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Seeking the Subaltern Consciousness in Nepali Cinema

**Tara Lal Shrestha¹, Bidhya Shrestha², Dipankar Senehang³, Bibechana Sharma Timsina⁴,
 and Pradeep B.K.⁵**

¹Principal author, Lecturer of English, Central Department of English, Kirtipur

²Corresponding author, Lecturer of Population Studies, Central Department of Population
 Studies, Kirtipur

Email: bidhya.shrestha@cdpl.tu.edu.np

^{3,4,5}Co-authors, students of the Fourth Semester, Central Department of English

Abstract

This article overviews the resistance of the subaltern and the ongoing debate on seeking the subaltern consciousness within and outside the elitist structure. The first part of this article exposes the notion of subaltern and subaltern resistance consciousness concerning the development of the Nepali film industry. The second part discusses different dimensions of resistance of the subaltern in shifting politico-cultural contexts. It also unfolds the structure of representation of the subaltern transformed within transitions which are observed more vehemently through the different politico-cultural scenarios of filmmaking, particularly before and after the Maoist insurgency. The last part analyses the aspects or efforts of the self-formation of the subaltern in terms of- along with class- caste, ethnicity and gender with references to representative Nepali movies, i.e. Numafung, Batomuniko Phool and Uma flash hope within hopelessness.

Keywords: Hegemony, subaltern, resistance, self-formation.

Subaltern in Nepalese Context

Subaltern studies in the Nepalese context often exists as a contested issue because it directly addresses the issues of domination and subordination related to, along with class, caste, ethnicity and gender. Exclusion and inclusion issues associated with religion, culture, region, etc. intersectionality appear with caste, ethnicity and gender. In Nepal, Dalits and ethnic-subalterns, among them, women who exist at the edge of auspicious, are more victims. Seeking the space of resistance and securing agency for them is the key role of intellectuals. This article is an effort of seeking resistance consciousness of such subaltern groups with reference to representative Nepali movies.

The word 'subaltern' was defined first after Gramsci, more clearly, by Ranajit Guha and his group as, "...of inferior rank'...for the general attributes of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or any other way" (SSI vii). In the introduction of *Subaltern Studies* (Vol. I), Guha gives a valuable account of subaltern history's genealogy and legacies. He gives its purpose and accomplishments with its empirical and theoretical bases. He includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants into the category of subaltern classes but, in his view, they can under certain circumstances be the agents of the upper dominant group and can act for the elites.

In the words of Tara Lal Shrestha, "the subaltern groups exist in diverse locations and multiple situations" (9). According to him, being a multicultural semi-colonial country, the identities of the subaltern groups of people are diverse in the Nepalese context; they exist and speak from various spaces. Though Nepal was never colonized, it was/is never free from (neo)colonial and (neo)imperial power interventions. The internal colonization mission has dominated and subordinated the women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis and disenfranchised them in such a way that the subalterns are hardly able to overcome the layers of hegemony. In such a context, this paper explores different dimensions of resistance of the subaltern where their self-formation is beyond their grip.

The term 'subaltern' is often associated with 'hegemony.' At the current time 'hegemony' denotes not merely the political, economic or military dominance of certain dominant groups over others, but it also refers to the cultural control of the elite over the subaltern groups of people. Politico-military dominance of a certain level over the other is still pervasive; at the same time, hegemony has been perceived in the micro-level-referring to the socio-cultural predominance of a certain group over others since the nineteenth century. Beyond the geopolitical level, hegemony is internalized more felicitous in the socio-cultural level within a society where the elite groups take the help of the subaltern's consent to rule over them. For the elongation of the dominance, elite groups create common sense according to their interest, and for that, they take the help of cultural apparatus which is also called cultural imperialism in a broad sense. This paper considers Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony to discuss how the ruling class manipulates culture to rule over the subaltern in Nepal and Nepali cinemas. The concept of consent as a politics of ruling over the subaltern, as Gramsci employs, is highlighted while interpreting and analysing the selected representative Nepali movies *Numafung*, *Batomuniko Phool* and *Uma*.

'Subaltern studies' in literature is at once linked to the multiple domains of art and social studies. That link is established through the identification of the subalterns and the

location of the areas where the subject becomes articulate. The study opens up important paradoxes, which form the basis for the study of the subaltern in literature. The major tones of the subaltern studies prepared by Indian scholars and published in India over the last quarter of a century have projected the image of the subaltern as the peasants, the working class and the marginalised people in the society. Studies made on them- their locations, social, economic and political positions and, very importantly, the questions of their representations- have been known commonly under the rubric 'subaltern studies'.

