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CONTESTING GLOBALISATION: EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN URBAN SPACES OF NEPAL

By

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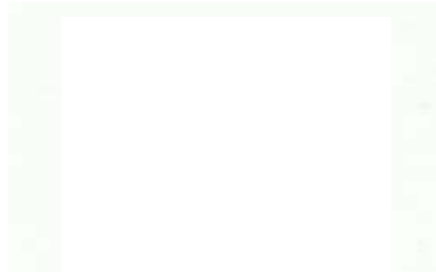
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I declare that the work presented here in this thesis is my genuine and original work.

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Nemu Joshi

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the influence of media, this study explores a variety of gender practices in the era of globalisation. In recent years various scholars have written about gender and globalisation but most have focused on women's work more than their intimate gender issues. Moreover, the meanings of gender roles and intimate relationships need to be contextualised on the basis of an understanding of the logic of local concepts and practices. This study explores how urban Nepali women constantly negotiate between global flows and local context and the effects of this negotiation on their gender roles, and on their familial and intimate relationships.I analyse the ways media, especially Indian visual media, which is a common source of discussion amongst urban women, is affecting them and their daily lives. Examining the importance of visual media, films and television in directing new identities and implications of gender roles and intimate relationships, this study explores ways urban women of Nepal are negotiating their gender relations and intimate lives in relation to the binary of 'cultural practices' and 'modernity' found in contemporary Nepalese cultural discourse. This study analyses the experiences of urban Nepali as revealed in women through their narratives when talking about modernity, cultural practices experienced and imagined through watching Indian visual media, and explores the claimed changes in their gender roles, family and intimate relationships. To compare the lived experiences of women within categories of class, caste, ethnicity, social statuses and age, I interviewed 54 middle class urban Nepali women of different generations residing in Kathmandu. They belong to different social statuses such as married, unmarried, single, widowed and divorced. My findings show that Indian visual media play a significant role in day to day life of the participants who are struggling to balance contradictory practices of 'tradition' and 'modernity'. It also reveals that these women see themselves as *thikka*, i.e. appropriately modern, in that by identifying themselves as such they are interplaying between their understandings of 'culture' and their agency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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1.   CHAPTER: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, women in South Asia have made considerable shifts in crossing the boundaries of 'tradition' towards 'modernity' with greater access to the public sphere and larger institutional, structural and political changes (Agnihotri 2008, Loomba et al. 2012). Just like women in other South Asian societies, women in Nepal have also experienced the intersection of 'culture' and globalisation. Therefore, focusing on the impact of cultural aspects of globalisation on local cultural practices, this qualitative study addresses a variety of gender attitudes and practices[1] of Nepali women resulting from that intersection.

This study originates from my personal and professional experience. Growing up as a high caste urban Nepali woman of Kathmandu, I had the privileges of global necessities but around the same time family and society also reinforced the ideas that as a woman I had responsibility for maintaining Nepali 'culture'. Since then, I have questioned the 'culture' that I was expected to protect as a Nepali woman. As an urban Nepali woman who was born and brought up in Kathmandu and working extensively on women's and gender related issues, I became aware of the gender and development discourse mainly originating in the West that permeates the Nepali developmental agenda. After having gained a Masters of Arts in Gender studies in the West along with several trainings in related areas, I sought the opportunity to contradict or expand my existing knowledge. In my post graduate studies and research at Birkbeck College I sought to challenge that received wisdom and to explore the intersection of culture and globalisation shaping women's lives in Nepal. In writing up my qualitative research, I explore how urban Nepali women have experienced the intersection of culture and global flows and how this affects their gender practices, based on seven months of field research in Nepal involving 54 participants.

1.1 Rese   arch contexts:

In recent years, Nepali society has experienced many cultural and social transformations due to mass media, the internet, and exposure to foreign aid and

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[1]Gender roles like work, consumption and education, familial relations and intimate spouse relationships

agencies as a part of globalisation processes. Consequently, these processes have caused shifts in social relations in the local cultural practices in Nepal. Although individuals' gender roles and intimate relations have been influenced by these flows, very little research has been done on women's experiences within this changing paradigm in contemporary Nepal.

In the current feminist scholarship on Nepal, there has been increasing demographic and anthropological works on social and family change (Ahearn 2001, Tamang 2002). Some studies focus mostly on rituals and 'high caste' women (Bennett 1983, Kondos 1982, 1989 ;) and "low caste" women (Cameroon 1989). Most of these studies ignore not only individual women's lived experiences but also the experiences of urban women. Though Liechty (1994) focuses on urban Nepal, his work on the consumer practices in the emerging middle class does not focus in on women. Rather, he mainly observed and analysed male youth from a class and economic standpoint. In contrast, this study explores how middle-class women living in urban spaces of Nepal negotiate between the global and the local cultural practices in contemporary Nepal and encounter global media from a gender perspective.

On the one hand, urban women seem to be moving beyond the hegemonic structure of Hindu cultural values and norms that dominated the Nepal's culture for centuries. On the other hand, they are still adhering to some privileges of middle-class practices. This creates a rather paradoxical context with the changing of recent attitudes and behaviors such as with the introduction of global media in urban Nepali society. Global media flows have permeated nearly all areas of Nepali women's individual lives in urban society influencing their day to day lives. Foregrounding the above argument, my study explores how urban women of Nepal are negotiating gender relations and intimate lives in relation to the binary of native 'cultural practices' and imported 'modernity' found in contemporary Nepalese society and culture.

1.1.1   A brief overview of Nepal:

As a nation state Nepal has never been as strong as India. As a contemporary nation state, Nepal has always relied on foreign aid. A new era of Nepali history began in 1950 when a popular revolution led by Nepalese ended the Rana dynasty rule and established a multi-party democracy under the monarchy. It was only after 1951 that Nepal opened to the international community and the rulers invited various bi-lateral

and multi-lateral organizations to help them modernize Nepal, mainly by developing transportation, mass communications and education (Blaikie et al 1980, Onta 1996, Panday 1997).According to UN 2011 Human Development report, Nepal still remains one of the forty nine "Least Developed Countries" (LDC) in the world. Using dependency perspectives, Blaikie (1980) argues that Nepal's failure to develop is rooted in its immense regional disparities and that Nepal's peripheral status compromises its development. He explains that although Nepal maintained political autonomy during the colonial era, due to its isolated geographical position, it depended economically on British India. In addition, more recently, foreign aid has benefited mainly Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal as most development projects of building schools and developing transportation were concentrated in the Kathmandu valley.

Kathmandu was a cultural and economic center long before the modern Nepali state began to take shape in the mid-eighteenth century when Prithvi Narayan Shah (PN Shah), king of a small hill town of Gorkha, began his series of conquests. Nepali historian, late M.C. Regmi (1978, 1988) argues that it was the Kathmandu's resources vis-à-vis Gorkha's impoverishment that inspired PN Shah's territorial conquest. By the end of the eighteenth century, virtually all of the tributary states of Kathmandu started operating as major administrative center (Blaikie et al 1980).

PN Shah's drive for conquest paralleled the expansion of British East India Company rule in India (Stiller, 1973). The expansion of the Nepali state suffered a major setback when the British defeated Nepal in the two-year war [1814-1816]. Then, Nepal signed the Sugauli Treaty and had to surrender about one-third of its territory to the British, which is now a part of India (Stiller 1973, 1976). Des Chen (1991) notes that the British were so impressed with Nepali soldiers' bravery that they pressured the Nepali rulers to let them recruit "Gurkha" soldiers into their army as one of the conditions of the treaty. While the Shah dynasty weakened from war and intra-family conflicts, the Rana oligarchy ruled Nepal for 104 years from between 1847 and 1951. The Rana rulers strategically isolated Nepali citizens from outside influence. So, a new era of Nepali history began in 1950 when an indigenous popular revolution ended Rana rule and established a multi-party democracy under the monarchy. In 1959, a constitutional monarchy was introduced and promulgated. Since then, the Nepali state started an open door policy which promoted imports of unregulated

commodities and services to Kathmandu and Nepal as a whole. This was the beginning of new era for Nepal and its connection to the rest of the world.

However, Nepal's political and economic landscape changed dramatically, especially after the restoration of a multi-party democratic system in 1990 which is also known as first people's movement. In 2006, in the second people's movement, there was the abolition of 239 year old monarchy and Nepal became a "federal democratic republic". Women participated widely in both these movements. While the 1990 movement mostly focused in Kathmandu and nearby cities, 2006 movement was throughout the country seeking to create a 'new Nepal' (Hangen 2009). The outcomes of 2006 movement also proved that there already had been political, social and economic transformations since 1990. Nepali people had become more culturally and politically aware as the aftermath of 2006 movement involving from marginalized group demanding to end social dominance of high caste Hindus (Hangen, 2009). Around this time that the modern bureaucracy of Nepal as well as significant influxes of international development aid and tourism, and the rise of media e.g radio and TV stations, newspapers and magazines also carpet manufacturing and remittances from overseas migrants began to flourish in Nepal.

Around 1990s, Nepal was introduced to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other donor International/Western agencies, welcoming their promises of modernity through educational and economic development. The modernizing projects in Nepal relied mostly on education, poverty reduction development programmes and popular culture (Ahearn 2004, Kramer 2008). These development discourses in Nepal have largely reinforced the ideals of modernity as development and progress. The rhetoric of being modern in Nepal is against those that are represented as the underdeveloped (Pigg 1992, Kramer 2008)

Since due to a massive inflow of international development aid and tourism, Kathmandu has become a "relatively cash rich region in an otherwise cash poor country" (Onta 2006, 48). In addition to this, with alliance of about 300 donor agencies all over the country, most of these projects are run by NGOs in rural areas focusing on 'economic development' or 'health initiatives' of underdeveloped individuals especially focusing on women. Thus, further promoting the idea that development is inevitable for the construction of 'modern' Nepal.

Development as a concept and national goal is largely contested. In its various forms development as a concept has brought forward a ubiquitous discussion. When at time development promises different vision of modernity, social changes and practices especially in the third world nations, it can be also observed as critical struggles and resistance of those who experience the contradictions of these development discourses (Escobar 2011, McMichael 2009).

Though contested elsewhere, in mainstream development discourse of Nepal, it is still considered as a vehicle of modern practices and modernity. I argue that Nepal's idea of 'modernity' has been derived from 'development ideology' (Pigg, 1996). According to her, Nepalis do not consider themselves modern and in fact they feel they have a ways to go to reach it. I concur with her that ideas of development and progress is substituted for modernity is hegemonic in Nepal .It is development institutions that are bringing forth the ideas of modernity such as non-hereditary occupations, paid employment outside the home, improved literacy and health services in Nepal. Also most possibly increased popular participation in politics and culture and more recently as consumption of manufactured and imported products. However, I do argue that the cultural and gender practices are mediated and influenced by these discourses and not completely determined.

As for the women's concern in development discourse in Nepal, in 1956 women were recognized as development beneficiaries. Then after, Women in Development (WID) policies gradually started entering in Nepal's development plans and agendas. However, in 1990 with the democratic movement in Nepal, changes were made in WID with introducing more progressive approach Gender and Development (GAD) as a practice and advocacy for Nepali women (Bhadra, 2001). Yet, the question remains if these agendas made any significant improvement in Nepali women's status and enhancement of their subjective being. It would indeed be interesting to explore if their subjective being was also challenged by these discourses. Here, in this study I only explore the influence of visual media on changes in women's gender practices especially including their gender roles and intimate and familial relationships.

Rapid development of Nepal's mass media has taken place since 1990, this was the same year of the people's movement which compelled changes in the Nepali constitution and political liberalization (Onta 2006, Wilmore 2008). Although private

mass media flourished after 1990, most access is still limited to urban Nepal. Print and electronic media are mainly based in Kathmandu (Onta, 2006) and it can be said that residents of Kathmandu has been exposed to different media messages and images through dozens of global televisions, national channels and FM stations, with mass media becoming a powerful influence of globalisation in urban Nepali society.

Similarly, in the 1990s, media viewing pattern also started changing in Nepal with the arrival of satellite TV in Indian sub- continent. Urban Nepali people started using satellite broadcasts like Star TV and other imported television programs from the United States of America and India.

This implies that meanings of modernity carry varied meanings in Nepali society. The span and dynamics of Nepali modernity have changed considerably since 1990s where discourses about freedom and modernity predominated (further elaborated in Chapter 4). Participation in consumer culture like access to media and engaging in fashion became important to a modern identity in urban Nepali society.

