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Representation of Masculinity in Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Muglan*

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Abstract

*Patriarchal gender roles provide certain privileges to males. They hold the position of house holder, which provides them access to power and resources, and authority over women and children in the family. Likewise, they get social recognition as the head of the family. But they get these privileges on the condition that they provide and protect their family members as breadwinners. One of the aspects of masculinity is to provide to the needs of the family. Thus, men take risks and accept challenges to earn money so that they can provide for their families. However, while performing the breadwinner role, they are likely to encounter different types of mental and physical threats that may cost them their lives. Govinda Raj Bhattarai's debut novel, *Muglan* deals with the problems faced by men in patriarchy. Though the protagonist and his companions have emulated the traditional masculinity and hoped to live like men, they fail. Thus, this article aims to analyze the representation of masculinity in the novel to examine the harms of patriarchal gender roles on men. For this, it takes insights from Masculinity Studies, which put forward to inessential approach to gender. This approach suggests that gender is not a natural phenomenon. Rather it is a socially constructed category, and rigid traditional gender roles harm both men and women. The article contributes to understanding the harms of rigid patriarchal gender roles on men.*

Keywords: Gender roles, masculinity, Nepali literature, patriarchy, performance.

Background: Masculinity and the History of Nepali Literature

History of Nepali literature begins with men writing to men. It shows men's adherence to traditional gender roles. Traditionally, a man is expected to live his life meaningfully by doing some noble and charitable deeds in the society. A real man is one who does something noble to be remembered even after his death. This is highlighted by the first Nepali poet, Bhanubhakta Acharya's poem entitled "Ghāsi [The Grass Cutter]". It explicates that a man will

be remembered not because of his wealth and physique but because of his contribution to the society. Thus, the poet regrets for being unable to contribute to society in spite of his richness. He criticizes himself as a worthless man.

On the contrary, the poet praises the poor grass-cutter who expects to get a well dug for the villagers from the money that he will earn. He hopes to be remembered even after his death. He clarifies his intention: "What is the use of savings? Nothing will accompany me when I die! Rather if – a pond is dug it will be of use to the village folk who will remember me even after my death." The words of the grass-cutter has inspired him so much that he spontaneously composed the poem "Ghāsi," which expresses his remorse:

*ghāsī daridra gharako tara Buddhi kasto/ mai Bhānubhakta bhaikana āja yasto . . . es
Ghāsīle kasari diyecha arti/ Dikāracha makana basnu narākhi kirtī* [though the Ghāsi
is poor materially/ he is immensely wise . . . how he has opened my eyes/ it is
worthless for me to live without doing memorable deeds.] (qtd. in Maitra 63)

Inspired to be remembered by people after his death, Bhanubhakta began writing poems. It illustrates an ideal way of performing masculinity in the then society.

However, men need cash to conduct the noble deeds. They also need it to provide materially to the family. Indeed, a man who fails to provide for the family becomes the target of public mockery and insults (Sawyer 25). Nepali society also treats a man as an effeminate one if he fails to support his family economically. For instance, there is a popular Nepali proverb that shows the status of a man who fails to earn cash: "nāmrđako shrīmatī hunu bhandā mardako kamārī hunu besa [It is better to be the maid of a masculine man, rather than to be the wife of an effeminate man.]" This proverb reflects the general societal understanding of a man's role in Nepal.

Laxmi Prasad Devkota's popular poetic play *Munā Madan* also deals with a man's compulsion of earning cash to meet the role of the breadwinner. Madan, the protagonist of the play leaves his beloved, Muna and his old mother back in Kathmandu and goes to Lasha, present Tibet despite the arduous journey. He explains his obligation:

But what do I do?/ A sip of milk to wet the throat of my mother/ Her dreams to build a
rest house and a public tap for the travelers/ A strong foundation for a home / made
insecure by loan. (Devkota 4)

As a breadwinner, the sole responsibility of managing the financial needs of the family rests on him. He has to live up to the expectation of his parents: meet his mother's desires, provide her nutritious food and pay the family loan. In addition, he needs to keep his wife happy by providing her with jewels. He asserts, "A man will either die or do but does not withdraw from

his decision" (Devkota 1). His resolution, though he has a tragic ending, suggests how a man should act.

The tragedy of Madan reminds the fate of Nepali youths who fly to abroad to materialize their masculine gender roles. If one visits the International Airport of Nepal, she will see the flocks of youth flying to abroad. Though they are aware of the threats that lie in their destination countries, these youths are flying to abroad to meet the family needs as male members of their families.

