

- Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal
- Index in NepJOL
- Permanently Archived in Portico



## **Stereotypes and Gender Roles in Pandey's *Jiyara*: Changing the Script**

**Dr. Asmita Bista**

Lecturer in English at Mahendra Multiple Campus, T.U., Dharan

Corresponding Author: Asmita Bista, Email: [asmitabista15@gmail.com](mailto:asmitabista15@gmail.com)

Copyright 2023 ©The Author(S). The publisher may reuse published articles with prior permission of the concerned author(s).

### **Abstract**

*Nayan Raj Pandey's Jiyara, an anthology of stories, portrays the prevailing gender practices in the Madhesi community that make women's life devastated. The anthology highlights that existing gender norms promote inequality, violence and injustice against women. So, the study investigates how the gender roles are instituted and imposed to the females in the story "Janaani" in particular and in the Madhesi community in general. It scrutinizes the issues related to socially prescribed gender roles that bring in the life of Madhesi women. This paper assesses the factors that force the Madhesi women to subvert the scripted gender roles. To address these objectives, Judith Butler's ideas on gender performativity, gender regulation and gender subversion are used. In Butler's understanding of gender, the 'performances of gender' are enforced through the social script. She views that an individual's gender is created by performing the script repetitively; however, the act of repetition creates the space for the individual to repeat the acts differently. Therefore, though a society constrains the individual in stereotyped gender roles, one seeks various possibilities within those constraints to break them. The selected story illuminates the prevailing gender stereotypes in the Madhesi community that act as a prime cause of the plight of Jamenty, the central character of "Janaani". The paper concludes that since gender is an unstable entity which can be constituted by the individual differently, Jamenty, a representative female of the Madhesi community, subverts the socially imposed gender roles.*

**Keywords:** Madhesi community, gender roles, subversion, stereotypes

### **Introduction**

With astute depiction of the Madhesi culture and tradition, Nayan Raj Pandey's *Jiyara*, an anthology of stories, appears as a breakthrough in the history of Nepali fiction. In *Jiyara*, by setting the stories in the Madesh, Pandey raises the issues of Madhesi community pertinently. Likewise, Pandey has brought the neglected Madhesi community into the center. The author admits that he has highlighted the plights of Madhesi people, where as the mainstream of Nepali fictions mostly exclude the Madhesi's issues. Pandey discloses that the anthology manifests itself as an

innovative literary creation by focusing on the social conventions and belief of Madhesi people that includes the dominant gender practices in the Madhesi community (youtube.com). The anthology appears as well-researched ethnographic document that reveals the exploitation and abuse done to the Madhesi women by confining them to stereotyped gender roles. The anthology exposes that Madhesi women suffer due to the gender biased social practices. Equally, most of the stories catch the flow of changes in women's thought that comes with the political movements in the nation. So, in *Jiyara* the female characters appear in powerful and decisive roles. Depicting the social practices of the Madhesi community, anthology unravels the status of female in the Madhesi community that instigates the researcher to select this text for research through the perspective of gender theory.

## Review of Literature

Pandey's *Jiyara* received critics' attention immensely since its publication. The anthology was reviewed and commented in different media including YouTube and face book. Since Pandey adopts a unique style of storytelling, inserting several narratives within a single story, *Jiyara* draws huge critical acclaim. Critics such as Himal Acharya, Bishal Babu Basnet, Khim Lamichhane, Renuka Jisi appreciate the anthology for providing agency to the marginalized Madhesi characters. This section reviews the ideas of these critics in detail.

Focusing on the theme and style of *Jiyara*, the article "Nayan Raj Pandey's New Collection of Stories *Jiyara*, Hits the Shelves" reveals that: "In *Jiyara*, Pandey combines reality and myth to tell his stories which document political corruption, patriarchy and offer a critique of capitalism" (par 1). The article further discloses about the style adopted by the author that creates a unique place for *Jiyara* among other works of fiction: "In the anthology Pandey has adopted new experimental mode of storytelling" (par 3). Moreover, Pandey has tried to create a distinct atmosphere for each of his stories where "one can find multiple avatars of the same character, multiple plots in the same story, and multiple settings" (par 2). Likewise, Himal Acharya praises Pandey for providing agency to the female. As he mentions: "Female characters are dominant in *Jiyara*" (par 12). In Acharya's view, in the anthology, the female characters appear as a vocal critic of every sort of discrimination and political discrepancies against Madhesi women.