These transformations have helped influence and improve women's status significantly especially in urban Nepal. Private schools, university education, and formation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that centrally focus on women and girls and along with media culture in urban Nepal have had an impact on the discourses and practices of sexuality and gender relations. There have been some positive changes on women's education access in recent times. According to the Central Bureau Statistics of Nepal, 2011, female literacy rate has grown from 35 % to 57% in the last decade while seats held by women in national parliament was 3.4 in 1990 while it is 29.55 in the current Constituent Assembly. Similarly, there has been increasing number of women participating in different forms of both print and electronic media in Nepal.

These changes are also important in producing middle class identities. I argue that NGOs as the harbinger of modernity through development have had a significant role in defining and shaping the meaning and nature of Nepali modernity particularly in relation to understanding gender and sexuality issues. My findings show that discourses of modernity are deeply embedded in urban Nepali women's lived experiences notions of caste ideology and understanding of *ijjat* issue. Hence, this study explores in what ways the effects of developments after 1990 to 2006 have

shaped urban Nepali women's experiences of and ideas about gender roles, familial and intimate relationships as well as caste identity.

1.1.2   Caste and Modernity in Nepal:

Caste is an important marker of identity in Nepal. Caste groups are hierarchically structured depending upon their ritual purity, making a sharp division between 'pure' or high castes such as Brahmin, Chhettri and Thakuri, the non-high castes such as the ethnic groups and lower castes, the 'impure' or 'untouchable'. Furthermore, regarding the 'politics of culture' among Nepal's diverse social groups, Whlepton (2004) contends that the emergence of different forms of ethnic and national identities has been brought into being through a gradual enforcement of 'Hinduism' as its main religion through the Hindu rulers in their processes of state-making. The result of this was that caste became individuals' base of identity. And closely attached to caste identity and gender is the notion of *Ijjat* (honour, prestige or respectability) an asset assigned to individuals and their whole families influencing their gender and intimate relations and ultimately their agency. A detailed discussion on notions of *Ijjat* is in chapter 2.

Since Nepal is going through 'modernization' in its political, social and ideological realms as mentioned above, one aspect of 'modernization' is resistance to the dominant Hindu ideologies, rituals and orthodox cultural practices. The resistance was to the adoption of 'caste' as the country's legal system to sustain high-caste Hindu dominance. Since cultural behaviour and practices are influenced by caste in patriarchal society of Nepal, women often bear the heaviest burden of it (further discussed below). In this context, this study also examines the ways urban Nepali women interact between local experiences and global cultural flows to produce new ways of understanding themselves, their ideologies on gender roles, caste identity as well as familial and intimate relationships.

Despite its small size Nepal is marked by immense geographic and socio-cultural diversities. Its topographic diversity ranges from high mountainous region, with Mount Everest, the world's highest peak, and its cultural heterogeneity, as recognized by the latest census (2011), spans over 135 caste/ethnic groups and 60 or more spoken languages. Consequently, the notion of "Nepali culture" can be understood as contentious in this context.

There is a huge range of diverse cultural difference in the existing Nepali context. Nepali society presents a cultural plurality that overlaps in the divisions of first, the hierarchical caste structured groups or jats and the ethnic groups Janjatis, second, the ritually "pure" or the high castes and "impure" the low castes and third between the Pahadi, people of the hill distinctive cultural differences among the groups representing castes and ethnicity that are manifested in their language, religion, art, architecture and political ideology. These caste groups are of Mongoloid descent that speak Tibeto-Burman languages and follow religions such as Buddhism or Animism that coexist with Hinduism. The caste groups are hierarchically structured depending upon ritual purity, with a stringent division between 'pure' castes and the 'impure' or 'untouchable' castes. However, the ethnic groups though have adopted and adapted many cultural forms of high castes, yet they do not have a strict social structure that are found among the high caste groups of hill and *terai* or plain region. People coming from the hills consider themselves culturally very distinct from the *terai* region (Pradhan et.al, 2005).

This complexity of caste relations fosters a vast array of cultural pluralism in the Nepali society, coexisting and competing within the structure. Looking at the multi-ethnic Nepali cultures, anthropologists who have discussed 'caste' in Nepal have refuted "Indocentric construction of Nepal" (Cameroon 1998,17) which means that caste relations in Nepal cannot be explained as similar to caste relations of northern India (Fisher 1986, Gellner 1997,Holmberg 1989). They explain that only a small portion of Hindu caste groups who live in the terai practice the north Indian caste system whereas the majority of Hindu ethnic groups adopt high caste cultural forms and vice versa. Despite these caste and ethnic interactions these scholars also note that one should not portray Nepal's uniqueness vis-à-vis India by ignoring the ideological and practical boundaries separating the lower and upper castes.

Emphasizing 'caste' as identity in understanding the constructed nature of 'culture' and 'tradition' within the discourses in Nepal, Sierra Tamang's in her article *The Politics of 'developing Nepali women* (2002) critiques the notion of heterogeneity of 'Nepali women' within the development discourses in Nepal. She asserts that development discourses and programs have imagined Nepali women as 'patriarchally oppressed, uniformly disadvantaged and Hindu' overlooking the heterogeneity of

their lived experiences. As there are multiple patriarchies in Nepali communities, definitions of a 'Nepali woman' will differ within different class ethnicity, gender, caste and religion. According to her, as cultural and social norms of Nepali communities are always changing, gender relations interwoven within their members' social identities are always being (re)produced. She argues to de- homogenise the discourse of ' the Nepali woman' as a single and static category. Agreeing with the argument above, I argue that the experiences of women in Nepal are affected by the variables of class, caste, ethnicity, religion and age. Indeed Nepali women's culture and cultural practices are very much associated with their caste due to the value-laden issue of *ijjat*, respectability or dignity. Although, there are additional dimensions, I deploy *ijjat* and caste identity of urban middle-class women of Nepal as a key aspect of their cultural negotiation.

1.1.3   Caste and Gender in Nepal:

Hierarchy in Nepali society is influenced by caste and class. Nepali society is mostly based on a complex caste system that also shapes social class formation. And it is evident that gender roles, intimate relationships and sexual identity are highly influenced by the cultural norms and social institutions. Uma Chakravarti (2003) states that caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are interlinked in the Hindu caste system which makes it easier to limit the sexual freedom especially for women to maintain their caste purity. According to Chakravarti establishing control over women's sexuality in a highly stratified and closed social structure could reveal the connections between castes, class and gender dominant factors of belief and practices. Such discourse suggests the importance of purity of blood and that of caste in Hindu society.

Following a Hindu, tribal and caste model, David N Gellner (1991), examines and discusses the relationships and position of women in Nepal. He uses an example of 'Newar', whom he refers as " very opposite of a tribe and the epitome of a Sanskritic, caste-based society" to show how *Newari* women have the freedom to divorce and remarry without being stigmatized while the similar custom is probably never applied easily to women of other castes. Gellner also proposes to understand the complexity of current ethnographic facts and some steps in the reproduction of the standard image of *Newari* women. It can be said that less scholarly attention has been concentrated on

the issues on how hierarchy of caste and hierarchy of gender are embedded as cultural domains in studying women's lived experiences. In this respect, my study aims to bridge the gap between local experiences and understanding of cultural forces when it comes to experiences of different caste of women.

Moreover, some feminist anthropological studies conducted on women and the local traditions and rituals have reflected very little on the construction of culture, gender roles and intimate relationships. One of the most comprehensive anthropological works done on the Hindu women in Nepal has been attempted by Lynn Bennett in 1960s *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High Caste women in Nepal* that focused on the lives of women, their sexuality and their ritual activities in Nepal. Following the theoretical paradigm of symbolic interaction, she studied the complex social institutions norms, ritual and social structures that shaped and positioned Hindu women in the gender system. Bennett, through the analysis of symbolic systems and kinship networks, explains the high value that Hinduism places on celibacy putting the status of unmarried woman high while the same woman after being married is considered dangerous as her sexual activity creates a low status.

Through her work, Bennett outlines a multiplicity of women's identities which dispels the homogeneous image of Nepali women. She mentions that the mother is associated with "purity" and asexual being whereas daughters-in- law are considered to be dangerous (239). However, since Bennett's study, Nepalese societies and cultures have drastically changed. There have been many anthropological works on gender, development and ethnicities focusing on gendered norms paradigms, but very few address women's lives, local culture and their day to day experiences which is the main focus of this study.

Another influential anthropological study on gender, caste and culture in Nepal by Mary.M. Cameroon (1998) analyses how concepts like purity, honour and auspiciousness interplay in the caste system of Nepal to situate the position of Hindu women. For instance, Cameroon's ethnography of lower caste women in the far-Western region, describes that the lower caste women are deemed "untouchable, and though they actively resist and reject the designation, the super-ordinate groups continue to disregard their objections" (17). Exploring the lives of 'lower caste' women of Nepal, she explains how people's

agency is reproduced, construed through Hindu caste ideology and articulated through social categories like caste and gender. However, Cameron further argues that patrilineal and family honour is linked with women's sexuality and modesty. My study confirms that family honour or *ijjat* is one of the factors controlling women's sexuality in Hindu society. Also associated with *ijjat* is conception of female agency.

Agency has been largely used in theorising media, modernity and development discourse as a means of focusing on the analysis of individual choices and action. As Madhok (2013) suggests there can be other theorisations of agency, that is an individual's speaking of individual can be read as how an expression of self through ideas and ways of being. Applying this argument to urban middle-class Nepali women, the results of my research suggest that their understanding of self and identity came through in their narratives in identifying as themselves as *thikka*, while they negotiate the global flows interacting with their local practices in the contemporary cultural Nepali discourse.

1.2 Research Aims:

The overarching aim and question of this study is to explore how global flows such as media and development discourses are (re)shaping women's local practices. In doing so, I use the lens of visual media, especially increasingly popular Indian visual media to explore changing attitudes, values, ideas and behaviours of urban Nepali women. It also intends to:

- Compare, analyse and explore the lived experiences[2] of four generations of middle- class urban Nepali women of different marital statuses, castes and religions.

1.2.1 Research Question:

This study addresses the following main question:

- In what ways are urban Nepali women negotiating the intersection of global and local cultural practices?

The following are the two related questions:

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[2] Daily lives in regards to their gender roles and intimate relationship.

- In what ways is visual media fostering/influencing the formation of women's experiences and what are the implications of these new identities for urban women gender and intimate relationships?

- In what ways do culture and agency interplay in the lives of urban Nepali women's understandings of the global and the local phenomena?

1.3 Overview of Thesis:

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In an initial chapter that introduces research aims and questions and also the general setting for the research, contemporary Nepal, especially after 1990-2006. I provide a historical background of Nepal presenting the changing context in terms of process of modernization and indicating the crucial role of media for 'new Nepal' after the political upheaval after 1990 and 2006, the main focus of my study. Then I present a brief analysis of 'caste' system in Nepal and its prominent role in defining gender roles and intimate relationships in individual lived experiences.

Chapter 2 reviews on globalisation and gender; globalisation, gender and media in South Asia; gender and culture and modernity in South Asia especially Nepal. In this chapter, I also highlight the complexities of 'culture' as understood by my interviewees in their day to day lives. Furthermore, I focus on globalisation in terms of cultural aspects to contextualize the impact of global media flows in urban Nepali women's local cultural practices. In Chapter 3, I discuss my research methods from site selection to data collection techniques, preservation of research subjects' anonymity and finally analysis of data collected. During data analysis some issues surfaced that prompted important considerations of the methodological approach for this qualitative study.

Chapters 4 and 5 present my research findings. In Chapter 4, I analyse the ways urban Nepali women situate themselves as *thikka* or in-between while interpreting the meanings of gender roles and intimate relationships in respect to global ideas. Chapter 5, I focus on the influence of media as the basis for analysis and discussion of the ways Indian visual media have stimulated urban women of Nepal to rethink ideas and practices of gender roles and intimate relationships. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present an overall summary and the conclusion of my thesis.