Providing materially to the family is an ideal way of performing masculinity in the Nepali society. Many Nepali novels from classic to modern chronicle the history of Nepali men migrating to foreign countries in the process of accomplishing their roles as breadwinners (Subedi 104). In this context, Govinda Raj Bhattarai's debut novel *Muglan* can be studied as a case. The novel poignantly explores the harms of traditional gender roles assigned to men. Sutar Kancha (now onward Kancha), the protagonist and his confidant, Thule have embraced traditional masculine gender roles and expect to provide materially to their families. So they flee to Muglan [The Mugal Empire] to get recruited into the army. Michael Hutt mentions that they were naïve and vulnerable, who even have no idea of how to catch a train (204). So, they fall prey to the human traffickers, who sell them as bonded labourers. Though they have male bodies, they are not free to take decision about their lives and perform masculinities the way they like. They are physically and mentally tortured to death. In this background, this article analyzes the representation of masculinity in the novel.

Problem, Objectives and Methodology

The protagonist and the other male characters of the novel have accepted the traditional gender roles assigned to men. They expect to play the role of provider and protector by earning cash. But in the pursuit of accomplishing their roles as breadwinners, they suffer to death. The extreme suffering of these male characters creates problem for the study of masculinity in the novel. The study aims to meet the following objectives:

- to analyze the depiction of masculinity in the novel, and
- to trace and examine the harms of patriarchal gender roles on the male characters.

To meet the stated objectives, the article takes theoretical support from Masculinity Studies. It primarily draws insights from Raewyn Connell, Judith Butler and others who put forward to inessential approach to gender. These critics believe that gender identities like masculinity and femininity are not innate or inborn qualities of men or women. Rather people acquire them as they grow up. Connell explains that becoming a gendered person "follows many different paths, involves many tensions and ambiguities, and sometimes produces

unstable results" (*Gender and Power* 6). Gender identities, then, are not predetermined or fixed by Nature, rather they are fluid and flexible that come to exist through performance as suggested by Butler. She defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body" (25). Chris Brickwell argues that "this is an antiessentialist position; these categories are not imported into culture or society from the 'nature' outside but rather are fundamentally shaped through language" (26). This means gender comes into being through performance: gender is what people do.

Analyzing the texts from this premise, it reveals that though men in general benefit from patriarchal gender order, not all men benefit equally. Likewise, "men who conform to dominant definitions of masculinity may also pay a price" (Connell, *Gender and Power* 4). The protagonist and his companions have embraced traditional masculine gender identity. Their main issue is earning money so that they can financially support their families. They have idealized the breadwinner role as an ideal way of being a man, but they fail to achieve their manhood.

Construction of Nepali Masculinities: A Review of Literature

Though the history of Nepali literature explores men's adherence to masculinity, studies on man and masculinity in the Nepali context is rare. Scholar Sanjeev Uprety mentions four studies on masculinity in the Nepali context. They are Pratyoush Onta's "Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of Jati Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanu Bhakta and the Writing of Bir History," Jeevan Raj Sharma's *Men's Participation in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*, Matt Maycock's *Masculinity, Modernity and Bonded Labourer: Continuity and Change amongst the Kamaiya of Kailali District, far-west Nepal* and his own "Masculinity and Mimicry: Ranas and Gurkhas." Uprety believes that these works have prepared the base for the further studies in Nepali masculinities. Uprety explains that though Onta's work is not directly concerned with Nepali masculinities, it "points to historical imperatives that might have shaped the construction of Nepali Masculinities" ("Triple Headed" 509-10). It explores how the history of *Bir* (brave) Nepali Nationality is constructed.

Maycock analyzes Kamaiya's masculinities in the changing context of the post-Maoist war. Kamaiyas have been bonded labourers who were freed when the Kamaiya System of bonded labour formally ended in 2000. His research provides a perspective on "the production of subaltern Kamaiya masculinities following the Kamaiya system and the subsequent increasing diversity in potential masculine performance" (242). Prior to freedom, the Kamaiya man was the head of his household, and he was subservient to his owner and worked as an agricultural labourer. Now he has no owner and has more chances of freedom of movement. But with the change there came the risk of being unemployed and failing to accomplish the role of breadwinner for him. Maycock concludes that masculinities are relational and Kamaiya's

masculinities are constructed through negotiation with Bahun Masculinities which are the hegemonic ones in Nepal.

