize it in her empirical studies (p. 176).

Marston (1993) further argues that as a result of this, Spain treats spatial arrangements simplistically as a given, rather than as a complex social product leaving the readers to wonder about how and why spatial institutions are created, or how they might have been resisted (p. 176). Fitcher (1994) argues that Spain fails to provide a causal account on the relative implication of segregated spaces for the ongoing structure of gendered power relations (p. 194).

Meanwhile, Marston (1993) claims that one of the most problematic implications of Spain's reductionist conceptualization is that she fails to directly explore the various complicating forces that drive the gendering of space (p. 176). She further writes:

While, generally speaking, women in the United States have an apparently greater access to social power in the home than highly spatially segregated Islamic women, their domestic social power is still highly circumscribed. Feminist scholars have shown that despite the degendering of the American home, sexual violence and physical abuse-signs of women's lack of social and personal power-occur most frequently there. Spain's analytical framework can neither explore nor explain this exception. (Marston, 1993, p. 176).

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the three theories that I am using for the analysis of the movies selected for the thesis: *Theory of the Male Gaze* by Laura Mulvey, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and the *Theory of Gender and Space* by Daphne Spain. I talked about the major arguments of the theories relevant for the analysis of the movies.

When using the Male Gaze theory, I look at how women are presented as the objects of desire and subjects of the controlling male gaze in the movies. I discussed the active/male and passive/female notion of Mulvey and its relevance in the movies. Also, I talked about the idea of fragmentation of female body as discussed by Mulvey and how it is relevant for the movies. Similarly, when talking about Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' I discussed the theory and how is it relevant to me despite of the various criticisms. Among the various arguments of Beauvoir in 'The Second Sex', I have picked three of her major arguments to analyze my movies: Women as caretakers and housewives; Women as the ones who always wait for the men; and marriage as the woman's ultimate career.

Finally, I discussed in detail the theory of Space and Gender by Daphne Spain and the major arguments that I will be using in my analysis chapter later. Looking at the spaces male and female characters are in, I will be talking about how men and female create two different class in terms of space and what meanings these spaces have in their representation. I also discussed the criticisms to the theories to argue that even though these aren't perfect theories, because they are relevant to analyzing female representation in the selected Nepali movies, I chose to use them in my thesis.

Using these three theories for analyzing the movies would further allow to discover the status of female representation in Nepali movies and provide a Nepali perspective to a global debate on women and cinema.

## 4 [Analysis]

### 4.1 Chapter I: Women as objects of desire for men

#### Joon in *Bir Bikram*

The movie presents the story of two male lead characters who are important for the movie because the title of the movie *Bir Bikram* is the combination of the names of the two male characters. The opening scene of the movie shows a young boy Bikram, staring at a girl named Joon in a classroom setting. The camera glances upon all the students who look towards the same direction except for the boy who is looking at something else. As the camera focuses the girl and the stare of the boy together, we know that it is the girl whom the boy is looking at while the rest of the class looks at the teacher.

In the scene where Bikram is staring at Joon, he talks about how beautiful she is and how much he likes her. As the camera slowly focuses on all the students of the class, Joon looks distinct as she has her hair let down while the rest of the female students in the classroom have their hair tied on the back, which is common in the schools of Nepal. This way we know that Joon is special and important in the movie and is not the same as the rest of the female students, however, we also know that the movie makers want the gaze of the viewers turned to her by showing her different from the rest of the other girls. The uniqueness of the girl here is presented in terms of distinctiveness of her hairstyle compared to the other girls. Joon uses her hand to tuck her hair behind her ears and smiles for no reason; we know this because there is nothing happening in the movie which requires smiling and there is no one else smiling except Joon. She has this tiny smile whenever the camera focuses on her. Joon is also seen smiling at the moment when Bikram is staring at her, this scene presents a woman's smile alongside the stare of a man and this portrayal is important here because that smile of a woman is intended for a man.

Bikram is staring at her all the time, instead of focusing on the teacher and talks to himself about how beautiful she is to be no less than a heroine of a movie. This scene is a representation of how it is the looks of a girl that matters for a boy. Also, this is a perfect example of what Mulvey (1975) argues 'the gaze is male, the image is female.' Joon is the image for the gaze of Bikram, she is glamorous, beautiful and desirable for the pleasure of Bikram's



gaze. And as Thornham (1999) argues that whenever a female's body is the focus, it is intended for the male characters and viewers, and in this case Joon is on the focus looking beautiful and different from the rest of the other girls and this focus is intended for Bikram and the male audience.

From my observation, one would never expect an ugly looking girl playing the love interest of a man in a movie or a man being attracted to an ugly looking girl because women are supposed to be beautiful in order to be liked by men. They have to look beautiful and attractive in order to be men's desire.

The first scene of the movie is only a small representation of how female characters are portrayed in the entire movie, but it doesn't fail to give us an idea that women are presented as the objects of desire for men. Whenever Joon is shown in the movie, she is always smiling, and her hair is waving most of the times. Joon is seen dressed up mostly in the traditional Nepali dresses including Saree and Kurtha Suruwal (worn by female in Nepal on formal and special occasions), which cover her body. The choice of the dresses for the lead female character in the movie aims to portray her as a traditional Nepali girl who is acceptable and desirable by the viewers but at the same time is beautiful and attractive and desired by all the men. Meanwhile, she is shy, gets angry rarely and is seen smiling all the time.

There is a villain in the movie, Aaitey, who is after Joon, and the boys, Bikram and Aaitey fight for the girl even if they are kids and have no idea about what love is. This fight continues throughout the movie which gives an impression of how women are presented as the objects men fight for. Also, it is interesting to see how the women is not consulted at all when men are deciding upon her life and fighting for her.

In this chapter, I am discussing how women in movies are presented as the objects of desire for men. I will be using Laura Mulvey's 'Theory of the Male Gaze' to discuss the representation of female characters in the movie. My argument is that no matter how independent, smart, and talented women characters are in a movie, their purpose is to please the men and they are portrayed as objects who are desirable and wanted by the men. Also, even if most of the scenes in the movie is about women and men, their love, struggles and happy ending, women are represented as characters to please men and the purpose of a woman's life is nothing more than to get married to a so-called suitable boy and live happily thereafter. In this chapter, I

am analyzing the scenes of the movie *Bir Bikram* to discuss my arguments. I will also be using relevant scenes from the other two movies to support my arguments.

To argue that women are portrayed as the objects of desire for men in this movie, I am analyzing three scenes of the movie to show how Joon is presented as the object of desire for the male characters in the movies: *Bir*, *Bikram* and *Aaitey*. In the first scene, I argue that Joon is there to be looked at by the men. In the second scene, I talk about how a man's word is the most important while the woman is silent most of the times. In the last scene, I will be arguing that the woman is shown in fragments, is never a complete individual which portrays her as an object of desire.

As the first scene progresses, the teacher asks a question to Bir, another lead male character who is also Bikram's friend. As the teacher finds Bir talking to someone else instead of paying attention to him in the class, he is angry at him and refers him to a donkey. Bir fails to answer, and the teacher gets angrier. The teacher turns to Joon looking for the answer to his question. The moment he turns to Joon, his anger vanishes, he instantly smiles, and his voice turns soft with no anger while he is speaking to her. The way the teacher is talking to boys and girls in the class is distinguishable, on the basis of my observation, this could be because she is a smart kid and another reason for this could be because this is how female students are supposed to be addressed by the teachers.

The first scene of the movie which features the young characters clearly shows how stereotypes start young and linger over a lifetime. The difference between the representation of male and female characters in the movies comes from a patriarchal Nepali society where a man is always superior to a female and Nepali media suffers from the same patriarchy (Karki, 2017). Women in Nepal are continuously featured in traditional gendered roles, as objects to sell products and as objects of sexual desire for men. It is also interesting how the first scene of the movie shows us female characters being quiet and paying attention to the teacher while some of the male characters are seen making mistakes and shifting their focus away from the teacher.

#### 4.1.1 Women being looked at by men

After the class ends, there is a scene where we see Joon walking alone. Bikram calls her name and when the camera focuses her face, we see her hair waving and she has a tiny smile on her face. There is nothing else happening in the scene except for a man calling the name of a woman which results to the smile on a woman's face and waving of her hair.



FIGURE 1: Joon's hair waves as Bikram calls her name



FIGURE 2: Joon smiles as Bikram calls her name.

These images present the slow motion of Joon's hair, so we know that the filmmakers want us to pay attention to the waving of her hair, we know hair is moving because it is the only thing that is in motion in the frame, also the blurring of background and a medium closeup of her face including her waving hair is a symbol of showing why her waving hair is important. Also, a man calling a woman's name resulting in the waving of her hair and making her smile suggests that the smile and the waving of her hair is caused by and intended for the man. The waving of hair is interesting to watch in the movie as Joon's hair is waving most of the times and this time it waves because a man is calling her name. Also, Joon is not looking directly at the center of the frame, she is looking sideways most of the times. These examples of a woman smiling, and her hair waving give us an idea of how the movie wants to represent female as desirable for men. Also, a man is looking at her, she is there to be looked at, and in return she does not look back which suggests that she is not returning the male gaze. In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Mulvey (1975) talks about scopophilia, meaning, pleasure in looking, associated by Freud with taking other people as objects (p. 60). She further argues that the pleasure in looking is divided between active/male and passive/female, where woman is an image and man is the bearer of the look (Mulvey, 1975, p. 62). Drawing on Mulvey's argument, the scene suggest that

Joon is a passive object who is there to be looked at while Bikram is active and the bearer of the look.

Bikram has a red rose in his hand as red rose is the symbol of love and he says, 'I love you' to her which she replies saying 'I love you too', smiles and runs away looking shy. At such a small age where the characters do not even understand the meaning of love, it is interesting to see how the filmmakers have used these characters to confess their love and attraction for each other. At the same time, making the girl run away from the boy after she has confessed her feelings to him, the movie portrays a woman being shy because she had said something she would not normally say. It is not normal in Nepalese society that women express their feelings directly to a man even though things might be changing now because of the influence from western culture. It takes a lot of courage and confidence for a woman to do something unusual that not every ordinary Nepali woman would do. This scene in the movie is the representation of the traditional belief of what a woman should do or how an ordinary Nepali woman should behave. As Joon is too young for her age and she says something that not every girl of her age who say to a boy, she becomes shy and runs away.

As Bikram is rejoicing his victory of getting a positive response for his confession towards Joon, Aaitey, the villain, along with some other boys, threaten Bikram and commands him not to go near Joon. What we see here is two boys, who are still in their childhood, fighting for a girl and saying that they both will get the girl no matter what, even if there is still plenty of time for them to grow up and get married. And what is interesting to see here is in none of these moments where the boys are busy deciding who gets the girl and marries her, the desire or consent of the girl seems to matter. Aaitey tells Bikram that Joon is his and he would cut his hand if he touches her and destroy his eyes if he looks at her. Bikram responds saying that he has seen her and also touched her and challenges him to destroy his eyes if he can. This scene portrays two boys fighting with each other as if they are fighting over a toy and telling that the toy is either of their property, implying the girl as a toy or as a mere object, who they fight for.

The entire movie is about three men fighting for a woman, as if she is an object and the one who wins in the fight gets the girl. Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that the woman's body is an object to be purchased (p. 456) and this is what the male in these movies are doing, wanting to possess the women. This representation is similar to a scene in *Kusume Rumal*, where Amar and

Rakesh are seen fighting for Suniti throughout the movie in order to get married to her. The movies have a number of scenes where men look at women, Joon is always looked at by the men when she is shown in the movie, Suniti and her friends in *Kusume Rumal* are teased by men all the time and there is a scene in *Darpan Chhaya*, which presents a group of men looking at women passing by and commenting about their bodies. Mulvey (1975) argues that traditionally women displayed in the screen has two functions, first, women portrayed as erotic objects for the male characters within the screen story and second, objects of desire for the spectator within the auditorium (p. 63). This way women are not only objectified for the male characters inside the movie, but they are made to look desirable because they are meant to be looked at by the male audience.

#### **4.1.2 Women and Silence: Man's word; woman's silence**

As the movie continues, Bikram tells Bir that he wants to marry Joon when he grows up, but he is leaving the village to go to the city, so he asks Bir to look after Joon making a promise that he would marry her after he returns. What we see here again is that it is the man who decides what he wants and not a woman making her choices in life. The desire of a woman is not discussed here at all, it is the man who decides who he wants to marry and not a woman choosing the man for her. Bir promises Bikram to keep her safe until he returns. This scene is a presentation of how males are deciding upon the life and marriage of females long before they know the meaning of marriage and long before they are capable of making their own choices. This scene is a representation of the reality of Nepali society where women merely get a chance to decide upon their lives and it is always the males who know what is best for their future. Arranged marriages still exist in Nepal where it is the parents who select a groom or bride for their children and it is they who decide upon their children's marriages. The male characters are keeping promises to each other to keep a girl character safe without even getting the girl to have her say. The way Bikram asks Bir to keep the girl for him raises an issue of if she is an object to be kept for a man and if she belongs to him. And most importantly, the girl's consent about all of this doesn't matter when two male characters are keeping their promises for the girl's life and deciding about her life and future.