According to Kaspar Maase, the resistance can be observed within the supposed context of a clash of interests between 'the people' and 'the power bloc'. As Gramsci claims, the cultural exercise of power is pervasive and when an oppositional thought or action takes place from the perspective of 'the people,' space of resistance is available. Subaltern studies is an intellectual movement for creating the space for the subaltern to exist and resist. It stands to offer space for the consciousness to resist- which is 'subaltern consciousness.' The research related to art, literature and performances carried out from the perspective of the muted subaltern, in Masse's words, "has to promote oppositional feelings, thoughts, and actions" (46). In this era of popular culture's advancement, the movies as commodities are being used for entertainment, but there are some dozens of Nepali movies produced with a certain level of resistance which has presented a glimpse of hope, though little late, in hopelessness in the field of cinema history in Nepal.

Countering the Elitist History

Any form of the artefact is called a significant apparatus to change the scenario of the world to its distinctive appearance. Audio-visual artefacts, particularly movies, are more responsive to comprehend the dynamics of society. But as the history of any form of artistic or literary practice, the 'power bloc' ignoring 'the people,' the context of foremost adopted morals concerning myths borrowing concepts from Bollywood cinemas, following it, the later version broadcasted stories assembling canonical figures has come into existence. The exclusionary attitude has its firm existence in the history of Nepali cinema from 1951 to 1971. The attitude showered a sense of offensiveness among the culture and identity of the marginalized groups, therefore, they took it as a matter of deliberate subversion. Hegemonic groups were not only diminishing humankind but also the means of recognition of the nation. We find the characters marching towards liberation breaking the orthodoxical wall but they are yet to take a form of flame to turn the dominant structure into ashes. Initiation of intellectuals in suggesting or promoting concepts can make the movies play a significant role as a mirror in making folks know the corruptive deeds being practised by the members of the elite group. Through the means of entertainment, the purposely blindfolded eyes can be naked and demolish the elite's

constructed ideologies. The way Nepali film industries transformed is noteworthy; however, it demands certain amendments for the realistic depiction of Nepali society.

Visual culture in the form of the film industry as audiovisual art has become an integral part of Nepali people in the recent decade. It is rooted in the aesthetic life of many people, so it is impossible to isolate the topic from the aesthetic dimension of human life. The boom of visual technology has offered the opportunity to the common mass of people to be connected with the visual digital world. These days, people are loaded with filmy fantasy and cede their life in the world of cinema not only to enhance the status of cinematic production but also to come into the limelight through the film career. To quote Deepesh Paudel, “The tremendous amount of faith shown by the expanding niche of the audience, especially the younger patrons, has been motivating and inspiring for the industry” (46). This shows that the conceptualization has changed since the later decades; however, the historical transformation did not come up with an easy bite, rather it confronted numerous challenges to grow up to this position. From the adaptive film career to the modern technological period, Nepal has gone through crucible events to develop a new countenance in filmmaking. This prosperity and progression have satisfied Nepali spectators to a larger extent. Nevertheless, some critics opine the grievances of the minorities are in ventriloquism and yet to be addressed through the cinematic projection. They argue the ethnic minorities and the oppressed people are not exactly depicted as they are and the films that have been projected, such subalterns, are merely aestheticized and have given optional roles. For instance, Bijaya Baral as Bir Kaji Bishwakarma in *Kabbadi* has been depicted as a utilitarian character with subordinated features. Thus, although the spark of subaltern resistance has been seen in the discursive production of the film industry and post-Maoist movement, it is still immature to allocate its position in the realm of Nepali cinematography.

From D. B. Pariyar’s *Satya Harishchandra* to contemporary films, the Nepali film industry is restlessly trying to illuminate Nepali society to the global periphery through the lens of the camera. It has tried to expose the dynamics and its different dimensions: art, culture, aesthetics, traditions and character of Nepal, foreshadowing the essence of the Nepali people. Largely, it encapsulates the diversity of Nepal, especially since the post-Maoist movement; however, Nepali cinema is still loaded with canonical frameworks and elite ideologies. Mostly the huge portion on the cinema screen is portraying the canonical structure and following the tendencies set by the canonical films. The artistic representation is more focused than the realistic representation and basically, it has derived its fundamental substances to the level of fantasy and romance than the articulation of the objective overview of the social phenomenon. According to Timothy Aryal, for a film industry that has been in place for over 50 years and produces dozens of films every year, Nepali cinema has hardly “any films that we can call our

own,” said Dipendra K Khanal, who has directed 10 films so far. And, this is primarily because a majority of Nepali films grossly neglect the basics of a film- a good script with memorable characters, cinematography, and sound design, according to veteran director Yadav Kharel.*

Nepali films need several amendments and rectification to depict the precise location of the Nepali society which is not as good as it is portrayed on the screen. This paper attempts to surge the representation of marginalized groups on the screen from history to the present, problematizing the conventional notion of the cinematic discourse and the projection. The subaltern groups of people and their aesthetic values have been ignored from the mainstream representation and even the artistic dimension of Nepali cinema culture undermined their existence in the aura of the social representation of the society. How the tendency marked by the canonical pictures continued to flourish remaining unaccountable to the subaltern group and how it tried to spark after the Maoist movement have been scrutinized in this research paper. Nepali society is distinctly different from the representation made in the digital world, thus it remarks the solid agency to advocate and represent the status of the subaltern as realistically as possible. The art, culture, aesthetics and lifestyle of the subaltern is not the playthings of the Nepali film industry rather it is a lifelong process for their existence. The mere romanticization of subaltern is not the appropriate way to find their position; rather, it should be strengthened and corroborated through the positionality of their real location.