Sharma analyzes the gendered nature of men's involvement in the Maoist insurgency. He explains that many young men of 14-20 age group, mostly from *dalit* (untouchable) and other socially excluded groups from the rural area of Nepal joined the war. Sharma has aimed to find out what motivated these youths to join the insurgency. He indicates:

For these young men, joining the Maoist insurgency was very much an attempt to redefine dominant ideas of being a man in the hills of Nepal. It was very much a move to escape from being labelled as a 'faltu' (or a useless person). For the youth from poorer households, joining the armed struggle did not reward them with salary or payment and it was not like a 'job' but it certainly attracted them as it opened a possibility of 'job' once the 'Maoist came to power'. (6)

The youths from the poor households joined the army to fulfill their future role as breadwinners. Maycock's and Sharma's works suggest that the 'breadwinner' role is an ideal of Nepali masculinity.

Uprety's "Masculinity and Mimicry: Ranas and Gurkhas" is an important one to understand the construction of Nepali masculinities from a different light. Uprety analyzes the constructions of masculinity of the Gorkhas in British representations and compares such constructions with representations of the masculinities of the two Rana Prime Ministers, namely Jung Bahadur Rana and Chandra Shumsher Rana. These two were the most influential Rana Prime Ministers of Nepal. Uprety argues that through considering the masculinities of these two prime ministers, one can better understand masculinities more generally in the first half of the 20th century-Nepal. These two rulers by appropriating and rejecting the British model of masculinity, constructed ruling-class martial Kshatriya masculinity in Nepal. Similarly, "Gurkhas were seen as hard, masculine people who were outside the theatre of mimicry" (10). According to him, the Gorkhas represent the working class masculinity whereas Jung represents hyper masculinity.

These studies show the existence of varieties of masculinities in Nepal. Uprety confesses that "a lot needs to be done in order to understand various aspects of Nepali masculinities, including their relation to caste and class, as well as their multiple historical and political manifestations" ("Triple Headed" 9). Yet, he argues that Nepal has been known as the "brave masculine nation" because of the legacy of the Gorkha soldiers who fought in the various battles in the world. Since masculinities lies at the heart of Nepali nationalism, women and other genders suffer from violence. Attributes like aggression, violence and domination are associated with masculinities, so women and other genders sometimes become the recipients of

male aggression at the domestic, household and community levels. He believes that Nepali men display violence in the domestic sphere to be seen as “real men,” the way the Gorkha soldiers have been displaying violence in the battle field. Uprety explores the nexus between masculinities and violence, including violence against women.

The theoretical review of existing literature on Nepali masculinities indicates the prevalence of patriarchal world view based on gender dichotomy. It associates aggression, domination and violence to masculinities and submission and silence to femininity. So men, in general, behave violently and practice violence to tame and control women and other genders. Likewise, patriarchal gender roles expect men to provide materially to the need of family to prove their manhood. Men who fail to accomplish these roles become the target of public mockery as *nāmarda*. The pressure to accomplish these roles leads them to migrate abroad where they may encounter violence, abuse and exploitation. *Muglan* explores the hardships experienced by Nepali men in the foreign land. Though the text was published 47 years ago and has subsequent editions, it has not been studied from this perspective. Thus, this article fills this existing research gap by analyzing the text from the perspective of Masculinity Studies.

Representation of Masculinity in *Muglan*

Set in the early 19th century, partly in India and mainly in Bhutan, *Muglan* tells a heart rendering story of Nepali men who go to Muglan with the aim of being recruited into the army. Kancha and Thule have gone to Dorling (at present it is Darjeeling - a district of West Bengal, India) for marketing from the eastern hilly region of Nepal. But instead of returning home, they flee to Muglan with the hope of being recruited into the army, so that they can earn for their families. Grown up in the patriarchal Nepali society, these youths believe that it is their prime responsibility to protect and provide for the family. Contrary to their expectation, their journey to Muglan ends in the Ha Paro Mountain as bonded labourers in the form of road diggers. Though they have freedom of movement and opportunity to explore the world as males, they suffer to death. The sufferings of these male characters indicate that though patriarchal gender roles benefit men, not all men are equally entitled to receive the patriarchal dividend.

