

Prithvi Academic Journal

(A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access International Journal)

ISSN 2631-200X (Print); ISSN 2631-2352 (Online)

Special Issue “COVID-19 & Beyond”; September 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v3i1.31291>

The Play of Gender Roles in Sheeba Shah’s *Facing My Phantoms*

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Submitted Date: 29 July 2020

Accepted Date: 05 September 2020

ABSTRACT

Setting the novel in different time-periods (Rana regime, Panchayat System and Maoist movement), Sheeba Shah’s Facing my Phantoms has depicted the condition of Nepali males and is considered a historical document. This article aims to examine the factors that constrain the male characters to traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. It also studies the consequences faced by the characters while performing and defying gender stereotypes. To address this objective, Butler’s and Connell’s ideas have been used as they have claimed that masculinity and femininity like any other human attributes are fluid; in fact, it is constantly reconstructed in response to socio-political changes under the pressure of social norms. According to Butler, gender is something that is not a corporeal thing, but it is reproducing, changing, and moving. The significance of this article is to find insights in understanding the condition of males in the Nepali society. It concludes that the male characters of Shah’s novel oscillate between traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. Under the social pressure, they perform the roles of an assertive and authoritative father, aggressive and ruthless lover/husband, and rational and responsible son. Likewise, when they get influenced by socio-political changes, they fail to stick to stereotypical gender roles. Consequently, they appear in the emotional, docile, dependent, confused, and unassertive roles.

KEYWORDS: Femininity, gender role, Maoist movement, masculinity, Rana regime, stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

The trend of using gender as a theme in the novel appeared more densely during and after the Maoist movement. Gender has been an important theme explored in Nepali novels after the 1930s. The Nepali novelists have focused their writing on depicting social issues. Therefore, some of them used gender issues as the main theme of their novels because they noticed that gender equality caused disparities in the Nepali society, and they wanted to use novels as a medium of condemning such social flaws. Highlighting the purpose of the novelists of this era, Baral (2013) has argued that Nepali novelists of the 1930s used novels to shape the people’s idea about gender equality (p. 398), whereas Pandey (2012) has presented an idea that is different to Baral and has claimed that none of the novels made gender as their subject till the publication of

Hridayachandrasingh Pradhan's *Swasnimanchhe* (1954). Pandey has claimed that Pradhan's *Swasnimanchhe* (1954) is the first Nepali novel that completely focused on gender issues (p. 28). Similarly, Baral and Atom (2009) have presented a list of the novelists who contributed to bring gender issues in Nepali novels. According to them, the novelists Bijaya Malla, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, Madanmani Dixit, and Prema Shah presented gender issues in their novels (p. 94). Likewise, Uprety (2014) has claimed that Parijat has rigorously explored gender issues in her *Sirisko Phool*. Uprety has viewed that Parijat has shown how the exhibition of masculinity resulted at the tragic end of the female characters (p. 257). These novels are insightful to the readers to know gender issues of that society. Gender has been a prominent theme in the novels during and after the Maoist movement.

Ever since the Maoist movement, Nepali novelists started to use gender as a prominent theme of their literary creations. The novelists of this period observed the changes spread by the Maoist movement among the people and they reflected those changes in their novels. Baral (2017) has assessed that due to the political changes in the country, people became conscious about their rights and equality. Likewise, they started demanding the rights, equality and justice for them. So, noticing those changes, the novelists decided to reproduce those changes in their literary creations (p. 87). Furthermore, he has viewed that the novelists of this period focused their writing on gender issues and identity politics. Similarly, Acharya (2012) has evaluated that at present, the subject of gender equality is not only the concern of the females but also the concerns of the males. Therefore, both male and female novelists have exploited gender issues in their novels (para. 11). Consequently, the novelists Krishna Dharabasi, Sarada Sharma, Pdmawati Singh, Nayanraj Pandey, Neelam Karki Niharika, Manisha Gauchan, Sheeba Shah, and others have portrayed difficulties caused by socially imposed gender roles on the people in their literary narratives. Since Sheeba Shah has focused her writing on gender issues, this article aims to explore gender issues in her novel *Facing my Phantoms*.