2 CHAPTER: LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite increasing understanding of the influence of globalisation and its effects on political, cultural and social changes, more analytical studies of women living in the third world are needed (Loomba et al. 2012). The assumption that the effects of globalisation have improved the economic conditions of women in the third world often precludes study of the other aspects of their lives such as their experiences in their gendered roles and intimate relationships within the local context. This chapter argues that globalisation discourse has often neglected the role of culture in determining women's gender and intimate relationships and how women use their understanding of 'culture' to manipulate, negotiate and balance in their respective lives.

Since this study focuses on how urban Nepali women conceive of their gender and intimate relationships within their local context, I start this chapter by discussing, literature on globalisation, which rests on the rhetoric of Western scholars and knowledge. Nevertheless, in recent times there have been discussions by non-western scholars on globalisation and modernity providing perspectives on how these notions are actually culturally embedded and linked to one's cultural heritage. This is indeed the complex context of modernity and culture within which my research's focus on women's lived experiences of using Indian visual media to negotiate ideas is situated. In essence, urban middle-class Nepali women's experience of Indian visual media in their everyday life is embedded within their understanding of their culture and *ijjat*. I posit *ijjat* as the lens through which women's gender roles, intimate and familial relations, caste and agency are refracted.

Henceforth, in this study, I argue that urban middle-class Nepali women choose to negotiate within a paradigm of being *thikka* modern and this is how they understand to be modern locally.

This chapter first reviews literature on the place of gender in cultural aspect of globalisation presenting an overview of how gender roles and relations are situated within discourses of globalisation. Then in the second section, I theorise modernity within the context of globalisation.

Arguing that media are important tool of globalisation, in the second section I present discussion on gender, media and globalisation focusing mostly on the context of South Asia. This is followed by sections reviewing studies done in Nepal on gender, caste, *ijjat* and culture theorizing of agency, concluding with discussion of feminist qualitative methods.

2.1   Globalisation and Gender: Neglect of Intimate Relations

In recent years various scholars have written about gender and globalisation, focusing more on the women, work and economic transformation brought about in family patterns. Women's economic roles have become one of the dominant themes in globalisation studies (Freeman 2001, Kraus 1996, Standing, 1989, Acker 1988). These studies focus on the changes in their household brought by women's economic roles through participating in the global labour market; however, they tend to neglect the shifts that have taken place in gender issues such as their familial, intimate relations and sexual subjectivities. The literature on globalisation highlights economic aspects and the feminists understanding of the global processes. It can be said that globalisation as well as development discourses has often undermined some of the assumptions analysis of cultures in understanding gender roles and intimate relationships and issues on sexuality. Although globalisation and sexuality discourse have a strong scholarship, interdisciplinary or intersectionality study can be quite productive to understand the everyday lives of an individual.

If globalisation is about the range of shifts in social, cultural and economic context, with growing numbers of people moving across borders being influenced by media and ideas, then an individual's ideas of gender roles, sexuality and intimate relations may undergo change (Altman 2004).

Furthermore, Kathryn Farr (2008) states that sexuality has not been defined appropriately within the globalisation discourse and most often to homosexuality, different sexual deviance is discussed. I agree with her that although sexuality is an important aspect of research and the study of globalisation processes and effects, more scholarship has been devoted to studying about homosexuality (Binnie 2004, Altman 2004). And works which trace culture, identity and migration to study globalisation and sexuality are often embedded in Western perspectives. According to Farr;

> "….for both 'gender' and 'sexuality' there is a heavy reliance in Western (but not all other) cultures on binaries. That is in typical Western terms, gender is portrayed as feminine or masculine, and sexuality as homosexual or heterosexual; in each case, greater value is placed on the latter side of the binary…."(2008,612)

Since there is no a priori cultural definition of 'sexuality' most of the definitions are related to the concept of body and everyday understanding of sexuality mostly connected to the very personal and intimate experiences. As defined by Giddens (2013, 15),

> "Sexuality' today has been discovered, opened up and made accessible to the development of varying life-styles. It is something each of us 'has' or cultivates, no longer a natural condition which an individual accepts as a preordained state of affairs. Somehow, in a way that has to be investigated, sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms."

So these conflations of sexuality and locality masking may be powerful ways to understand in which sexualities are the product of globalising forces. Therefore, sexuality is an effective and analytical value in studying about 'globalisation'.

As for Bianchi (2003), issues of sexuality have now shifted from the private to the public and that which remains in private is 'intimacy'. The term 'intimacy' is understood differently in various cultural contexts, however, in general understandings refers to the closeness between people. Although I accept and understand that intimate relations can involve family members, friends and kin, in this study, I refer to intimacy as one form of gender practice that forms a close connection between my interviewees, married and unmarried with their partners. As Jamieson (2012) states,

> "Although there may be no universal definition, intimate relationships are a type of personal relationships that are subjectively experienced and may also be socially recognized as close. The quality of 'closeness' that is indicated by intimacy can be emotional and cognitive, with subjective experiences including a feeling of mutual

love, being 'of like mind' and special to each other….[..] It is unhelpful and unnecessary to deny the significance, such as the oft repeated stereotypes and scripts of popular culture and the pervasive popularisations of expert knowledge delivered through mass media."

In the context of mass media, such social and electronic media, new forms of intimacy and display of emotion can be achieved. I argue that urban middle-class Nepali women watching Indian visual media not only influences their notions of intimacy but also contributes to their development of a sense of self and subjectivity derived from desire and choice to be *thikka* modern.

While on the macro level, many studies on globalisation have approached female gender from a 'victims' approach', there is a multiplicity of effects associated with women's participation in the labour force. During the past decades of neo-liberal policies, the gender effects of globalisation and the feminization of labour have been parallel albeit affecting men and women differently. Gender ideology is changing with women's increasing participation in labour force in globalised spaces. This study looks into the urban middle-class Nepali women's lives in respect to their gender roles and intimate relationships taking into consideration the recent historical, socio-economic conditions.

In this context, Diane Perrons (2004) contends that interpretation of gender dynamics in analysing globalisation and social change has been limited. She states:

"Gender continues to be an important organizing principle or structure even though there is significant variation between women in terms of social class ethnicity, age, qualifications and so on. Explaining these continuing gender divisions is complex and a number of different categories and concepts have been used, including gender regime, gender order, gender arrangements and patriarchy but these terms only identify and describe the form of gender relations in any particular country, rather than explaining why gender continues to play a role in shaping the structure of societies." (24)

Most of the contemporary feminist studies on gender and globalisation explore women's roles and the challenges faced by women due to economic and political

factors (Marchand and Runyan, 2000) in relation to their ordinary lives. They point out that adding gender analysis and having a relational thinking will help developing an understanding of globalisation.

Another aspect of understanding gender in the discourse of globalisation has been done by transnational feminists. In this respect, Grepal and Kaplan (1994) propose a transnational feminist understanding of the global process arguing that the category of gender is linked to the concepts that structure some economic and cultural theories of post modernity. They claim that feminist post-structuralist or psychoanalytic theories often neglect transnational frame.

They further criticize the term "global feminism" which has failed to understand the diversity of women's agency and instead stood for the "a universalized Western model of women's liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity" (17). The authors state that the interdependence between multiple patriarchies and power relations has to be situated within the context of global restructuring. Naming it as "scattered hegemonies" as a conception of understanding post-modernity, they suggest that feminists analysis need to take into account "the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalism, "authentic" forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridical oppression on multiple levels." (17)

They address the shift in the world at the structural level and suggest 'transnational' links the cultural contexts with the bigger social structures. Although the dominant discourse on transnationalism may try to overlap in understanding both globalisation and culture but more broadly has its limitations. Many of the global processes take place in spaces where they are actually de-centered from nations. One process of transnationalism is migration of nationals across the borders of one or more nations (Kearney, 1995). However, it should be taken into consideration that transnational analyses attend to locations, class, and gender, ethnicity including geographies like urban and rural. Moreover, they avoid relying on 'victims' narratives and prioritize giving voice to agency and acts of resistance. (Farr, 2008)

Although global theory encompasses theories of culture, social organization, migrants and their communities, it is only gendered analysis of transnational migration that permits understanding of actual global processes. Although my study does not focus

on issues of transnationalism, it is part of the experience and the narratives of a few of my interviewees who have returned from living in the 'West'.

Mahler et al's (2003) critique of the existing transnational framework opens up discussion on how gendered analysis can affect individuals in various levels in transnational migration. Focusing on three fundamental elements "geographic scales," "social locations" and "power geometries", they argue that, "gendered geographies of power" is a framework for analyzing people's gendered social agency - corporal and cognitive - given their own initiative as well as their positioning within multiple hierarchies of power operative within and across many terrains" (815). I believe that this framework is not only applicable to transnational migration but that "gendered geographies of power" can produce better explanation of global processes in relation to any local cultural setting.

Aihwa Ong, a feminist anthropologist, similarly provides an exciting approach to discussions on issues of transnationality and globalisation. She works from an anthropological point of view and questions those scholars who have equated globalisation with erasing of the national borders by saying: "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has been intensified under late capitalism" (1999, 4). She brings out the notion of flexibility by stating that both individuals and governments have to develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty for capital and power saying that "in their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favouring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. These logics and practices are produced with particular structures of meaning about family, gender, nationality, class mobility and social power"(1999,6). These issues are relevant to my work as some of my interviewees who had stayed longer in the West had different experiences in relation to their gender and intimate roles. I argue that mobility in urban middle-class women offered them opportunities to reflect on their subjectivities and agency. Further, I argue that transnational lens also assists to understand urban middle-class Nepali women's notions of agency with and the ways they negotiate between modern and local practices.

Reflecting on other methodological issues for feminist scholars of globalisation, Carla Freeman identifies hierarchical dualisms in globalisation, superior macro/global attributes to masculinity and inferior micro /local to femininity. Her work, "Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalisation" examines the particular case of contemporary transnational Caribbean 'higglers' whose work transforms the global processes as producers and consumers by buying goods abroad and selling in local markets. And by doing so they demonstrate that globalisation does not only flow in one direction and is not only masculine in nature.

Freeman states that feminists argue that macro structural analyses are not sufficient to describe the lived realities of globalisation. Arguing "local as constitutive of global", Freeman states that "..the gendering of space as well as the social and economic processes associated with globalisation imply that local and global become characterized in oppositional terms (feminine/masculine), then critiquing the effects of globalisation on local ground can answer only one dimension of this conundrum" (2001, 1013) As Freeman suggests, feminists need to reconfigure the local as they are not only the effects of the process but also the constitutive factors in changing of these larger processes.

Integrating gender can not only expose how women have been participating in the global economy but it also improves understandings of the ways women have been able to deploy their agency in the global cultural discourse (Freeman 2001, Acker 1988). Culture is a multifaceted concept, and it is reasonable to say that globalisation does impact different cultural spheres. Nonetheless, a vital area of research in the era of globalisation is exploration of how different spheres and local constitutive cultures are understood by women in defining them and themselves and their notions of their world.

Moreover, scholars like Arjun Appadurai assert that the global and local consistently reinforce each other in their situated cultures. Through the framework of 'scapes' like 'mediascape', 'ethnoscape', 'ideoscape' ,' 'technoscape' and 'finanscape', he shows how the global and local feed and influence one another (explained in next section). Arjun Appadurai's ideas of "scapes" intersected urban middle-class Nepali women's experiences of global flows in their local contexts, as women understand 'culture' and themselves in discussing globalisation and modernity. I subtly address this link in my

study by exploring that the women, who are often said to the bearers of their local patriarchal, cultural practices (Kurein 1999, Rayaprol 2003), can also be agents of modernity.

In this section, I explained intimacy and intimate relations are often ignored in the discourse of gender and globalisation. I argued that intimacy and intimate relations are important to explain subjectivity, gender practices as well to understand social change in any given context. Regarding urban middle-class Nepali women, I argued that media and to some extent mobility is also helping them to define intimacy. In the upcoming section, I present role of media in defining and claiming modernity through practices of intimacy.

2.2   Globalisation, Modernity and role of Media:

Globalisation, both as a concept and process, has been a object of study and discussion for academics, policy makers and planners around the world .For example, Arjun Appadurai in 'Grassroots Globalisation and the Research Imagination' argues that there is a significant disjuncture between "globalisation of knowledge and knowledge of globalisation" (2001, 4). He asserts that, first; there is a difference between academic theorization of globalisation and the everyday understanding of global forces of the poor. Second, the poor and their advocates find themselves marginalized from the national discourse as they find themselves far removed from the debates.

