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The Architect of Himself: Forging Essence through Existential Choices in *Pashupati Prasad*

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Abstract

Constructing the self in the realm of human society begets multiple challenges as the uncertainty of human life struggles in the immensity of human problems. However, human beings are compelled to exist because they are condemned to live; they are self-denying creatures who validate and make their life meaningful themselves. In this regard, this paper explores the process of constructing essence through existential choices in Pashupati Prasad (2016), a film directed by Dipendra K. Khanal, in light of the existentialist perspective. As the film depicts the struggle of Pashupati Prasad, the protagonist, it shows the existential choices that give meaning to his life. The relentless struggle makes him an existentialist who dares to challenge the constraints rather than surrender. In this connection, this research paper deals with three specific questions: Why does the film portray human difficulty as the driving force to make existential decisions? How does the film expose the existential choice of the protagonist that ignites his process of cultivating himself and illuminating his essence? What allows Pashupati Prasad to make his decision subjective, autonomous, and existential? To answer these questions, this research employs Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of 'existence precedes essence' and claims that the film Pashupati Prasad exposes human continuous refurbishment in the perpetuation of the process of becoming. It reveals that human beings are involved in the signifying process of essence through existential choices, which is entirely a subjective process, but the process is entrapped in a vicious cycle that never ends

Keywords: Becoming, Existentialism, Meaning, Signification, and Subjectivity

Introduction

The meaning of human existence or the essence of human life encapsulates the most contestatory comprehension in the human sphere. Do human lives encompass meaning with a significant purpose, or are they meaningless and demand constant effort in shaping their existential value? This is one of the toughest ontological questions in the human epistemic realm. The philosophical inquiry has become more intricate as the world is marching towards postmodernism, where self-reflexivity and flexibility have become the major components of

an individual who dares to exist in the world. Taking this instance into account, this study delves into existential choice as the remedy for constructing the essence of humans in the film *Pashupati Prasad* (2016), directed by Dipendra K. Khanal.

Pashupati Prasad gained sensational feedback from the audience soon after its release in 2016, and it instantly attracted the attention of the media, film critics, scholars, and researchers. The film portrays the relentless story of a common man who dares to fight against the brutality of the human world, deteriorated by moral ruptures and social disorientation. With the articulation of an anchoring storyline and magnanimous acting of the characters, for example, Khagendra Lamichhane as Pashupati Prasad Khakurel, Bipin Karki as *Bhasme Don*, and Barsha Siwakoti as Bunu, the film succeeded in receiving many awards, including the best Nepal Film Technicians' Awards (2016), LG Film Awards (2016), NEFTA Film Awards (2016), and FAAN Awards (2016) in different categories. The film became the way to achieve 'Moviemandu's Movie Person of the Year' for the director Khanal, through which the movie expanded its popularity.

Since the film revolves around the struggle of Pashupati Prasad, who has lost his parents in an earthquake and has come to Kathmandu to earn money and pay off his debt, Himalayan News Service illustrates, "The struggle of a common man in the city to repay his debts isn't a new storyline in films. A son trying to fulfill his parents' last wish too isn't a novel idea" (1). However, "even after putting together these commonly used ideas, the new movie *Pashupati Prasad* wins your heart, thanks to its strong storyline, actors' notable performances, witty dialogues, and creditable cinematography" (1). Although the film seriously deals with the issue of economic depression and the struggle of individuals to consolidate financial stability in a religious setting, critics like Dikshya Karki do not fail to engage with the issue of women's subjectivity in the film. She undertakes women characters as "Mute Dancing Subjects." For her, "Women are helpless, left in the background as voiceless or muted from the narrative" (136). Moreover, she asserts, "Pashupati's romantic interest [*Bunu*] cannot speak, and she communicates with him through glances. Since all her hopes are on meeting Pashupati, and he does not turn up, she remains silent, her desires unfulfilled" (136). To the godmother with whom Pashupati Prasad meets in an old age home, Karki opines, "Pashupati's godmother . . . also waits for him and is disheartened. He is the key to their happiness, and they are left stranded without him" (136). Karki considers Pashupati Prasad as a center of women's character, and their existence is anchored in Pashupati's assertion.