In Shah's novel, the male characters are confined to the traditional gender roles through socio-cultural practices and norms. Thus, they go through despair, despondence, frustration, and suffocation. For them, playing the role of a successful leader, authoritative father and responsible son is not easy. Likewise, influenced by the social practices, some of the male characters perform the role of a brutal and ruthless individual to exhibit their manliness. Nevertheless, as gender is not an innate characteristic, but a socially constructed phenomenon, these male characters, time and again, get liberated from the prescribed gender roles and appear as weak, unassertive, indecisive, and irrational persons. These male characters appear as critics of restrictions imposed on them by the society. Similarly, in her novel, Shah has shown the fact that male characters of the first generation of the Singh family perform the traditional gender roles, though the male characters of the second and third generations fail to do so. Therefore, this article has analyzed the factors that imposed stereotypical gender roles to the characters. Similarly, the reasons that compelled them to defy the traditional gender roles have been analyzed in the article. Additionally, the characters' behavior, attitude, thought, and motif have been analyzed in detail in light of the concept of gender theory that has been mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs.

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER: A CONSTRUCTIVE PHENOMENON

The concept of gender was developed during the 1970s and 1980s as a set of ideas guiding historical and other scholarship in the West. This concept proposed to look at masculinity and femininity as sets of socially created characteristics shaping the lives

of men and women. Kimmel and Aronson (2004) have argued that “the concept of gender replaced or challenged ideas of masculinity and femininity as innate human attributes” (p. xv). They have pointed out that after the universal suffrage revolution of the twentieth century, many feminist scholars questioned the assumptions regarding women’s and men’s attributes, and claimed that differences between women and men are socially created. After the movement, gender theory amalgamated to various disciplines and the term ‘gender’ got broader meaning. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) have noted that the development of gender studies as a specialized area of academic shifts has taken place in the field, forcing the critics to think of gender as a complex, multi-faceted topic (p. xii). The concept of gender has been adopted within academic literature and development programming as a medium of understanding the different roles and behaviors of men and women within their particular social context.

Gender theorists Butler, Cameron, and Connell have viewed that the traits or features which are deployed to confirm an individual’s identity as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ are socially constructed. In Butler’s view, gender is socially constructed; therefore, it is fragile, provisional, unstable phenomena. Butler has claimed that ‘gender identity’ is the sum total of an individual’s appearance, it cannot remain unchangeable. Rather, it varies from time to time and place to place (as cited in Cinar, 2015, p. 55). Reinforcing the idea of ‘gender performativity’, Butler has argued that gender identity can be created in various ways through performances. According to her, gender is something that is not a corporeal thing but it is reproducing, changing, and moving. Similarly, Cameron (2006) has viewed gender as a created phenomenon that changes through human interactions. She also observes that the context plays a vital role to create one’s gender identity and to make one’s identity acceptable in the society. According to Cameron, gender identity has to be constantly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing acts in accordance with the cultural norms which define masculinity and femininity (pp. 421-424). Likewise, Connell (2009) has claimed gender as “a key dimension of personal life, social relations and culture” (p. ix). He has noticed that gender identity is produced by the society under a strict supervision. Thus, an individual compels to stick to the socially prescribed identity. For Connell, gender is a pattern in the social arrangements, and those arrangements are governed in the everyday activities or practices.

Similarly, Butler (2007) has claimed that gender is regulated and policed by rigid social norms. She has argued that while creating gender identity, human body is reduced to automata, and is programmed to repeat the appropriate gendered behavior forever. She has observed that individual’s ‘gender identity’ has been established through cultural norms; therefore, one’s identity is not possible to be changed easily. According to her, identity is assured through the stabilizing concept of sex, gender, and sexuality. The very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to confirm to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (p. 23). Thus, in her view, an individual tries to perform as per the social norms and instructions. Nevertheless, since gender identity is a socially imposed and constructed phenomenon, both males and females time and again deviate from stereotypical gender roles. Based on this idea, this article shows that the male characters of Shah’s novel, try to perform traditional gender role. But when they undergo socio-political changes, they subvert the traditional gender role and appear as emotional, docile, dependent, confused and unassertive.