Appadurai uses the concept of 'globalisation from below' that strives for democratic standing and challenges the hegemony of discursive globalisation. This discourse arises when the poor are not involved. This concept challenges the assumption that Westernization/Modernization will be replicated everywhere including the socioeconomic patterns of a society. He argues that western-centric ways of building up knowledge cannot help to produce knowledge from below which is very important to understand the process of globalisation. Through studies like this, Appadurai and other scholars have challenged the concept of local, giving a clear distinction between local and global.

Similarly, Appadurai's other significant work *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalisation* (1996) clearly presents globalisation as a non-linear, non-monolithic

phenomenon that affect different localities to the global processes. Using five dimensions of cultural flow through the framework of "scapes" he shows that culture can be totally de-territorialised. Thus, Appadurai poses a very interesting question of whether different geographical, social, political religious and cultural spaces operate similarly. Arjun Appadurai proposes five global cultural flows-ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscape, finanscape and ideoscape and how they contribute to global exchange of ideas, movement and information which are fluid in nature and are constantly shifting. The Ethnoscape means people migrating across different cultures and borders which means constant flow and movement. Technoscape refers to different power of technology that can bring cultural interactions and exchange. Mediascape means different media kinds like television, films, radio etc., which can help shaping the 'imagined world' we live in and the narrative and images that we can imagine about certain culture. Finanscape is the economic exchange we encounter and lastly, the Ideoscapes centers on ideologies of states and also on counter ideologies around different political cultures and counter-cultures. All these scapes are all strongly intertwined with each other and constantly shifting.

Focusing on the local, Ted Lewellen (2002) in his book, *The An thropology o f Globalisation: Cultural Anthr opology Enters the 21 [st] Century* , argues that most studies of globalisation focus on narrow economic aspects and therefore he provides a broader definition that includes "not just economic flows but also cultural flows, and not just globalisation but also regionalization and localization" (8). Lewellen's arguments suggest globalisation has been understood in a contextual way, and it is imperative to study both culture and globalisation together by understanding that globalisation has plural forms. Regarding local-global linkages, he also discusses how globalisation challenges the conventional concept of culture. He argues that understanding of cultural dimensions of globalisation can reveal how the local absorbs and reconfigures the global influences and challenges our constructed understanding assumptions of homogeneous global culture. He asserts that rather than being subsumed by the global, the local finds ways of accommodating or resisting the global.

In relation to understanding 'gender' within globalisation discourse, V. Spike Peterson in her essay 'Shifting Ground(s), Remapping Strategies and Triad Analytics' argues that taking gender seriously means to acknowledge "gender as constitutive of binary

framing" (109). She uses 'contextual' and 'conceptual' as two dimensions of understanding the gender relation orientation, with the contextual dimension focusing on the empirical and political categories and conceptual dimension on the analytical implications of the relation. Peterson's two dimensions broaden the understanding of variations of constructions of gender within the local context in relation to the global.

In the above context, understanding 'modernity' in the local context will provide more insights in filling the gap. Modernity is always associated with location, mostly the West and even to see modernity if "..not as a product of West but product of interactions with non-West" still makes it problematic (Mitchell 2000,3). It still tends to validate the existence of West over that of the non- West thus not allowing definitions of modernity to encompass local third world culture and practices. Mitchell (2000) further states that to understand modernity, one has to question not only its location but also its historical time so that it isn't defined as a temporally universal modernity. However, modernity can be understood in terms of culture decentred from equivalence with Western forms. Understanding both culture and modernity can offer subtle clues to approach changing social dynamics. However, modernity should not be seen a single cultural movement (Arnason 2002) nor as a product of contradictory or conflicting cultural processes.

As for understanding modernity in non-Western context like Nepal, it can be said for urban middle-class women, that narratives of globalisation, modernity and development are intertwined and that experiences of them gave women a chance to reconsider their values and behaviour and create new identity as *thikka*. Recent social and political transformations, development discourses and media viewing are linked with aspirations toward modernity for urban middle-class Nepali women as they create their culturally specific forms of modernity.

2.3   Globalisation, Modernity and Media in South Asia:

Turning to contemporary South Asia, it is worthwhile to question whether the globalisation has been able to bring in increased freedom and more opportunities in lives of people especially to those of women in gender roles and relationships within the local context. However, it would be also problematic and inadequate to see South Asian women as a homogeneous category without understanding their historical and 'local hierarchies and differences' (Tamang 2002).

Arguing for the same, Bhatia et. Al (2008), assert that attention to local implications is necessary for understanding the effects of globalisation in South Asian women's everyday lives.

While patriarchy emerges as a necessary concept to critique development in view of multiplicity and overlapping forms of oppression, the mediations between patriarchy and other forms of classification such as caste, class and religion or ethnicity need to be more specifically examined. The focus on South Asian women, as a descriptive though non-homogeneous category, serves a useful purpose to lay out the contextual terrain within which women's issues and experiences need to be examined (151).

While South Asian women are considered either 'traditional' or 'victims' and their agency denied or not explored with the Euro-American feminist scholarship (Mohanty 1991), it is essential to recognize and analyse the multiple modernities fashioned by the women in the so-called "third world peripheries" in order to analyse their agency (discussed below).

Many theorists have shown the complex ways in which media has been influential in the era of globalisation, (Appadurai 1996, Giddens 2002, Thompson 2011) as Thompson states "…if we wish to understand the nature of modernity-that is, of the institutional characteristics of modern societies and the life conditions created by them-then we must give a central role to the development of communication media and their impact".(Thompson 3, 2011,)

Certain aspects of globalisation such as mobility and media are directly linked to re(producing) and re(shaping) culture, gender roles and intimate relationships. Moreover, media is a powerful lens for understanding globalisation and modernity. Although representation and participation of women in media has always been questioned and much debated globalisation and modernity of media narratives have affected women's understandings of relationships and roles.

As culture is a much contested, argued and produced fluid concept in itself; however, purposes of my study I try to problematise how my interviewees see representations and how they define and understand 'culture'. In reacting to Indian visual media and in discussing it in the interviews, my interviewees reflected on their ideas and perceptions. My analysis uncovered on media as an agent of modernity for urban

Nepali women, influencing them as they're (shape) their culture, gender roles and intimate relationships.

Media theorists like Meenakshi Gigi Durham et al (2006) posit that understanding culture critically is essential as it provides insights on how media and culture construct and produce gender and roles and identities; however, they further state there is no one perspective or method that can easily contribute to this process.

> "…there are many forms of media that saturate our everyday lives and the cultural change of the current technological revolution is so turbulent that it is becoming increasingly difficult to map the transformations and to keep up with the cultural discourses and theories that attempt to make sense of it all. Culture today is both ordinary and complex…." (2009, xi)

Similarly, the notion of ' culture' or 'Nepali culture' can also be understood as contentious in this context. There is a huge range of diversity in the Nepali culture, presenting a cultural plurality of overlapping caste, class, and ethnicity.

Now, coming back to the importance of media in understanding nature of modernity in South Asian context, there are some ethnographic works which show how the Third World societies mediate along the boundaries of the 'global' and 'local' through the medium of media. In the similar context, Purnima Mankekar's ethnographic study on *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* explores the relationship between mass media and socio-cultural life, national identity formation of women in India, a non-Western context. She describes how everyday viewing of television in India has shaped women's place within the family, community, and nation and in fact has influenced formation of class, caste, consumption, religion, and politics. Her argument suggests the power of media to redefine women's roles and identity within the society and nation as a whole. Furthermore, it could be also viewed as the adverse effect that global processes can have on women by reinforcing gender and other ethnic, racial and caste stereotypes.

Another study on globalisation, gender and nationalism by Rupal Oza (2006) conceptualizes the study of gender and politics in India through examining three phenomena: neo-liberal policies, the rise of the Hindu Right, and the consolidation of

the middle classes. According to Oza, India's exposure to globalisation has fostered rigid gender and sexual identities in the name of sovereignty over national culture and identity. Oza suggests that gender subjectivities are changing through electronic media such as cinema and television in India. She explains that in these public discourses, Indian women are shown as modern representing a globalized Indian, but that somehow they are also presented as deeply rooted in Indian culture.

Thus Oza examines how issues of gender and sexuality cater to the allegiance, patriotism and nationalism in neo-liberal India. I will explore the applicability of her ideas to notions of gender in Nepal, another South Asian, predominantly Hindu culture, where also the nation has recently undergone changes in cultural and political environment.

Likewise, along with the local processes, the global ones also affect women's notions of the meanings of gender relation, intimate relationships, female agency and possibilities of contradiction and subversion.

2.4   Globalisation, Modernity and Media in Nepal: Effects on Women:

The mass media has a primary role in introducing Nepal is to 'cultural globalisation' with international media along with Indian media strongly influencing local urban media.

In this regard, Mark Liechty asserts that it is important to analyse media effects of globalisation in Nepal. One part of Liechty (1995) studied the effect of Western pornographic media consumption on women living in Kathmandu. Though this study was neither based on feminist qualitative study nor on media culture, it is significant for understanding urban Nepali women's experiences of modernity in consuming media. He states that women relegate sexual pornography to the category of foreign images and by doing so they detach themselves from it to maintain their sense as respectable Nepali women. On one hand, they consider themselves modern via watching foreign media; while on the other hand, it was not something they could identify with. Liechty's argument seem applicable to my research since I observed that urban Nepali women, especially middle aged older women faced significant challenges in being respectable Nepali women as they negotiate their experience of new forms of sexuality which they encountered in modern media. However, I argue

that *ijjat* which can be defined as dignified/respectable carries a significant meaning for urban women in Nepal, especially older women who seem to have embraced this notion in their day to day lives.

Nevertheless, in arguing further about who is respectable in urban society of Nepal, Liechty presents a homogeneous concept of the dignified Nepali woman. Here, I argue that in contemporary urban Nepali society, a new elitism in form of high caste values still exists within the women processing modernity in urban spaces of Nepal. These high caste values symbolize modernity for many urban women of other castes who belong not only to non-high caste social groups but also those who come to Kathmandu from other places.

In this context, I also integrate arguments made by scholars to understand how the interplay of ideas of nationality and modernity aid in comprehending subjectivities of urban women of Nepal. I examine how global narratives in the form of Indian visual media content and local cultural narratives in forms of *ijjat* interplay to shape women's subjective identities in urban Nepali society. Moreover, in the recent times, Indian films and TV serials project narratives that challenge stereotypes of gender roles and positions.

Under such situations, I examine the (re)negotiation of agency of urban Nepali women vis-à-vis the 'local' and 'foreign' from viewing current Indian visual media. This situation also pose a significant question for my research focus as whether the Indian media's influence on Nepali gender roles and relations can be defined as South-South globalisation or as the Western influence that is mediated by India and Indian visual media.

Indian visual media have dominated urban Nepali media for a long time, likewise, my interviewees also find Indian visual media a starting point for discussion of their gender roles, and intimate relationships and has become a common discourse of discussing their ideas. It would be worthwhile to contemplate whether urban Nepali watching Indian visual media is the regional, economic and cultural power dominance India has over Nepal, and it opens another fruitful area for research and analysis. However, my study is limited to my debates on cultural compatibility that both nation share. The success of Indian visual media in Nepal is not only because of the geographical closeness but is also associated with cultural compatibility between the

two nations. Culpan (2002) argues that cultural compatibility is closely connected to cultural proximity which means closeness to the cultural practices of one organization to another one. Likewise, the influence of the Indian visual media in the Nepali context, especially urban media is its cultural values and affinities with India. Cultural proximity is in part the preference of audiences for media in their own language, values, and way of life and culture, ultimately leading the audiences to prefer local and national productions over those that are globalized (Straubhaar 2008). Hence, I argue that urban Nepali women watching Indian visual media foregrounds cultural proximity theory that shares cultural similarities including gestures, rituals and language.

Indian serials or soap operas which are very popular amongst middle and elderly urban Nepali women, are based on the ideals of a typical large, extended family, which are written in very melodramatic forms typically about middle class, joint families modern yet deeply rooted in the Hindu cultural contexts. This resonates easily with Nepali female audiences. The women in these melodramas are well educated but remain very true to their 'Indian' values or 'Hindu norms', while integrating tradition and modernity. Allen (1995) asserts that there is a strong symbiotic relationship between soap operas and melodrama and aspirations to audience satisfaction where on the one hand melodrama may to break the taboos within the genre of soap opera while on the other hand, they embed unrealistic melodrama that to increase the plot combinations. Further Zettl states that contextualism may have many shifts and different meanings but art is one feature what is being evaluated within its context. She argues that all "...events or incidents of life are understood within their cultural contexts; contextualizing aesthetics means that what and how we perceive any event is greatly influenced by its context." (2005,5). Following the above argument, I examined the nuances in which urban Nepali women consider in Indian visual media as a common cultural context in discussing gender roles, intimate relationships and their 'culture'.