Indeed, Pashupati Prasad becomes the hope for the women characters in the film; nevertheless, it is also significant to understand the effort he endures in molding his position, which makes him an adorable character from a stranger. More importantly, amid the hardships, including the death of his parents, economic crisis, and tussle with the local baddies and city economic vampires—gold shop owners—Pashupati Prasad exceeds the difficulties with firm determination, even though he loses his life in the end. Against these backdrops, this study explores his choices in consolidating the essence of his life from an existential perspective. To substantiate the argument, it employs Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of

“existence precedes essence.” For Sartre, “Man is indeed a project that has a subjective existence, rather unlike that of a patch of moss, a spreading fungus, or a cauliflower. Prior to that projection of the self, nothing exists, not even in divine intelligence, and man shall attain existence only when he is what he projects himself to be—not what he would like to be” (23). Existential aspiration determines the meaning of life because human beings are ‘condemned to live.’ Thus, the existential perspective is deliberately used in this study because “Existentialism is a doctrine that makes human life possible and also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity” (18). In this regard, this study investigates the projections of the protagonist, Pashupati Prasad, in constructing himself.

This article is divided into two sections: Pashupati Prasad as an Existentialist: The Landscape of Choices and The Subjectivity of Existence: A Signifying Process of Becoming, especially focusing on two different stages of the protagonist in which he wrestles to confirm his existence. The first section discusses his existential choices in which he dares to fight the brutal world and enjoys the meaning of life, and in the second section, the study delves into the issue of the subjective determination of the protagonist's existence in the cycle of becoming. Although the discussions will proceed across several characters of the film who assist in cultivating the essence of the protagonist, the study concentrates its focus on Pashupati Prasad and his act of projection in making his existential choice.

Pashupati Prasad as an Existentialist: The Landscape of Choices

After the death of his parents in the earthquake, Pashupati Prasad becomes a lonely character who strives to give pace to his life through struggle and toil. He is engulfed in the chasm of debt and the heart-piercing words of the lender. While performing the funeral ritual of the parents, one of the lenders dishearteningly says, “They say that [the] gates of heaven don’t open for [those] who die unpaid debts. Will you be able to open the gates of heaven for your father?” (00:09:35-00:09:41). In response, Pashupati Prasad exclaims, “Don’t talk down to me because I am poor. I have people in high places. I won’t scatter my parents’ ashes until I pay your debts. Mark my words!” (00:09:43-00:09:52). With his firm determination, Pashupati Prasad vows to pay the debt, rescue his parents’ souls from purgatory, and let them enter heaven; but at the same time, he also chooses to struggle and prove his meaningfulness. Indeed, he lacks any support that could help him pay the debt, and in such a situation where the possibility of rescuing becomes a fairy tale, he dares to act upon the dark and oblique circumstances. In doing so, he makes himself an existentialist because as J. B. Coates contends, “The existentialists are at one with the empiricists as against the idealists in their recognition of the importance of brute fact, of the formal emptiness of systems in which there is not a continual checking of speculation by fact” (234). Since existentialists are beyond the compass of factual data, they are not destined for the truthfulness of the subject but rather the creation of truths. In the same way, Pashupati Prasad boldly objects to the lender for his cruel words and claims his ability to clear the debt, ensuring his touch with high people, but he was never aware of the vulnerability of those he was making perfunctory.

In doing so, Pashupati Prasad cultivates himself and constructs his existential value

through a series of choices that incubate the true being of himself. As Sartre contends, “Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself” (22). In this context, Pashupati Prasad encounters himself as a helpless character yet does not hesitate to continue his existential journey. He moves to Kathmandu, Pashupatinath Temple, from his home, Sindhupalchok, and meets his Sworn Father [Mitbaa] Til Bahadur Baniya, unwary to know that his Mitbaa was not a rich man but a corpse incinerator who makes little money out of it. He is struggling to sustain his life because of economic depression. Interestingly, he finds a stark difference between the Mitbaa he met in childhood and the same Mitbaa he met in Kathmandu. The difference can be seen in the following snapshots:



Fig I. Mitbaa in Sindhupalchok



Fig. II. Mitbaa in Kathmandu

In Fig. I., Pashupati Prasad, as a child on the left, encounters his Mitbaa, on the right, with fashionable clothes, goggles, a Newsboys cap, and a fresh appearance. He is projected as a rich man with confidence and versatility. This reality is imprinted in the minds of young Pashupati Prasad, and it becomes a touchstone for recognizing his Mitbaa. However, when he finds Mitbaa in Kathmandu, he discovers his Mitbaa in a weak attire and loose fashion. Fig II. is the resemblance of the *new* Mitbaa on the left and adult Pashupati Prasad on the right; Mitbaa is wearing a Nepali Hat [*Dhaka Topi*] instead of a Newsboy cap; he has no goggles; he looks anxious, and his movement displays agony. Indeed, Pashupati Prasad recognizes his Mitbaa despite the sharp contrast, but does not get an opportunity to share his astonishment. It happens so because when Pashupati Prasad, at first, meets Mitbaa, he denies confessing his acknowledgment of his sworn son. When Pashupati Prasad shows the neckless of *Shivaji*, which was a gift by Mitbaa to him in childhood, Mitbaa says, “If every twerp wearing a Pashupati pendant claims to be my sworn son, I have to ask at every shop [*in the evening*]—how many sons have I made today?” (00:04:29-00:04:37).

Mitbaa’s answer pierces Pashupati Prasad’s heart and throws him into grief; nevertheless, he does not surrender and accepts Mitbaa’s denial. Instead, he waits for Mitbaa and makes him realize that he is not a stranger but a real sworn son. In doing so, he consolidates his existential roots and makes a firm decision to believe his experiences based on his senses. As Henry W. Nordmeyer contends, “no existentialist in his own right mind will want to throw away the experience of mankind, but a personal, searching reexamination of the values thus embraced must unceasingly be carried on” (588). Pashupati Prasad holds firm

determination to convince his Mitbaa and waits for him to ignite the reality. As he meets Mitbaa, he says, “Look into my eyes and tell me that you are not my sworn father” (00:08:55-00:08:58). When Mitbaa fails to respond to the question, Pashupati Prasad takes out the pendant and exposes the tragic death of his parents in the earthquake. This makes Mitbaa recognize the truth and accept Pashupati Prasad as his sworn son.

Interestingly, Mitbaa’s act of recognizing Pashupati Prasad as his sworn son is not merely a process of identification but also Pashupati Prasad’s ability to show who he is and what he belongs to. In the words of Mimi Halper, “Man is subjective in that he is what he makes of himself. Man finds no essence by which he can be intuitively known or absolutely determined” (53). In this sense, perhaps the man who was in front of Mitbaa was undoubtedly Pashupati Prasad, but it was in no sense clear that proved him Pashupati Prasad; however, the effort he endures to prove his Mitbaa constructs the identity of Pashupati Prasad because “By whatever man does with himself, his created individuality becomes his essential nature to himself, as well as to others; it becomes an essence which he can at any time repudiate and to which he is not ultimately bound” (53). Pashupati Prasad did not believe in essence but in existence, and he exposed what he was rather than what he was destined to be. In other words, had he believed he was Pashupati Prasad, he would have failed to prove his existence to Mitbaa, but what he did instead was believe in existence and prove his essence. In this sense, he is not destined to be Pashupati Prasad, he becomes Pashupati Prasad through his existential choice because had he not chosen to be Pashupati Prasad, he would have been a complete stranger to Mitbaa.

When Pashupati Prasad chooses to be Pashupati Prasad, he chooses life over death. He is ready for the commitment to struggling to earn money and clearing the debt. Importantly, as Richard A. Brosio points out, “Existentialists argue that existence precedes essence, i.e., that there is no stamped-out or cookie-cutter essence of humanness; what our essence is to be is constructed by sentient and intellectual men, women, and children as we seek to live and make sense of our lives” (162). Pashupati Prasad chooses to struggle rather than to prefer death and make his life meaningful. It is palpable in his words when he says, “I know how people live as workers abroad. Three of my friends died there” (00:13:32-00:13:37), in response to Mitbaa’s suggestion to fly abroad to earn money. His contention is to elucidate the importance of life and wrestle against the difficulties that compel human beings to surrender. In other words, Pashupati Prasad’s willingness to stay in his home country symbolizes his audacity and awareness regarding existential cruciality that blooms the meaningful flower of life.