Mulvey (1975) discusses the female representation in two movies *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not* in her essay. First, the movies portray women as the objects of combined gaze of the male protagonist and the spectator, they are glamorous and sexualized, have been made up to look like women, and as the narrative progresses, the women fall in love with the main male protagonist in each movie and become their property (p. 64). This is exactly what is happening in the movies I have selected for my analysis. Joon is a glamorous character, she is fair, beautiful, always has make-up on, she is dressed in beautiful colorful clothes and all of this has been done in the movie to make her look desirable. She likes the main male protagonist and he likes her back and at the end of the movie they are united, and she becomes his property. Similarly, Suniti in *Kusume Rumal* gets engaged to Amar at the end of the movie while there is always this struggle between Rakesh and Amar to decide who would possess Suniti. Likewise, Raj and Abhishek in *Darpan Chhaya* like Smriti and both want to marry her.

Meanwhile, women's silence is important for the representation because I argue that she is an object who has lost her speech or chooses not to speak because she fears she might hurt a man. Towards the end of the movie, Joon chooses to remain silent about not wanting to marry Bikram and tell that to Bir because she fears that Bir might not accept that and might do something bad as she could not help him keep his promise. She refuses to speak in order to honor a man's desire and his word and she suppresses her desire for a man. To be able to get away from the silence and to speak up as a woman would be same as becoming an object of desire and losing yourself as Modleski (1984) claims (p. 327). We have a similar example in the movie *Darpan Chhaya*, where Smriti chooses to become silent about her illness until the end because she doesn't want Abhishek and Raj to fight for her and ruin their friendship. She uses a letter to tell them the truth when she is about to die when it would bring her no benefit. This portrayal is similar to the story of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Modleski (1984) presents an example in Max Ophul's 1948 film, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, where the hero of the story Stefan is given a letter which reads "By the time you read this, I may be dead" (p. 326). It is a letter from an unknown woman who remained silent for her life-long devotion for Stefan and chooses to speak up through a letter which can bring her no benefit as she is about to die. As Modleski (1984) puts it "At stake, then, is not only a man's word, but a woman's silence" (p. 326).

Let me discuss another scene in the movie which presents women as silent objects. Joon walks towards the school for work, she is dressed in a white dress, with a red shawl, red shoes and a red flower tied to her hair. Aaitey blocks her road and tries to hold her hand against her will but she somehow manages to pull her hand from him. He speaks to her about a minute telling her about how he likes her and wonders why she does not believe him. She tries to ignore him and walk past him, but he stops her by force. She does not speak a word in the entire scene in her defense and when he tries to take her shawl by force, she can't seem to do anything about it except looking at him angrily. At the end of the scene, Aaitey takes her shawl with him while Joon, still silent, walks past him letting him have the piece of her clothing. Her silence in the entire scene is the representation of her inability to raise her voice against something that is not acceptable by her and she chooses not to speak up even if she could, just because she is a woman. Her silence represents that women are supposed to watch everything without protesting the wrong. This shows that women are portrayed as objects without voice contrary to humans who are able to speak against unacceptable things. There is a similar scene in *Kusume Rumal*, where some girls remain silent when the villain, Rakesh teases them, the girls seem helpless and ignore him because as women they are expected to remain silent. I identify these female characters who remain silent in the movies to the character Lisa in the movie *Letter from an Unknown Woman* who according to Modelski "is the classic dilemma of what psychoanalysis calls the hysterical woman, caught between two equally alienating alternatives: either identifying with the man or being an object of desire" (p. 327).

In two of the three movies that I have chosen for my analysis, a man's word is portrayed to be one of the most important things. And what we see in *Bir Bikram* is that a man does not want to keep his promise at stake at any cost because a man's word is his honor and is everything to him (Modelski, 1984, p. 326). One of the reasons why Bir does not want to acknowledge his feelings for Joon is because he is constantly reminded by his promise made to his friend Bikram about keeping Joon for his friend and feels that he would put his promise at stake if he acknowledges his feelings for Joon. Bir doesn't accept Joon even if Bikram tells him that it is okay for him to do that as it was the promise made by him when they were too young to know what it meant. However, Bir rejects the offer because for him his word matters even if he was a young person when he made his promise and had no idea what he was doing.



Here is my observation from watching Nepali movies about the common stories the movies have tried to present over the years: there is this nice guy who likes a girl and wants to marry her. The ultimate purpose of a woman is to marry off a good guy like the lead characters in these movies, while the man is always there to save her from the villain and make her happy no matter what. This portrayal is similar to what Beauvoir (1949/2011) claims that unanimously everyone agrees that catching a husband, a protector in some cases, is for the woman is the most important of undertakings (p. 342). And in the movies, there is always a male villain who is after the girl, wants to marry her against her will and wants to kill the lead character to get the girl. This pattern is prevalent in the movies that I have selected for my analysis.

Let me discuss another scene in the movie, where Bir and Bikram are sneaking into a cinema hall to watch a movie. The scene that is playing at the movie is interesting and relevant to my analysis as it is a man, a villain, in a movie, chasing a woman and she is running away from him and needs help. Bikram narrates the scene to Bir as Bikram is peeping through the window and he says that the hero's purpose in the movie is to save the heroine. He further narrates that there is a huge fight between the hero and the villain and the hero is winning. The scene is the perfect example of the portrayal of men and women in most of the popular movies in Nepal, where it is a man who a woman should fear, and it is another good man who is her savior. And what is common in the movies is that a woman is always weak, mentally, and physically, and she is portrayed to be dependent on man for her safety and security. This portrayal is similar to the arguments of Basri and Ibrahim (2004) who claim that women are portrayed as passive, physically, mentally and morally weak and dependent on men who save them against any harm (p. 12). There are a very few movies made in Nepal where woman fight for her safety, because it is very uncommon and unrealistic for a woman to be stronger than a man, to have a fight with him and defeat him. Women are supposed to be mere objects, who are there for the desire of men and nothing more than that, let alone being strong and independent.

The entire movie is about Bir saving Joon from any harm because of his childhood promise of keeping Joon for Bikram. In the movie, it is the desire of a man that matters the most. It is the boy's wish to marry a girl and not the other way around. There is not a single scene in the movie which shows what a woman really wants in her life. Such portrayal presents women as objects who are only there to provoke the male characters and help them achieve what they want.

This portrayal is also discussed by Mulvey (1975) as she quotes American Film Director Budd Boetticher who claims that in herself, the heroine has not the slightest importance in the movies, what counts is what she provokes or what she represents (p. 62). The movie is all about a man's desire and it is always a woman who he fights for with all his energy, gets her at the end and they live happily ever after.

Even if the woman is shown weak and in need of help from a man, Joon is different from Suniti and Smriti as she has a job and is independent financially. She works as a teacher in a school in the village, however, her ultimate role in the movie is to get married and live happily ever after with the love of her life. As Basinger (1993) argues the woman's film which is about marriage is where the woman has already chosen love and marriage (p. 322). This is true in two of the movies I selected where Joon and Suniti both have already made their choices about love and marriage. It is interesting to see how Basinger (1993) argues 'Marriage hovers over the woman's film like a black cloud' (p. 319). Moreover, happily married after stories are mostly about a man and the woman is always on the background (Basinger, 1993, p. 324). These movies have men on the center and the woman is there to serve a man, become his desire and take care of him, like in *Bir Bikram*, the story is about two men and Joon is the desire of these men who fight for her until the end. The major issue on female representation in *Kusume Rumal* and *Bir Bikram* is that both Joon and Suniti, who are the center of the plot of the movies are never seen questioning their choices, be it about their marriages or about their careers and aims in life, even if they are modern intelligent women who are free to make their own choices in life.

In a scene, while Joon is talking to her students in a classroom, she reveals that she wanted to become a singer, but she has to go to the city to become one and somehow could not leave the village. She lives with her father, a drunkard, and the movie seems to give us the idea that she didn't go to the city to pursue her dream because her father didn't let her go and she had to take care of him. Also, in many scenes, she confesses her love to Bir, and because she loves him and wants to be with him, she never left the village. She couldn't make the choice for her life because of two important men in her life, her father and her lover. This shows that a female is always ready to sacrifice everything for a man, but it is never the other way around. We know that a man is not sacrificing anything for a girl, because we don't see Bikram staying in the village because he liked Joon, rather he leaves the village and moves to the city in the hopes of

becoming a decent man for Joon while he asks another man to take care of her. As I said earlier, it is the man who decides the future of a woman in Nepali society and this is what is shown in the movies too. Women characters are shown to be kind, looking after everyone and full of love and care and this is the reason they don't want to leave their old parents and their lovers behind to achieve some dream or fulfill their aim in life. The movie also represents Joon as kind and caring woman as she is seen taking care of her father, Bir, and his mother when she gets sick. When Bir's mother gets sick, Joon prepares food for her and takes it to the hospital and takes care of her.

The female characters are bound by their responsibilities towards their families and are never represented as independent women who are passionate in achieving their dreams. Out of the protagonists in the three movies, it is only Joon who talks about her dream while Smriti and Suniti are never seen discussing what they are passionate about. There were many chances for Joon to go to the city to pursue her dreams as she is shown to be a smart woman who could be independent, but rather she chooses not to do so because she is a woman, no matter if she is smart or independent, she is expected to look after a man and wait for him and never follow her dreams.

Bir is poor, lives with his old and sick mother and looks after her. He earns for the family and takes care of his mother. Bir is the only child of his mother, she wants him to marry before she dies so that she could die in peace knowing that there is some girl who would take care of her son for the rest of his life. What we see here is that the purpose of a woman's life is to marry and take care of her husband and son after she has one and make sure they are happy for the rest of their lives. The filmmakers, through all these scenes, present an idea of how women live their whole lives for men in several roles, their fathers, husbands and sons. They are just objects who serve the desire of man, who are silent and have no say for their desire or aim in life.

Bir makes a living by transporting goods from the village to different places using some horses. He dropped out of school and is not as smart as Joon and Aaitey. However, Joon likes Bir as he is always taking care of her. Bir is always the one who protects Joon from Aaitey. He buys gifts for her and she is happy that he cares for her. But all that care and protection of Bir towards Joon is because of his childhood promise to Bikram which is revealed to Joon later in the movie. All this story of keeping the promises in the movie comes from a society where men are always

known to have kept their promises. If they don't keep the promises they made, they are weak and not strong enough to be called male. There is a similar story in *Kusume Rupal*, where the fathers of Suniti and Amar are childhood friends and long before they were born, they decide to marry their children off to each other if either of them has a boy and a girl. The two men forget about their promise as they do not get to meet each other until the end of the movie. However, after they meet at the end of the movie, they remember their promises and are relieved to know that their children like each other and had kept their promises unknowingly. We see similar cases still in the villages of Nepal today. We still have many families in Nepal who believe in arranged marriages. In these kind of marriages, the families look for a suitable bride or groom for their family, talk to the parents and decide on the marriage. Of course, the consent of their children matters to them, but we also have cases where people force their children to get marriage because they think they have found a perfect match for their children and they know better about marriage than their children.

#### **4.1.3 Women as fragments**

Joon wears red dresses most of the times in the movie with red flower tied to her hair matching the color of her dress. She always has a slight smile whenever she is seen in the movie, this is because the filmmakers want to represent her as a girl who is desirable and liked. She dresses up in beautiful and colorful dresses because her character desires to be attractive in the movie for the men. Looking beautiful through her makeup and dress is the major focus for Joon's character in order to be wanted and liked by men and the movie does not seem to represent her otherwise than a beautiful and attractive looking young woman who dresses up well and wears makeup all the time. Also, in the movies, women are always fragmented and not shown as a complete human being. There are many scenes in the movie where the camera focuses Joon's eyes, hair, face, lips, belly and so on. She is always chopped up and never a complete person. Showing fragments of her body, the reaction of her lips, the waving of her hair, her flat belly, and her curves, we are given an idea of how women are portrayed as objects and made to look desirable. Mulvey (1975) argues there is a combination of the beauty of women as object and the screen space in the movies, she is a perfect product and her fragmented body is the content of the movie and is the direct recipient of the look of the spectator (p. 65). Joon's

glamorous body chopped in fragments is the subject of the gaze of not only the male characters in the movies but also the male audiences. As Mulvey (1975) and Chaudhuri (2006) argue, the female body that is sexualized and fragmented is the major content in the movies and the female character, for example Joon in *Bir Bikram* is nothing more than a product.

One morning, Joon is see outside Bir's house. There are red flowers all over the balcony of the house and interestingly Joon is dressed in the same color as the flowers, which is intentional as Joon wants to become a part of Bir's house and his family. The color of her lipstick and hair band are the same color: red. She plucks a flower from one of the vases and places it in her hair. She stands in front of the door of the house where there is a mirror, looks at the mirror and smiles. By wearing the flower plucked up from a man's house, she tries to show him that she wants to become a part of his house and tries to fit in. The flower here is a symbol of becoming a part of a man and his life.



FIGURE 3: Joon looks at the mirror placed on the wall after she places a red flower on her hair.

Now, her purpose of looking beautiful with the dress and the red flower in her hair is still not served, because the man has not looked at her and complimented her yet. So, now she looks for the man, Bir, who happens to be watching her from one of the corners on the top of the house. She asks Bir about her appearance while she is still smiling.