2.5   Globalisation, Caste, Intimate Relation and Nepali women:

The existing anthropological studies of Nepal have tended to employ structural approaches with light if any attention to globalisation, thus providing limited

understanding of women's lived experience. In this section, I analyse some of these studies on globalisation and caste issues in Nepal and their perspectives.

In Nepali context, Laura Ahearn (2001) and Mark Liechty (1995, 2003, 2010) have focused on studying cultural globalisation. Laura Ahearn's ethnography *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Socia l Ch ange in Nepal* (2001) explores the influence of globalisation in rural areas in west-central Nepal and the role of education (literacy practices) in the expression of self through love letters. This expression gives them personal agency and documents the fundamental shifts occurring not only in social realms, such as gender roles and marriage practices, but also in individual understandings of self and agency through education.

Ahearn contends that the literacy program which was the main pillar of Nepal's modernising or developmental projects inspired values of modern selves that embodied education and modernity. Exposed to different development discourses and programs and other mass media such as both Nepali and foreign films, magazines and novels, young people in this village came to understand themselves as individuals who are able to make choices and improve their lives. Analyzing hundreds of love letters, she states how young people increasingly premise future life success in their ability to freely choose their companion for marriage. In terms of agency, she points out the ironic ways in which young people understand romantic love. There is irony because they describe love as something that happens to them uncontrollably, as fate-driven but once established, this new love is experienced as an empowering force that gives them personal agency. However, Ahearn fails to sufficiently incorporate the Nepali culture in her analysis of agency. She does not demonstrate how these youth's prior internalised cultural experiences affect in their understanding of self, modernity and agency.

Similarly, Mark Liechty's (1994) ethnographic study on the experience of middle-class youth illuminates gender and sexuality in the urban areas of Nepal. He analyses the discourses of age, class, and gender to show how new identities are constructed around modern cultural goods and practices. However, Liechty's study overlooks the aspect of caste as a cultural construction. Liechty's assertion that caste is slowly fading away in the urban context of Nepal is problematic. Caste has always been a contentious category but it is also an important aspect of social stratification which

helps shape to a large extent gender and intimate relations in Nepali society. Moreover, Liechty does not present his interviewees' caste/ethnic, age, educational and occupational background which certainly makes it difficult to generalize about the overall "middle class culture" of Kathmandu. In addition Liechty's focus on youth culture mainly explains the behaviours and practices of male Nepalis, a partial understanding of gender paradigms in the contemporary Nepali urban discourses.

Thus, Ahearn's and Liechty's analyses of gender and modernity do not take into account all the variables inevitably present in Nepali society. While my study aims to expand the issues raised by these scholars exploring gender and sexuality in the context of globalisation, it also explores how urban middle-class Nepali women's constructions of gender and intimate relations are different or similar across generations, social statuses and socio-economic background.

Although my analysis of urban modernity takes into account the dynamics of class, caste, gender relations and media as Liechty does, my focus is on women's experiences. I take a feminist approach to show how women living in Nepal of urban spaces are negotiating between global flows and local practices. Throughout the study which focuses urban Nepali society of post 1990 and 2006 movements,[3] I present the ways urban Nepali women negotiate conflicting ideas of modernity and 'culture' in this transitional era.

I argue here that without understanding the social position such as the caste of a person in the Nepali context, it is difficult to interpret the gender and intimate relationships of the person. What a woman brings from her culture and how she understands her womanhood also strongly shape her consumption practices and thus defines modernity for her.

Since caste as a cultural identity still plays prominent role in women's experiences in urban Nepal, a woman's caste position (discussed more below) is a key aspect of female's understandings of Nepali modernity.

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[3] 1990- People's movement that brought end to an absolute monarchy and began constitutional democracy. 2006-Democracy movement which led to end of monarchy in Nepal.

Since caste is related to sexual purity of women, female sexual conduct offers a threat of introduction 'low' or 'impure' blood into the lineage. Sexual and even social behaviour of women is closely monitored. Issues of *ijjat* (explained in next section) or respectability are associated with women's sexual behaviours and subjectivities. As mentioned earlier, *ijjat* is an excellent lens for understanding through which Nepali women's gender and intimate relations with partners and other family members.

There has been a paradigm shift in studies of Nepal since the 1980s. Some less known anthropological studies explore factors influencing the construction of sexual realities. As an example of the existing *Sex Education in Nepal* Pokharel et al (2006) identified a discourse of 'gender differentiation' in the curriculum of sex education. They opine how this discourse has further reinforced the supposed typical gendered behaviour. More explicitly, they stress that the contents in sex education materials are inadequate and are limited to anatomical facts. Another study on sexuality or intimate relationship issues, *Reproductive H ealth o f Nepal*(Mathur et al.2001), studied adolescent girl reproductive health. They state that it may be critical to implement positive reproductive health interventions because of rigid social norms and institutions that impose restrictive sexuality on girls. Although both studies employ social constructionist perspectives to understanding women and girls' lived experiences, they still seem to emphasize the essentialist views of gender roles without providing a better analysis of the interplay of culture and gender. Addressing the importance of putting sexuality issues at the centre, Miller et al (2004) argue that issues of sexuality cannot be overlooked in the work related to health and human rights. They claim that health policy and other newer initiatives in public health have been taken into account of sexuality, similarly at international, national and local level efforts have been introducing issues of sexual diversity and reform of sexual laws. Here, I argue that issues of sexuality and intimacy have become an 'analytical device' in academic discourses to study about given society and culture, caste, gender roles and relationships.In this section, I explained that caste is a prominent identity marker for women since it is linked with their sexual purity and their overall being. To understand how urban middle-class Nepali women negotiated the global and the local, caste and its underlying factors such as *ijjat* should be taken into account.

2.6   *Ijjat*, Gender, and Media Globalisation in Nepal:

Not only intimacy in general, but the concepts of *ijjat* are crucial to women's identity in Nepali. Yet *ijjat* which means honour, respectability prestige and reputation, is further linked to caste status. While *ijjat* is that local culture that inscribes Nepali women's understanding of her gender roles and intimate relations it is challenged by encounters with the global flows, especially media. And I argue herewith that it is the same notion of *ijjat* that women in urban spaces of Nepal use in asserting agency in being or acting as *thikka* as they negotiate between the binary of global and the local.

Ijjat, the concept which remains implicit in much research on South Asians has been a recurrent theme in my research analysis where my interviewees have associated *ijjat* while performing appropriate of *thikka* modernity. Mark Liechty (2010) while stating how Kathmandu's market economy is becoming a consumer economy, argues that "the logic and practice of *iijat* is clearly at the heart of a new middle class consumer culture in Kathmandu", (p.18) asserting "*ijjat* economy is never only a *moral* economy or only a *material* economy", (p. 17) but both. Stressing that class ought to be understood as a cultural practice and not a thing; Liecthy further explains that this perspective helps to understand the relation between the global and the local in globalisation and construction of modernity. Bringing the framework of middle-class *ijjat* economy, he argues that it bridges gap in between the local understandings of prestige and the realm of capitalist consumer culture.

Here, I agree with Liechty's claim of how *ijjat* perspective helps to understand the relation of local to the global. The interviewees in my research also articulate fears of losing *ijjat*, as if *ijjat* were a thing to be guarded. However, underlying of the concept of *ijjat*, I think is an assumption that moves beyond Liechty's assertion of moral and material economy. The concept of *ijjat* is constituted through the practices of modernity by women in urban spaces as they negotiate between local practices and global processes Moreover, unlike Liechty's concept, *ijjat* in my research is associated with the issues of morality and intimate relations. For women in urban spaces *ijjat* was not only related to the display of consumer goods and participating in material culture but being socially acceptable without compromising with their caste/ethnic identity.

In explaining how women become respectable subjects, Skeggs (1997, 12) states that these "Subjects positions are the effects of discourse *and* the (organizational) structures" and these discourse help them how they can be situated in these institutional structures. Further, she says,

> "Respectability is a discursive position which informs the take-up and
> content of subject positions" (1997,12)

The above implies that attaining values which are prized in their society and not staining them is what respectability is all about for women. In this aspect, I argue that urban Nepali women are using notion of *ijjat* to locate their position in between the global and local.

Although some researchers e.g. Liechty (2010) Gilbert et al. (2004) have made references to *ijjat* principally as honour , respectability and shame, the concepts are used in contexts which mainly reflects the interlinked notions of pride and shame and gender relations within a given culture. Cameroon asserts that the concept of *ijjat* has intricate relationship with *jat* (caste) as well as competition, social standing, respect, gender dynamics and reputation. She also distinguishes the notion of *ijjat* in the individualism of Western societies, and the preference for collectivism in cultures found in the South Asian. Since *ijjat* is closely associated with female sexual purity and their caste, meaning of *ijjat* can be differently understood in context of urban middle-class Nepali women.

As mentioned earlier, *ijjat* can be understood as a key to understanding female *agency* in urban Nepali women's negotiations of global flows and local practices. Urban middle-class Nepali women express new ways of understanding agency which can be both contradictory and paradoxical since it is about being *thikka* in their behaviour, speech, gestures, dress and also ideas. They want their modern identities intact within parameters of respectability. Urban middle-class Nepali women want to enjoy a sense of liberty, using their own agency to improve their status in the social structure that puts them in a low position. Agency has nuanced meaning(s) and notions that can be expressed in varied ways in different contexts and an individual's agency is invariably incomplete. However, the agency my interviewees are talking about can be located in individual contexts and understood as 'contextual agency'. As Laura M. Ahearn (2001,112) asserts agency as, "the Socio-culturally mediated capacity to act," which

means it is related to resistance and also acceptance to act within any historical circumstances. I argue that urban Nepali women theorize *ijjat* as their medium to practice agency while remaining within their self-defined cultural contexts. *Ijjat* was repeatedly used by most of my interviewees in discussing modernity and by doing so my interviewees gave legitimacy to something that they value and cannot lose. Nevertheless, the construction of notions of agency takes place within any individual in any cultural context within power relations of that context.

> "Agency is not an entity that exists apart from cultural construction (nor is it a quality one has only when one his whole, or when one is an individual). Every culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency, its own modes of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what one finds there" (Ortner: 1995, 186).

Anthony Giddens (1998) states that human agency and social structure act through each other. In urban middle-class Nepali women were being self-reflexive in describing themselves as *thikka* deploying *ijjat* to continuously resist and recontextualize their position. In a given context especially as viewers and consumers of Indian visual media, they may feel that they are exercising power and agency to negotiate (accept and resist) with global flows and their 'culture'. Yet as Appadurai argue these images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser (1996,24). Through exploring these ideas of agency, it can be understood that urban middle-class Nepali women did not express explicit understanding of agency. However, agency is conceptualized by them through reiteration of *ijjat* discourse and practices.

In addition to it, agency of urban middle-class Nepali women is also conveyed through consumer practices and modern practices in Nepal. Liechty (2010) states 'foreignness' as an important historical context of Nepal's relation with modernity. Focusing on the movement of foreign goods among people mainly in Kathmandu Valley, he asserts the context of cultural economy of foreignness and its influence on the individual and class. Furthermore, he argues that members of the Ranas caste as

elites established modern class practices and constructed of modern culture through consumerism. My study examines how urban women of Nepal understand articulations of modernity and 'foreignness' and how their notions illuminate women's agency. It further explores whether the modernity fashioned by urban Nepali women is just an escape from their old cultural practices or an opportunity to build a desirable future and to understand how women have been able to use their agency in new globalised cultural contexts.