However, staying in the country costs a lot for Pashupati Prasad as he comes across challenges he had never encountered before. He is bombarded with countless challenges that drag him to the bottom of his survival instinct and question his essence. He has to undergo an ordeal every day to achieve his goal and fight against the harshness of life. As Niranjana Narasimhan et al. point out, “a person has no predetermined nature and hence there is no such thing as a value to start with. The individual creates his own values and through his actions constructs meaning in life” (371). Pashupati Prasad does not lose hope of his bright future

and success. While discussing the determination of earning money and the possibility of stabilizing their life, Mitbaa informs of a shortcut to achieve prosperity in city life, especially in the Pashupati area. He says, “If your luck favours, you will make millions through sewers. Or with a rotten luck, you’ll end up like this! . . . If you have luck, it isn’t hard to earn money in this town. My friend found [a] gold ring in Bagmati and became a millionaire” (00:14:51-00:15:25). Pashupati Prasad takes Mitbaa’s experience so seriously that finding a gold ring becomes the ultimate goal of his life and the only remedy to solve the trials and tribulations. He dreams of finding his future gem because, as Sartre contends, “Whenever we desire something, there are always elements of probability” (34). Mitbaa is a witness to people’s success from a gold ring; therefore, for Pashupati Prasad, the choice of existential value becomes an alternative to substitute for his pathetic predicament.

Instead of scrutinizing the reality behind the gold ring, Pashupati Prasad equips himself with hopefulness for uncertain luck because, as Richard A. Brosio opines, “Existentialists speak of human contingency. This means that you and I are dependent for our existence on something uncertain. Contingency refers also to chance, without known cause, and even being accidental” (163). Further, he adds, “Another meaning of contingency is that something, or someone, is neither logically necessary nor logically impossible, therefore necessitating sensory and intellectual observation and study in order to portray their existence” (163). From Brosio’s perspective, human beings are contingent creatures; their dependency relies upon uncertain things. In the same way, Pashupati Prasad is contingent on his fantasy of a gold ring; he is certain of uncertain material. For Derek Freeman, “the members of the species concerned have been evolved by natural selection to make fixed ‘choices’ among the alternatives they commonly encounter in their environments” (30). In this connection, since Pashupati Prasad could not afford a luxurious life, could not accumulate money to go abroad, could not buy a business cart and start a business, his choice to rely on the gold ring is the best alternative that could alleviate his economic hollowness.

From an alternative viewpoint, it can be argued that in consolidating his existential value or choosing a shortcut, isn’t he demoralizing himself? Isn’t it a matter of endorsing a degraded human self? And, can it be a dignified way of building oneself? In this relevance, Sartre reveals, “Choosing to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for any of us unless it is good for all” (24). While choosing the shortcut, Pashupati Prasad is not committing a crime, nor is he demolishing his moral stand of being human. His selection is primarily based on his existence, which does not harm any other character, at least from a humanitarian aspect. In the words of Paul Tillich, “We experience ‘Existence’ in the same way we experience a person through his actions. We do not draw conclusions from observed effects to their causes, but we encounter a person immediately in his utterances” (52). What is seen from the moral perspective is fragile in front of what is being experienced. For Pashupati Prasad, the gold ring is his hope, but not a stolen one; his ethical stand is as strong as any existential creature who depends upon something to validate their existence. Thus, in the words of Martin P.J. Edwardes, “having selfness is being human; and that is why

self defines each of us – both from the outside, with others’ models of me, and from the inside, with my models of me” (189). Pashupati Prasad is kind to himself because to save his existence, he values selfness, and in doing so, he becomes human; he is alive.

Pashupati Prasad’s will to acquire material goods to achieve his purpose cannot be equated with passion, nor can it be a motivating force that compels him to perform any act because, as Sartre clarifies, “Existentialists do not believe in the power of passion. They will never regard a great passion as a devastating torrent that inevitably compels man to commit certain acts and which, therefore, is an excuse. They think that man is responsible for his own passion” (29). Moreover, Sartre points out, “Neither do existentialists believe that man can find refuge in some given sign that will guide him on earth; they think that man interprets the sign as he pleases and that man is therefore without any support or help, condemned at all times to invent man” (29). In this sense, Pashupati Prasad takes his hope as his invention to construct himself. In other words, he imbued the desire to provide the essence of his life rather than a desire motivating him to do something that defines his being. This is more evident when he throws a magnet in the Bagmati river to collect and encounters strife against Bhasme Don. When Bhasme Don says, “Who gave you permission to use magnet? . . . If I see you here again, I will throw you in the river, and you will find money there. No one will disturb you” (00:20:58-00:21:15). In response, Pashupati Prasad says, “As if your father owns this place!” (00:21:16-00:21:18). The dialogue ignites Pashupati Prasad’s notion of freedom and the existential value of subjectivity. In other words, for him, human beings are free to do anything as long as humanism is concerned; they create the meaning of life through free will rather than prescribed conditions. In Sartre’s words, “There is no determinism—man is free, man is freedom . . . man is condemned to be free: condemned because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (29). In this sense, Pashupati Prasad implies his existential value in the meaning-making process, and he takes Bagmati and any act over there as an individual’s will to create a life-relating process rather than an ownership of any human beings.