GENDER DYNAMICS IN *FACING MY PHANTOMS*

Shah's *Facing my Phantoms* engages with gender issues of different times of history: time of the Rana Oligarchy, the Panchyat System and the Maoist movement in the country. In the novel, She has unfolded the lives of three generations of the Singh family. Through the portrayal of the character Raja Saheb, the member of the first generation of the Singh family, the novelist has revealed the masculine's modality firmly prevailed in the time of the Rana regime. In that period, males were supposed to act in a masculine manner: authoritative, strong, brave, and macho (Acharya, 2017, p. 26). So, regulated by the conservative social norms, Raja Saheb demonstrates the masculine stereotypes such as courage and adventuresome. Without fearing about the consequences, he involves in revolutionary activities against the Rana regime. Consequently, the Rana rulers exile him from the capital city Kathmandu. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to exhibit his masculinity even in his exile. Chanda explains Raja Saheb's courageous deeds to Sanat:

Your husband is in exile, Rani Saheb. The Teen Sarkar in the capital doesn't want him to needle with the politics there, he will be in problem if he returns...until his allies working from Calcutta Benares, Dehradun manage to out the Teen Sarkar and help Raja Tribhuvan to gain control of governance. (Shah, 2010, p. 50)

Raja Saheb's exhibition of power and authority does not restrict only to a small area of Kanda. Living in Kanda, he takes the leadership of revolution against the Rana regime inside and outside the country.

Raja Saheb showcases his masculinity by putting his efforts to become a successful king. Mailer's (1966) claims, "Masculinity is not something given to you, something that you are born with, but something that you gain" (p. 201). As the king of Kanda, he exercises his authority in that region but he thinks that to prove his manliness, he has to do more. He realizes that to get full-fledge power, he should reinstate in his former power and position; therefore, he puts his effort to regain his power. In this case, Connell (1987) claims: "the power of men and the authority of masculinity are relatively connected. There is a core in the power structure of gender" (p. 109). Thus, Raja Saheb exhibits manliness by acclaiming the supremacy of the Singh clan because his prestige and power rely on it.

In Raja Saheb's case, the stark patriarchal socio-familial structure works as a boosting factor to rear him as a powerful and brutal male member. Consequently, he showcases superiority to his wife. The narrator portrays Raja Saheb's exhibition of superiority to Sanat: "Not only he inspires respect and subservience but Sanat cannot help feeling a sense of terror when with him" (Shah, 2010, p. 49). Since he is accustomed to display his authoritative nature, he appears the same to his newly married wife. The narrator reports:

'Sit down', he says finding her standing motionless by his chair. She begins to squat on the floor before him. 'Not there, come sit by my side.' The tone is the same that he would use with any of the servants in the house, careless and overbearing. (Shah, 2010, p. 52)

Even in the first night of their marriage, Raja Saheb does not speak softly to his newly wed wife. Rather, showing his manliness, he acts ruthlessly; he intimidates her and gives her command.

The society prescribes the role of an oppressor to males; moreover, male members are kept at the top of the familial hierarchy. Acharya (2017) observes that during the Rana regime, Nepal had "patriarchal type of society" and "nobody could raise the voice" for the gender equality (p. 26). Since the society forces males to confine to the

masculine role, Raja Saheb tries to perform the role of a powerful and courageous ruler and an authoritative husband. Connell (1995) claims: "masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interest in society" (p. 44). Raja Saheb exercises supremacy over his wife. Through this, he reinforces the social custom of male supremacy over female.

In the past, during the Rana regime, the society and law of the nation allowed polygamy for man; moreover, it applauded the man who can collect more wives. According to Krisna Thapa, "Prior to the political change of 1951, the social, political, legal, economic and religious factors have made Nepalese women weaker, more exploited and devoid of any sort of freedom with such social evils as polygamy and child marriage" (as cited in Tamang, 2000, p. 131). Since the society provides Raja Saheb the role of a *marda* 'a real man', he collects several legitimate and illegitimate wives and numbers of legitimate and illegitimate children. Moreover, exhibiting his manliness, he tries to own Sanat's body. Sanat notices that taking her as a mere sex object, "he watches her; a scrutinizing look that moves down her entire form. 'you are too thin'... 'you have nice hands, long and delicate fingers, very ladylike'" (Shah, 2010, p. 52). The society assigns the role of an authoritative husband to Raja Saheb; therefore, he shows his possession to Sanat. Hence, he can never express his love and emotion to her.