In Bishal Babu Basnet's perception, in *Jiyara*, the suppressed people, mainly females seem to be converting as sheer rebellion. Basnet observes that the awareness against the females' oppression is evident in the stories such as "Salma Sitara", "Janani", "Ya Devi", "Jiyara" and "Laila o Laila" (par 8). Basnet views that paving the ways towards the solution of every kind of domination, Pandey conveys the message that female should not tolerate injustice. Similarly, Renuka Jisi notices that *Jiyara* not only depicts the real picture of Madhes, it also unfolds the discriminatory behavior of the government towards the dwellers of Madhes. Jisi claims that Pandey has enriched the story by adopting the various style of writings, by using of different local dialect, and by unveiling the several issues of Madhes (par 6). She observes that *Jiyara* not only highlights the problem of citizenship to the Madhesi people, the anthology also focuses the problem faced by women that is caused by gender-bias social practices in Madesh.

Khim Lamichhane Kaji observes that Pandey has highlighted suffocation, anger, demand and issues of people, living in remote part like tarai region of Nepal. Kaji perceives that, Pandey does not limit his characters as a complaining individual; rather, they find out the reasons of their problems and decide to revolt. He has criticized the patriarchy in his stories by depicting the pains of women, caused by rooted patriarchal belief. The author, reveals that though females have been suppressed through male chauvinism, time has brought remarkable change in them (par 15). In Kaji's perception, Pandey displays the spark of revolution in the Madhesi women that is ready

to burn all kind of discrimination and inequality. In *Jiyara*, the condition of women has already changed. So, they have declared a war against the males' oppression against the females. These critics have analyzed *jiyara* meticulously. They have reviewed the themes and styles used in anthology. However, they have left the scope for the researcher to analyze it from the perspective of gender theory that has been discussed in the following section of this paper.

### **i) Concept of Gender Performativity and Subversion**

This research is based on the assumption that gender is just a performance. In Judith Butler's perception, an individual performs the feminine or masculine roles under the pressure of powerful social conventions that confine people to particular gender. Butler brings up the idea that gender roles are scripted one that is instituted and controlled through social and cultural norms. Emphasizing the concept of gender performance, she argues that gender is mere a performance; so, gender does not remain stable. Highlighting the scripted nature of gender, Butler claims that one constructs her/his gender through performing the socially prescribed gender roles repeatedly (524). Butler underscores that gender is constituted while performing the roles assigned by the cultures, societies, and families.

Butler also discloses the condition that forces people to perform the stereotyped gender roles. She throws light on the social provisions under which gender roles are scripted and regulated. Butler points out that society institutes the individual's gender through social norms; then, pressurizes an individual to adopt the standardized gender identity. She further claims that society constrains the people in fixed gender identity through punishment. The gender deviator is labeled as unviable person. Moreover, she/he is socially outcasted. Butler highlights about "the presence of forced normality in which the individual entrapped" to perform certain gender roles in order to constitute the socially approved gender identity (526). In Butler's perception, "One important sense of regulation, then, is that persons are regulated by gender, and that this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person" (*Undoing Gender* 52). She focuses on the social pressure that confines the individual to a stereotyped gender roles through social and cultural norms, rituals and practices. Butler admits that since gender is not an innate entity; rather, it is constructed through punishment, one's gender does not remain stable forever.

Butler notices that gender is constructed through performing the prescribed roles; so, there is possibility of deviation in the performance. One may subvert the socially imposed gender roles whenever she/he finds oneself stuck or confined to the conventional gender roles. Butler reveals that while performing, the performer gets the power or agency to diverge from the scripted roles during the performance. Agency, for Butler, provides possibility of gender subversion because during involving in action, one can deviate from the prescribed norms by repeating the acts variously. Butler reveals about the possibility of gender subversion:

Agency is to be located within the possibility of a variation on the repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarism, then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (*GT* 198-99)

Indeed, for Butler, the norms that regulate the agency, do not always succeed; they can be manipulated at the moment of performance and such manipulation creates the possibility for subversion. Following the same line of argument, this article evaluates and analyzes the causes and consequences of socially imposed gender roles to the Madhesi women in the story "Janani".