The tussle between Pashupati Prasad and Bhasme Don persists because they are guided by individual choices. However, where Bhasme tries to create his realm through dominance and superiority, Pashupati Prasad imbues his free will to conglomerate existence and essence together. Instead of dictating the participants in his journey, Pashupati Prasad searches for alternatives and tries to magnify his existence. When he knows that a business cart can grow much larger and earn a handsome sum of money, he decides to collect money and buy a cart so that he can reach his proposed destination easily. Not only does he make a business plan, but he is also involved in a money-making business. For example, when Hanuman Ji, a businessman who had been penniless because of casino, disguised as Hanuman in Pashupatinath Temple, suggests to him that “Look at there! The cremation platform, there. Clothes of [the] dead being thrown into the river. Collect those clothes and sell them” (00:54:10-00:54:19), he accepts the plan and chooses the alternative to earn money. His seriousness in such a business motif is depicted artistically, which can be observed in the following snapshot:



Fig III. Pashupati Prasad, Selling the Products to the Customers.

In Fig III., Pashupati Prasad, on the left, is showing the beauty of the product, wrapping himself with the red *Saari*, to the two customers on the right. The negotiation between Pashupati Prasad and the customers shows his choice to dissolve his social recognition and acceptance of life governing tactics. As Sartre opines, “a man is nothing but a series of enterprises, and that he is the sum, organization, and aggregate of the relations that constitute such enterprises” (38). He is conjoining his life with social participants and establishing the meaningfulness of what he is doing. In the words of Asher Moore, “A human being is not a but a who. The structures involved in being a human being are, therefore, not what a human being is; they do not make up his nature. A human being is not determinate but self-determining. He will have been what he chooses to be” (410). In this sense, Pashupati Prasad’s act of involvement in the process of ‘becoming’ is his nature to ensure ‘self-determining,’ and he is defining who he is rather than what he is.

Whatever Pashupati Prasad chooses to be, he chooses freely, or he chooses freedom freely. However, as Marjorie Grene states, “[F]reedom is not an abstraction to be generically applied to ‘man’ as such, but a risk, a venture, a demand. In a sense, we are all free, but we are free to achieve our freedom or to lose it. There are no natural slaves, but most of us have enslaved ourselves” (267). In this sense, indeed, he chooses to be free with freedom, and he becomes free not only from the grip of any human and social constraints but also from his own existential hindrances. To make it more precise, when he happens to find the gold ring, he goes to sell it in the market, but since he lacks the bill of the gold, shopkeepers deny him payment as much value the gold deserves. At last, the shopkeeper, politically, says, “This is ten thousand rupees. Take this and go, buddy. Otherwise, I’ll call the police” (01:58:17-01:58:23). Without hesitation and fear, Pashupati Prasad boldly denies the deal, snatches the gold ring, and runs away. But taking this as an advantage, the shopkeeper accuses him of stealing a gold ring. As a result, he is chased by the public and beaten to death. In this context, the most notable thing is that Pashupati Prasad, till his last breath, does not surrender; he keeps defining himself; he chooses to dignify his life and succeeds in trapping the process of ‘becoming,’ engulfing himself in the tempest of death. This resonates with Sartre’s aspiration: “Man’s destiny lies within himself” (39). In a similar point, Pashupati

Prasad decided his life by himself freely and with freedom.

The Subjectivity of Existence: A Signifying Process of Becoming

Pashupati Prasad fights against the social and moral constraints that consistently disprove the validity of his existence. He desensitizes any factor that allocates him in the moral realm of the human sphere. In other words, he takes the social code of conduct as an apparatus to construct himself, but not as a fundamental grammar that defines his essence. The moral principles he plumps for are his essential selection that refurbishes his existential value and furnishes the process of becoming. For example, he aspires to be an honest son of Mitbaa and the women in the old age home. He exceeds the limits of human behavior in communication and develops a strong bond between the street food businessman and Hanuman Ji. In doing so, he masters the existential phenomenon and establishes himself as a self-determining subjective creature because the fundamental value of existentialism lies in man's ability to be engulfed in human subjectivity. For Sartre, "Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject to choose what he will be, and, on the other, man's inability to transcend human subjectivity" (23-24). According to Sartre, man is free to choose, and even if he does not choose, he still chooses not to choose; therefore, he cannot 'unchoose' since he is bound with the freedom of choosing. In this sense, Pashupati Prasad's attempts to construct a familial environment are to set up a new social realm in a new place where the relationship among the people is derived from economic necessity.