Nepali Film Industry in Pre-Maoist Movement

Nepal does not share a long history in the film industry in comparison to Hollywood and Bollywood; however, it has strived to celebrate more than a half-century in cinematic production. Starting from the adoptive film career, Nepal introduced *Satya Harischandra* which was an imitation of Indian cinema. The first Nepali film by D.B. Pariyar in 1951 was produced in Kolkata, India. It was a transmutation of Hindu mythological king Harischandra which was originally depicted by India. The film revolves around the story of King Harishchandra which tries to educate the audience about the deeds and the moral message from the King. It shows the initiation of Nepali film was loaded with mythological and religious interference, omitting the possible inclusion of a marginal community rather than accommodating the canonical sphere. The past with certain modifications was presented through the means of technology to enhance modern culture. To quote Swarali Patil, “...it is important to ask the question of which sources are used to explore ‘our pasts’. Most of the people’s pasts are not found in written sources, rather they are in folk, popular and oral traditions” (14). The tendency and the trend were consolidated with the power structure and canonical forces sidelining the marginal groups

* <https://tkpo.st/2utqxyT>

in the cinematic representation. Some critics opine *Aama* of Hirasingh Khatri to be the first film of Nepal because of its location of Nepali production. The film describes the story of a young army man minimizing the sacrifices of his mother. Rather it chooses people with high personnel identity, boycotting the people belonging to the subaltern groups. The bravery of the male: son, has been depicted eliminating the sacrifice of the mother. This resembles the deliberate silence of the women subaltern since the historic period.

Neither *Satya Harishchandra* nor *Aama* recognizes the existence of subalterns and their positionality in the cinematic discourse. Rather, these films feature profoundly the elite male and dominant faculty of the society, foreshadowing the canon and overshadowing the marginal groups. The films are incorporated with biased ideologies and shaped with unitary representation instead of particularization and precise observation. Overwhelming domination of Hindu culture and elite tradition did not merely paralyze the representation of subaltern, moreover, the following tendencies and the upcoming generation in the cinematic colloquy took it for granted and made it normalcy which was sufficient enough to silence the picturization of the subaltern in cinematic discourse to a long back history.

A cinema needs to portray the incidents that represent the scenario experienced by common people through which one can comprehend everyday life. According to Ute Holl, “Cinema belongs to the trance techniques of our culture because it systematically treats and shifts the normative and imaginary time frames, in which we remain subject to conscious daily production, in all the disciplines of our bodily knowledge” (26). However, the cinema at the time does not comprise principles followed by majority members living in the society, rather emphasizes the majoritarian lifestyle. It fails to accommodate an appropriate picture of a society assembling the suppression, suffering, and suffocation of subaltern groups and their encounters with predicaments.

Ruling groups have deliberately crushed the voices of the marginalized groups. They have adopted the colonist ideology to dominate the subaltern groups as Frantz Fanon writes:

The magical, supernatural powers proved to be surprisingly ego busting. The colonist’s powers are infinitely shrunken, strangled by forgiveness. There is no real reason to fight them because what really matters is that the mythical structures contain far more terrifying adversaries. It is evident that everything is reduced to a permanent confrontation at the level of phantasy. (19)

The colonist mindset of the dominant culture does not let the sidelined group receive their recognition. Even the scripts lack veracity within it as it holds the guidance of people belonging at the top. The cinema has become an exemplary representation of what Alain Resnais writes,

“Cinema is a manipulation of reality through image and sound” (Qtd. in Michelson 20). The cinema with insertion of doctrine acceptable to the majoritarian group receives triumph over the suffocation of sidelined groups. Focusing on the victorious thoughts, they manipulate the reality of the society and divert audiences by monopolizing the concepts developed from the perspective of people at the top. It is believed that during that period, the film industry was under the grip of Royal authority. The script of the movie was read by King Mahendra before production and the story that favoured Royal was only permitted to be generated and displayed to audiences. The power politics, it implies, in the arena of the film resembles the supremacy of royal authority to control over the representation and gripping the frame of recognition of folks without permitting the subalterns to be exposed. The only film healthy to the authority was something hazardous to marginal people but it was not the concern of the authority rather it was embalmed with the prosperity of their position merely. These tendencies replicate the deliberate entrenchment of the royal authority regarding space and the playfield of the margin.