FIGURE 4: Joon looks happy as she asks Bir about her looks.

However, Bir doesn't tell her that she looks beautiful, instead he directs his friend nearby to look at Joon and tell her how she looks. As Joon doesn't get the expected answer from the man and as he doesn't look interested in her look, her smile fades away as presented in Figure 4 and 5. Because the smile of a woman is always for a man, lack of acknowledgement from a man results in the fading way of the smile of a woman which was intended for the man. Joon gets angry instantly because she had expected Bir to compliment her for her looks. Now, in response to his comment about her look, she reaches her hand to her hair where she had tucked in the flower and throws it on the floor.



FIGURE 5: Joon looks sad as Bir doesn't compliment her for her looks.

She throws away the symbol of becoming a part of the man's life as seen in figure 6. Because the man didn't accept her becoming a part of him, by throwing the flower she is implying that she would be herself again, her old self. Again, here it is the man's decision that matters for a woman. A man decides whether a woman is looking beautiful or ugly. In the movie, Bir is lying about his true feelings so, he doesn't compliment Joon about her beauty in this scene, however, what the scene makes us clear that it is for a man a woman looks beautiful. She wants to be desired by him and tries to change herself to become a part of him like Joon does here with the flower.





FIGURE 6: Joon throws away the flower placed in her hair.

Later in the movie, Bikram returns from the city like he promised Bir in his childhood and when Joon and Bikram meet, he saves Joon from Aaitey. He does not tell anyone about who he is and wants to know if Joon and Bir liked each other. Joon's father likes Bikram as he is dressed up like a rich man and wants to marry off his daughter to him even if he is a stranger to him. However, Joon likes Bir and wants to marry him. The movie continues among the struggles of Bikram and Aaitey wanting to marry Joon while Joon likes Bir who is saving her for his friend. Later he knows the truth about Bikram and the truth about why he took care of Joon is revealed.

Joon is angry about the fact that Bir never loved her while she did everything for him. The movie has several scenes where Joon wants Bir to confess to her, but he says he would tell his true feelings when the time comes. He never says he likes her until the end of the movie where he realizes his feelings for Joon and confesses. Joon feels betrayed by Bir as he tells her that he cared for her because of his promise to Bikram, while she always thought he loved her as he was always protecting her from Aaitey and looking after her and buying gifts for her. Joon finally speaks about how she feels about Bikram at the end of the movie and says that she would



not marry him as she didn't love him. The movie through various scenes from the beginning makes it clear that Joon likes Bir and as a female it is her dream to get married to the one whom she loves. For Joon, marriage is her life, as Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues, it is her destiny and she has to make the marriage work (p. 454).

Joon never talks about her aim in life except for the one time in the classroom scene, however, the entire movie is about Joon and Bir falling in love at the end and living happily ever after. At the end, Bir realizes that he actually loves Joon and they reunite, and it is a happy ending. The ending is clearly about what a man wants and how his decision helps towards a happy ending for the movie. It was Bir's decision, a man's decision to accept a woman at the end even if he continued to push her away in the entire movie and it is notable to see how a man's decision is everything for a movie and for its happy ending.

#### **4.1.4 Conclusion**

To sum up, the entire movie revolves around the female character, Joon, where the male characters are constantly fighting for her, sacrificing for her, and making promises to make choices about her life. Woman is never the center of the plot, she is always on the background in a man's story where he is the center of everything that happens in the movie. The movie is never about what Joon wants in her life, how talented she is or what her career is, but it is rather about who the perfect match is for her and her marriage.

In this chapter, I analyzed three scenes of *Bir Bikram* to argue how Joon is portrayed as the object of desire for the three men in the movie. I talked about how the features of Joon, her hair, body, lips, smile and make up among others were highlighted to suggest that Joon should be looked at and her features are important. Similarly, analyzing another scene, I argued that men are the ones deciding women's life and making their life's decisions while the women remain silent. I argued that silence is the sign of repression as the scenes portray that women have no voice while the filmmakers made the use of various colors and images to present Joon's feelings in certain situations. I also argued that a man's word is the most important thing for him and he would do anything to keep his word. In the last scene, I discussed how Joon is presented as

fragments as most of the scenes and moments featured her body parts rather than her as a complete person. I argued that this fragmentation presented her as an object of desire.

Even if Joon is smart, beautiful, and independent and has a job, she is dependent on man for happiness, she is emotional, and in most of the scenes where she is required to raise voice against the things unacceptable by her, she remains silent. Choosing not to speak up towards something bad, Joon represents how women are made to look silent, stupid and weak. Meanwhile, the physical characteristics of Joon is important for the movie and this is shown by fragmenting her and focusing on her body parts one at a time to make her look desirable. It is because she is a woman, she is beautiful, and she is an object of desire for men, she is always looked at by men. Also, Joon, Suniti and Smriti's character are important for the movies because they complete the man's story in the movies being their desires. The stories of these women are never their own, it is always about men who they try to please the entire movie and at the end they get married to them as it is already decided from the start of the movie. Also, in these movies, it is already decided that the hero always gets the girl no matter how hard he has to fight for her to make her his.

## 4.2 Chapter II: Women, The Second Sex

### **Suniti, Kanchhi and Amar's mother in *Kusume Rumal***

The plot of the movie *Kusume Rumal* revolves around a man, Amar, and a woman, Suniti, who go to the same college and later fall in love and get engaged at the end. The story is about the various struggles they face in their love life including the threats of the antagonist, Rakesh. The plot also presents the friendship of Suniti and Amar's fathers, long lost friends, who decided to marry off their son and daughter long before they were born.

The movie has presented both male and female characters in their traditional roles prevalent in Nepali society. The film portrays women in their traditional roles as mothers, caretakers, and housewives while man is the breadwinner and the decision maker of the family.

This portrayal can further be explained through the image presented below. Figure 7 shows a woman and a man sitting across each other in a kitchen setting.



FIGURE 7: Amar's mother prepares tea as her husband is busy reading a newspaper.

While the man is dressed in his bathing gown, the woman is dressed in a saree, which is a traditional dress for women in Nepali culture. Looking at how the man is dressed, one could easily assume that it is early morning and it is interesting to see the woman dressed in the traditional attire while the man is in his bathing gown. The image gives an idea that the man has just woken up and we can assume that the woman has to wake up earlier than him to have dressed up like that and prepare the tea. Looking at the way the woman is dressed early morning suggests that she has to make herself up, she has to become a woman while a man doesn't see the possibility to dressing up as it is normal for him to present himself in the way he is. This is one of the realities of Nepali society where the wife, the homemaker, wakes up earlier than everyone else in the family, cleans the house, dresses up to become a woman and prepares the breakfast while the men get up from their beds to be ready to have the breakfast prepared.

Similarly, while the dishes surround the woman, the man is reading a newspaper. The way the household stuffs surround the woman and not the man suggest that they are a part of her and because she is a housewife, it makes more sense to have the dishes close to her and not the man. She pours some tea in a cup and gives it to the man while the man sits there reading his newspaper and taking the sip of tea served by the woman. Also, if we look at the space the woman is in, what we see is she does not have an escape, everything is closed and cluttered which doesn't provide a possibility for her to move along the space. Jones (2013) argues that private spaces are supposed to be dark, cluttered and disorganized (p. 255) and an example of this is presented in figure 8. The closed wall behind the woman with no window, household stuffs surrounding her, dishes arranged to her side and not near the man, suggests that it is this boundary that distinguishes her from the man, traps her leaving no any possibility for her to get out of this space.



FIGURE 8: Amar's mother serves tea to her husband.

This representation is clear to suggest how women belong to the kitchen and the home and she is there to look after a man, cook for him and take care of him. Simone de Beauvoir, a French writer, and Feminist, in her book 'The Second Sex' (1949/2011) argues that woman's place is her home, and she is never seen arguing with a man (p. 13). My concern here is to discuss how the movie has presented women in the domestic space and how they are never seen leaving this space. Amar's mother is always seen in the kitchen preparing and serving food for the two men, her son, and her husband. Throughout the movie, the mother is never seen out of the house, out of the kitchen, to be more precise. Being limited to the domestic boundaries, she is never seen crossing the border of the kitchen in the movie.

In this chapter, I am arguing that women in the movies are presented as the second sex, they are not independent and autonomous individuals, rather they are portrayed as the relative beings who have identity and meaning only in relation to the men. I argue that women characters in the movies I have selected don't have any identity without a man, they are dependent on men for their happiness. Similarly, I argue that the woman waits for a man her entire life, she is the housewife and caretaker of the man and her ultimate career is marrying the man suitable for her which suggests that she is someone only in relation to a man and presented as the 'Other'.

The major focus of this chapter is to show how women are the secondary characters and how the story of the movie is all about the men while women are their caretakers. I will be using relevant arguments made by Simone de Beauvoir in her book 'the second sex' (1949/2011) for analyzing the relevant images, scenes in the movie *Kusume Rumal* to show how Suniti, Kanchhi and Amar's mother are presented as the second sex in the movie. I will also be using relevant examples from the other two movies to support my arguments.

I understand that the book by Beauvoir (1949/2011) is dated, however, because the arguments she makes in her book are still relevant to the movies I have selected for my analysis, I am using the book to analyze the movies as a major text. The representation of women characters in these movies are similar to the arguments made by Beauvoir, so my movies and their analysis require the text because of its relevance even today. As it is not possible for to write about everything that Beauvoir talks about, I have selected three major arguments she makes in the book which is also the major concern in my movies and analyze these scenes using appropriate images from the movies.

In arguing how women as portrayed as the second sex, I will be focusing on the following three major arguments to show how women are presented as the other and the man as the Absolute.

- Women as caretakers and housewives
- Woman is the one who always waits for the man
- Marriage is a woman's ultimate career

I will be analyzing certain scenes, plot, and images from the movie relevant to my arguments and argue how the women's representation is problematic. In doing so, I will also be using my own experiences and cultural context of Nepal to discuss certain scenes and plot of the movies and the meanings they carry in Nepal's cultural context.

### **The Second Sex: What does it mean?**

Humanity is male, as Beauvoir (1949/2011) writes and a man defines a woman, a woman is defined as a relation to a man, she is not an independent and autonomous being, in fact she is

the relative being who exists because of man (p. 6). Beauvoir's argument centers on the fact that man is the subject, he is the Absolute while woman is the relative creature, the Other, who determines herself in relation to the man while the man does not in relation to her (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 6).

The notion of the Second Sex not just means the woman is not equal to the man or she depends on the man her entire life, it rather refers to the notion that a man has meaning without a woman while the woman is nothing and has no existence without a man. Beauvoir (1949/2011) famously wrote 'One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.' It is obvious for a man to present himself as an individual of a certain sex, a man does not need any introduction to prove that he is a man, but for a woman, she starts by saying she is a woman if she needs to define herself (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 5). For a woman, in order to introduce herself she will have to start by saying she is a woman, however, for a man it is obvious that he is a man and he needs no introduction. When I talk about my experience, I have been doubted about my opinions many times just because I am a woman. I have been told so many times that I should not do this and that, for example, I should be humble and not be loud, just because I am a woman and a woman is supposed to be kind and silent. Similarly, throughout my life I have been judged so many times on the basis of the kind of dresses I wear in public space and I have always been taught to be silent and polite in certain places, especially, in front of my seniors and in public places. However, for a man, there is no such thing as being asked about his identity and he is not doubted for his choices and opinions, just because he is a man. There is a boundary that is set in the Nepali society about what you should do and what you should not, based on your gender, and this has created a divide between male and female.

One of the most important characters of the second sex is that a woman does not think herself without a man while a man thinks himself without a woman, and a woman is someone and something that a man decides; she is hence called 'the sex' meaning the man sees herself as a sexed being, she is inessential in front of the essential, man (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 6).

#### 4.2.1 Women as caretakers and housewives

In two of the scenes which involve Amar's mother, she is preparing to cook the meal and cutting fruits and vegetables while the males sit and talk about other important stuff which does not involve the issues concerning the woman. The mother is dependent on her husband and children and as she is the housewife, her work makes her more dependent on them because she is not focusing on anything else than looking after the men of her life. The woman's work inside her house, according to Beauvoir, does not grant her independence (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 497), rather this makes the woman depend on her husband and children, in fact her entire world revolves around the male and she connects her existence with the male. Various studies show that women spend more hours in housework compared to males even though they have other full-time jobs (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Dex, 2004, as cited in Treas & Drobnic, 2010). In case of Amar's mother, she tries to find her existence through her husband and her son as she has been dedicating her life towards them, taking care of them, cooking for them, and looking after them. Haralovich (1989) argues that the family space including the kitchen, dining room is the woman's space and she has no any private space inside the house (p. 77).

The woman is the one who has the responsibility inside the house to take care of the house, make it a home, a proper place to live in and help her husband achieve his goals be it in his work, sport, or anything outside the house. Haralovich (1989) quotes Dolores Hayden in *Redesigning the American Dream* as suburban housing is described as:

An architecture of gender, since houses provide settings for women and girls to be effective social status achievers, desirable sex objects, and skillful domestic servants, and for men and boys to be executive breadwinners, successful home handy men, and adept car mechanics (p. 65).