“Janani” is the first story in the anthology of Pandey’s stories *Jiyara*.

## ii) Performance and Subversion of Stereotyped Gender Roles in “Janaani”

Foregrounding the Madhes to its center, in the story “Janaani”, Pandey depicts the changed appeared in Madhesi community in the context of conventional gender roles. By providing agency to the female character, in this story, the author mirrors the transformation appeared in Madhesi women. Likewise, he subverts the trend of mainstream Nepali literature that promotes the stereotype gender images of women. The text reveals that though in the Madhesi community, there is unequal power sharing among the Madhesi females and males, due to the social-political changes in the country, at present time, the spark of revolution against the injustice and inequality has already seen. Through the story, Pandey exposes that Madhesi women no longer let herself to be confined to the stereotyped gender roles of silent, submissive and sacrificing self. Rather, subverting the stereotyped gender roles, they appear as assertive person who expresses her desires unhesitatingly. Moreover, they crush the hurdles that appear in the path of their freedom and emancipation.

Setting the story in a remote village of Nepalgunj and Aligunj Lakhnaw, an Indian village, in “Janani”, Pandey unfolds the social practices of the ethnic Madhesi community that constrain the females to stereotyped gender images such as moral, obedient, self-sacrificing, and submissive woman. Consequently, Madhesi females perform the socially prescribed gender roles. Since they observe their sisters, mothers, and sister-in-law playing those roles, they build up the image of a loyal and selfless person by recurrently performing the scripted roles. By constructing an image of a weaker sex, the Madhesi community deprives females from sharing the equal status in family and society.

In “Janani”, Pandey reveals that in the Madhesi community, the males not only play a major role to constrain the female to conventional gender identity but claim their ownership to them. Moreover, males even keep the female members under the surveillance. They pry on females’ activity in order to check whether the female family members perform the stereotyped gender roles or not. Likewise, the males compel the females to suppress their desire by confining them to the image of a moral, obedient, self-sacrificing, and submissive women. In the story, Jamenty’s father and brothers also want her to act as an obedient daughter/sister but she denies to do so. Rather, by claiming her rights on her body, she appears as an assertive individual. Consequently, she gets punished as the male members of her family ruin her happiness.

“Janani” exposes the heart rendering consequences declared by the Madhesi community against the trespasser of stereotyped gender roles. The dwellers of Aligunj assign the daughters to the roles of a compliant, timid, and passive individual but Jamayanti, the central character, acts daringly. She vocalizes her desire by eloping with a Muslim boy even though marriage between the Muslim and the Hindu is strictly prohibited in that community. Jamenty’s activities justify that “gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’” (Butler *G T* 25). Likewise, in that social milieu, a girl is not allowed to choose her life partner; rather, male family members select a groom for their daughter/sister. Taking the decision of life in her own, Jamenty appears as a bold lady.

However, she faces dire consequences for denying to stick to the stereotyped gender roles. Actually, denying the socially imposed gender identity, she makes her life problematic. The community punishes her for her disobedience. The narrator reports that as a punishment, they

murder her husband brutally:

*Ek din ghara najikaiko masjidabaata namaj padhera pharkeko belaa aar esa kaa kaaryakartaako bishaala bheedale Aftablaai samaatyo. Aftable aaphu nirdosha bhaeko yaachanaa garirahetkaa thie. Bhidale unako naama sunnai chaahena. Pitipiti maaryo, Aftablaai.* (Pandey 3)

One day, while returning from the mosque, after reading namaz, a huge crowd of political cadre of R. S. party arrested Aftab. Aftab tried to prove his innocence. But the crowd did not pay heed to him. The crowd beat him till death. (my trans.)