To imply hardcore censorship and consent only on gratified self is to hegemonize subaltern forcefully debilitating their existence and accentuating homogenous cultural presence. For instance, B.S. Thapa's *Maitighar*, the first commercial movie under a private banner released in 1966 depicts the story of a girl who had to face brutality from the people of the society after the death of her husband because of their compressed superstitious belief. The woman in the movie is projected as one having endurance capabilities without an audacity to rebel against the deteriorating repression. It presents women as the subject of the timid and male, the subject of courage. Emphasizing the corruptive ideologies constructed by the societal personnel on women's weakness belittles their contribution to society. The title *Maitighar*, even though it represents women, yet fails to capture the worth a woman withstands. It failed in the disintegration of the chain of paralyzing subaltern groups being followed within the Nepal Film Industry. In the wake of time, the Royal Nepali Film Corporation came into existence on the strength of the government in 1971. It premiered its initial movie i.e. *Manko Bandh* by Prakesh Thapa in 1973. Following it, the first colour picture was broadcasted in 1977.

It is often noted that *Kumari*, directed by Prem Bahadur as the first colour Nepali picture, appeared to introduce the culture of the Newari community. Through the display of art, it significantly prepares people in a multi-cultural society like Nepal to develop mutual understanding with a sense of educating themselves and others about various cultures existing in the society. Bela Balaza writes, “it has always been the rule in the history of art and culture that the two were functions of each other in dialectic interaction. Art educated the taste of the public, and the better of the public demanded and rendered possible the development of art to higher levels” (19). Through the means of entertainment, it aroused enthusiasm within people to acquire additional education and have the ability in comprehending the thoughts of people

other than the culture of their own. Art, with its multifarious interpretation, unites the communities aiming for their growth. Art has several important roles to play in education in a multicultural society. Herbert Read claims that experiences with art may “enhance self-concept and develop a sense of social reciprocity” (Qtd. in Nadaner 6). It concurrently assisted people in being aware of the social reality and united to solve the problems that are hazardous in the enrichment of the culture and sidelined population. The movie facilitated the void that the Nepal film industry was deprived of. Highlighting the essentiality of culture, the film industry became familiar with constricting issues of society.

Another movie *Sindoor* by Prakash Thapa forwards the story of young women with a confrontational perspective towards the traditions of the society in 1980. A young woman walks in the path of liberation seeking to live the way of life as per her desire. It reflects the growth in the sense of autonomy. Buddhadev Ghosh asserts, “Yet, there are reasons to believe that the subaltern class has an autonomous domain.... It is here that one has to pin one's hope for the emergence of a kind of politics at the grassroots level that is propelled by the processes of empowerment of the marginalised people” (87). Dreaming of autonomy does not help people succeed in what they aspire to. Hegemonic thoughts are to be eradicated with consistently firm effort. The perspective of people who were compressed to live below because of hegemonic principles necessitates an outburst, alarming the revolution in the social order sustained by elite groups. The constructed supreme tendencies are to be confronted for fragmentation as the squeezed groups had begun the process of reformation.

The provision of raising voices for the upliftment of marginal voices was in practice at the time which has been represented through movies like *Kumari* and *Sindoor*. However, concurrently, the existence of forces in trivializing the matter was notably active. Linda Alcoff writes:

The recognition that there is a problem in speaking for others has arisen from two sources. First, there is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one's location....The second source involves a recognition that, not only is location epistemically salient, but certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous. In particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for. (7)

The one raising voice had a fear of rising in suppression of sidelined groups with people in power for explicitly representing the grievances of oppressed groups. Eliminating the representation of subaltern groups, the success of movies in the film industry was in an inclined

position. It assisted in the accession of private parties into the film industry for expansion. However, the initial development of new politics, the Maoist Insurgency, in Nepal emerged as an opposition force for the growth of the nation in every aspect by countering the established status quo.

The Nepali Film Industry in the Post-Maoist Movement

Maoist insurgency with the motive of allocating equality focused on the deportation of elites and royal groups. The film industry which was firmly under the grip of royalty experienced a shift from Royal Nepal Chalchitra Sangh to Chalchitra Bikash Board. Before this, in about six decades, the dominant class prevailed in history. The films produced in these decades boycotted the subaltern, abandoning space for their representation by relinquishing their space for the daring roles. Subaltern groups were featured for lamentation, pain, and oppressed situations. The member belonging to the elite class was presented as the one to rescue the subaltern groups, therefore, the subaltern demands history from the bottom. It is believed that when the mission begins from below it will automatically reflect the subaltern making its presence in a remarkable position. According to J. Maggio, "Theory, though powerful, cannot act as an elixir to the issues of the subaltern. Hence, the initial question is what is the role of the academy, and whether there is a liberating place for the intellectual desires of studying the subaltern" (420). The oppressive attitude subaltern came across is no less than the trauma. The events trigger within the enthusiastic self of sidelined groups in the persisting period, therefore, intellectuals studying or fighting for liberation need to have patience in observing the change.