This way woman is supposed to look beautiful for men and she needs to be a skilled homemaker in order to help the man achieve his dreams, take care of him and cook for him. A woman is the supporter of man who earns money for the family and fulfills the wishes of the family members. This is the reality of every Nepali household even at present. Housework separates woman from her public life lowering the status of the homemaker (Hayden, 1981, as cited in Haralovich, 1989, p. 71). This is true in case of Amar's mother as she is always seen inside the house and the household chores prevent her from having a public life.





FIGURE 9: Amar joins his parents in the kitchen.

In the same scene that I discussed earlier, Amar joins his parents in the kitchen and sits next to his mother in the dining table as shown in figure 9. Amar is dressed in a bathing suit similar to his father and this suggests that men don't have to make themselves up like that of the woman who has to get dressed early in the morning. These men don't even consider dressing up to become men because there is no such thing as becoming a man, a man is born and that is it, while for a woman, she has to make herself up with the help of her clothing, make-up and hair. Similar example is presented in the first scene of *Darpan Chhaya*. The scene shows Raj's mother in the kitchen all dressed up and cutting some fruits, while the man is seen half naked praying in the prayer room. While the woman is expected to turn herself into a woman, the man doesn't even see the possibility of making himself up, because he is a man, the Absolute as Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues. This scene shows that one is born as a man while a woman has to make herself up to become one.

Also, the woman is never seen arguing with the man. While Amar's father and mother sit at the dining table in the kitchen talking, the father asks the mother why Amar came home late the previous night. She tells him that he was not late, however, Amar's father tells her not to lie

and further commands her to put some sense to her son's mind as he doesn't like the family members staying out of the house until late. This scene clearly presents how the man is the head of the family and decides what the family members should do. This is an example of every household of Nepal which is dominated by men. The mother, instead of arguing with him, remains silent about the matter and suggests that they should think about Amar's marriage as a solution to the problem of him coming home late because after marriage he would want to come home early because of his wife and his responsibilities towards her.

Because wives depend on their husbands for everything, they want their marriage to work and they work hard for it and in this example, this seems to be true as it is hard for Amar's mother to argue with her husband even though she knows that it is not her fault that her son is late. For Amar's mother, marriage is her life and as Beauvoir (1949/2011) claims, no matter what, she has to make it work, or else life becomes miserable for her (p. 454). Rather than arguing with her husband and telling him that she has nothing to do with Amar coming home late, she chooses to remain silent because marriage is important for her and she can't risk what she has by arguing with him. According to Beauvoir (1949/2011), there is a heavy curse weighing on a woman's shoulders, which is that the meaning of her existence is not in her hands, it is in the man's (p. 497), which is one of the reasons why protecting the marriage is so important for the woman compared to that of the man as he an autonomous individual before being a husband.

The second time Amar's mother is seen in the movie is in the same kitchen setting, she is sitting next to her husband while she calls Amar to eat. Amar is late again; his father looks angry and scolds him asking why he would always be late to eat knowing that his mother would not eat anything without seeing him eat. This example shows how the woman is the caretaker of the males. For a female, it is her responsibility to take care of the males before herself, so she does not even bother eating without waiting for the males. It is very normal in Nepali families that women wait for men to finish eating before they would start eating. This practice of women waiting for men to eat is one of the characteristics that a good housewife should possess.

This scene reminds me of my own experience of how my mother waits for my father every time during dinner and lunch. My father would come home late from work and no matter how hungry my mother was, she never ate before my father. In my opinion, this practice comes

from a patriarchal society of Nepal where women are taught to treat their husbands as Gods. They would respect them and pray them as they would pray the God every morning; they would look after their husbands, prepare meals and fast for them. We even have an entire month in Nepal where Hindu women fast every Monday of the month of Shrawan (July and August) offering prayers to Lord Shiva for the long life of their husbands while the unmarried women would fast asking the Lord to provide them with good husbands (Devotees through Shiva temples, 2017).

As the scene progresses, Amar's mother says that no one cares about her, she complains that the males aren't paying attention to her and says that she is alone as she is the only one staying at home while Amar and his father are busy with work, college, and social work. Housework, as Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues, allows the woman an indefinite escape which is far from herself and her identity (p. 491). While the man finds social life everywhere and make new contacts, the woman, the relative being, who can only live in a couple, is more often alone than the man (Beauvoir 1949/2011, p. 598). The men in the movie, Amar, who is busy in social work, and Rakesh, who is busy making evil plans with his friends against Amar, are busy with their lives, while we see women complaining about their loneliness as Amar's mother does. For a woman, she is nothing without her family and this turns out to be true in case of Amar's mother as she is complaining that the males do not care about her and she is alone in the house. Unlike men, woman's work does not occupy her mind and her education did not allow her to have the habit and taste of independence (Beauvoir 1949/2011, p. 598), and this is true in case of Amar's mother and Raj's mother in *Darpan Chhaya* as both of them are housewives.

Amar's mother continues to complain and tell the males that she is getting old and needs a daughter-in-law and asks Amar to look for one. By that she means she needs a caretaker for the family who would help her in the house and also take care of her son. There is a similar scene in *Bir Bikram* where Bir's mother tries to convince her son to get married by telling him that she is getting old and sick every day. She tries to convince him to marry so that she could die in peace knowing that there is a woman who would cook for him and take care of him for the rest of his life. This way women are presented as having no other purpose in their lives except becoming the housewives, taking care of her husbands and in-laws, cooking for them, and taking care of the house. These scenes of the movies constantly remind us that Nepali women have no any

existence without men, they are meant to be the caretakers of men and they have no other purpose in their lives.

Similarly, another character Kanchhi plays the role of a maid in the movie and works in Suniti's house, and in most of the scenes, we see her cleaning the house and preparing food and tea. Below is the image of Kanchhi dusting off at the house and carefully cleaning stuffs around the house.



FIGURE 10: Kanchhi dusts off the house.

This is an example of how women are portrayed as the ones belonging to the physical setting of their houses, doing the household chores while men are involved in more important works outside the house. Housework is meant for the woman while the man is busy outside the house taking bigger and better responsibilities (Beauvoir 1949/2011, p. 13). Kanchhi is always seen cleaning while the other male characters Arjun and Jeet work in the fields. She prepares food and tea for the men. Preparing and serving food to the man is a woman's job. A similar scene which presents woman as caretakers and meant for housework is presented in *Darpan Chhaya* where there is a guest who visits Smriti's father at their house and her father asks her to pour some tea for the guest rather than doing it by himself or asking the guest to do it by himself.

Amar is into social work and he is seen a very few times inside the house as he is busy outside with other works. He comes home late because he is helping other people and his work is important for him. This shows how a man's place is never his home while the woman is born for taking care of the house and cooking meals for the family.

What is problematic in all the three movies is that the woman is never involved or asked to get involved in activities related to development, social welfare, and other important stuff; the bedroom, the house, the dust and dirt inside the house are meant for her and she is not capable for achieving something more and valuable in her life (Beauvoir 1949/2011, p. 488). It is always the male who are asked to participate in important things, for example, in the movie, the principal calls Amar to discuss about abolishing the practice of ragging system in the college. Ragging is the notion of teasing a person, especially in an intense or prolonged way (dictionary.com, n.d.). However, a woman could also be consulted in discussing important stuffs to make the world a better place to live in, but that never happens in these three movies, which is disappointing in terms of their representation.

#### **4.2.2 Woman, the one who always waits for the man**

A common thing that all these female characters in the movies share is that they wait their whole lives for suitable men who they would marry and live happily thereafter. Finding a man is one of the greatest achievements for a woman as Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that a woman is not complete without a man, which is why she needs her (p. 452).

Let me discuss a scene in the movie where Amar's father asks what kind of girl he wants for getting married. He says he does not have someone but if he had to think about it, he would want a girl who is fair, beautiful, attractive, having good character and someone like that might come to him in the future. What we observe here is a man talking about his preferences about a girl who he would want and marry, this suggests that it is the man who makes choices for himself and for the girl as well. However, Amar is not saying that he is looking for a girl, he is rather confident that some girl like the one he described might come to his life sometime in the future. Finding the right girl is not his life's ultimate goal, rather it is just an element in his life as he keeps himself busy in his study and social work. Also, his statement makes it clear that he is

not waiting for his perfect girl and waiting to get married as according to Beauvoir (1949/2011) no young man considers marriage as his fundamental project unlike a woman whose purpose in life is to get married to the man in her dreams (p. 456).

By saying this, I am not arguing that it is only a woman who wants a man, of course the man desires her and needs her (Beauvoir 1949/2011, p. 452), however, marriage is not the only goal in his life unlike a woman's. For Amar, it is obvious from the scene where he describes about the woman of his dreams that he wants her, however, it would be incorrect to say that he is waiting for her. The woman of his dreams is just one element in his life who is yet to come, however, the woman is not his only destiny, he has more important things to do in his life rather than waiting for her. Unlike a man, a woman's youth is consumed by waiting for a man, as Beauvoir (1949/2011) claims, even if a man dreams of a woman, he does not spend his life waiting for her and she will never be more than one element in a man's life (p. 352) and this is true in case of Amar, Suniti and Joon.

Similarly, in the movie, women need men because good men are those who protect them from any harm and therefore the company of a man becomes necessary for a woman as argued by Beauvoir (1949/2011, p. 357). In the movies, the harm for the woman is the antagonist, the villain, who is always a man. What is a common story in these movies is that the villain is after the woman and wants to make her his wife and it is the hero of the movie, who protects her from the villain. The company of a good man who would protect a woman becomes a must for a woman and finding a man who would protect her and love her becomes her necessity.

Similarly, it is common in Nepal that women are stared at and teased by men in groups by whistling in public and making inappropriate comments about their dresses, appearance among others (Rajbhandari, 2015). Rajbhandari (2015) further argues that Eve-teasing, also known as street harassment, a term used for public harassment or molestation of women by men, is one of the ugly truths in the lives of women in South Asia. Similar situation is mentioned by Beauvoir (1949/2011) as she discusses how women are stared at if they wander the streets (p. 358). She argues how it would be inappropriate for the girls to run through the streets in happy groups as boys do because they would be followed, approached and would attract attention, because they are women who are not allowed to do the same things boys do.

The notion of how men are free to wander in the streets links to the concept of *Flaneur*, meaning, one who has the time and resources to wander freely in the streets looking (Richards, 2003, p. 149). Various scholars including Janet Wolff, Mica Nava, Anne Friedberg and Wilson have discussed if the notion of the *flaneuse* could exist in the modern era. Critics such as Wolff and Pollock argue that it is an impossible concept because the streets which symbolize the public space and the right to look at belonged entirely to men making it impossible for women to wander freely in the streets (Wolff, 1990; Pollock, 1988, as cited in Richards, 2003, p. 151). If women would just wander freely in the streets, something bad could happen to them, they are being looked at, teased, molested, and judged for walking freely as the streets are not safe for women.

This reality that women in Nepal face every day in their lives is presented in these movies too. In the movie, Rakesh and his friends are seen teasing and making inappropriate comments to a group of girls. Kanchhi is also teased and touched by a group of men in a scene in the movie which is presented in the image below. Figure 11 presents two drunk men trying to touch Kanchhi while she is walking carrying a water pot.



FIGURE 11: Two drunk men tease Kanchhi in the street.

Similar scenes are presented repeatedly in all the three movies which portray how unsafe the streets are for women and none of this is their fault, the only mistake they did is being born as women. And, most importantly, it is always a man who protects these women from these bad guys, some examples include Amar protecting the girls from Rakesh while he teases them, Jeet protecting Kanchhi from the drunk men on the street and Bir protecting Joon from Aaitey among others. This is one of the reasons that women need men to be by their sides and protect them their whole lives. Women from early on learn to live fearing men and this fear grows as they grow up. Shrestha (2013) argues that Nepali women will continue to face these problems until the mindset of society which values a boy child more than a girl providing him freedom for everything, is changed. Until this situation and mindset prevails in Nepali society, the movies will continue to have such scenes where women are molested, teased, and even raped by men.

What is clear from these scenes is that women need to be careful all the time as no place is safe for them as they are women and if they do something they are not supposed to do. For example, as pointed out by Beauvoir (1949/2011), if the women run through the streets in happy groups as boys do (p. 358) or maybe raise their voices against something bad, they attract attention, they are followed by boys or are insulted, which force them to lose their confidence and fear men. All of this makes women dependent on men and catching a man, a husband who would protect her from evil and rescue her when she is in need becomes one of her most important undertakings (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 353). This argument is true in case of the Suniti in *Kusume Rumal* as she is impressed by Amar after he rescues some girls from Rakesh and his friends. She starts liking him after he saves these girls from the bad guy. This scene of the movie makes it clear how a woman is searching for a man who can protect her in case of some evil things that might happen to her and in case of Suniti she chooses Amar who respects women and is different from the bad guy Rakesh.

#### **4.2.3 Marriage is a woman's ultimate career**

Suniti is a strong, independent, and smart character compared to the rest of the women characters in the movie. I am saying this because she has the courage to leave her father and move to a different city for her studies. However, the moviemakers fail to maintain her



independence and courage throughout the movie and present her in similar roles like the rest of the women characters. I will be discussing how the movie does this in the rest of my arguments.