Similarly, through Raja Saheb's eldest son Prabhat, Shah demonstrates that male members of the second generation of the Singh family also perform socially prescribed gender roles. Prabhat, as a first male child of the royal family, gets assigned to traditional gender roles, affirming Suthrell's (2004) claim that "Having ascertained the sex, the process of gender begins" (p. 13). Hence, in his juvenile age, Prabhat exercises his masculine traits by owning the body of a married house maid Badki. He drinks alcohol and beats his wife Durga. The narrator depicts his brutality towards Durga:

One night, Prabhat enters their room, where Durga is spread out, unconscious in deep sleep. He begins to feel her body all over...He sends her tiny form flying across the bed. Terrified, she begins to cry. Durga's helpless, vulnerable figure suddenly begins to excite Prabhat with a strange obsession and he stand over her, his tall legs spread apart above her, more like a towering bridge. Petrified Durga covers her face with her hands and begins to sob. (Shah, 2010, p. 163)

Prabhat unhesitatingly rapes his wife Durga because men are not expected to take consent of their wife for doing sex. Rather, in the society, according to eldis (2006), "it supposes that men can have sex with women, whenever and wherever they want, even if she is not willing" (p. 5), under such traditional belief, Prabhat victimizes Durga. Imposing his sexual thirst to his docile and fragile wife, he exhibits his manliness.

Prabhat's cruelty affirms that the idea of gender is an effortful social process. Bacchi and Eveline (2010) claim that "gender is accomplished through the disciplining of bodies, actions and language" (p. 96). Like Bacchi and Eveline, Butler (2007) claims, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 45). Prabhat exhibits his manliness by his constant trainings to be cruel, whimsical, and violent. Sanjeevani recalls his brutality in this way: "Thulubua thrashing Auntie black and blue was nothing extraordinary. He had once beaten her throughout the night. Thinking her dead, at the break of dawn, he asked my father to dump her lifeless body somewhere" (Shah, 2010, p. 140). He performs violence because in the Nepali society, beating his wife, husband exhibits his manliness. Yadav (2016) exposes: "One-third of married women aged 15-49 experience emotional, physical

and/or sexual violence from their spouses” (p. 49). In Prabhat's case, his family members do not even try to discourage his violence against his wife. Sanjeevani reports:

I remember as a child, sitting outside Aunty's room and hearing her stifled cries along with loud curses from Thulubua. I would wonder why no one did anything. Others, the elders, would pass the bolted door and sometimes even pass the bolted door when there was silence, but move away as soon as they heard aunty's painful cries. (Shah, 2010, p. 140)

Prabhat's violent activities increase with the social and familial endorsement. Therefore, he becomes crueler to his wife day by day. In fact, beating his wife, he exhibits his manliness.

Prabhat displays his manliness stereotype by keeping more wives and involving in extra-marital affairs. Apart from that, he exercises his authority over his younger brother. He imposes the responsibilities of the family on him. He regulates his brother's life. He forces his brother to sacrifice his dream and to settle down in Ganeshpur. Nevertheless, neither his mother condemns his act of violence and practices of polygamy, nor does his brother show any sign of protest against his authoritativeness. Their approval to Prabhat's activities affirms that “gender stereotype is made effective by the idea that other people reward conformity to them and punish departures from them” (Connell, 1987, p. 50). Since Prabhat's authoritativeness has been rewarded by his family members, he keeps on exhibiting it. Moreover, while demonstrating his masculine traits, Prabhat victimizes his wife as well as his brother. He snatches his brother's dream. His brother Prashant wants to explore his career in the capital city but Prabhat compels him to go and settle in the remote village Ganeshpur.

In Shah's novel, the Hindu culture and the then political condition play significant role on producing and maintaining traditional gender roles. As Butler (2007) argues that gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (pp. 4-5). The male characters of this novel, overrule their female counterpart because the Hindu religious and cultural practices promote males' superiority. Prabhat belongs to the Hindu family which has cultural practices of granting power and authority to the males. In that society, religious beliefs are the guidelines to maintain social order. It positions the husband equal to God with the title '*pati parameshwara*' 'husband is equal to god'. Instructing his wife about her duty, Olivelle (2005) mentions: “A husband should be constantly worshipped as a god” (p. 155). Likewise, the society positions the male family member as head of the family. When a man becomes the family head, no one has the right to point out his mistakes and mischiefs. Therefore, being the family head, Prabhat repeatedly displays masculinity showing his power and authority over his family members, including his brother Prashant.