The state earlier sponsored the institution in which the elite had the dominance, neglecting the existence of the subaltern community. Aroused rebellious forces made the elite concerned about the sidelined communities. To bring subaltern within the mainstream forum, the scars of subordination should fade, which is yet to take place. Gyanendra Pandey writes, "The attempt to recover the peasant as a contemporary of modernity, and a maker of the modern, thus runs up against the common sense of the age, that the peasant, for all his or her heroism has remained at the receiving end of larger forces of historical change and progress" (4736). However, state institutions i.e. Nepal Television and Radio Nepal represented the canon earlier; later an alternative canon gradually came into existence. The paper at the end focuses on the illustration of resistance consciousness in the subaltern groups being based on the issues highlighted with three particular themes in the three different movies. Themes related to regional, religious and other various types of minorities have not been able to incorporate in this research.

Emergence of the Ethnic-subalterns

Though it was guided by high-class/caste elite ideology, *Numafung*, the cinematography of Nabin Subba in 2004, allocates the Limbu community which was previously ignored. The movie presents the positionality of the subaltern Limbu community through the representation of Limbu culture in the film industry. It has shown the coexistence of subalterns in the realm of the film industry dominated by the dominant class, inducing the significant social location of the Limbu people. Moreover, the story resembles the struggle-oriented lives compressed within the perseverance of tradition and pursuit of personal preferences of other Nepali women through the young girl, Numa. The action of Numa at the end of *Numafung* connotes that the subaltern groups have begun their act of resistance to change the majoritarian historical practice imposed on them either in the name of culture or the concept of the ideal. Her action is associated with Dipesh Chakrabarty's discourse. For him, there is no single, universally applicable description available anymore of what it might mean to talk about "eventually freeing mankind of its shackles" while the evidence that human collectivities "do not want to live under the domination of those whom they regard as 'others' is to be found everywhere" (27). This projects, no living creatures desire to be part of the sympathetic discourse. Through their action, they establish a firm flame to maintain the social equilibrium beginning merely with a spark of fire. Nevertheless, it embraces the erasure of silences being considered as a universal truth demonstrating the idea that subalterns and subaltern women can speak.

The ethnic minorities: Madhesi, Indigenous and Dalit, were boycotted from the mainstream politics and representation before the Maoist movement. The insurgency brought the common sufferings of these minorities into the limelight-addressing their existence and significance. The movement urged for the inclusion and envisioned the aesthetics of the subalterns. It emphasized the minorities and imposition of the dominant culture, problematizing the canonical tendencies which were exacerbating the positionality of the subalterns. The rights and autonomy confiscated by the majoritarian were foreshadowed, particularly illuminating the essence of aesthetic dimensions, to elucidate the intrinsic reality of society. The semblance created by the privileged group has been falsified and the objective representation of minorities had been initiated in Nabin Subba's *Numafung*.



Image I: Preparing for marriage in Limbu culture

The movie *Numafung* (2004) introduces the culture and tradition of the Limbu community through the characters belonging to the community. However, the movie revolves around the life of a young girl: Numa. The story of Numa resembles the struggle-oriented lives compressed within the perseverance of tradition and pursuit of personal preferences of other Nepali women. The demonstration of flexible culture represents the comprehensive ideologies towards women in the community; however, the materialistic mindset of people subordinates their place. Keeping suffrage at its utmost position when women's inclines to live within their true self contesting towards the established ethics, the story presents the plot that frictions the family, friends causing conflicts within the dominant values of her time instead of celebrating the audacity women have within her to stand against the torment. But, still, concerning the indigenous culture, it highlights the tragic reality in which women are sufferers.

Women are victimized when the family illustrates them as the commodity. The father of the protagonist is displayed putting forth his views regarding the materials he demands from the family of the groom to permit them to marry his daughter. He mentions, "If you leave 10 measures of gold and 15,000 rupees, you can take away..." (2:56-3:00). This represents the money-oriented concept of the community in the name of culture through which we can claim that the ideologies of parents themselves are responsible for the subservience position of women. Numa denies tying a knot of marriage, mentioning, "I don't want to get married now" (4:31-4:32) when she gets to know about the proposal. But, her mother persuades her to marry

for the sake of society. She mentions, “if a girl stays unmarried for too long, everyone will laugh at her” (4:44-4:48). The ethics of the culture itself are made to make women suffer by educating them to prioritize society over self-desire. Numa’s father is found to be worried about the quantity of the material he receives. Father treats his daughter as an object. How can he expect other family members to treat her like a queen if he treats her as an object? He is never found concerned about Numa’s interest.