Suniti moves to Darjeeling, a city in India to pursue her studies; she is an independent woman who is capable of and free to make her own decisions and choices in life. However, we never see her graduating from college and utilizing her education for her career or for the betterment of society. During the start of the movie, as a viewer, I had high expectations for Suniti as a character and also towards how strong her character is, but as the movie progresses, she is never seen raising her voice against something bad, she is silent most of the times and easily falls in love with Amar and starts talking about their marriage. All of these developments in terms of the portrayal of Suniti in the movie fail to maintain my first impression and expectations for Suniti as a character. As the movie progresses, Suniti is never seen prioritizing her career over marriage, in the entire movie, she is seen desperate to get married to Amar which shows how marriage is her ultimate career. As Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that girls marry to get married because they are not taught to get along on their own and not equipped to know how they could work to make a living (p. 459). In marrying a suitable man, women seek a lifeline, and this is true in case of Suniti.

Friedan (1963) argues that the dream image of a young American women and of women all over the world in the middle of the twentieth century, was to get married, have a house in a nice suburb and have four children (p. 18). She further explains how the women during that time were told by experts about how to catch a man, how to breastfeed, how to dress, become more feminine, how to make marriage exciting and overall how to become the perfect housewife. These women, similar to the women characters in my movies, were so proud to become housewives and their highest ambition was to have children and beautiful house while they wanted their husbands to make major decisions (Friedan, 1983, p. 18).

The woman characters in these movies are never seen getting jobs for themselves and living on their own even after they finish their studies. Suniti chooses to get married after she finishes her studies and her father is never seen discussing with her about her career, instead it is her marriage that is the major concern in the family. The only character in these three movies who has a job is Joon, however, she is always told by her father to find a rich guy for marriage. Her father is constantly trying to convince her to marry a rich guy. In a scene, he talks about

marrying her off to a rich man so that she could have a good life with all the riches he has. The father is never seen encouraging his daughter to use her educational qualification, skills, and intelligence to get a good job and become financially independent, however, his concern is only about marrying his daughter off to a rich guy who could fulfill her wishes with his money.

At the same time, the women characters in these movies are never seen prioritizing their career over marriage, there is not even a scene where Suniti is seen concerned about getting a job after she graduates. In case of Smriti in *Darpan Chhaya*, she is not concerned about her career as she knows she is dying, the only thing Smriti does is make good friends and memories before she dies. Likewise, Joon in *Bir Bikram* never makes an effort to make her dream of becoming a singer come true, her ultimate goal in the movie is to make Bir confess to her as she thinks that he cares for her.

Similarly, it is always the man who is working outside the house in several important jobs with important positions. For example, the principal in the colleges in both *Kusume Rimal* and *Darpan Chhaya* and the mayor in *Bir Bikram* are men. The fathers of Amar and Suniti both were in Army and fighting to save their country from enemies while their mothers were housewives. As Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues, economically men and women form two different hierarchies where men have good jobs and hold the more important positions in any job industry, they are paid well compared to women and have a higher chance to get success in their jobs compared to the women (p. 10).

Wolff (1985) mentions two reasons as to why it would be appropriate to talk about the world as a 'male' world (p. 37). First, the men run the institutions, the more important roles in operation and hierarchical structures were owned and dominated by men and women were nowhere near taking these roles as they were meant to be at home as homemakers and caretakers. Second, the women were restricted to the private sphere of the house and the suburb (Hall, 1981; Davidoff & Hall, 1983, as cited in Wolff, 1985, p. 37). Even though women started to go out and work in some areas outside the homes, the public sphere was the domain of men. In these movies, we see women going out of the houses, studying, and getting jobs, however, the private sphere of home and the household still belongs to women while men dominate the workplaces and public spaces. I will be discussing in detail about the spaces of men and women later in the

third chapter 'Gender and Space' to analyze what these spaces mean for the two genders in terms of their portrayal in the movies.

One of the most important representations of women in these movies is marriage being their ultimate career and purpose in their lives. Even though we see strong, independent women in these movies who are studying, making their choices in life, and putting education as their priority, at the same time, we see them desperate to marry the men they love. We don't see Suniti applying for jobs and getting one after her studies, instead she gets engaged towards the end of the movie. Long before Suniti finishes her study, she dreams of marrying Amar with whom she falls in love with during her college days. From the moment they fall in love, they start talking about their marriage and discuss how they are incomplete without each other. Even though both of them talk about being incomplete without each other, falling in love according to Beauvoir (1949/2011) has not at all the same meaning for both sexes (p. 699). Beauvoir (1949/2011) quotes Byron as he said that love is an occupation on the life of the man, while it is the life for a woman. When woman loves, she devotes her entire body, mind, and soul to the man while a man never abandons himself completely if they love a woman. This is also the reason why failed marriages hurt the woman more than a man.

Marriage chains a woman to a man, she becomes his slave while the man is autonomous and complete without a woman, the woman is incomplete without a man. The woman becomes the mistress of the home and is destined to take care of the home, her in-laws and her husband (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 455). What Beauvoir (1949/2011) further argues is that the economic advantages that the men have force the woman to prefer marriage over her career and she chooses a man whose situation is better than her, it is one of the reasons why the parents of the women in these movies are so eager to marry them off to rich guys (p. 455). This is true in case of Joon as her father is eager to marry her off to a rich guy, which I discussed earlier in the chapter.

Similarly, Joon in *Bir Bikram* is desperate to hear Bir confess his love to her. While Bir is keeping his promise for his friend, he cares for her, however, he never tells her that he is in love until the end. However, there are many scenes throughout the movie where Joon keeps on asking why he cared for her. For Joon, even if she has this dream of going to the city and become a

singer, she never leaves the village because of Bir whom she wants to marry and live happily ever after.

The marriage of the woman is always a major discussion in these movies. Suniti's father, while discussing with Rakesh's mother about her marriage tells how one day girls are supposed to get married and go to someone else's house. Joon's father talks to her many times about her marriage and how Bir is not the perfect man for her. Smriti's father expresses his wish to see his daughter getting married and tells that he was an unlucky father as he could not see her get married because she was dying. What is clear here is that the ultimate purpose of a woman's life is marriage, which does not seem to be the case for the man. For a man, marriage is not the only topic for discussion. While Amar and his father talk to each other, they talk about his college, social work, and other stuff. They are never seen forcing him to find a girl and get married in the movie.

In case of girls, marriage is the only way in which they can be involved in a group and if they don't marry or are rejected by good guys, they are social waste (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 453). To present an example, there is a character in *Bir Bikram* who is abandoned by her husband because she belongs to a low caste in the society. Her husband rejects her, and she is thrown out of her house. She is sad and is always crying whenever she is presented in the movie. Because she is rejected by her husband, the society considers her to be a social waste and doesn't let her stay in the village. However, if the woman was still married to her husband, she would not have been rejected by the society.

For man, marriage is a way of life, it is only a part of his life and it is not a big deal for him even if his marriage does not work out. While for a woman, marriage is her life, it is her destiny and she has to make it work no matter what, or else life becomes miserable for her (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 454). Suniti gets engaged as soon as she graduates from college, her ultimate career is marriage. Her destiny is to get married because it is important for her to get a good husband and a protector, while for Amar, marriage is just an element of his life while he is involved in more important stuffs, including his job, and his career. By marriage, writes Blackstone (as cited in Perkin, 2002, pp. 1-2):

The husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being, or legal existence of a woman is suspended during marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of a husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything.

While man is a complete individual being who is socially independent and free, the woman is devastated without a man. Her world revolves around her husband, she is a hidden individual who sinks into her husband's world and assumes that she is nothing without him. The woman who is abandoned by her husband in *Bir Bikram* is always as sad whenever she is shown, she is presented as emotionally heartbroken and cries all the time. She lives with her brother, who protects her and takes care of her.

The man is economically the head of the family and while marrying, the woman takes his name, she belongs to his family, his other 'half', she joins the man's home and the home is her place for the rest of her life (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, pp. 454-455). After marriage, the woman follows the man wherever he goes, his work determines where they live, and the new life becomes the most important part of her life as she breaks with her past. In case of marriages in Nepal, it is always the woman who follows the man and a man's work determines the place they live and not the other way around. In *Kusume Rupal*, Amar's mother follows her husband after marriage, so does Raj's mother in *Darpan Chhaya*. It is never the other way around that a man would follow a woman after marriage because this is how things have been for a long time now and continues even today.

When I talk about these movies and how important marriage is for these women in these movies, I wonder why the situation of this representation could not be changed in these movies. Beauvoir (1949/2011) claims that woman is a slave even if she conducts herself with freedom, so it is important that the situation needs to be changed by prohibiting marriage as a 'career' for the woman (p. 535) and in my opinion, if this could be practiced in the movies, it would improve the portrayal of women to a greater extent.

#### 4.2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the women are relative beings, the 'Second Sex', who have no meaning without men who are the Absolute. To prove my argument, I divided the chapter in three major sub themes where I talked about how the women characters are desperate to find a man and they wait for suitable men their whole lives, I discussed women's roles as housewives and caretakers and finally I argued that marriage is the ultimate career of a woman which would allow her to settle and become the mistress of the house. I analyzed various scenes and images from *Kusume Rumal* including the plot of the movie presenting examples from other movies to support my arguments.

According to my analysis, what we see is that the representation of women is rather painful and problematic in these movies. We see women being portrayed as objects and secondary characters while the story is all about the males. The movies portray women as housewives and caretakers of men and they are featured in scenes inside their homes as housework makes them busy. They are the mistress of their homes and are meant to take care of the house and family.

Furthermore, no matter how strong and talented these women are, they are shown waiting for men and desperate to get married. Marriage is their ultimate career and we never see these women wanting anything else than getting married to a man of their dreams which is problematic in terms of their representation.

### **4.3 Chapter III: Gender and Space**

#### **4.3.1 Analysis of spaces of women and men in *Darpan Chhaya***

The movie *Darpan Chhaya* is a story of two friends Raj and Abhishek, who are best friends since childhood and are willing to sacrifice for each other until they meet Smriti and fall in love with her. Smriti is ill and is aware that she is dying, however, she wants to make memories with good friends before she dies, so she becomes friends with Raj and Abhishek. The movie revolves around these three characters, the men fighting for the woman and wanting to possess her, their college life, and several scenes where Raj and Abhishek both fall in love with Smriti and try to impress her.

As the movie continues, both Raj and Abhishek express their feelings for Smriti and she tells both the men that she loves them, because she does not want them to fight and end their friendship because of her. At the end, she reveals the truth about her illness through a letter addressed to these men before she dies, which also says that she would donate her eyes to Abhishek, who has lost his eyesight in an accident in his childhood.

Let me discuss one of the scenes in the movie where the students studying in the college organize a picnic. All the students are having fun in their own ways in the picnic, we see some girls dancing and some boys talking while a group of boys are seen swimming in a river. A group of girls are seen dancing in the land near the river where the boys go for swimming and this is presented in figure 12.



FIGURE 12: Raj and his friends are seen swimming in a river.

This scene is normal for the movie as it is some boys having fun in a public space which is common in Nepali society. The space that separates the land and the river is a portrayal of the boundaries set for the women as they can't cross their space of the land and join the boys in the river. As the scene continues, first we have the medium long shot of boys swimming and then a medium long shot of some girls sitting as shown in figure 13. Later, the boys start teasing the girls asking them to join them in the water. They keep on asking the girls for a long time to come to the water as if they are challenging them saying that it would be impossible for the girls to join them in the water.





FIGURE 13: Smriti and her friend look at each other as the boys challenge the girls to join them in the river.

What we see next is the shots including the girls looking at each other as seen in figure 13, a medium close-up of Smriti and another girl which shows that their facial expression is changing after they are teased. Their expressions show that they look angry and sad with face being turned away and their initial smile fading after they are teased. By asking the girls to go to the water, the boys are pointing out the boundaries for girls. The boys know that the girls can't join them in the water, so they are in a way reminding the girls of how they should behave in a public space. Water here is a man's space and this scene in movie presents an idea of how women could not possibly enter the men's space.



FIGURE 14: Smriti turns her face away as she is unhappy with the boys and their challenge.

And looking at the expressions of girls and how angry and sad they are, we know that this is not a joke for the girls as they are reminded of their limitations. It would be problematic and inappropriate if a group of girls would go for swimming in the river. One of the reasons for this to be problematic is because women do not belong to this public space and they have restrictions as to how they can behave in a space that belongs to the men. One could imagine a girl or a group of girls swimming in a private pool, maybe a swimming pool inside her own house, where no one could see her as it is a private space, but it would be awkward if the roles would be reversed.

It is common for men to behave in any way in a public space because they own this space, however, if women would behave the same way in the men's space, it would be problematic, inappropriate or would attract attention. This scene presents an idea about how the space of men and women is different and how they behave in these spaces is important. Spain (1992) discusses about how men and women form two different groups in terms of space and status. Geographical and architectural spatial arrangements have helped create status differences between men and women across cultures and throughout history (Spain, 1992, p. 3).