However, realization of individuals' agency of may not mean being powerful. In this context, Anne-Marie Hilsdon (2007) cautions that dominant discourses of agency do not present a hierarchy of significant and insignificant forms of agency and asserts that anthropological work and those related with globalisation should give more recognition to the studies of power and agency of women. She further states that women do not necessarily observe the gender construction within their local context critically and this makes anthropological work vital to study women's lived experiences and fields of power in order to understand their agency. I concur with Hilsdon here that critically thinking about women's action and ideas in their local contexts provides space for reflexivity. In this way, the meaning of agency in anthropological works can also shed light on women's multiple subjectivities such as in the case of urban middle-class Nepali women. I argue that conceptions of agency have been articulated mostly in terms of development discourse in Nepal. However, I have in this study explored that these concepts have been changing, especially urban middle-class Nepali women expression of *ijjat* also suggest that it deployed by them for being *thikka* modern.

Reflecting more on urban Nepali women's situation, it can also be said that they have restricted agency in relation to modernity and cultural practices by which they construct their *thikka* identities as a way of resisting local and global patriarchal social orders (Abu-Lughod1998,Mohanty 2003). Since urban Nepal women constructing their identities as *thikka* suggests multi-faceted meanings, in certain contexts Lila Abu-Lughod's argument can be applied to name women situation as resistance in the form of agency. For example, my interviewees understood *ijjat* and caste statuses as their sense of dignity and self, however, they were also equally aware of economic deprivation and subversive potential that could go beyond the caste statuses. Therefore, these theories further provide insights into understanding the relationship

between structure and agency and also between powers of individuals to make choices against the power of the social structure.

Another form of debate of the agency within the neo-liberal discourse is the relation between agency and coercion. As Kalpana Wilson (2013) examines feminist notion of agency within neo-liberal discourse and asserts that understanding the agency under the circumstances of coercive conditions have not been theorized. She states that agency has been over associated with 'choice' and further states it cannot be considered 'agency' if women act against other women whether they show resistance to Western imperialism or whether they are victims of patriarchal culture, e.g. veiling for religious reasons.

In other words a feminist account of agency may recognize agency but still want to intervene politically to encourage different choices, rather than validating identities attached to 'otherness' in a politically limiting manner. (32)

Similarly, Madhok (2013) presents arguments about how to think of agency in oppressive contexts, stating a need to move away from standard understandings of agency within act and action but rather to focus on 'speech practices':….consisting of a shift from action to speech practices, and focusing on how persons articulate a sense of themselves and reflexive considerations in their speech practices. This challenges prevailing understandings of agency that privilege free acts and actions of persons as standard measure for analysing agency. (107)

2.7   Writing A Feminist Qualitative Study:

In this section, I discuss writing about this feminist qualitative study and the use of reflexive co-construction method to understand the lived experiences of urban Nepali women as they negotiate between the modern and their cultural practices. Due to research methods adopted, a reflexive co-construction method was appropriate for knowledge production in this study.

Scholars like Ahrean and Liechty who have contributed to the globalisation studies in Nepal have overlooked the issue of reflexivity in discussing women's experiences with modernity. Ahearn's study emphasised on the literacy movement of Nepal as a medium of modernity and its impact on young women while part of Liechty's study was based on women's experiences with media consumption. These studies did not

contribute to the reciprocal sharing and understanding of knowledge between the researcher and their interviewees. However, my study is based on women's lived experiences and offering them a space to critically think and rethink about their ideas and practices. As some knowledge that became part of my study produced was urban middle-class Nepali women gained new knowledge of themselves and their socio cultural worlds through participating in my research project. Also, their understandings influenced my interpretations of their ideas and experiences.

2.8   Reflexive co-construction of knowledge production in a Feminist Qualitative Study:

Social scientists in the past have given attention to the discussion and analysis of qualitative and ethnographic methodology in comparison to the positivist standards. A 'naturalistic' stance was considered to be the best approach for qualitative research where the researcher studies environment without any interference. Here, the presence of the researcher is written out and distanced from the phenomenon only providing the objectivity for the validity of the qualitative (Hammersley, 1990a). Therefore, my chosen epistemology for this qualitative study is reflexive co-constructionist approach. Thus, I completely accept that my account do not provide any objective validity.

This reflexivity debate is associated with the binary of subjectivity/objectivity. However, the boundaries of subject and object disappear and they become one as qualitative researchers incorporate reflexivity in their methods (Davies 2008). Davies states that no process of knowing can be reflexive until the process is " Turned to the knower and the 'knower becomes self-conscious even of the reflexive process of knowing " (2008:7), a process in which where both the researcher and the interviewees are acknowledged as engaged together to in the co-construct knowledge.

The concept of 'reflexivity' is perhaps most notably and effectively used in feminist qualitative (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989, Naples 2003) since this practice offers more dialectical relationship between the researcher and interviewees where interviewees occupy a central position of being active participants. Mascia-Lees et al (1989) in asserting that current feminist theory gives importance on the diversification of women's experience, suggest that research questions should be framed according to the wants of the 'other' in the research. They argue that such framework that

encompasses self-reflexivity and inter subjectivity between the feminist researcher and the 'subjects' would be able to overcome the power relations between the two embedded in qualitative work.

Similarly, Nancy Naples (2003) points out the advantages of reflective practice in which a researcher considers her own position as well as the social positions and cultural locations of her interviewees in the research process. This stance implies that the researcher's position shapes interaction in the interpretation of the field.

Situating myself in this qualitative research, I used a co-construction approach to employ the methodology considering the ethical issues involved in a co-constructed-knowledge production.

This work is located within fields of feminist qualitative study that include different modes of applying reflexivity and co-constructionist approach and memory as use of narrative conversational mode. All the 54 women interviewees, key personnel from specified occupational sectors and participants of the focus group discussions, invested their valuable time and affect making a creative co-constructive contribution to this research.

While engaging in interviews with participants the researcher's subjective experience encouraged open, familiar relationship with the participants. Particularly from the life narratives of older women, I gained a deeper understanding of the social and cultural understandings and negotiations that revealed the social and cultural spheres of their lives and society. For instance, a biographical narrative of a 95-year old woman enabled me to grasp the content of "standard gender roles" and "constraints of sexuality" imposed on women of her generation, giving me a deeper cultural and historical insight.

Following Gayle Letherby's (2002) concepts of 'descriptive' and 'analytical' reflexivity, it can be stated that both the researcher and the participants were engaged in a useful 'reflexive narrative' approach through the lens of memory. Letherby (2002) claims both of these reflections can be demonstrated by interviewees' narrative accounts of how they evaluate their own experience and their perceptions of others. My interviewees while narrating their experiences were reflexive, describing and understanding their own and their views on others. It was illuminating to realize that

interviewees who were newly residents of Kathmandu were more 'open' in their approach to social, political, economic and cultural changes than those 'local' to Kathmandu who had a more conservative outlook. But in any case, all the narratives contributed to valuable insights into gender discourse in contemporary urban Nepal.

2.9   Conclusion:

In this chapter, I theorised gender in the era of globalisation suggesting the relative neglect of understandings of intimacy and gender and intimate relationship in globalisation and development paradigm. I also stated why I prefer using the term 'intimate relations' in place of sexuality to analyse the day to day lived experiences of women. Then I discussed modernity in the context of globalisation focusing on the media as an analytical tool, especially in Nepal. In the latter part of chapter, I reviewed studies on caste, *ijjat* and gender in show that *ijjat* is a crucial lens through the experiences of urban Nepali women's gender roles, caste identity and intimate and familial relationships are refracted. I also argued that *ijjat* is a key construct in urban middle-class Nepali women's deployment of agency. In the last sections of the chapter, I discussed my standpoint as the researcher of this qualitative study and the impact on the perspectives of reflexive and co-construction research methods.

3   CHAPTER: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to carry out this qualitative study including the different challenges encountered during the fieldwork that lasted from November 2010 until May 2011. I investigated how urban middle–class Nepali women experienced new, sometimes conflicting ideas of modernity and culture in times of transition following the years 1990 to 2006. I listened and interacted with women of varying marital and social statuses as married, unmarried, divorced, separated and widowed women, working and non- employed and different castes belonging to four generations regarding their experience and though about social and cultural aspects of modernity ranging from marriage, divorce, cohabitation to fashion. Most of my interviewees said that they had not thought about these questions before, nor had they had the opportunity to talk about these issues before. My main methods were personal interviewing and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which involved creating and constructing the information from the interviewees (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). This process of eliciting information from the interviewees was more listening to their stories and encouraging them to take responsibility for the meaning their narratives rather than influencing them.

In this chapter, I describe the methods employed during the fieldwork starting from the selection of the site, research participants, interviews, participant observation and methods of data analysis.

In the latter part of the chapter, I explain the methodological considerations needed to understand how urban women are negotiating global and the local cultural practices. I also discuss critiques in regard to the validity in qualitative research, including ethnography and utility of a self-reflexive approach. In the process, I present the feminist critiques of accountability of selected methodological approaches.

3.1 R   esearch sites:

Choosing Kathmandu (the capital city of Nepal) as my research site was a practical consideration as it is the best site of global media consumption. Kathmandu is also the best site to study Nepali modernity because it allows people to access to both international and transnational information since it is gradually becoming connected with the global media.

Moreover, it is the place where I was born and brought up. However, as studying and living in 'the West' for quite some years, it was interesting to observe dynamics I was not aware of when I left. So I was in an interesting position being familiar with the city and its ways of life but as the same time less familiar with the latest changes in society as I had been away from Nepal for couple of years to pursue my higher education. Therefore, it allowed me the opportunity to explore the ways urban women were negotiating between the 'modern' and the 'cultural practices'.

My research used qualitative methods that included in-depth interviews, participant observation and FGDs. However, the discussions with FGDs and Key personnel have been only included in introduction and conclusion of thesis and merely in the analysis chapters.

Almost every day of my fieldwork; I was productive either interviewing some key personnel or the informants. When I was not in the field, I stayed home writing field notes, translating transcribing and reading. I developed good communication and rapport with the 'gatekeepers' who were my close friends and some family members in order to contact my informants.

However, the fieldwork was partially interrupted during the marriage season from February-April when it was difficult to contact and interview middle aged/older women as they kept postponing appointments. At first, I thought the frequent postponements were a way to avoid interviews but upon meeting those women I discovered that women had to devote more time in maintaining to the social obligations and adhering to conventional gender roles. This discovery was insightful for the research.

For the fieldwork, I identified five different types of institutions: media publication companies and cinema halls, Ministries of Health and Women (Government of Nepal), the National Women's Commission, the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the Tribhuvan University and some women-related NGOs. Visiting these institutions and talking with key people provided me with the supplementary data on cultural norms, effects of globalisation and ongoing gender activism in Nepal. The analysis of these materials enabled me to grasp the ways urban women in Kathmandu understand these bigger events and interpret them in their own personal lives.

Furthermore, this gave me a better understanding of how issues of gender roles and intimate relationships are both reinforced and transformed by the global flows.

3.2 R   esearch participants:

This qualitative research which employs a 'patchwork' sampling approach is based on narratives of 54 urban middle-class Nepali women, 28 key personnel and participants from FGDs. However, the information gathered from 28 key personnel and FGD participants are used as to set the background of the study and not in the analysis sections. The breakdown of the 54 urban middle class [4], women of different generations and different marital statuses is married (31), unmarried (12), widowed (8), divorced (2) and separated (1). Twelve of the fifty-four interviewees were mothers and their unmarried or married daughters belonged to six households and four interviewees were mothers -in -law and their daughters- in-law were from two households .The age groups of interviewees were 20 from 20-35 the young group, 16 were 36-50 the younger middle- aged group, 13 were 51-65 the older middle group and 5 were women above age 66, the elderly or senior group. The oldest woman interviewed in the study was 95 years old. The involvement of participants from diverse backgrounds, relationships, ages and experiences provided productive data.

Interviewees' Age group chart

Age group range	No. of Interviewees
Younger (20-35)	20
Younger Middle (36-50)	16
Older Middle (51-65)	13
Elderly /senior (66 above)	5
Total	54

Table 1. Source: Fieldwork 2011

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[4]My interviewees identified themselves as 'middle-class'. Their self-definition of middle-class was someone being educated, having good income, neither rich nor poor.

To recruiting interviewees for my project, I used my own networks of friends and family. My own position of being a 'local' and also having worked as the developmental sector for quite a long time in Kathmandu proved advantageous for obtaining introductions to many urban women easily and for the snowball type of interview sampling. Chaim Noy (2008) suggests that the snowball sampling method essentially involves "social capital" of both the researcher and an informant who possesses a good social network of friends and acquaintances and is therefore easily located.