The more Pashupati Prasad makes the connection with the people, the better version of himself he creates. As Sartre notes, "The only hope resides in his actions and that the only thing that allows him to live is action" (40). He expands the convenient boundary of the relationship and makes a broader scope to signify his life to make his world playful. For instance, when Bhasme Don steals Bunu's father's wallet, he informs him, and Bhasme Don is caught. However, the incident breeds Pashupati Prasad's four strong relationships with secondary characters. Firstly, he cements rivalry against Bhasme Don and becomes his enemy; secondly, as Bhasme Don and his friend punishes him because of the incident, he meets the old woman from the old age home who turns into a lovely mother; thirdly, Bhasme's chasing leads to a strong friendly relationship with Hanuman Ji; and fourthly, an incomplete but a true love relationship with Bunu. Interestingly, he merely chooses to be true and honest in telling the truth behind Bhasme's pickpocketing act, but it consequently begets multiple dimension that makes his life worth living. He earns the mother, friend, love, and enemy. His subjectivity enables him to compartmentalize his life into different relationships, and each compartment cultivates him as a new individual. As Mimi Halper explicitly claims, "If man is to form his essence from his existence, he must be free to do so" (54). Halper adds, "Acceptance of freedom as a basic motivating force of being presupposes the existence of accompanying attributes, those of choice, of finitude, and of responsibility, the existence of which, for the existentialist, is a *sine qua non* [an essential condition] for the operative ability of freedom" (54). In this context, Pashupati Prasad subjectively chooses to form the relationship and expands the conditions of becoming rather than being. In other words, in the process of subjective valuation, he confirms the possibility of his essential ground that not

only makes his life visible but also worth living in any sensible sense, either from an interior or exterior perspective.

Since Pashupati Prasad relies on the subjective definition or the principle deployed by the social actor, his subjectivity may seem like a selection that has been prescribed or the selection of the alternative that is distributed in the social realm. In other words, no matter what so ever, Pashupati Prasad makes a subjective decision; he can merely make a decision which is available in society, which means that the options are there and his random selection automatically falls under the menu that is offered by social dogmas. Nevertheless, when Pashupati Prasad freely chooses to make a relationship with the strangers, he tries to create meaning out of absurdity. Moreover, it was not necessary to create such a relationship; he could have chosen Bhasme Don's path, but he chose to breed a relationship that could afford his existential values and offer him the meaning of life. As Marjorie Grene points out, "If . . . freedom can inform necessity and give meaning to the meaningless, it may also fail of its transcendence, it may succumb to the multiplicity and absurdity of fact, it may seek escape in the fiction of a supporting cosmic morality or in the domination of a blind passion or in the nagging distractions of its everyday concerns" (267). In the same way, despite being circumscribed by numerous obstacles, he primarily relies on the meaning-making process. Thus, in Sartre's words, "If . . . existence truly does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is . . . And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men" (23). In this sense, while constructing himself, he also constructs the existence of other people because at last, he opens the eyes of Hanuman Ji and compels him to demystify his reality; he gives a real sense of son to the old woman [*Aama*] who is deprived of son's love; he makes Mitbaa realize the real sense of existential value who has lost the essence of living and changes Bhasma Don's perception towards life who ever and make him cry in Pashupati Prasad's death.

In reframing his existential values and shaping his significance among the people in his connection, Pashupati Prasad decides every step with his choices rather than following the moral principles of social demands. It happens so because, as Sartre says, "If . . . God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse" (29). For Sartre, the moral principles of human society no longer function since god's presence is not visible—God is dead—therefore, the moral principle based on god's assumption decays, which necessitates humans to make their own fundamental grammar to mechanize their life. As Jong S. Jun "by understanding the self as socially constructed in relation to others, we can overcome the problem of duality between the individual and the organization, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between the administration and the public" (88). Moreover, "These dualistic boundaries can be transcended only by thinking about self through the enlargement of the person's boundary into other spheres" (88). Human beings are free, and they are free to incubate moral principles based on their existential values, but that does not mean they can