In the novel, the novelist has presented Prashant and his son Sanjay as the representatives of the second and third generations of the Shah clan. Through these characters, Shah shows the dynamics in the performance of gender roles. The activities of these characters confirm that gender identity is not unchangeable and stable. Likewise, they affirm that the effects of gender are not always predictable, stable, or unitary. From his childhood days, Prashant appears as an obedient son. The narrator depicts his character describing that “he had always been a docile and compliant boy carving his mother's attention” (p. 165). Like all male children, he is also assigned to the role of an assertive, courageous, and rational person. However, he denies traditional gender roles and acts as a selfless and unassertive person. Butler argues that one can subvert gender identity simply by reinventing gender identity or deviating from prescribed gender

dispositions while performing the gender role in an unconventional way (as cited in Lloyd, 2007, p. 65). Performing the role of a submissive son and unassertive brother, Prashant lets his mother and his elder brother take decisions of his life. Despite his reluctance, he agrees to go to the boarding school because his mother wants him to go there. He even cannot choose his life partner unless he gets his mother's approval. He admits his guilt for falling in love without his mother's approval:

Muajiu, do forgive me if you can for my insolence, but I have to admit that I have given my heart to this young lady who is two years junior to me in college. We have exchanged handkerchiefs and with it our hearts too. I feel that after my graduation and with your respectful blessings, the two of us should get married. I repeat, only if it is acceptable to you will I suggest this to her, or else I shall let this flame die out slowly but surely in my own heart...do forgive me if my insolence has offended you, Muajiu, and do be assured that your son will not take any decision without your consent. (Shah, 2010, p. 167)

Prashant cannot go against his mother's wishes and is ready to sacrifice his happiness for her. Thus, he dismantles the masculine image of an assertive and self-centered male.

Prashant practices to be a subservient person from his childhood days. This habit of him continues till his adulthood. Prashant's exhibition of feminine traits affirms Butler's claim that "gender is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, 'a set of repeated acts'" (as cited in Salih & Butler, 2004, p. 63). The feminine attributes such as selflessness, submissiveness and unassertiveness grow on him through constant practice. Then, they reflect in his deeds and decisions. So, when his brother orders him to quit his government job and to take care of the farms at his behest, he immediately follows his order. Sanjeevani reports Prashant's submissive nature: "... my father was completely dominated by his elder brother" (Shah, 2010, p. 141). His wife's remark further highlights his submissiveness:

Why you always listen to your brother? It is all right for him to leave his wife and children in the village, make a big career for himself and live in Kathmandu as a prince, and you have to go back to toil in the farms and take all the responsibility of Muajiu, and his wife and kids. (Shah, 2010, p. 190)

His wife expects him to act in a masculine way but he tolerates all sorts of injustice and oppression done to him by his elder brother. So, when he fails to demonstrate his manliness, his wife condemns him.

Prashant faces problems while maintaining his masculinity because on the one hand his upbringing in a royal family teaches him to become an obedient brother; similarly, his higher education develops him as a gentle person. On the other hand, his wife insists him to claim his rights and to display his masculinity. Nevertheless, later, he demonstrates his manliness while performing his responsibility towards the family. Gardiner (2002) argues that "masculinity is not monolithic, not one static thing but the confluence of multiple processes and relationship with variable results for differing individuals, groups, institutions, and societies" (p. 11). The patriarchal teaching and practices regulate him to perform as a responsible son. Therefore, he tries to exhibit his manliness under the regulatory frame of the society. He returns to Kailali and takes the responsibility of the family. Apart from that, he shows his duty towards his aged mother.