I employed a snowball sampling technique to locate a purposive sample of 54 middle class women of urban society of Nepal. These were the women who generally identified themselves as middle- class and also residents of Kathmandu. The interviewees included 42 urban women who belonged to high caste and 12 to non - high caste. Most of these women were working outside home and educated. Some women were not originally born in Kathmandu but had long experience living there. I conducted two FGDs with the younger and elderly women's groups respectively. In each of the FGDs, there were 6-8 members. I discussed the research with them, explaining my objectives. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), focus group discussions can be used as the triangulation process which offers individual's response and participation into the context. These FGDs members willingly agreed to participate in the FGDs. FGDs conducted with the younger and elderly women's groups helped me explore Nepali women's perspectives on their experiences of gender roles and relationships in the urban society of Nepal, the socio-cultural issues faced by women and narratives of their day to day experiences. I located younger women ranging from their early to mid -20s who around the time were working as interns at a social awareness raising organisation. They felt honoured to have their experiences listened to and represented in this research, because it helped them to understand the value of their experiences regarding their marriage preferences, career and education. The FGD comprised of elderly women was conducted at Sai Saangh[5] where these women were regular visiting members.

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[5] A centre where spiritual groups meet and discuss teachings of spiritual teacher Sai Baba

I spoke with a total of twenty-eight people from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women/Children and Ministry of Communication, non-governmental organisations, media publication houses, university professors, women activists, lawyers and independent intellectuals in Kathmandu. These key personnel provided me with a general overview of gender discourse in academia, media and development agendas. The number of key people far exceeded what I had indicated in my original proposal, due to their flexibility and a warm response that I received from them. My status as a researcher from the UK might have been a factor in eliciting their cooperation. Since the interviews with key informants did not include any personal accounts and consisted of general public information, I asked for and gained their permission to use their real names in data analyses and publications. Thus, they have agreed to be identified with the information they provided for the study.

3.3 R   ecorded interviews:

For a qualitative inquiry into the views and life histories of the interviewees, I recorded interviews only after gaining their informed consent. The interviews (schedule in appendix 1&2) lasted for 1-2 hours. I had prepared a demographic questionnaire along with an interview schedule that consisted of questionnaires related with interviewees' childhood, partners and family relations and practices and their experience and information on media. I maintained a separate codebook with the real names and contact information of the informant in a locked cabinet in my home in Kathmandu. I labelled each transcription with a code. All the anonymised transcripts and audio files from the interview are stored in my password protected laptop. Most interviewees seemed comfortable talking in Nepali, although few preferred speaking only in English[6].However, I noticed that most interviewees spoke with mixed Nepali and English throughout the conversations.

To my surprise, some interviewees assumed me to be a 'therapist' or 'expert' on gender issues and approached me with personal queries at the end of the interview.

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[6]Women educated in English Boarding School St.Mary's High School mainly spoke in English. It is a very well known girls' school in Kathmandu. People would feel honored to send their daughters to this school.

This informal interaction helped me reflect on my interviewing technique contributing to the co-constructionist aspect of my research. It was noteworthy that some considered me an 'insider' as I am a native Kathmandu woman, but on the other hand, also as an 'outsider' as I have been educated in the West. Due to Western education, I was seen as more knowledgeable. However, my role was not dichotomized into the binary of 'insider' versus 'outsider'. My interviewees seemed to find my position to be 'non-threatening'. My position during throughout fieldwork and especially during interviews was shaped by varied social and emotional experiences.

I supplemented my research strategy of interviewing urban Nepali women with meetings with 28 key personnel who were either media professionals, academics and development workers using other methods discussed below in sections 3.4 and 3.5 of this chapter. The main purpose of these kind of discussions was to attain a greater depth of understanding of Nepali gender roles and intimate relationships as a basis for more penetrating analysis of changes under the impact of global processes such media and development discourse.

3.4 Obser   vation participant:

As the research focus is to explore how contemporary urban Nepali women are negotiating between traditional and modern gender roles and intimate relationships. I adopted participant observation as one of the key research methods. I took notes on some urban women while interviewing them and also while participating in different rituals and family functions. However, due to space limitations, little of that data could be included in this study. As for the organisational spaces, I attended workshops, and seminars organised the Tribhuvan University and an organization called READ (Rural Education and Development). I visited international and national women's organisations like Nari Chetana Kendra, Mata Pita Samuha and Saathi to observe and have interactions with their members. This data appears in chapters 1, 4 and 5 interwoven within introductory and analytical sections.

Depending on the context and time constraints, I took notes that were pertinent to my research. I had the opportunity to do participant observation when mothers and daughters and mothers-in law and their daughters-in-law of the same households participated in rituals, and I had asked to and received permission from them to take photographs of the rituals. Photographs have been helpful in capturing the

performances of identity during the rituals by different ages of women. However, those photographs are not used here as the rituals are not discussed.

3.5 Questi   onnaire Checklist:

My initial research questions involved the following variables: age, social status, education, and marital status. I designed all questions in English and translated them into Nepali in order to gather data efficiently from a large number of urban Nepali women of both high and non-high castes, residing then in Kathmandu. Questions about caste, education, marital status and age were asked directly and then I developed open-ended questions to get at the central research question.

3.6 Method   of Analysis:

Discussion of transcription and other technical details of methodology precede description of my analytical methods. My analysis is based on the epistemological concerns raised by Charlotte Davies (2008) which were treated in Chapter 2 in section 2.8. which concerns a reflexive process where both the researcher and the interviewees are engaged together in the co-construction of knowledge.

I determined the important and significant themes for my analysis on the basis of the principal question of my study, which was to explore the ways urban Nepali women experience the intersection of local culture and global media flows and how they are negotiating these in their day to day lives. I asked questions related to social and gender relation patterns of behaviours and attitudes delving deeper into gender and intimate relations than Liechty's focus on consumption patterns in 'Suitably Modern' to understand lived daily experiences of contemporary Nepali women residing in Kathmandu. My questions probed around the effect of media in gender roles, intimate and familial relations of urban middle-class Nepal and women's negotiations of these shifts in their day to day lives.

As I focused on finding the themes regarding their ideas and experience on their daily lived experiences, I used information from their interviews and analysed depending on the survey and research questions and also insights from conversations with experts. Since Indian films and serials constituted a common denominator for discussing ideas for these urban women, topics like divorce, extra marital affairs and love developed from themes in these imported films and serials. I have to identify

common themes, drawn extensively on analysis of my interviewees' spoken narrative of their ideas and experiences.

After transcribing and translating all the interviews into English, I kept the transcriptions in my security protected laptop. Since qualitative ways of data analysis offers different ways of examining, comparing and interpreting meaningful codes or themes, I decided to use an efficient way of doing so by using software. The data were stored using a software, MAX QDA10 for analysis. After reading, making notes, data were coded and recurring dominant themes like *thikka*, *ijjat* and 'modern' were identified. These themes emerged from interviewees' narratives and their responses to questions related to age, marital status, caste and migration experiences also surfaced.

One stimulus to my data analysis was Liechty's study (2001). In it, he explores how middle-class urban Nepali women respond to viewing pornography. He asserts that though these women identified viewing pornography as 'modern', at the same time they considered those images to be 'dirty' and a threat to their security. Though the themes of my research are similar to those of Liechty's, our methodological approaches are different. Influenced by different methodological literature, self-reflexive co-construction approach is applied for this qualitative study. Reflexivity is important for the analyses in which the researcher understands that the data were constructed between the ethnographer and the participants in the field so that analyses should illustrate the meanings related to that context bound situation (Brewer 2000). For more extensive discussion on reflexive co-construction methods see chapter 2.

3.7 Other Methodological Issues: The Researcher's Standpoint and Objectives:

My position as a Nepali woman resident of Kathmandu and also as someone having worked in developmental sectors based in Kathmandu proved advantageous in being introduced to and building a trusting relation with many interviewees in the research process. Moreover, my intense involvement in issues of gender as a feminist researcher and a student enabled me to participate in this research at a variety of levels in doing this qualitative study. Using methods of co-construction mode of knowledge production, my qualitative study explores ways gender roles and intimate relationships have been influenced in the urban Nepali context.

My standpoint reflects Stanley and Wise (1993) who state that women's lives offer a continual reality making research and the life one and the same when the personal is involved in construction of theory and consciousness. They further argue that theory does not come before research but develops along with it: And then our experiences of the research, as our theoretical perceptions changes, change too. All of this had consequences for our consciousness through the entire process. Everything feeds into everything else (1993,61). The point here is that experience is not just limited to strengthening of the relationship between the two because the researcher along with creating a deeper network is also developing her own thinking. For example, in this particular study, the FGD with the older women was quite illuminating. This FGD was conducted with middle/older aged women members of Sai Saangh. Through listening to these women discussing their ideas with each other regarding their intimate relationship and gender issues as well as 'spirituality', it was impossible to restrain their ideas, faith, giggles and laughter. It was a revelation to me that an FGD provided an 'appropriate' environment because in it women can feel comfortable sharing even intimate information. These women, who had already known each other for a long time, told me that it was the first time ever that they shared their experiences that way. The FGD proved to be strategically useful in making close connections not only between the researcher and the participants but also amongst the participants themselves. This was contributing not only to academic research but enriching the ideas and lives of female participants.

I agree with Marina Lazreg (1994,50) that 'subjects' are not reduced to bodies and that feminists need to offer a valid epistemology for the understanding of the experience not as a "[..]as a given, a self-explanatory concept that each feminist specifies in her own way", but also to acknowledge that experiences are susceptible to change and should be understood in terms of power relations and social structure. Lazreg (1994) further argues that relying too much on subjectivity, as in Western theory may bring an 'epistemologist fallacy' where the experience is given ontological status and reality. She claims that women's knowledge should not have any specific epistemology. She further argues that it is essential to bear in mind that women's lives are also affected by what they 'do not do in everyday world' (1994, 49).

In the same context, Uma Narayan (1989,263) claims that "Western feminist despite critical understanding of their own culture, often tend to be part of it more than they

realize. If they fail to see the context of their theories and assume that their perspective has universal validity for all feminist, they tend to participate in the dominance that western culture has exercised over non Western cultures." Coming from a non-western position she asserts that 'epistemic advantage' comes from having the knowledge of one's own contexts as well as that of their participants' without 'romanticizing' it. I argue here my position as a Nepali woman educated in the Western society provides an advantageous epistemology.

3.8 C   onclusion:

In this qualitative study, I employ a self- reflexive approach and posit myself as a 'co-constructor' of my research designed to understand the ways urban Nepali women are constantly negotiating between global media flows and local cultural practices and how this influences their gender roles, familial and intimate relationships.

To unveil my research methods, I have discussed in length the qualitative methods used for this study, from selecting site and data gathering methods to methods of data analysis. I also state that from interview, data collection and analysis to production of the final text has been a process of co-construction. I further provided my arguments in this chapter where I claim that researcher and her subjects engage deeply for knowledge construction. I also argue that the self-reflexivity approach provided an opportunity to represent myself and my informants as co-participants in challenging and perhaps altering the power relation that underlie subject/object male/female binary. For more on this approach to qualitative research, refer to Appendix 2

4.   CHAPTER: GENDER PRACTICES, MODERNITY AND CULTURE

The main purpose of the chapter is to show the ways global flows affect the cultural practices of urban Nepali women regarding their gender roles, intimate relationships, religious and cultural ideas. The chapter primarily analyses the way global flows have helped women's ability to rethink and interpret local meanings of their day-to-day life and relating them to a globalised context. It also explores in what ways urban Nepali women are negotiating between their gender roles and intimate relationships within the changing culture of Nepali society. In addition, it attempts to examine urban Nepali women's 'construction of self' amidst cultural practices, religion with their everyday experiences brought about by global cultural flows. This chapter contains a discussion focusing more on the changing trends brought about by media, one of the influential globalizing tools in urban Nepali society.

In addition to this, their construction of self reflects their day-to-day life in relation to gender roles, marital and intimate relationship, caste and religion; elaborating how these media is helping them to construct their idea of modernity. Therefore, I analyse the narratives on ideas and experiences of several generations of urban women in this chapter.