In this chapter, I am looking at the spaces of women and men characters in the movie and how they behave in these spaces. I will be looking at some scenes to discuss the spaces of both the gender and the difference between these spaces. I will be closely observing where the women are allowed to go and not go and also analyze if they are allowed to move freely within the spaces, they are in. I will also be using relevant scenes from the other two movies as examples to support my arguments.

In discussing the spaces in the movies in which men and women are in, we see women mostly inside the house, in private spaces while men are seen everywhere, both the public and private sphere. Jones (2013) argues that most scholars use the term 'public' to describe the spaces that are accessible to everyone, for example, the streets, whereas private spaces are those whose access is normally restricted by personal and institutional ownership, for example, home and religious spaces. The concept of separate spheres, discussed by Spencer-Wood et al. (2013), which has been prevalent in various cultures and societies for a long time now, suggests that men belong to the public sphere while women are engaged in private and domestic spaces (Spencer-Wood, 1991, 237, as cited in Spencer-Wood et al., 2013, p. 1). Women are destined to the boundaries of home and are limited to the domestic sphere of housework and motherhood which has been presented in these movies too. The scenes from *Kusume Rumal* which presented Amar's mother in the kitchen cooking and serving food to the men as I already discussed in the second chapter presents a clear idea of how the private sphere of the home and kitchen is a woman's space.



FIGURE 15: Raj's mother cutting some fruits in the kitchen.

The first scene *Darpan Chhaya* presented in the figure 15 presents Raj's mother in the kitchen cutting fruits while the father is shown praying in another room. The married women playing the roles of mothers in these movies are seen only inside the houses while the men go outside and work. Works that has integrated gender into the studies of space has focused on a divide between male public and female private, where married women are generally associated to the domestic space (Jones, 2013, p. 248). Various scholars have talked about how women master at taking care of the home and their children, while men are best at going out of the home in the public space conducting activities including wars, fieldworks, businesses, and governments among others (Robertson, 1992, Matthaei, 1982, as cited in Spencer-Wood et al., 2013, p. 1).

Similar portrayal of women in the domestic space is seen in *Kusume Rupal* where Amar's mother is never seen leaving the house and is always seen in the kitchen. Amar's mother is presented in a similar setting in *Kusume Rupal* with closed and cluttered spaces and household appliances surrounding her. It is argued that the middle-class homemaker was engineered to be socially satisfied for being contained within the private sphere of the home (Haralovich, 1989, p. 61). In this regard, the arguments of Haralovich (1989) are similar to the arguments of Beauvoir

(1949/2011) regarding women belonging to their homes as I discussed earlier in the second chapter.

When we see the image above, we see that the woman is not the center of the frame, a bunch of household appliances surround her, the window behind her is closed by a curtain, she has a very small space in the frame while the household items cover most of the space of the frame suggesting that her being in the kitchen in closed wall is important in terms of how she is presented. Furthermore, the cluttered spaces and cluttering of the side shows that she has a little space in the frame suggesting that it is difficult for her to move within the space she is in.

Also, because women are destined in these private spaces and men are meant to go out in the public spaces and own these spaces, men are seen involved in better jobs than women. Various feminist scholars have discussed various theories about space and gender. Spain (1992) in the book 'Gendered Spaces' talks about an article titled "City and Home: Urban Housing and the sexual division of Space," in which McDowell (1983) has argued that the construction of spaces in capitalist societies have been divided into masculine centers of production and feminine suburbs of reproduction (p. 7).

This has been presented in these movies as well. Amar's and Suniti's fathers in *Kusume Rumal* work for the Army, Smriti's father in *Darpan Chhaya* is a Judge, similarly, the head of the schools and colleges shown in these movies are all men, while we see only a handful of women including Joon in *Bir Bikram* and some women in *Darpan Chhaya* working as teachers. According to Spain (1992), masculine spaces contain knowledge of law, medicine and theology which are socially valued while feminine spaces, mostly home, contain the devalued knowledge of cooking, child care and cleaning (p. 10). When American women began to enter the labor force in the nineteenth century, the relatively few jobs open to them were highly segregated by gender. Domestic service and teaching were acceptable female occupations, but factory and clerical work were controversial because they placed women in the same spaces as men (Spain, 1992, p. 14). As the movie is also from the twentieth century, we see the similar trend here where teaching was one of the most acceptable professions for women in *Darpan Chhaya* while men were doing all kinds of work.

Even though the lead characters in these movies are not always seen inside the home, they have boundaries on if they can go to certain places and in certain time. For example, Joon in

*Bir Bikram* is unable to move outside of the village to pursue her dreams of becoming a singer because she likes Bir who lives in the village. However, in case of Bir, he is often travelling out of the village because of his work, and Bikram moves to the city to study. Similarly, Smriti and her friends face a challenge from the men if they can go to the river and join them because they have restrictions on where they can go. Similarly, in another scene in the movie, which I will be discussing later, the boys find it problematic and inappropriate as Smriti and her friends shout in the college.

Spain (1992) argues that domestic service and housework kept women within this private sphere and as they stayed inside the homes, it created less public disapproval compared to when they went outside the home, in contact to men in the public sphere working in more controversial and clerical jobs (p. 172). Because women started to move outside of the home to be in the same spaces as men, it was problematic and raised disapproval from those who argued that the women's place is the home and the private sphere. When the women started to mingle freely with men at work, they started to undermine the gendered spaces of male and female spheres (Spain, 1992, p. 171).

Hanson and Pratt (1995) argue that the relationships among gender, employment and geography emerged in the late nineteenth and twentieth century and are highly implicated in the gendered ideas of the public and the private spaces (p. 94). This distinction divided the women, suburbs and femininity, into the private sphere while the city, men and masculinity were placed into the public sphere.

Looking at how independent the lead characters in the movies I have selected for my analysis are, how they are making choices about their lives and how they are seen in the same spaces as men makes the representation of women a bit hopeful. However, the study of the spaces women are in and how they are allowed to behave in certain spaces makes their representation problematic and different from that of men. I will be discussing various scenes and images from the movies to show how the portrayal of women in terms of spaces is problematic and different from that of the spaces of men.

Even though Smriti is seen in the college and mostly in the public space and not just at home, there are moments where she is judged about her character if she behaves in a different way than she was supposed to in the public space. To take an example of how the movie presents

this, let me discuss a scene where some boys along with Raj and Abhishek are gathered to look at if some good-looking girls joined the college for the new session. This scene is an example of how women are there to be looked at and men are there to look at women as discussed by Laura Mulvey (1975), which I have already discussed in my first chapter. The boys are there standing, looking at women and deciding if they would like any girl passing by. This scene is an example of how women are portrayed as objects of desire for men. The scene suggests that women are passersby while the men sit there and look at them and further shows that the public space is men's space and women are objects to be looked at in men's space.

The way the boys are sitting and looking at women as shown in figure 16 reminds me of the audience sitting in a stadium, the only difference is here they are looking at girls and not a match as they would do in a stadium.



FIGURE 16: Raj and his friends gather to look at women.

The girls passing by don't look directly at the boys, they are unaware that they are being looked at and are not returning the male gaze. This representation suggests that women are the objects of the look who don't look back, further implying them as objects who can't react and return the gaze.





FIGURE 17: A group a girls in the college passing by.

Meanwhile I argue that because it is the men's space, the public space which they own, they are allowed to behave that way and are allowed to look at women in that space. What we could not imagine here is a group of girls gathered in a public space looking at boys and deciding if a boy among the ones passing by would be a proper match for them. This would be uncommon in the movies for two reasons, first, men look at women and not the other way around as Mulvey (1975) argues, and second, because women don't own this public space, they are not allowed to behave in the same way they would in a private space, such as the home. Spain (1992) argues that because the location of knowledge and power is made inaccessible for women, the system of existing gender stratification has limited women to the private sphere while men own the public space (p. 4).





FIGURE 18: Smriti, dressed up in white, walking up the stairs in the college.

The next thing that is problematic in terms of the representation of women in this scene is how women are assumed to behave in the public space. As the boys continue to look, Smriti enters the frame walking upstairs as presented in figure 18, she is dressed in white and has a book in her hand which she carries close to her chest. The color of the walls on the two sides of the frame is white while the image presents the clear sky above her. She enters the frame dressed in white to compliment the color of the walls and the clear sky above her. The camera zooms in to show a medium close-up of her, cuts, and presents a medium shot of the boys, so we know that the boys are looking at her. As soon as she enters, the background music changes to a soft tune creating a serenity and the camera focuses on her appearance starting to focus her body from the bottom to top. However, she doesn't look back at the men which suggests that she is not returning the male gaze and is unaware that the men are looking at her. She is moving her eyes continuously from one direction to the other as if she is looking for someone, she looks shy with her eyes looking down towards the floor and looks confused. The boys who are standing there are making comments about how she is dressed and looking at how shy she is they assume that she would speak slowly in a soft tone or not speak at all.



FIGURE 19: Smriti looks confused as if she is looking for someone.

As Smriti is looking at several directions, the camera stops and zooms a girl upstairs, and cuts back to Smriti who now has her eyes focused at a point and is smiling. She shouts a name; her facial expressions change from a shy look to a happy and excited look as she runs towards the direction of the girl and the girls run towards her shouting. Now the way these girls are behaving and shouting in the public space result in the boys standing there cover their ears with their hands as shown in figure 20. They immediately start making comments about the girls questioning their characters as they believe that good girls would not shout in that way in the college. This scene presents an idea that this is not what women are supposed to do in a public space.



FIGURE 20: Raj and his friends covering their ears hearing the girls shout.

As the judgement of the boys about how a girl should behave in a particular place is rejected, she is judged by the boys who comment and question about her character and wonder if a girl from a good family should shout in a public space. Looking at her appearance at first, the boys assume Smriti to be a silent and shy girl, but the impression changes after she shouts in the public space. This portrayal is similar to the argument of Wylie, who claims that women are often supposed to behave as silent, passive, and domestic in western culture (Wylie, 1991, as cited in Spencer-Wood et al., 2013, p. 2). Joon in *Bir Bikram* and Suniti in *Kusume Rumal* possess the similar characters as silent and passive as argued by Wylie (1991). Based on my observations, this legacy of perceiving women as silent and passive individuals is relevant in Nepali society and not just the western societies in the ways Nepali culture and perceptions is highly inspired by the western culture.

Because it is a private sphere, to be more precise, men's space, a woman is not allowed to behave like she is in her house, a private space. Soon, Smriti is judged for her behavior and the boys conclude that she is not a good girl from a good family. We could never imagine a boy being judged about his character if he would behave that way in a public space because it is his space and he is allowed to do anything he wants in that space. For women, there is this boundary

about where she can go and not go and how she needs to behave in a certain space. How men and women should behave in the home is not only negotiated in the home but also in other spaces such as work, at school and at social events (Bowlby, Foord and McDowell 1986, as cited in Spain, 1992, p. 7).



FIGURE 21: Smriti and Abhishek collide with each other.

The scene continues and as the girls run towards each other shouting, Abhishek is shown in the frame, Smriti enters the frame and collides with him as shown in figure 21. She falls on the ground and so does Abhishek. Smriti is angry at Abhishek and shouts if he is a blind to have not seen her at all and collide.



FIGURE 22: Smriti looks furious as she blames Abhishek for colliding with her.

Meanwhile, Raj enters the frame, he is furious that she is not realizing the mistake to be asking if he is a blind, which is a fact in the movie. Smriti is unaware of the fact that Abhishek is visually impaired, so she claims that it is not her fault. Raj threatens her and asks her to apologize. Figure 23 below shows Raj threatening Smriti, his eyes looking straight ahead with his face looking furious. The anger of the man is justified here as if he is telling the woman how dare she speak in a public space like that and at the same time he is threatening her to know her place. The scene shows all men and one woman, men overpowering her and the woman trying to stand up for herself arguing that it was not her fault.





FIGURE 23: Raj looks furious as he threatens Smriti.



FIGURE 24: The tension between Raj and Smriti as they stand up for themselves.

But soon the woman who wants to be herself in the men's space is reminded of her place when Abhishek asks Raj not to be angry as she has told the truth of him being blind. Smriti

realizes her mistake, she is soon put in her place and is reminded that she can't be herself in a public space. As she is reminded of her place and her mistake, Smriti apologizes to Abhishek telling him that she was unaware of his disability as shown in figure 25.



FIGURE 25: Smriti apologizing to Abhishek.

To analyze the entire scene, first, Smriti goes to the debate with the men, however, as she is not supposed to behave that way in the public space, she is soon reminded of her guilt and her place and apologizes to Abhishek. This way she is not only apologizing to Abhishek, but to all the men for being herself in the public space as she is not allowed to behave the way she did in the first place.

Smriti and her friends are going to the college and the spaces they are in is different from that of the mothers, however, they can't go everywhere inside the college. They are not seen going everywhere in the college where men are. We see men are free to go to places inside the college and outside in the streets and in other public spaces, while women have to think twice before they wander freely in the streets especially during the night. This representation is similar to my discussion in the second chapter, where I discussed how women would attract attention, would be teased or even raped if they wandered freely in the streets especially in the night which is also argued by Beauvoir (1949/2011). Also, we see that the men and women in the college are

always in groups. Girls have their own group of girls where a man is not allowed to enter, and boys have their own groups where it is not possible for a girl to enter.