Though Prashant tries to exhibit his masculinity, he fails to do so. He deviates from socially imposed gender roles when the Maoists start making their presence in the village. They appear as enemies of the feudal class. Due to the Maoists' threatful presence in the village, he compels to flee from Kailali. Thus, he fails to show essential masculine

traits: bravery and courage. Nevertheless, after some time, he struggles to prove his manliness. For that, he involves in the political activities held in Kailali in the presence of King. Sanjeevani reports his effort:

I see my father sitting with the reception committee created for this occasion. He is excited and probably nervous too. but I am certain that deep within it all is a sense of pride, his lost pride soaring up again...there is a hint of the glory of the old days in him again, a suggestion of the same vanity...the feeling of being important, the pride of being one of the king's men. (Shah, 2010, p. 170)

Prashant puts his efforts to show his manliness. He exhibits his manliness by putting his life at risk. So, when he realizes that the king can settle down the ongoing conflict of the nation, risking his life, he participates in the assembly organized by the government. Sanjeevani reports: "He had rushed down, a fortnight back, ignoring the threats to his own life here in Kailali only to be a part of the reception committee for the king's visit to an area that once was his homeland" (Shah, 2010, p. 178). Such circumstances sprout and strengthen the masculine traits in him because "gendered bodies are the products of disciplinary practices. Bodies are docile and biology bends to the hurricane of social discipline" (Connell, 2009, p. 55). He is compelled to maintain the honor, wealth, and power in order to claim his masculinity and that is possible only when the king defeats the Maoists. Therefore, he becomes extremely happy when the king reinstates his power position seizing the power from the elected prime minister. He is confident that king's active participation and strong presence in the government will downsize the Maoists and redeem the power of feudals like him. Thus, he struggles to exhibit his manliness.

Sanjay, a representative of the third generation of the Singh family, deviates from the traditional gender identity and appears as an obedient and unassertive person because he has been socialized in the same manner by his mother. Here, in this regard, Connell (2009) observes that "sex roles were acquired by socialization. Various 'agencies of socialization', notably the family, the school, the peer group and the mass media took the growing child in hand" (p. 95). In Sanjay's case, his mother reared him as an obedient and unassertive individual. In fact, she regulates every move and action of her children. Sanjeevani reports: "It was not that only I was subjected to my mother's senseless dictations; my brother, too, was a victim to her tyrannous ways" (Shah, p. 34). His mother plies him into a submissive poppet of her hand; consequently, he practices to act selflessly and unassertively. Sanjeevani as she reports: "Dada gave in easily, too easily always without a fight. Sometimes, he even sacrificed his own wants and desires" (Shah, 2010, p. 35). Though traditional gender roles given to a male child are "warrior, rogue, and adventure" (Kantrowitz & Kalb, 2009, p. 203), Sanjay submissively sacrifices his desires and wishes. Since he is the offspring of the royal clan, the social teachings force him to become subservient to his elders affirming Connell's (2009) claim that "Patterns of child rearing differs between cultures" (p. 4). Consequently, he cannot go against the decision taken by his mother. Hence, he deviates from the traditional gender roles.

Sanjay cannot execute the role of an authoritative person. He cannot take the decision firmly. Instead, he lets his mother to interfere on his life. Moreover, he lets her to take every decision of his life either it is related to his career or his marriage. Sanjeevani portrays his sacrifices and helplessness: "Even though my brother dreamt of pursuing a medical career, she had coaxed and cajoled him into taking care of the farm" (Shah, 2010, p. 35). Under the pressure of his mother, Sanjay agrees to settle in Ganespur as a farmer. He denounces the traditional masculine role that demands him to act as an assertive person. Moreover, he demonstrates the feminine traits "modest,

unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing” (Kantrowitz & Kalb, 2009, p. 203). Sanjay demonstrates the attributes of that of a ‘good girl’. Sanjeevani depicts his compliance; “I saw him quietly pushes away his dreams and make our parents’ expectations rule his life” (Shah, 2010, p. 36). His every deed pushes him towards the feminine category as his mother claims: “He is a good boy. He listens; he understands his parents and his obligations to his family first” (Shah, 2010, p. 37). He demonstrates the extreme level of self-sacrifice when he agrees to marry a girl selected by his mother even though he knows that there will be incompatibility in that match.