Like other patriarchal societies, in Nepal also gender identities are partly defined in terms of sexual division of labour. Gender roles based on the division of labour "is a concrete expression of ideologies surrounding gender identity" (Connell, *Masculinities* 74). Nepali society emphasizes men's role as economic provider and protector of the family. Kancha and Thule have also embraced the gender identities based on the division of labour and want to perform masculine gender role as breadwinners. They have emulated the breadwinner role as an ideal of manhood.

Masculinity is also associated with bodily traits such as strength, energy, fitness, courage and stamina. Young and energetic with robust physique, Kancha and Thule have all these traits. So they are confident with their masculine identity, and hope to be recruited into the army, because, traditionally, it was an exclusively a masculine profession that demands physical fitness, energy and stamina. Uprety claims that "Nepal has been represented in various historical and literary texts as 'a brave masculine nation' especially due to the Gorkha soldier who fought in various battlefields around the world" (510). Kancha and Thule have been familiar with many Nepali men being recruited into the army and returning homes with money and material things. Thus, getting recruited into the army is a means to that end for them.

In Nepal, generally, men are taken as responsible for earning resources, such as income, land and livestock to support the family. As male members of their families, Kancha and Thule perceive themselves as future heads of their respective families. They believe that it is their responsibility to support their elderly parents, wives and children. Indeed, they have cherished the dream of working in the army, earning money and living as the head of the family.

Similarly, men are expected to endure suffering and physical hardship to gain physical and mental strength. Experience of hardship is a kind of rite of passage into masculinity of Nepali youths. Thus, they are encouraged to explore the world, collect the material things and return home to spend the rest of their lives. Pakhe Kailo's father's assessment of Kancha's worth as a male suffices this. He approves: "It is alright for a son to leave home and go to foreign land" (118). Kancha and Thule must have believed that exposure to outside world and physical suffering strengthen their masculinity. That is why, despite their lack of exposure to the world, they head to unknown destination in a whim to achieve their manhood.

People of patriarchal mindset think that a male body is resilient to exploitations, and it needs no protection. Kancha and Thule take no precaution to protect their bodies and spend the night in the platform. But this is not so true for "bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice" (Connell and Messerschmidt 851). Men, too, are vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. The two youths fall asleep. Their money is stolen: they become penniless. The narrator describes their pathetic condition:

Neither of them had a single penny left. For a while, both of them lost their senses. Their whole bodies trembled, they began to perspire, their mouths became dry and Sutar felt as if he was melting into water or his entire body was dissolving into the earth. (17)

It shows the vulnerability of men in patriarchy. They are so helpless that they feel they would perish.

Since men in patriarchy are trained to endure pain and suffering, they are expected to accept mishaps and act in a balance way. Hence, Kancha and Thule decide to work there despite the hostile environment as Kancha expresses his desire, "we were thinking of working here if we could get any" (21). It supports Connell's argument about gender identity. She states, "Being a man or a woman, then is not a pre-determined state. It is a becoming, a condition actively under construction . . . one is not born masculine, but has to become a man" (*Gender* 5). Kanch and Thule, too, are not fearless and strong to support themselves, but they have to be. So, they consciously perform their masculinity to be socially acceptable.

Likewise, another characteristic of masculinity is men's capacity to earn money. Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella in the Indian context point out:

Cash is an important sign of success and masculinity: a man is someone with liquidity, not just assets. Holding land and owning property is important, but so too is command over cash, and wealth is a central requirement in most styles of masculinity. (120)

The Indian society treats a man as a non-man if he fails to earn cash and provide for his family. It is applicable in the Nepali context as well. To earn cash, employment is a must for the poor people. Unemployment or inability to earn is a threat to their masculinity. Sharma's observation of the motive of the poor Nepali youths joining the Maoist War supports this:

For the youth from poorer households, joining the armed struggle did not reward them with salary or payment and it was not like a 'job' but it certainly attracted them as it opened a possibility of 'job' once the 'Maoist came to power.' (Sharma 6)

The main issue for Kancha and Thule then is concerned with earning money. That is why, they decide to stay there and work for money.

Falsely thinking of being employed as the army personnel, Kancha and Thule follow the traffickers. On the way they meet other twelve lads, who have all been set up to be recruited into the army. Their fascination towards the job reveals the significance of being employed for men. One of the characters shares:

Now they will take us and train us for about a year. Once you come out of it successfully, they will send you out with rifles. In between, you get two year leave. You don't have to pay for food, clothes and lodging; the government provides all. You get a full pant, shirt, uniform, belt, beret cap, everything, all governmental. For six months, the big officer just make you shoot at target. I'm told that the one who can hit straight is taken in. (27)

Getting entry into the army and earning money will provide them success. They are determined to return homes after making money. Ironically, they have already been trapped by the traffickers.