Portraying the rueful action of Madhesi people against the gender deviator, the story unveils the terrifying practices of Madhesi community against the female's assertiveness. Since Jamenty creates the image of an audacious woman and acts accordingly, her image challenges the ages old practices that assign the female to the role of a submissive individual. Therefore, society punishes her by converting her life into chaos. They not only murder her husband but also bring her back to natal home forcefully from her husband's home because in Madhesi community daughters are not allowed to choose their life partner. If a girl dares to choose her life partner her acts is taken as a stigma to the family reputation. Therefore, they go to any extent for the sake of family's honour. So, Jamenty gets punished when she follows her free will. Her condition affirms Butler's claim that people who do it in ways that accentuate its genealogy and construction are punished by culture and laws (Butler *GT* 273). Through punishment, Jamenty's parents confine her to socially imposed gender identity.

"Janani" exposes that the existing practices like dowry system is used to confine the females to a weak, dependent, and acquiescent individual. Pandey reveals that each member of Madhesi community shoulder the responsibility to regulate the individual's gender. The Madhesi community sets several provisions to confine people's gender, among them dowry is the prominent one (Tiwari 69). Cultural practices of Madhesi community confirms that gender is "a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions" (quoted in Salih 26). In the story, Jamenty's parents use dowry system for punishing their daughter by constraining her to the role of a mute, obedient *Janani* or 'wife' of a sick, weakling person from a foreign land, Nepal. By doing this, they end up to every chance of her deviation from the assigned gender role. Moreover, they even declare that from the day of her marriage, they break every sort of relation to her. So, she should not dare to visit her natal home and parents. Her mother even announces that for them, she is already dead.

Through Jamenty's case, Pandey discloses that by offering dowry to the groom's parents, girl's parents can easily hand over their daughter to a desirable man. Hence, they freely exercise their authority or ownership on their daughter. So, based on that power, they constantly regulate their daughter's gender identity. In fact, in Madhesi community, to keep intact with prescribed gender identity is a must to maintain the family prestige. Pandey exposes the effort of Jamenty's Parents to constrain Jamenty's gender image as an obedient daughter: "*Jamentyko pariwaaralaai jasari bhae pani kunai hindu ketaasita chhorilai bhidaaidinu thiyo. Tyasaile jamentykaa pitaale Raghulallaai prashasta daaijo dine lobha dekhaae*" ("Jamenty's family was desperate to hand over their daughter to a Hindu man. Therefore, Jamenty's father tempted Raghulal by offering huge amount of money as dowry": my trans.; Pandey 4). Therefore, Raghulal accepts to make Jamenty his daughter in law. Hence, as a punishment, Jamenty's parents constrain her to the role of an acquiescent individual.

When Jamenty's family confine her to the role of a helpless Janani or wife, she performs the allotted role mutely. As Butler highlights the reason for sticking to the socially prescribed image:

Unintelligible gender roles become object of disgust and derision in public. Therefore, individual constrain her/his actions to the socially prescribed gender roles (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 9). As a result, she tolerates every kind of injustice and abuse of her parents. She does not question to her parents for selecting an unsuitable person like Durgalal as her husband, neither does she protest to her parents' decision of sending to her into an alien and distanced land. After marriage also Jamenty brilliantly performs the role of an obedient daughter in law and a loyal wife. She tries to construct the image of 'selfless person by adjusting and blending with the domesticity of her husband's domain. The narrator reports Jamenty's effort of making the image of a dutiful wife:

*Jamenty bhihe garera aadedekhi...kasaisita kunai gunaaso pani garinan bas, aago baalthin, bhaata ra roti pakaauthin, khuwaauthin, bhaadaa majhthin, Durgalalkaa lugaa dhoidinthin...usako tatti saphaa garidinthin. Je je garthin chupchapa garthin.* (Pandey 6)

From the day of her marriage...Jamenty did not do any complain she just set fire, cook rice and bread, feed the family, washed the dishes, washed Durgalal's clothes...cleaned his toilet. Whatever she did, she did quietly. (my trans.)