create whatever they like. Rather, they can create values that are good for others as well. Fundamentally, Pashupati Prasad does the same thing in creating relationships with the other characters. His association with Hanuman Ji and concerns while being upset not only reflects the motif signifying his only existential meaning but also impacts Hanuman Ji's existential mechanism that drags him to Pashupati Prasad. As Sartre contends, "Human universality exists, but it is not a given; it is in perpetual construction. In choosing myself, I construct universality; I construct it by understanding every other man's project, regardless of the era in which he lives. This absolute freedom of choice does not alter the relativity of each era" (43). The relationship between Hanuman Ji and Pashupati Prasad is intertwined because of universality. This film portrays this aspect vividly when they discuss love and human affairs. Their interconnection can be observed in the following snapshot:



Fig IV. Upset Pashupati Prasad with Hanuman Ji in the Crematorium.

The snapshot occurs when Pashupati Prasad is upset because his beloved Bunu does not appear on the school bus. Bunu used to pass by where Pashupati Prasad sells clothes, but without information, Bunu remains absent for a week, which throws him into despair. At that moment, Hanuman Ji comes to him to ask for help because he has emergency work; therefore, Pashupati Prasad has to be Hanuman Ji for one day as per his proposal. In such circumstances, both share their views and opinions regarding the need for human effort in achieving desired intentions. As Hanuman Ji, seeing Pashupati Prasad upset, says, "If you lack the strength to leap, you shouldn't try to pluck roses from the skies" (01:22:00-01:22:08). In response, Pashupati Prasad says, "If I can't leap, I'll throw sticks at it until I bring it to me" (01:22:09-01:22:12). In the conversation, both of them enclose existential choice. On the one hand, Hanuman Ji suggests that he must have put in enough effort rather than become sad. On the other hand, Pashupati Prasad declares the impossibility of an impossible task—no matter how difficult it is, he has the strength to drag it to him. Both of them aspire to be existentialists as they are connected emotionally and interestingly, as Sartre regards, "Feelings are developed through the actions we take; therefore, I cannot use them as guidelines for action" (32). In this sense, their relationship is a product of the actions they

inflicted upon each other.

The existential choice of Pashupati Prasad determines the meaning of his life. His inclination towards freedom invites him into a realm of the human sphere where he redefines a new set of values that define his essence. However, for Friedrich Nietzsche, “The most terrible and most fundamental desire in man, his impulse towards power — what they call the impulse towards ‘freedom’ — for the longest time was the impulse most in need of restraint. (409). In this sense, is Pashupati Prasad a slave of power? Is he not able to control his inner spirit, what Nietzsche calls the need of restraint? In fact, the power he means is willingness and his subjective choice to make fundamental decisions for oneself, which is beneficial for others at the same time. In the latter concern, Pashupati Prasad is full of forbearance and controlling force. This is conspicuous when discussing with Hanuman Ji, he says, “Everything was coming together. Instead of [a] father, I had my sworn father. My new mother loved me just like my own mother did. I [had] found friend in you. And I was just about to fall in love. I had earned a few enemies, too. I had found a cart to start my business with” (00:11:27-00:11:46). He adds, “In a year or two, I’d pay my debts and scatter the ashes of my parents. Everything is ruined” (01:11:47-01:11:58). Despite mechanizing the chaos of life and ordering the hazy motion, he is again engulfed in the chasm of darkness. Mitbaa has secretly taken away the saved money from his piggy bank, which not only dissolves his efforts and money but also shatters his emotional strengths: the hope of a better future and a dream of success. More importantly, when his Mitbaa cheated him, he also looted Pashupati Prasad’s signifying object, an apparatus that could justify his meaning and potentially magnify essence, consolidating subjectivity.