Similarly, hard work is another important aspect of masculinity. Morrell and Swart claim that "masculinities are centrally constructed around work" (102). Maycock has identified breadwinner or householder as the dominant modes of masculinity for the working class Nepali (154). Men from this class perform their masculinity by working hard. In the hilly region of Nepal, working class masculinities are defined in terms of carrying load, digging the land, ploughing the fields, felling of the trees and like that. The male characters of the novel also associate masculinity with hard work and perform their gender identity accordingly. The narrator comments:

Felling trees was just child's play for the lads who had grown up on the nutritious solid food of millet and corn in the invigorating climate of the hills. Right from the age of ten or twelve, these boys had ceased to consider tasks like going to jungle for collecting fodder, felling trees and chopping firewood to be any work at all. (50)

They have been brought up doing things which have been identified as men's tasks.

Grown up as hard working men, Kancha and other male characters continue working hard, despite being cheated, because they believe that hard work will reward them. The narrator describes: "They would not even realize that they were getting drenched fully in sweat as long as their axe moved ignoring their hunger, thirst and even the call of nature, they razed countless trees" (54). Indeed, Kancha receives social recognition and respect as 'a real man' because of his hard work in Pakhe's village. The narrator approves: "It was nothing like work for him to tend the muddy fields the whole day in the month of Asar, go to shed in the evening and come back home early in the morning" (137). Like Kancha, other male characters also work steadily for they are told that the more they work, the more salary they will earn.

The breadwinner role assigned to men provides them certain benefits as well as risks. They have access to resources and power and authority over women and children. They have freedom of movement and exposure to the outside world. However, they have to bear risks and accept challenges as well. Kancha and other male characters have emulated the masculinity that emphasizes the breadwinner role of men in gender order. They are mesmerized by the scene of soldiers' parading and wish they were recruited. The narrator reveals their excitement: "They sensed they had reached the place of recruitment. Their heart soared in flight with the fantasy of military life that they might be leading" (24). The youths are free to leave homes to get entry in the army so that they have resources and authority over the other.

Though the male characters have freedom of movement, they face problems. The traffickers appoint them as road diggers. The contractor announces authoritatively: "Alright, now you are in our charge. From today onwards, you have to do whatever job you are assigned. . . .But if you run away from here. . ." (47). The supervisor threatens to kill them if they try to escape from there. Though they are men with physical strength, they submit to the contractors: "Nobody had any courage to utter even a single word, either in protest or in approval" (49). The freedom of movement provided to men in patriarchy has led these men to the contractors.

Traditional gender roles harm men. Since hard work is associated with masculinity, men are expected to do the arduous work which may take their lives. Pointing to this risk, Connell argues: "Though the detailed division between men's and women's work varies in different part of the world it is common for men to predominate in heavy industry, mining, transport, indeed in most jobs that involve machinery except a sewing machine" (*Gender* 3). The novel exemplifies this. The contractors appoint Kancha and others to blast the rocks. Thule never returns the tent from the worksite. He must have been crushed to death by the blast. Likewise, Lale Subba has frozen to death. "He was biting his teeth forcefully, as if he was still shivering and rattling his teeth with cold" (76). Rai Kancha, too, dies. The narrator poignantly describes his pathetic death:

Rai who had left his parents, home and village with a hope of seeing them again after being recruited into the army and earning money, and making his and their life comfortable, was lying lifeless today, offering the last breath of his life to the 'Ha Dzong' on a bare hill, without even being noticed by the vultures and jackals." (80)

Construction of road demands hard labour associated to masculinity. It is believed that men can work for longer hours in the extreme weather with minimum of food. So they are made to work in the adverse situation. Consequently, many of them get accidents and die.

Moreover, traditional gender roles harm men at the emotional level as well. Traditionally, men are treated as emotionless robots made for work, and they are prohibited to be carried away by emotions. Inability to hold on tears is a marker of weakness associated to femininity: behaving emotionally weakens one's masculinity. Thus, Kancha hides his emotion to look rational and manly. "Sitting in one corner, all alone he started to sob and shed tears" (73). Thule's disappearance shocks him; he grieves. But he cannot cry openly. The way he behaves indicates that gender identities are acquired as we grow up. Becoming a gendered person as pointed by Connell "follows many tensions and ambiguities, and sometimes produces unstable results." She argues that gender identities are not fixed by Nature. Rather people construct themselves as masculine or feminine. People claim their places in the gender order" (*Gender* 6). Kancha, too, claims his masculine identity by working hard and controlling the emotions.