Since the Madhesi community sets a role of a devoted wife to a female, Jamenty dedicates herself in the service of her sick husband. By creating the image of a dutiful wife, she tries to escape from the punishment as Butler discloses the consequences for a gender deviator: "if individual fails to be recognized as a viable subject, then his life will be impossible, illegible, unreal, and illegitimate" (*GT* viii). Moreover, while befitting in the role of a dutiful wife, she decorates herself in a fashion of a newly married woman. Likewise, every Monday, she visits the temple because in Madhesi community, Hindu women visit temple, particularly on Monday in order to pray for good health, long life, and success of their husband. Jamenty sticks to the stereotyped gender roles, till the death of her in laws.

After the death of her in laws, Jamenty's again deviates from the socially prescribed gender roles affirming that to control one's gender in all situation and at all time is not possible. As Butler claims that individual performs her/his gender differently. In Butler's view, there is no fixed identity that one must reflect because the identity itself is a construct crafted by societal expectations that individual makes through repetition of actions over time. Since the act of repetition constantly changes, it makes the identity unstable, plastic, and flexible (*GT* 33). Since the demise of her in laws uplifts her in the position of the family-head as her bedridden husband is almost nonexistent person, she changes the rule of the game of the performance of gender role. Consequently, a meek Janani/Jamenty turns into an aggressive individual. She expresses her anger towards those who want to satisfy their carnal desire by consuming her body. Playing a role of a bold woman she rebukes as well as challenges the sexual abuser:

*Sandhai shaanta ra chupachapa dekhine Jamenty jagaltaa phinjaera ugrachandi jasti bhaeki thiin. Krodhale anuhaara laalalaala bhaeko thiyo...Uni chichyaaudai thiin, "aao bhataaraharu! Pakada malaai. Bhoga gara malaai. aaphno saaraa mardaangni ma bhitra ghusedideu.* (Pandey 7)

Jamenty, who always stayed calm and quiet, had become a terrible woman. Due to anger, her face had turned red...she was shouting "common rascals! Hold me. Fuck me. Insert your masculinity within me. (my trans.)

Dismantling the image of demure, weak, selfless, and caring woman, she challenges the notion of ideal womanhood, scripted by the society. Portraying Jamenty, an ethnic woman, as a courageous individual, Pandey subverts the stereotype image of Madhesi women.

In “Janaani”, Pandey admits that he provides a different image to his central character Jamenty than that of the image of an ideal woman, promoted by the main-stream Nepali literature (youtube.com). In the story, after the death of her in laws, Jamenty celebrates her freedom. She not only appears as a free individual but also satisfies her carnal desire by keeping sexual relationship with different men. A villager discloses Jamenty’s image of an unrestricted woman that she constructs for her: “Jamentyle malai bichabajaaramaa samaati. Purai nangaa bhaera mamaathi chadhi” (“Jamenty held me at the middle of the market. She mounted over me in a complete naked state”; my trans.; Pandey 8). By sexually abusing males, she molds herself to the role of a sexual abuser. Presenting Jamenty in the role of oppressor, Pandey parodies the role of his central female character. Butler also proposes to subvert the socially imposed gender identity through parody affirming Butler Jamenty “pokes fun at the gender norms and the gendered self that is constituted through the norms” (newrepublic.com). Pandey reverses the role of female character from a helpless victim to a bold persecutor.

Presenting Jamenty in an image of a cruel avenger, Pandey further reveals about the transformation that come in ethnic women, with the passage of time. Jamenty’s rationality, cruelty, and courage appear evidently when she brings a successful end to the plan of murdering of her parents and in laws in Kumbha Fair (a place of Hindu pilgrimage). Murdering her parents, she takes revenge to her parents for spoiling her life. Likewise, assassinating her in laws she secures her freedom and authority. Through her deeds, Jamenty construct the image of raged, callous, aggressive, shrewd person that rip to pieces to her feminine image. As she admits her cruelty: for me, my parents had died a long ago. I also had already died for them. I had come here not as Durgalal’s wife but as a corpse. Corpse neither loves anybody nor anyone loves corpse (9). Pandey exposes that gone are the days when daughters mutely accept the role of an obedient person. Rather, they write their own script as Jamenty does.