Although Numa presents the audacious character traits mentioning, “I don’t want to get married now” (4:31-4:32) when she gets to know about the proposal in the movie the lack of agency does not let the contest of the character succeed. Numa, despite her dauntless character traits, fails to mark the stability over her decision before the consciousness towards the thoughts of society and dignity of her parents. The film has consolidated the aesthetics of the Limbu culture prioritizing the participation of the indigenous group which was not available in the prior broadcast movies. The tradition that the Limbu culture follows from their emergence on the earth to their demise along with the inclusion of the daily activities performed by the members of the sophisticated and poor family in the community incorporating the situations of love and loathe; pleasant and loneliness; fun and furious, has been prioritized in the film. Furthermore, the frequent display of drinking of Tongba by the characters in the movie identifies the significance of culture and the sense of cultural perseverance making even children drink it.

As the plot moves forward, the major paradigm shift has been highlighted through the life of the protagonist. It presents the audacious, intoxication and resistance of the protagonist. The visit to the fair where the protagonist meets the Rikute who puts forth his view on getting married to her and the reply of Numa, “If you’re a son of a Limbu, then come according to tradition” (47:56-48-01) presents her audacious characteristics. Similarly, Numa denies in getting married to Girihang and threatening her parents to leave home and stay with the parents of her late husband if they force her to marry with her questions to her mother asking why they are treating her as an object reflects the outspoken nature of the protagonist. She mentions, “Aren’t you satisfied giving me away once? Do you take me for an object to be traded? I’m not one of your cattle. I’m not going to marry again! (53:24-53:34). Numa proves her dauntless character traits with this step. The acceptance of the community to let a widow step into a new life without any set drama is quite fascinating. But family guidance with money-oriented value over the child’s preference presents the orthodoxical perceptions of the community.

Women in society are supposed to live life being a shield of cultural tradition killing their dreams. Numa for the dignity of her father has to marry Girihang despite her disinterest. Girihang: a character with no sense of respect towards women who even utters a shameless

statement in front of his brothers to his wife and treats her as a commodity. Even though Numa revokes him by mentioning, “You’re shameless! You don’t even know what to say and what not to say in front of others” (1:02:42-1:02:47). But Girihang does not regret, rather laughs as if he has done some victorious deeds. He even tortures her and repeatedly makes her feel she is an object and has to work as per his will and has no autonomy. The suppression of the Numa in the movie presents the intoxicated behaviour that the women have to undergo in the community. However, the twisting plotline of the movie manifests the autonomy and the succession of the women towards the oppression. The twist on the plotline presented through Lojina’s (younger sister of Numa) dream manifests the succession in achieving the resistance; the path of liberation, that the women deserve to live.

The Hegemony of Caste Hierarchy

Nepal is a multi-diverse country encapsulating more than 127 linguistic/castes groups; however, the hierarchy among the castes has paralyzed the integrity of the society- derailing it towards conflict and contestation. The supremacy of certain castes still dominate others and relegates them as subordinated members of society. The so-called Dalits are the most intoxicated category of people dominated by the majoritarianism- Khas Aryan (Brahmin); nevertheless, it does not outcast the intra-caste conflict that is eroding subalterns themselves. But the suffering that minorities suffer from the majority is more painful and inhumane than the suffering they get from their internal conflict. The dominant group has gripped their firmness so strongly that they have changed the same people into untouchable. They have succeeded in doing this through a significant apparatus- hegemony, which has not only consolidated the supreme position of the majoritarian but also has assisted to prolong their dominance.

The ascendancy of the hegemonic dominance over subaltern groups has been precisely illustrated in Yash Kumar’s movie *Batomuniko Phool* (2010), picturizing barriers and conflicts in the inter-caste love relation and intra-caste respectively. Insights bestowed through the movie dismantles elitist historiography, focusing on the autonomy of subaltern groups they have within themselves. However, their voice for justice, autonomy, liberation and modification has been diluted with destructive forces between themselves. For instance, when Kanchha puts forth his feelings to Tusli she rejects mentioning the differentiation between Biswakarma and Damai. She says, “You and I are not alike in our thinking or our castes. I am a Bishwokarma (Blacksmith) You are a Damai (Tailor). Have you ever heard of a Blacksmith marrying a Tailor?” (39:22-39:32).