Patriarchal hierarchical structure is sustained by the domination and subordination of the weak men and women. In the novel, the contractors appoint the supervisors to monitor and control the labourers. The workers have to do the arduous work non-stop in the extreme weather with minimum of food to provide profits to the supervisors and the contractors. bell hooks maintains that "patriarchy provides the right to dominate and rule over weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence" (18). The political system of the nation also supports this. The contractors warn them not to run away from the work place. The youth cannot complain: if they run away, the police will catch them and hand over them to the contractors. The system of the nation allows the contractors to dominate and discriminate against the workers because they are socially, politically and economically weak, and they cannot protest against the injustice.

The sufferings of these male characters support that not all men receive the patriarchal dividend equally. Connell explains that though men in general benefit from traditional gender order not all men benefit equally. She explains:

Men who conform to dominate definitions of masculinity may also pay a price. Research on men's health shows that men have a higher rate of industrial accidents than women, have a higher rate of death by violence, tend to eat worse diet and drink more alcohol, and (not surprisingly) have more sport injuries. (*Gender* 7)

Connell analysis supports the condition of these men. Their activities support hegemonic masculinity. They are hardworking, sincere and honest. They aim to achieve the status of householders and are engaged in masculine tasks. Nonetheless, their participation in the masculine activities make them vulnerable to diseases and death. An experienced labourer cautions them: "You all have come here with such an enviable physiques and are full of dreams, but they will suck every drop of blood out of you and kill you" (61). As predicted by this man, because of the poor working condition, lack of proper housing, lack of nutritious food, and over work their health deteriorates and many of them die.

The male characters persistence to work proves their commitment to hegemonic masculinity that emphasizes men's role as householders. They would endure utmost pain and suffering provided with the minimum salary. Thule as a reasonable man consoles the depressed Karki: "Don't get disheartened. If our life remains, we will someday escape from here. We shall take care of our parents, cattle and everything" (67). But, instead of earning money they may lose their lives like the other workers. It would be useless for these men to spend their life aimlessly. So they decide to escape from there. Kancha insists that they should take risk once more: "No matter what, let's risk our life once this time" (83). Butler's notion about the performance of gender identities helps to understand their activities. She proclaims that "gender is performative, bringing identities into existence through action, rather than being the

expression of some pre-existing reality" (42). They confirm their masculine identity by taking risks.

Nonetheless, masculinity is relational and it changes in time and place. Here the workers, despite their masculine jobs, they fail showcasing their masculinity in terms of aggression and dominance. They are subjugated and dominated by the contractors and supervisors: they are emasculated. However, the protagonist retains his masculinity by running away from there. As stated earlier, masculinity is associated with bearing risk, controlling the body by enduring hunger, pain and fatigue. Kancha accomplishes the arduous journey walking for ten days, and reaches to Pakhe Kailo's farm. He acts like a man being humble and benevolent, and maintaining self-dignity. He wants to pay for the hospitality that Pakhe has provided him because a man should not take obligation from others. But on the other hand, he should always be obliged towards his parents and wife as a real man. He explains the reason why he wants to return home: "Despite enduring so much I had almost lost my life. I think of my home, my old father and mother, my wife in her parents' house" (105). His realization of a man's obligation as a son and husband indicates his adherence to traditional gender roles assigned to men.

The pressure of rigid gender social norms discourages Kancha even from returning home without cash or other material gifts. Despite his intense desire to return home, it would be insulting for him to return home with empty pocket. He confesses: "It's shameful for a son who disappeared for all these days to go back home with empty pocket. . . . Everybody will laugh at me if I return a pauper like this" (110). His dilemma approves David Gilmore's explanation about manhood. He explains, "Manhood certainly does not appear to be self-reliant and autonomous. On the contrary, masculinity seems to depend chronically on the estimation of others, to be highly vulnerable to attack by ridicule, shaming, subordination, or 'dishonourable' female action" (17). He fears to be treated as *nāmarda* (an effeminate man). It means masculinity is fragile and is under constant threat of loss. So, one has to win and defend it against powerful odds as postulated by Gilmore (11). Failing to perform masculinity as breadwinner then results in mockery and insult.