Jamenty recurrently appears as a rebellion character. She persistently challenges the stereotyped gender roles by constructing the role of a daring and determined woman. After the death of Durgalal, Jamenty’s husband, Jamenty casts herself to the role of Aftab’s widow. She creates the image of a Muslim widow by cladding herself in a black burka. As Butler points out that the gender identity is not the real one but it is the naturalized or imposed one. So, gender can be created through outer forces such as attire, appearance, body language, and the like. She claims: “gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous” (quoted in Salih 124). Creating the identity of Aftab’s widow, she dismantles the identity of Durgalal’s Janani or wife that is imposed to her forcefully by her parents. When the situation is unfavorable to her, Jamenty plays the role of a virtuous woman, but when she reaches to the authority, she appears as a self-centered, resolute, and rigid woman who follows her free will at all cost.

## Conclusion

Bringing the marginalized Madhesi community at the center, in “Janani,” Pandey portrays the changes that appear in the Madhesi women. The writer reveals that the Madhesi women no longer confine to the stereotyped gender roles. In the story, through the central character Jamenty, Pandey reveals that the Madhesi women cannot remain untouched by the changes appeared in the society. Consequently, they dismantle the socially imposed gender image that restrict them from following their free will, deprive them from equality, and suppress their desire and wishes. In the story, Jamenty’s father and brothers regulate her actions and activities by confining her to the role of a dependent and demure wife of a physically weak and sick man. They use dowry system as a means to regulate her gender because they offer a huge amount of money as dowry to the groom’s

father. However, when the condition becomes favourable to her, she subverts the image of a meek woman. She challenges the sexual abuser. Moreover, Jamenty parodies the role of a perpetrator by sexually abusing the males of that village. Hence, she fulfils her desire freely. Apart from that, she even appears as a ruthless avenger by taking revenge to those who constrain her to the unwanted role of a subservient wife of a weakling foreigner. Hence, this paper has constricted its study to the analysis of the gender issues of Madhesi women from the perspective of gender; nevertheless, it leaves room to analyze it from other perspectives such as feminism, social realism, cultural study, psycho analysis and the alike.

### Works Cited

- Achyarya, Himal. "When Nayan Raj's 'Jiyara' Caught Fire." *Himal Sanchar*, 3 July 2021. <https://himalsanchar.com/when-nayan-rajs-jiyara-caught-fire/>
- Basnet, Bishal Babu. "'Jiyara' Kathaa Phaantako Utkrishta Kriti Ho." *Pharaka Dhaara*, 3 March 2022
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2007.
- . "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol.40, no.4, 1988, pp. 519-531. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sci=01922882%28198812%2940%3A4%3C519%3APA-AGC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C>
- . *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, 2004.
- Jisi, Renuka. "Nayan Rajko Nayaa Baanki 'Jiyara'." *Setopati*, 4 June 2021. <https://www.setopati.com/art/book>
- Kaji, Khim Lamichhane. "Jiyara: Pandeyle Aaphnai Lekhana Padhatilaa Bhatkaeko Kathaa Sangraha." *Sahitya Post*, 18 April 2022. <https://sahityapost.com/top-news/41531>
- "Madhesmaa Mahilaa Utpidankaa Bidrohi Kathaa-Jiyara I Nayan Raj Pandey I AP TALK TIMEI APIHD" <https://www.youtube.com/c/ap1hdofficial>
- Nussbaum, Martha. "The Professor of Parody." *The New Republic Online*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/150687/professor-parody>
- "Nayan Raj Pandey's New Collection of Stories Jiyara, Hits the Shelves". *Nepal Live Today*, 15 Jul 2021. <https://www.nepallivetoday.com>
- Pandey, Nayan Raj. *Jiyara*. Fine Print Books, 2020.
- Tiwari, Sushma. "Exclusion of Madhesi Women in Decision Making." *Academic Voices A Multidisciplinary Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2014, pp. 68-72.
- "Women in Nepal: The Foundation of Dehumanisation and Inequality." *Online Khabar*, 28 Nov 2021. <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/dowry-violence-against-women-nepal.html>