Sanjay fluctuates between the roles assigned to him by his mother and society. While performing the role of an obedient son, he appears as a submissive and an unassertive person, but when he performs the role of a masculine man he appears as a bold and rational person who can suppress his emotions and frustrations. Through his activities, he affirms that “as social actor men should keep their feelings under control” (McCubbin & Dahl, 2009, p. 189). Sanjay becomes frustrated when he has to compromise to his dreams, ambitions and wishes but he does not convert his frustration into anger. By doing this, he dismantles the image of cultural ideals of boys “with heavy dose of violence” (Kantrowitz & Kalb, 2009, p. 203). Though he is not satisfied with his marital life, unlike his uncle, he does not outlet his anger and dissatisfaction to his wife. Rather, he calmly tolerates the pain. Through his activities he shows that people of different generation react to the same condition differently.

Nevertheless, later, under the social pressure, Sanjay tries to appear masculine. The reason for his change is his exposure to the Maoists’ movement. Since he observes the Maoists’ demand for equality based on gender, caste, religion, and ethnicity, he realizes that like his father and grandfather, he should not exploit villagers. So, he decides to shoulder the responsibility of farming, and toils on it. Moreover, he plans to make Ganeshpur a model village, so that his rationality, industriousness, and determinism reflect and spread all over the area. His father Prashant recalls: He wanted changes in Ganeshpur and even talked about improvisation in his farming techniques. “Ten years down the lane, Ganeshpur will be self-sufficient,” he would say, “I will make it a model village” (Shah, 2010, p. 202). Thus, unassertive Sanjay appears as an assertive leader who makes plan for the development of his village. His actions confirm that gender is not fixed, homogenous, innate, and stereotype, but it is rather fluid, relational, and contextual.

Sanjay remains as a fighter in the village despite the threat from the Maoists and thereby he demonstrates his manliness. Gilmore (1990) claims: “Men nurture their society by shedding their blood, their sweat, and their semen, by bringing home food for both child and mother, by producing children, and by dying if necessary, in faraway places to provide a safe haven for their people” (p. 30). Shah shows that the outer forces contribute to bring drastic changes to Sanjay’s performances. Consequently, a meek and unassertive mamma’s boy transforms to a bold man who even ignores the threats of the Maoists and remains in the village. Acclaiming his masculinity, he denies to exile from the village to the capital, despite the fact that it can bring the dire consequences. Ultimately, he pays the price for his manliness as the Maoists murder him later.

CONCLUSION

Performing their gender roles, the male characters of Shah’s *Facing my Phantoms*, show that masculine and feminine traits are not innate characteristics; rather, they are acquired through the regular practices. Therefore, they are fluid and fluctuating rather than rigid. Through their activities and behavior, the male members of the Singh family not only reflect the changes that appear in stereotypical gender roles, but also the

causes behind those changes. Raja Saheb, a member of the first generation of the Singh family, exercises manliness by involving in polygamy and exploiting his wives. He exhibits his masculinity by revolting against the Rana regime and risking his life. He performs the role of a brave, courageous, authoritative ruler as well as husband that is assigned to him by the society. His masculine traits are marked by social approval and applaud; therefore, he performs the traditional gender roles throughout his life. Like Raja Saheb, his eldest son Prabhat also performs traditional gender roles. Since his family rears him as the first male child of the Singh family, assigning him the role of an oppressive, authoritative, and assertive person, he exhibits manliness in his performances. He shows cruelty and violence towards his wives. He shows authority towards his younger brother and he oppresses and suppresses the people. Raja Saheb's youngest son Prashant and his grandson Sanjay appear as unassertive, submissive, and docile in the beginning. However, they also perform as a responsible and rational person exhibiting the male attributes imposed by the society.

Shah's novel demonstrates that the society assigns the traditional gender stereotypes to male characters, and prescribes the attributes such as assertiveness, rationality, and cruelty to them. Likewise, it shows that through socio-cultural norms, the society compels them to perform the traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, the characters Prashant and Sanjay dismantle traditional gender roles time and again. They oscillate between traditional and anti-traditional gender roles. Similarly, Shah shows that some of the male characters are forced to struggle hard to maintain their stereotypical gender roles. Consequently, they suffer a lot while showcasing masculine attributes and shaping their masculine image. Hence, this article has constricted its study to the analysis of male characters of the novel from the perspective of gender; nevertheless, it leaves room to analyze it from other perspectives such as feminism, social realism, and the alike.

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