Image II: Conflict due to caste within Dalits

The above scene in the film depicts disparity within themselves: subaltern groups, visualizing the persisting intra-class conflict and the weakening of the firm empathy they need to hold towards themselves, however as an effect of the dominance of Khas-Aryan over subaltern groups, it fails. The movies of these forms favour the subaltern groups, through the visual medium enhancing their role as active consumers and critiquing the objectification, discrimination, subordination, and suffocation deliberately made a part of subaltern groups. Furthermore, it identifies the subaltern occupying the devoid highlighted since historic period through elitist discourses. It remarks that the laws are just for the common and subaltern people to problematize their situation but not just the people. As Antonio Gramsci asserts:

It is falsely assumed that the law is an integral expression of society as a whole. Instead, a truer expression of society is those rules of behaviour that jurist call "legally neutral," and the sphere they encompass changes with the times and with the scope of state intervention in the life of citizens. The law does not express the whole of society (if it did, those who break the law would have to be considered antisocial beings by nature or mentally deficient; the law, rather, is an expression of the ruling class, which "imposes" on the whole of society those norms of conduct that are most tightly connected to its own *raison d'être* and expansion. The greatest function of the law is the following: to presuppose that insofar as all citizens can become members of the ruling class, all of them must freely accept the conformity set down by the law. (83-84)

The law seems to be incapable in the practical realm of human society. The false assumption is guiding people and motivating them to believe what the laws say but not what the law is. It has

become a common practice to abide by the law and respect it, but people fail to comprehend the flow of power and its practicality. As Michael Foucault writes, "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge produces discourses" (1139). The law is diluted time and again by the power bloc and makes the subaltern groups of people a victim without crime. So, Foucault believes, "It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (1139).

Supremacy of the majoritarian groups has repressed the functioning of the subaltern group, victimizing the subalterns through the discourses produced. The discourse that the lower caste can not ever be able to form an intimacy with the higher caste has been depicted picturizing the humiliation and discrimination experienced by the characters: Radha, Gurans and Suresh. As Radha, a so-called high caste woman who gets married to a Bishwakarma man goes to her birthplace to receive a kind of support from her parents because of the discrimination she was experiencing in society. But her father kicks her out of the house by humiliating and discriminating which leads her to attempt suicide. Therefore, Suresh witnessing the scenario decides to separate from Gurans: a girl from high-class society, and he neglects her, suppressing the love he has for her. However, his grandmother supports Suresh and promises to help him to unite with Gurans.

The radical thought and the autonomous self of the grandmother have been depicted in the movie as she mentions, "I don't care about this society. Suresh and I are going to Mohan's home tomorrow. Come along if you want or we will go without you" (1:57:09-1:57:19). It also limelights the sense of solidarity that the subaltern people have even though they have been victims of the domination imposed. But, the visit to Gurans' father turns out to be more humiliating as he imposes his ideology related to caste dominance. Mohan Prasad Upadhyaya (Gurans' father) does not accept their marriage proposal; rather he badly insults them even though he runs the anti-untouchable organization. He says that he has run an anti-untouchable organization for his business rather than the abolishment of caste discrimination. The hypocrisy and the inhumane characteristics of the people belonging to the so-called higher-caste along with their dominance that destructs the diverse society fragmenting the solidarity that subaltern groups have within themselves towards the society can be comprehended through the dialogue. Hegemonic groups have taken the existence of the subaltern group as the object pretending the sense of empathy towards the subaltern.

Women's Audacity and Agency Formation

The Maoist movement has contributed ample aspects of Nepali society including women's recognition and the formation of agency for the positionality of women. It has consolidated the recognition of women and paved the way for the exposure of their audacity. The Maoist movement has played a pivotal role as an agency to voice the voiceless subalterns. How women were underprivileged before the insurgency and the way they participated during the Maoist movement resembles a profound cleavage of the comprehension regarding women. This particular scenario has been precisely articulated in Tsering Rhitar Sherpa on *Uma* (2013); this movie delivers the resemblance of events the country underwent during the Maoist insurgency in the 1990s conveying the necessity of revolutionary steps for the appropriate evolution of the nation due to the increment on the assassination of voices of people articulating social change. It extends to the period when opposition to ideologies and beliefs of people in power has to experience the tremendous torment on which innocent people were victims. The young woman, Uma (Reecha Sharma) along with her friends (Jagat, Anurag, Anil) are presented as one having concepts of equality, liberation and justice for minorities with a sense of concrete rebellious attitude towards the orthodoxical mindset. They represent the propaganda of Maoists who hold a sense of duty towards the nation and have the determination to bring change in society from its ground level being the voice of the voiceless; Maoist movement as an agent for the change in the society. However, Milan (Saugat Malla), brother of Uma, a police officer, has faithful adherence to his duty towards the nation. He believes Maoists as terrorists and a hindrance in fulfilling their responsibility as a government service provider.