Similarly, if we closely look at the design of Raj's house in the movie, there is a living room as soon as one enters the house. Next to the living room is Raj's room, let's call it his private space inside the house. The living room then leads to the kitchen and next to the kitchen is the master bedroom for the couple, Raj's parents. This design is similar to what Haralovich (1989) describes as the 'open floor plan' which provided a living environment for the whole family (p. 67). This plan would allow the entire family members to access the whole space of the house as there would be few walls separating the different rooms. Figure 26 below shows that the living room and kitchen of the house is separated by a thin white curtain.



FIGURE 26: The kitchen and the living room separated by a thin white curtain.

This way what we see is that the housewife does not have a private space even inside the house. For her, the space of kitchen, dining room and living room is her space and she is totally isolated from the outside world (Haralovich, 1989, p. 77). The only moments we see Raj's mother is in the kitchen, once in the bedroom with her husband, and once in the living room with her son and husband. The only moment we see her alone is in the kitchen, however, she is soon accompanied by someone. This way we know that she doesn't have any private space inside the



house. Similar example can be seen in *Kusume Rumal* where Amar's mother has no private space inside the house and is seen with her husband in the kitchen. Also, we never see these women go outside of the house. They are always seen inside, either in the kitchen cooking or in the living rooms taking care of their sons and waving them goodbye before they go to the college. Jones (2013) argues that from at least the eighth century, public and common spaces were designed to be spacious while private spaces were supposed to be dark, cluttered, and disorganized (p. 255). As private spaces belong to women, these spaces are dark and cluttered and are not spacious enough to fulfill a rational function.

In the first scene of *Darpan Chhaya* where Raj's mother is sitting in the kitchen, she hears a voice from the other room of her husband talking to someone saying how he adores her and wants her to come to his house. The way the sound coming from one room can be heard in the other room suggests the idea of open space inside the house. Raj's mother suspects that her husband is talking to another woman in the other room. She gets angry, picks up the knife she is using to cut the fruits and goes to the other room with the knife in her hand as presented in figure 27. The only way she can confront her husband is by bringing with her, the knife, a representation of the domestic space. This scene suggests that the only way the woman could enter the man's space is by taking with her, a symbol of her private space. This portrayal further makes it clear how women have restrictions on the spaces they can move within and how they should behave in men's space.



FIGURE 27: Raj's mother carrying a knife as she confronts her husband.

#### 4.3.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the spaces men and women are in *Darpan Chhaya* and analyzed these spaces in terms of representation of gender in the movie presenting and analyzing the examples from the rest of the two movies. Looking at the scenes and the various images in the movie, I argued that feminine spaces are private and public spaces belong to men.

I further argued that as the spaces women and men are in are different, it would be problematic if either of them entered each other's spaces. Also, it would be inappropriate for women especially in public space to behave and act in the same way they would do in a private space. I also looked at occupational segregation of men and women and how the roles of men in workplaces is completely different to that of the men. As Spain (1992) argues that in modern workplace, there are not only women's and men's jobs but also men's and women's spaces (p. 15).

As women's place is argued to be the home, cooking cleaning and caring the child and the men, is what they are meant to do, and this routine of women has been argued to have

occupied women in the private space while men are meant to dominate the public arena (Lamphere, 1987, as cited in Spain, 1992, p. 22).

To sum up, as these spatial boundaries have been creating unequal status for women for a long time, they need to change places and work with men in the public arena. We have examples of women going out and asking for equal pay and better jobs in the present context, however, the Nepali movies at present fail to highlight this representation, rather than suggesting that women are still shown in the domestic spaces and status.

## 5 [Conclusion]

In this section, I briefly summarize the findings of this thesis.

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

The major findings of this study include:

- **Women as objects of desire for men:** The findings suggest that the women characters in the selected Nepali movies are presented as the objects of desire for men. I studied three scenes from *Bir Bikram* with examples from *Kusume Rumal* and *Darpan Chhaya* to argue that women are there to be looked at by men, they are presented as fragments and are portrayed as silent characters. And this representation presented female characters as sexual objects who can be owned by men.
- **Women as the ‘Second Sex’:** Women characters in the movies are portrayed as ‘the second sex’ meaning, they are identified in relation to men and have no existence without men. I analyzed various images and scenes from *Kusume Rumal* with examples from *Darpan Chhaya* and *Bir Bikram* to argue that women are presented as the ‘Second Sex’ in the movies. I argued that the movies presented this by portraying women as housewives and caretakers; by showing that marriage is the ultimate career of a woman and presenting women as the ones who wait for men.
- **Women and Space:** My final argument is that women belong to the private spaces of home and the kitchen while men dominate the public space. I analyzed the various scenes in *Darpan Chhaya* to analyze the spaces of men and women presenting examples from *Bir Bikram* and *Kusume Rumal*. The findings also suggest that women have limitations in terms of spaces, meaning, they aren’t allowed to move freely and behave in certain way in certain spaces.

The findings suggest similar patterns in terms of portrayal of women in all of the three selected movies. Comparing the portrayal of women in the three selected movies, I find that there has been no change in this portrayal over the years.

Women characters continue to be portrayed as sexual objects of desire in the movies even at present. The various scenes that I discussed in Chapter I including the waving of hair of female intended for men, men looking at women and women as silent characters, suggest that women are portrayed as objects that men can own. Similarly, women continue to be presented as sexual beings in relation to men, which I referred to the 'Second Sex' while men are the Absolute. All of the movies presented some female characters in the roles of housewives and caretakers. Even though the lead female characters didn't play the roles of housewives, I argued that the movies presented them as the 'Second Sex' because they prioritized marriage over their career and desperately waited for men.

Likewise, all three movies had an important place for marriage, I discussed the scenes and moments in the movies in Chapter II which showed the importance of marriage for the female characters. However, for men, finding a partner and getting married was just an element of their lives.

Similarly, the study of the spaces of men and women in all movies showed the hierarchy of the gender in terms of space – women belong to the private sphere of home and the cluttered spaces of the kitchen, while men dominate the public space. Women characters in the movies were restricted to move freely in the public space of men mostly during the night as they would attract attention, be teased and even raped by men if they did so. Also, analyzing some scenes from *Darpan Chhaya*, I argued that women are often judged if they behaved in a way they weren't supposed to in public spaces.

All in all, the thesis analyzed the portrayal of women in three popular romantic movies over a period of three decade with the use of textual analysis and various elements of Mise-en-scene and three classic theories on women and cinema.

## 6 [Epilogue]

### **Representation of women in Nepali and Nordic movies: A Comparison**

This chapter attempts on beginning to compare the portrayal of women in Nepali movies to that of the movies in the Nordic countries. Throughout the chapter, I will begin to discuss how female characters are presented in movies and media in Nordic countries using the various literature available and compare it to my findings on the representation of women in the selected Nepali movies. As I already mentioned in my introduction and research aims, the reason for me to compare female representation in movies of Nepal and Nordic context, the two regions being so different from each other is: first to see how Nepali media and female representation in the movies measure up and compare to the Nordic context and the other reason being the requirement of my degree.

In the earlier chapters, I discussed the various discussions and debates on women and media. Various studies over the years have shown that women and men have been presented in stereotypical roles; women as housewives, caretakers and protection seekers, and men as strong, independent characters who protect women. I discussed a study analyzing women's portrayal in American crime serials, the findings of which showed that women were presented as passive, inefficient, unintelligent, mentally, morally, and physically weak characters dependent on men while the male characters were the ones who saved the women (Simson, 1978, as cited in Basri & Ibrahim, 2004, p. 12). Similarly, studies show that women have been underrepresented in the media, they are almost invisible and are presented as sexual objects of desire for men (Basri & Ibrahim, 2004). However, the findings of a study of gender role portrayal in nine Disney Princess movies released between 1937 to 2009 suggest that there have been some changes in the gender role portrayal over time, however, roles of male characters were seen to have gone through less change than that of the female characters (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011).

Much of these discussions on global media and portrayal of women present similar arguments as my findings; women are mostly presented in the roles of housewives, caretakers and objects of desire, the characteristics of the male and female actors in the movies are stereotyped: to provide some examples, the protagonist *Raj* in *Darpan Chhaya* and the antagonist

*Rakesh* in *Kusume Rumal* are the aggressive ones, the other male characters *Bir* and *Bikram* in *Bir Bikram* and *Amar* in *Kusume Rumal* are strong, independent, capable, successful and demanding, while the female characters *Suniti*, *Kanchhi*, *Amar's mother* in *Kusume Rumal*, *Smriti* in *Darpan Chhaya* and *Joon* in *Bir Bikram* are caring, gentle, passive, dependent, weak and often presented as sexually attractive.

In the rest of this chapter, I will begin to discuss the portrayal of women in Nordic media and movies and start to compare my findings to the available literature on women and media in the Nordic context. Searching the literature on portrayal of women in Nordic cinema, what I found is that there is surprisingly little writing available in the English language. It was interesting to see and find only a handful of articles on gender and cinema in Nordic context, meanwhile, this problem made it difficult for me to entirely compare my findings to that of the Nordic context.

After searching for a long time, because I was able to find only a few writings in English language on gender and cinema in the Nordic context, in the epilogue, I have only started to discuss and compare the portrayal of women in Nepali and Nordic cinema. This is my attempt to begin to talk about gender and cinema in Nepali and the Nordic context, and with the help of this epilogue, I believe I am opening a path for further studies and research on this topic.

### **6.1 Portrayal of women in Nordic media and movies**

When we talk about Nordic countries, these countries are mostly noted for their high level of gender equality compared to the rest of the world. According to Djerf-Pierre (2005), almost 50 percent of Swedish journalists are female, which clearly shows women's exceptional participation in media in Sweden. In a region where gender quality is a major characteristic, portrayal of women in media clearly is assumed to be stronger and better compared to the rest of the world.

The old literature suggest that the power elites consist of men with supporting women and housewives connecting men and families through marriage. And these women support these men to achieve their goals (Djerf-Pierre, 2005, p. 268). However, the situation has changed in the recent decades where women have started to move into spheres and positions that were

previously informally been reserved for men and this can be seen in the political sector of the Nordic countries where female participation has increased broadly (Djerf-Pierre 2005, p. 268).

Meanwhile, a comparison of prime-time television content in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands in 1998 by Eie showed that women were portrayed in roles associated to lower social status: 47 percent as ordinary citizens and 37 percent as ‘victims’ compared to men who were portrayed as experts (80 percent) and politicians (72 percent) (Eie, 1998, as cited in Basri & Ibrahim, 2004, p. 13). This portrayal, Basri and Ibrahim (2004) argue, is unrealistic as women’s participation in most of the sectors including politics, economics, science and business among others in these countries is high, for example, 31 percent women in Germany and 43 percent women in Sweden represent the national parliaments (United Nations, 2000, as cited in Basri & Ibrahim, 2004, p. 13). Likewise, the highest number of female representation in the parliament is in the Scandinavian countries with 39 percent in Finland, 36 percent in Norway, 33 percent in both Denmark and Sweden (MacFarquhar, 1994, pp. 42-48, as cited in Wiles, Tjerlund, & Wiles, 1995, p. 37).

A study by Wiles, Tjerlund, & Wiles (1995) on the gender role portrayal in magazine advertising across three nations including the USA, Sweden and the Netherlands shows cultural biases and stereotypes in the portrayal. These nations, according to the writers, are those who have a recent history of advancements of women in various sectors including politics and workplaces among others and these countries also represent unique cultures (p. 38). The findings of the study suggest that the magazine advertisements in all the three countries show men in working roles rather than women even though women have made much more progress in politics and the workplaces in these countries (Wiles, Tjerlund, & Wiles, 1995, p. 46). Moreover, Swedish and Dutch advertising were found more likely to present men as high-level executives.

## **6.2 Comparison of portrayal of women in Nepali and Nordic Cinema**

### **6.2.1 Women as victims and objects**

Now let me discuss the portrayal of women in some of the movies in the Nordic context. A study on female characters in Icelandic movies produced between 1992 and 2012 shows that



many Icelandic movies still present the female characters as powerless victims of violence even though the country is famous for social safety, political power and gender equality (Konefal, 2012, pp. 133-134). According to the statistics, an equal number of male and female became members of the Icelandic government in 2009 and in the same year, for the first time a female politician became the prime minister of the country. Similarly, only 3 women accounting as 5 percent of its members worked in Icelandic parliament in 1979, while this number increased to nine, accounting to 15 percent in 1983 (Konefal, 2012, pp. 133-134). In the year 1991, women candidates were elected for 25 percent of the seats in the parliament (Gender Equality in Iceland, 1995, p. 26, as cited in Konefal, 2012, pp. 133-134).

Even though the statistics suggest the improving situation of women in Iceland in social, political and on the labor market, however, the study of their representation in movies produced in Iceland between 1992 and 2012 fail to focus on this progress and present women as victims (Konefal, 2012, p. 34). The study claims that most scenarios in Icelandic movies present female characters as victims of domestic violence struggling with alcoholism, hostile social system and brutal behavior of their partners (Konefal, 2012). Presenting women as victims is close to presenting them as objects who can be exploited and victimized. This representation is similar to my findings in Nepali movies where women are treated as objects, often teased by men in the streets and are likely to be victims of domestic violence. In the previous chapters, I presented the examples in which Kanchhi and other female characters in *Kusume Rumal*, Smriti and her friends in *Darpan Chhaya* are often teased by men in the streets.