However, as Peter K. Manning suggests, “man makes decisions and builds up with them (if possible), and is in fact forced to act, to accept creates meaning within social relations and his relationship established by his mode of perceiving his spatiotemporal world” (209). In any circumstance, “Any system of thought that sees man as only a partial of his mind, or as a victim of his body, is rejected in favor of restoring the wholeness of man: his emotionality, his sentience, his bodily basis for life, his ignorance and error” (209). Pashupati Prasad decides to rewrite his identity, reconstruct his essence, and take a subjective turn, which shows his restraints that make him a willful character rather than a slave of power or freedom. Indeed, in the words of F. C. Copleston, “The world is the object of knowledge and is not created by the knower in regard to its being. The world is phenomenal in the sense that what we mean by the world is that which appears, but it does not follow that we can reduce the being of phenomena to *percipi* [the condition of being perceived]” (25). In this sense, Pashupati Prasad’s existential choice is not an acceptance of the phenomenal world, which imbues the dispersion of knowledge by the knowers. Instead, his subjectivity incorporates a creative evaluation, examination, diffusion, and dissemination of existential values. To make it more precise, he decides to be Pashupati Prasad, a sworn son of a penniless person, a son of an abandoned mother, a friend of a bankrupt man, and an enemy of a man who himself is intoxicated by existential crisis. In this sense, as Madeleine Clemence remarks, “Man is not, but is forever becoming. And this shaping of himself goes much deeper than mere personality

changes: it is his very essence that is at stake" (502). Hence, "The choice is his: either to pay the price and be an 'authentic' person—willing to use one's freedom, to accept one's responsibility toward existence—or to follow the easy path of the 'man of the crowd'" (502). From Clemence's perspective, Pashupati Prasad pays with his life while enjoying his freedom, but in doing so, he captures the perpetual journey of becoming in the nexus of life and death.

However, it is not to say that freedom always costs life, but rather to expose that even Pashupati Prasad's choice to stand in his decision and encounter death is his subjective choice, which was the only alternative to entrap his process of becoming infinite. Interestingly, this is also a medium to emasculate the notion of impossibility that could deny the essence of the existential value he possesses. Describing the relationship between the existence and essence, Mikel Dufrenne contends: "the essence is not concealed behind the existence, it is read on the object as its meaning; doubtless this reading never comes to an end, because the essence, as the principle of the series of appearances, is infinitely removed, but this infinite is homogeneous to the finite and immersed in it" (53). In this sense, Pashupati Prasad marked a crucial essence and meaning of his life and made it perennial when he died, while signifying an existential becoming. Had he been aware of his life, he wouldn't have chosen the way he decided to choose, but since he was always in a journey of signifying process, he delved into uncertainty. As Kees van den Bos argues, "being completely certain about all or many aspects of one's life may make one's life rather dull, and there are clearly instances in which people strive for uncertainty rather than seek to reduce it" (201). Pashupati Prasad chose uncertainty to make his life full of multiple meanings rather than implanting dullness. In doing so, he distinguished himself from the crowd and made himself a warrior who dared to take the challenge and enjoy the sense of being even while keeping life at stake. Thus, as Sartre asserts, "the coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic; there is always the possibility that one day the coward will no longer be cowardly and the hero may cease to be a hero. What matters is the total commitment, but there is no one particular situation or action that fully commits you, one way or the other" (39). Pashupati Prasad, in this sense, is an existential hero who worked on his commitment to signify his existential value and imbue essence without demolishing any sense of integrity, which forges his essence through his subjective existential choices.

Conclusion

Pashupati Prasad exposes the human struggle as an apparatus to motivate existential choice in creating truth rather than believing the truths dispersed in the human realm. It advocates for human active participation in the construction of existential motives through the sensory perception and experience of life. Denying the dependency upon the factual data scattered in the social milieu, it shows human contingency upon uncertainty that provokes them to keep their journey on in consolidating the self through subjective determination. The film ignites human difficulties not as a constraint for human existence but rather as a crucial mechanism to define the essence of existence. Through the lens of a protagonist who toils to establish his value in the strange city but later becomes a son, a friend, a lover, and an enemy,

the film necessitates difficulty in elasticizing the meaning of one's life in an indeterminate human world.

To believe what an individual is means to accept the predestined limitation of human life. Instead, existentialists believe in who an individual is; therefore, they persistently define existence to create the meaning of their existential cause. Pashupati Prasad does the same thing in the film and becomes an existentialist. He chooses to be Pashupati Prasad and expands his realm in a range of ways that enable him to be self-determined and allow him to be in the nexus of perpetual 'becoming.' He values himself, driven by the motive to survive—to earn money and release the souls of his parents to heaven, which makes sense of his living and proves that he is alive. In doing so, he cultivates himself as a hero who holds the subjectivity of his life and freedom to explore his subjective choice. Nobody compels him to do anything; even more, he gives no authority and opportunity to the external agency to define his existence, but plays an active role in deciding his verdicts freely with 'freedom.'

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