The protagonist of *Uma* chooses the path of revolution in bestowing the justice of squashed voices being part of Maoist combatant fragmenting the definition of the ideal women the society has formed. Her role in the movie disintegrates the stereotypical conception constructed in society towards women as she poses questions to her brother when he objectifies sending her to Kathmandu to pursue higher education. She mentions, "Brother, you know full well what's wrong with the education here" (8:38-8:41). It portrays her audacity to put forward her views which we rarely identify with ladies of the time. Similarly, the ideas within her are not confined within certain boundaries rather it reflects the sense of rebellion characteristics through the deliverance of her poetry as it assembles the similes and metaphors of frustration and revolt towards the political imbalance along with the ideas of liberation and justice. She is portrayed as one with dauntless character traits which can be displayed in the scene of the termination of class when Anil mentions, "Let me walk you. I will drop you home" (20:58-21:00). She replies, "Thank you but I can go home by myself" (21:00-21:03).



Image III: Rejection of the proposal to drop home

The above scene in the film depicts the message that women have a sense of denial and are outspoken. The conventional pattern formed to compress women within the four walls persuading them to accept the established ideology that they are biologically weaker and belong to the subordination group have no space in the movie. Similarly, Uma's returning home late after attending a poetry workshop was not an issue, it did not set off drama. The character correspondingly was allowed to fall in love twice. Firstly, during the first half of the movie with Anil and after his death with Vineet (Pramod Agrahari), the Maoists are combatants after the protagonist joins the Maoists camp. And prominently her pregnancy before binding into a social institution: marriage was not a threat to the family. This sets a radical example in the context of Nepal where pregnancy before wedlock is considered a serious crime even in the twentieth-first century.

The increment and the firm shape to develop audacity in women that made possible with the Maoist movement. Accepting the Maoist movement as the agency in formulating the sense of concrete rebellious attitude towards the orthodoxical mindset is assembled within the movie. Although the movement was concerned with replacing the irrational structures built to elevate women's position, the patriarchal domination was not yet in its discontinuity. For instance, the scenario in which the group of three- Uma, Vineet and Apal- are assigned the greatest mission, i.e. shooting the IG of Nepal Police meanwhile, Apal mentions women as a subordinate group through his dialogue, "Women is usually not considered to with such brevity" (1:59:36-1:59:38). It can either be taken as a conspiracy of Apal to demotivate Uma or the male domination. However, Uma does not dilute herself with such filthy comments rather mentions fulfilling the task with utmost responsibility. The deliverance of her dialogue, "to

shoots down the enemy will be an honour” (2:00:03- 2:00:05) resembles the audacity that women have to smash the concepts of patriarchy with their power. The establishment of a positive attitude towards the women and the minorities breaking the orthodox assumptions balancing their responsibility towards society was the motive of the Maoist movement.

The rage of establishing positivity in the society and concern for the liberty of other people prior self manifest an optimism in the young generation. The balance of their responsibility towards society and the accomplishment of personal self desires depict the affirmative notion of solidarity. The absence of solidarity has nevertheless let the Uma’s team march forward representing themselves as a resistance force. Ranjit Guha opines, “Solidarity is thus a categorical imprint of peasant consciousness and there is hardly a rebellion that does not bear it. However, its quality varies from one event to another and from phase to phase within the same event depending on whether its content is a sense of belonging to the same class or any other affinity” (169). Furthermore, even though the movie can be regarded as an example of the resistance force, women are confined within certain boundaries developed by the elite of the society. They are presented with one having delicate character traits imposing the duty to fulfil their responsibilities over professional ones. Imposition of biological responsibilities dearth in developing the identity of the subaltern. However, as the plot moves forward, a sense of autonomy in Uma is palpable which describes how morality has dilapidated the position of the women and the movement helped in upgrading their position.

Conclusion

The Nepali film industry has made tremendous changes and progression of the self-formation of the subaltern after Maoist Insurgency. The issues related to- along with class-caste, ethnicity and gender audacity have been depicted more vehemently in Nepali films; however, the changes are just the sparks of the subaltern resistance. The elementary films taken as representative of the subaltern consciousness do not bring about thorough comprehension with the inclusion of isolated ideas. But, they have paved a certain way to the inner freedom of the subaltern groups- with the semblance of knowledge regarding art, aesthetics, culture and voices of the communities representing the common structure constructs the film with a sign of recognition. The films have to communicate the experiences of the human collectively instead of prioritizing the members of a particular elite group by incorporating the voices of the voiceless to be heard in the social realm for groundbreaking changes. The Nepali film industry has presented some sort of hope by producing films that celebrate art as an apparatus to freedom and autonomy of the subaltern; a clear picture of transformation is closely connected to various historical and politico-cultural movements to the Nepali film industry for self-empowerment to the artists and creative activists. The gradual efforts have paved the way to resistance by questioning the elitist authority to the reversal of politico-cultural hegemony. The

progression in the Nepali film industry ultimately demands transformation at the micro-political level which is possible only after the subaltern groups of people having revolutionary consciousness making a bold determination of autonomous self-formation.

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