To present an example of how women in the movies in Iceland are presented as victims and objects for men, let me present an example of an Icelandic movie *Agnes* produced in the year 1995. The female protagonist Agnes works as a maid in the house of sinister sheriff, a man who holds the supervision over the country. The sheriff uses every opportunity to seduce her (Konefal, 2012, p. 136). In the movie, Agnes, along with her daughter, is about to be sold to a person who offers the highest money to buy her, but is, however, saved by her lover. This depiction is similar to the findings in *Kusume Rumal* and *Bir Bikram* where the female protagonists are saved and rescued from something bad by men. Also, the idea of how a woman can be sold and bought by money present her as an object.

Konefal (2012) argues that in the beginning, Agnes is presented as the victim of sexual violence who struggles to survive in a world ruled by brutal men (p. 136). Later, the film changes its perspective and presents her as a young, beautiful, sexually attractive woman who men want to possess. The character of Agnes is similar to the female characters Joon, Smriti and Suniti in my movies who are sexually attractive and beautiful, and this portrayal presents them as nothing but sexual objects for men who want to own them.

The portrayal of women as objects can also be seen in the Finnish movie *The Match Factory Girl*, where the female protagonist Iris is presented as a silent character. As I discussed in Chapter I 'Women as objects of desire of men', silence is the form of repression and voice in feminist discourse is an essential metaphor for the condition of being presented as object. Iris is voiceless when she is rejected, and she is silent most of the times in the movie (Kivimaki, 2012, p. 79). Kivimaki (2012) interprets Iris's silence as a sign of her lack of voice. She resembles Joon in *Bir Bikram* as both of them are silent and choose not to speak and this silence marks the condition for being represented as objects.

### **6.2.2 Women as housewives and caretakers**

Gurdin (1996) claims that independence is still poorly perceived in Icelandic society, where the society even today prepares girls from an early age for the role of housewives (Gurdin, 1996, as cited in Konefal, 2012, p. 135). The best example of such attachment to the patriarchal social system, according to him, is the meaning of the noun "husbondi", which not only is a word with the meaning 'husband', but also, literally means, 'master of the house' a person who is the leader of the family (Gurdin, 1996, p. 134, as cited in Konefal, 2012, p. 135). The portrayal as men as the head of the family is similar to my analysis of Nepali movies, where men are the breadwinners and women support them by taking care of them and cooking for them.

The Nepali movies I studied are filled with the idea that a woman's place is her home. This idea is prevalent even in Icelandic movies. In the movie *Stormy Weather* directed in 2003, a female character Loa is suffering from mental disorder. The female protagonist in the movie, Cora, works as a psychiatrist in a mental hospital. Two of the male characters in the movie Gunnar, Loa's husband and Einar, who knows about her illness, both are against the

protagonist's treatment because they think that her place is at the home and not in the hospital (Konefal, 2012, p. 139). This clearly shows how men believe women to be the mistress of the homes and not doing something else on the public sphere.

### **6.2.3 Women and Marriage**

In the earlier chapters, I discussed how the Nepali movies I analyzed presented marriage as an important element in a woman's life. Getting married is a social achievement for women, in marrying they not only become socially accepted but also find a protector for themselves. Similar argument is presented in Icelandic movies.

In the movie *The Honour of the House* (Icelandic: *Ungfrúin góða og húsið*) produced in 1999, the female protagonist Rannveig is sent to Copenhagen by her parents to find a suitable candidate for a husband. A woman getting married to a suitable man is the primary focus in the movie. However, she is seduced by her sister's ex-lover and returns home pregnant. Her family conclude that her child has to be sent to an orphanage to save the honor of the house, so she is forced to give her baby away, which leads her to mental breakdown (Konefal, 2012, pp. 136-137). As the movie progresses, as an act of revenge on her family, she starts an affair with a worker from her family farm and gets pregnant again. Now in order to save the integrity of the family again, she is forced into marriage which she protests by marrying a retarded and physically disabled man (Konefal, 2012, pp. 136-137).

The importance of marriage for a woman is clearly presented here because the family wants Rannveig to get married in order to save the dignity of the house. In marrying, she would find a suitable man for her who would be her protector and lead her to a happy life as I discussed earlier in Chapter II 'Women as the Second Sex.' Because she gets pregnant without getting married, she is considered to be a social waste and someone who would jeopardize the honor of the family. Talking about the female representation in Icelandic movies, Konefal (2012) argues that the movies presents female protagonists as those who are unable to determine their own lives. The decisions women make in the movie shows that they are merely a helpless tool to maintain the patriarchal order (Konefal, 2012, p. 137)

Kivimaki (2012) argues that marriage is a means of livelihood for women and an alternative to earning money by themselves (p. 77). This representation is shown in a study on *The Workers' Trilogy*, which includes three Finnish films *Shadows in Paradise* (1986), *Ariel* (1988) and *The Match Factory Girl* (1990). In *Shadows in Paradise* the female protagonist Ilona asks the male protagonist Nikander if he is able to support her economically before she decides to follow him. Likewise, the female protagonist Irmeli in *Ariel* quits one of her part-time jobs to have dinner with a man Taisto and at the end of the movie, she leaves her jobs and apartment for him. Similarly, Iris in *The Match Factory Girl* dreams of a better future with a rich man, Aarne (Kivimaki, 2012, p. 77). The characters of Ilona, Irmeli and Iris fail to fit with the general image of Finnish women as strong and independent as their lives revolve around the men (Markkola, 2002, as cited in Kivimaki, 2012, p. 79). Hence, marriage is the ultimate career not only for women in Nepali movies but also for women in Nordic movies.

#### **6.2.4 Women and Space**

A study titled 'Intimacies: Spaces of work, life and sexuality in *The Norrtull Gang*', Brauerhoch (2015) examines *The Norrtull Gang* as a film which explore solidarity and community and the physical realities of working lives in office and home (p. 81). The Swedish movie follows the lives of four working-class women, Pegg, Eva, Emmy and Baby, who live in a shared flat in Stockholm. For the four women in the movie, city life also involves poverty and lack of private space as they share a flat and work in private spaces (p. 83). The space they live in is feminine because of two reasons: One the signs on the wall read 'Men may under no circumstances have a seat in a ladies' compartment' and the other reason is the relaxed bodily behavior and physical intimacy among the women (p. 82). In this sense, Brauerhoch (2015) argues that the film pays close attention to female space of closeness and harmony and provides these women with possibilities of moving and living.

This possibility of moving within spaces in this movie is however, violated in workplace and private spaces of house when the two sexes meet as Brauerhoch (2015) puts it 'it is a dance of male abuse and female deference, of women's struggle for integrity and men's disregard for boundaries' (p. 83). Brauerhoch (2015) presents an example of this as she writes:

The boss summons his secretary for a dictation. He uses the pretext of taking a closer look at her typing for a brush of the cheek, a hand on the shoulder. She tries to dodge but there is no room for her to move away, and it is difficult to rebuff him without being confrontational.

The film takes an observational stance. Who has the right and opportunity to rule over space?

This discussion presents the differences in the spaces men and women are in: men are mostly in the public spaces also argued by Spain (1992) while the only space women are free to move in the movie is their private apartment, which however, isn't entirely private as it is shared between the four women. The presentation of space and gender in this movie is similar to my findings of the chapter 'Gender and Space, where I talked about how men own the public spaces such as streets and workplaces among others while women are confined to the boundaries of home. The study of space in the movie *Norrtull Gang* suggests similar arguments of how women aren't allowed to move within public spaces while they own their private space in their apartment.

Even though some literature on the portrayal of women in the Nordic movies and media that I discussed above present similar arguments to that of the Nepali context, there has, however, been some changes in this portrayal in case of the Nordic context. This change has been discussed in a study titled 'Female desire, Puzzy Power and women-directed Scandinavian sex films.' In this study, Shriver-Rice (2015) talks about Lars von Trier's *Zentropa*, which in later 1990s became the first mainstream company to produce female audience-centered explicit movies with the 'Puzzy Power Manifesto'. The three Puzzy Power films *Constance* (1998), *Pink Prison* (1999) and *All about Anna* (2005) transformed women into sexual subjects from sexual objects desires and gazed by male characters (Shriver-Rice, 2015, p. 185). These movies kept women into the center and presented them as subjects rather than the traditional stereotypical representation of women as objects of desire.

This representation of women as subjects rather than objects is different to that of the Nepali movies where women are objectified and made sexually attractive to please men as I discussed earlier in Chapter I 'Women as objects of desire for men.' Shriver-rice (2015), talking about this representation, writes:

In *The Pink Prison* the photojournalist protagonist Mila bets her publisher that she will be able to land an interview with an infamous and elusive director of a men's prison. Is she wins, she will keep all profits from her photo-reportage; if she fails, she will go on a

romantic trip to Paris with her boss. The film opens with Mila holding a camera and objectifying men, a nod to the female gaze. She sustains this gaze throughout the interior scenes of the prison. Without help she breaks into the prison, watching the men in various scenes of undress and sexual interaction. She moves through space, looking, observing, investigating and partaking in sexual acts whenever she feels like it. As she progresses further into the prison her autonomous sexuality is highlighted with close-ups on her face registering desire; her decision to interact with the inmates stems not from her seduction or coercion by them, but from her own carnal need. At the close of the film, she successfully interviews the prison director (who turns out to be a woman). Most of the men she has encountered line up at the exit and smile respectfully as she walks out. Once outside she finds the publisher asleep in her jeep, waiting for her. She lets him know that she won the bet and says, 'I'll drive'. The film closes with her driving away, her male co-worker as passenger, in a reversal of the usual male-as-active, female-as-passive narrative (pp. 185-186).

There are a few things to pay attention and note on this scene from the movie *The Pink Prison*. First, it is not women who are objectified and gazed, rather it is woman who is looking at males and objectifying them. Hence the traditional 'Male Gaze' here is transformed into 'Female Gaze.' This is the exact opposite representation than that of the Nepali movies as I discussed in my findings that women in Nepali movies are the subjects of the male gaze. The idea of 'female gaze' would be unacceptable in Nepali movies as I already discussed women in Nepali movies are there to be looked at and not the other way around.

Second, the female protagonist Mila is holding a camera, is looking, observing and most importantly moving through spaces in the prison whenever she wants it, she is her own boss, she is confident, fearless and she questions the traditional stereotypical notion of how women shouldn't be herself in public space. What we see here is Mila owns this space, a public space, which is supposed to be a man's space in Nepali movies. Mila is exactly opposite of Smriti in *Darpan Chhaya* who tries to be herself in public space but remains quite as soon as a man reminds her that she is not allowed to be herself in his public space. Mila is in fact the opposite of all the female characters of my movies in the sense that she is her own master, she is strong,

independent and challenges the traditional notion of what a woman should be and how she should behave.

In Nordic cinema, digitally available feminist explicit films including *Puzzy Power* to *Dirty Diaries* are greatly helping women explore their sexuality and define it for themselves, as these countries have high level of gender equality, opportunities and empowerment for women and not just for men (Shriver-Rice, 2015, p. 188). These movies are in fact challenging the traditional representation of female in movies and media.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

In the chapter, I began to look at some of the literature on women and media in Nordic countries and started to compare this representation to the findings from my analysis of three Nepali movies. The various literature available on the portrayal of women in Nordic media and their analysis show a mixed kind of portrayal in Nordic countries which are known for their high level of gender equality.

Some of the literature I used here presented women in roles with low status compared to men. Men were represented as high-level executives in advertisements while women were mostly presented in recreational roles (Wiles, Tjerlund, & Wiles, 1995). I discussed the portrayal of female characters in Finnish and Icelandic movies as silent objects and as housewives and caretakers, which is similar to my findings.

Likewise, I discussed how some Icelandic and Finnish movies presented marriage as important element in the lives of the female characters. Also, a study on the Swedish movie *The Norrtull Gang* by Brauerhoch (2015) studied the spaces women and men are in and the findings show that men dominate the public space while women are mostly presented in private space of homes. All of this representation presented similar arguments as that of Nepali movies that I analyzed.

However, feminist explicit movies in Denmark and Sweden; *Puzzy Power* movies and *Dirty Diaries* question the traditional notion of women as objects as these movies present women as subjects. In these movies, women characters are independent, move fearlessly through spaces

which is uncommon in Nepali movies. Moreover, instead of objectifying female, these movies have objectified males and the male characters are presented as the subjects of the female gaze. All of this representation of women characters in Nordic movies is contrary to my findings of Nepali movies where women are represented as objects of desire and subjects of the male gaze.

To sum up, as I begin looking at the portrayal of women in Nordic movies, the available literature presents similar arguments as that of Nepali movies as; Women as object of desire, Women as the Second Sex; and Women belong to private space. However, some changes have been made in Nordic cinema over the years in terms of this representation as some of the movies present women as subjects who are independent, and this portrayal challenges the traditional stereotypes on gender.



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