Kancha tries hard to retain his masculine identity. Working hard and cooperating others he gets approval from Pakhe's family. They identify him as a real man and readily offer him their daughter though he is a foreigner. The narrator reveals their notion of a real man: "They believed only one who had strong limbs, who could work at home, field and shed was capable of taking care of their daughter" (137). In addition to hard work, Kancha exhibits other traits linked to masculinities. The narrator approves, "Anybody who saw his smartness, agility, friendly nature and smiling face would admire him tremendously and tell everybody that a 'man' should be like him" (124). This means masculinity as a socially constructed phenomenon

comes to exist through performance. Butler rings true when she states that "gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character" (180). Kancha gets approval from the family as well as from their community through the repeated performance of activities associated with masculinities.

In addition to the above mentioned traits, masculinity is also linked with high sexual desires. It is therefore, people, in general, turn a blind eye to men's infidelity as they believe that men have high sexual urges. This belief benefits men as they have access to sex. Kancha has also internalized the belief about men's high sexual desire. Thus, he readily accepts the proposal despite his marital status. He feels elated when they recognize him as a 'real man' and award him for playing the traditional masculine roles. "Sutar felt like he was in a different world. A drastic change was noticed in him. He was filled with gratitude in his thoughts and action toward Pakhe" (139). Men who perform the traditional roles and meet the social expectation are rewarded. Kancha also benefits from the patriarchal gender order for the time being. He has money, a young lady as a wife and has also got an offer of permanent settlement by his in-laws, even in abroad.

Though performance of traditional masculinity rewards men, it invites challenges as well. Kancha's decision to stay there is against Bhutan's law. Though he narrowly escapes from the police, he becomes penniless. Consequently, he cannot go home and stays working at Chengmari tea state. He dreads of reaching home empty handed. He has to prove his masculinity constantly as the narrator reveals his psychology: "He was in his late twenties, how could he go back home empty handed. His parents might have very high hopes of him. He thought it better to die rather than go back home empty handed" (151). His compulsion reminds that masculinity means "more than just being a man" (Synnott 22), and men have to think, behave and act as masculine to get social acceptance.

Kancha's masculine identity gets currency when his wife, Thuli comes to him. "He is proud upon his manhood as he had husband honoring chaste wife, Thuli, who had been waiting for him the darkness" (155). But to accomplish masculine roles, one must have a robust and healthy body. One cannot remain masculine in case of having physical injuries or mutilations. Despite his desperate attempt to play the householder role, Kancha cannot protect and provide for his family after he becomes a disable. He is helpless when the state authority makes him evacuate his shelter. His incapacity to support the family leads him to madness. Now instead of respect and love for the father, the head of the family, his family members develop contempt and fear towards him. So, Thuli chases him with a burning log after he attacks his daughter.

Conclusion

The novel *Muglan* deals with Nepali men adherence to traditional gender roles and its repercussions on them. The male characters of the novel have accepted and expected to perform masculine gender roles assigned to them. They aim to achieve their manhood by performing the breadwinner role as an ideal way of being a man. Thus, Kancha and Thule go to Muglan hoping to be recruited into the army so that they can meet the financial need of their families. They have embraced traits like kindness, cooperation, honesty, strength, stoicism and hard work associated with masculinities. Grown up in the patriarchal Nepali society as males, they have taken it for granted that they have freedom of movement and they are invulnerable. Contrary to their expectation, they are sold to the contractors as road diggers. These contractors need masculine men who are expected to work for longer hours enduring hunger and pain. Thus, they make them work for longer hours with minimum of food and no comforts. Consequently, many of them fall sick and die.

Performance of masculinity in the socially acceptable ways rewards men. However, men have to fight against the odds to win and preserve masculinity. Thus, though most of his friends die, Kancha struggles hard and retains his masculine identity which rewards him temporarily. But at the end, he gets amputated and fails to perform the householder role. Feeling of helplessness drives him to madness and death. Kancha and other male characters suffer because of the traditional gender roles allotted to them. Their sufferings indicate that though traditional gender roles are rewarding to men, not all men are equally entitled to receive patriarchal dividend, and many of them suffer to death. This study has traced the harms of traditional gender roles on men. Future researchers can study the text from Subaltern and Marxist perspectives as well.

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