My analysis has been arranged into three sections that constitute this chapter. These sections elaborate my argument of the ways urban Nepali women's day to day practices, experiences and ideologies are affected by the global flows. It also demonstrates how they negotiate with them while adhering to their subjective understanding. As an effect of globalisation, urban Nepali women identify themselves as being 'modern' in their day to day cultural practices and ideas as heavily reflected within their narratives. The first section breaks into two sub-sections. The first part of the section examines the ways urban Nepali women define and identify with modernity. The sub section focuses on the roles urban women have to perform to appropriate between their modern and traditional values. The first part of second section discusses the ways urban Nepali women attempt to match in their gender and intimate relationships, and marriage with the representation of being appropriately modern. While the latter part of this section offers insight on urban Nepali women's performances within their gender roles in order to make them appropriate. In the last section, I offer a conclusion of the chapter.

4.1 Cultural Modern practices: Urban society's experiences in Nepal:

In this section, I analyse the ways urban Nepali women are negotiating and interpreting local meanings of gender roles and intimate relationships in respect to global ideas. I examine women's understanding of selves and changes in their gender and intimate relationships as they encounter with global flows in forms of ideas, media and changing of their locations. In this section, I look not only at the physical locations but also at the socio-cultural positions of women and their day -to- day experiences. I analyse the narratives of women who have travelled abroad, women who are local and non-local residents of Kathmandu. Following their narratives, I discuss how shifts in locations as well as their socio-cultural status helped them understand their gender roles and relationships. Further, I examine the ways urban Nepali women use their agency to interpret and negotiate to perform appropriately in the given context.

4.1.1 *Thikka*: Being Appropriately Modern:

In this sub- section, I argue that urban Nepali women engage and to some degree accept global flows by identifying to being 'modern'. This section argues that urban Nepali women's relations with ideas of modernity are quite paradoxical when they are exposed to different contexts and the ways they perceive and perform across these contexts.

While identifying as being modern, their definition of being modern is about performing and making choices in an 'appropriate' manner. This means that the ideas of modernity themselves are very subjective as urban Nepali women interpret the new ideas in their own local understandings. In this regard, urban women's definition of 'appropriately modern' may sounds similar to 'suitable' as described by Mark Liechty (2003). It is true that as women identify themselves suitably modern when it comes to defining modernity. However, I use the term *thikka* throughout the chapter to state the ways women situate their understanding. *Thikka* literally means to be appropriate. Liechty's idea of 'suitability' as put by is in the context of global flows and trends penetrating into the fabric of urban Nepali society. The availability of consumer practices can give an individual the opportunities to transform herself or himself into 'suitably modern'. However, as I argue, urban Nepali women seem to rather

appropriately or consciously making decisions to become modern. They want to choose from the available resources to situate themselves.

This section examines the ways in which urban Nepali women's experiences shift boundaries between the local and global to construct their own identity within this framework. It analyses the idea of an 'appropriate' modern and the contradictions that arise with the increasing influence of the media, access to education and information, influence of development discourses in the daily lives.

> I don't think I am that modern. I am "thikkako modern". "Thikka" means neither modern nor conservative average…..[..]modern means education, fashion everything. It doesn't mean just being fashionable; our culture should be modern and we should bring modernity in our society. (Shikha, 25 years old)

I start this section with the above quote by Shikha, the young high caste married woman in her twenties who attempts to define her understanding and what it means for her to be modern within the context of Nepali urban society. Shikha explains being appropriate in every situation is being modern.

We have to develop society. Just like my household was so conservative and now look, I am free, how we have risen from such things. In the same way, we have to develop society.

With these words Shikha implies that modernity is a gradual transformational process where the self has to reach a balance between the old and new versions. Shikha compares the situation of the society to her household and how to make it progressive. Shikha was able to use her agency to create a space for herself, reflecting that for her modernity means interpreting ideas and performing in ways that are appropriate within the context of one's life. Shikha's interpretations of 'appropriate' modernity are also related with freedom. The ideology of freedom can be understood as a means that assists in defining modernity. Nepal's experience of modernity is based on development ideology (Pigg, 1996) and this resonates in Shikha's ideologies on freedom and modernity, which are two of the main components of ideoscape, where her narratives reverberate with development discourses in Nepal.

According to Liechty (2010), after the Nepali "people's movement" of 1990, Nepali women went through the contradiction between rhetoric and the reality of freedom and equality rights. In his essay, Liechty also states that

The debate over "freedom" is an important point at which women confront the contradictions of modernity and attempt to construct valued middle-class identities. In the social and political ferment of Nepal in the 1990s women have much to gain, and much to lose, in claiming the space of public freedom. (2010, 308)

Under the effect of post people's movement, Liechty claims Kathmandu women must "look out for themselves" in order to strengthen their rights in the public sphere. As the global trend arising in urban spaces of Nepal, this study argues that a new discourse is needed to theorize Nepali urban women's approach to modernity. It is important to stress that urban Nepali women are re-elaborating the meaning of "freedom" in the context of their claim for national identity.

However, I argue that urban Nepali women are making an effort to integrate themselves with multiple interpretations of modernity. Since the discourse of modernity in urban Nepal has been shifting from the time period of 1990s and major political changes, the concept of 'freedom' has slightly changed as well.

While in the 1990s freedom was understood to be mainly a collective political freedom, now it is thought to be more individualistic and subjective. Liechty's (2010) concept of 'freedom' as a model of modernity was based on 'collective performance of middle class culture' relating to democracy and equality. However, I argue that in the contemporary context, the discourse of modernity has moved beyond 'freedom' concept amongst urban Nepali women. They have become more flexible in defining and understanding modernity as it does not only limit to freedom discourse any more but as a way of making appropriate choices in their lives.

With the emergence of many development discourses since 1990s, there are many avenues for urban women's understanding of being modern and negotiating themselves with multiple identities and multidimensionality within the local. This tendency has been apparent in several of the narratives of the women interviewed in this research.

It is interesting to note here that particularly the generation of middle-aged urban Nepali women may still understand modernity as being able to exercise freedom. Nevertheless, their ideas of freedom have moved beyond the collective freedom as mentioned above. They mainly relate of an 'appropriate' freedom not identical to the radical freedom of the 1990s analysed by Liechty.

The analysis given above dealt with the ideas of 'freedom' and how they are appropriated by urban women as part of their understanding of modernity. Another facet of understanding the term modernity is that it is used quite ubiquitously by the urban Nepali women. Their understanding of modernity may not be a total rupture from the traditional meaning although it is being influenced by Western cultural contexts or the process of globalisation. As Hoodashtian (2006) asserts, globalisation processes can thoroughly transform traditional non-Western societies and create a paradoxical situation that he refers to as 'mixed modernity' in this quotation below:

…modernity is historically Western in its origin but by nature profoundly global. This brings us to the conclusion, "the more modernity becomes global, the less it becomes Western." Modernity beyond the West is therefore a modernity that has become at the same time both global and local, a modernity that transcends its origins by becoming global and combining values which are more acceptable to non Western-cultures. It is a mixed modernity. (p.2)

This concept of mixed modernity may be applied to Nepali society as one of the non-western societies influenced by global processes. But urban Nepali women showing mixed modernity is also appropriated as shown in the following narratives.

> I think films help people being "modern". Whatever is being shown on films, people try to copy that, right? Even dresses of our time are coming back into fashion but with "moderation". I think that eating habits also change with time with seeing so many different things around. …I think that wearing such clothes with skin show *jiudekhaeray* is not good at all. I don't know if it is because of the time we are living in *jamana* or because of those films that have influenced people a lot. Leena (middle aged divorced woman)

Leena, a high caste divorced woman, is talking about lifestyle and consumerism with the advent of global flows in Nepal. She suggests that tradition cannot be discarded in the face of modernity instead there should be a way for 'moderation'.

Similarly, Menuka, middle aged full time employed mother , says that her educated and 'modern' daughter's behaviour should retain some sense of identity and strike a balance between traditional values and modern trends. Bringing in the issues of caste and class, she emphasises adjusting these values within the paradigm of being 'modern'.

> I tell her to wear whatever she wants to, but that it should be 'decent'. 'Decent' like no body parts revealing but she has to make her career good. It is fine if she has chosen someone but it would have been better if her future partner was of our caste also. I think being 'modern' doesn't mean we don't need caste and class. Menuka (a middle aged high caste woman)

These two narratives are examples of how modernity is strategically reconstructed in response to the counter practices and ideas of 'Western modernity'. Menuka appreciates the career her daughter has chosen and how she has been leading her life. Although she does not criticize her westernised lifestyle, at the same time she would not like to see her breaking with tradition by marrying a man who does not belong to the same caste. Middle-aged urban Nepali women's encounters with modernity seem to have brought about some ambivalence regarding their identities in relation to the dialectic of local and global.

A concept which is important in analysing the global /local dialectic was coined 'globalisation' which was introduced Roland Robertson (1995) who identified it as "........concept has the definite advantage of making the concern with space as important as the focus upon temporal issues....[..]Systematic incorporation of the concept of globalisation is of assistance with respect to the issues of what I have called form. The form of globalisation has specifically to do with the way in which the compression of the world is, in the broadest sense, structured." (p.40) as he asserts that local culture may resist or agree to 'global' forms and that local cultures may intensified by assigning different meaning and identities.

Thus, following Robertson (1993), I argue that urban Nepali women formulate their ideas of modernity against a back drop of 'globalising'. However, by asserting themselves to be appropriate in every situation, urban Nepali women are using their agency to decide and choose whether or not to incorporate new notions of modern attitudes and behaviours. It is because of the globalising process that urban Nepali women are identifying themselves, and as expressed by Patrick Mendis, "The gift of freedom always nurtures human imagination for greater progress-thus globalisation demands it; globalisation responds to it. This creative tension is the beginning of greater human journey for human empowerment and the enhancement of the ingenious globalisation processes where people and communities mattered." (Mendis 2005, 24)

Just as expressed above, the narratives of urban women indicate that they are familiar with the global flows such as films, Western fashion, and media information and so on around their lives. However, their ideals of modernity depend on the ways they understand these ongoing trends and interpret them the ways they want to. Hence, I argue that urban Nepali women are appropriating themselves by neither resisting nor accepting all global structured forms and having the same ambiguous position towards local structures as well.

In this first section, I focused on women's ideas of modernity focusing on the discourses of freedom. While Liechty has proposed that modernity is associated with attaining freedom, I argue that urban Nepali women's ideas about modernity nowadays, more than twenty years later, are rather associated with appropriated freedom that is more subjective. I also argue that the ideas of freedom ceased to be the main component of women's ideas of modernity and those women's ideas of modernity are becoming more aware of the globalised contexts.

4.1.2 Negotiating Modern and Traditional values:

The earlier section focused more on urban Nepali women's experience and understanding of modernity, this section provides more illustrations of their lived reality. With the help of their narratives, I explore and situate women's experiences within a larger context trying to explain their negotiation between the boundaries of modern and traditional values. Here, I argue that Nepali women's personal day to day life experiences with the global cultural flows and the ideological discourses

embedded around them provide the means to negotiate and renegotiate their understanding of modernity.

The previous sub-section stated that urban Nepali women identified with the ideas of modernity aligning with the value system that is specific to 'Nepali society' helping them to be appropriate. In this sub-section, I present their accounts; about the ways they situate their subjectivity negotiating values to be appropriate.

Following are the narratives of middle aged urban Nepali women whose experiences offer some redefinitions on the notions of tradition and modernity. One of the middle aged women, Anita, a high caste woman who remarried after a divorce, states:

> I think being modern is all about or having good thoughts. I think culture also helps us to become or not become modern…. []. It (her second marriage issue) can be modern in today's context but I was really ostracised by the society then. …When I reflect back I see that as a compromise.

This is an example of negotiating between modernity and traditional values where a second marriage was an obligation rather than a choice says Anita. She claims having knowledge of the social and moral responsibility within the cultural norms imposed for Nepali women. Assuming that the life of a separated Nepali woman could be restrained by social mores and values, she chose to remarry. While any practice that transgresses the traditional norms and values implicitly becomes a taboo in any given society, Anita opines that her resistances towards these norms were more of an obligation than being 'modern'.

It is really interesting to gain different insights into the ways urban middle-aged Nepali women find their ways to appropriating modernity and practicing them. Experiences of urban Nepali women living at the edge of traditional and modern dichotomy offer a contextualized understanding of modernity. On this respect Binita, an experienced school teacher, says:

> You can be modern in terms of economic development. I think I am somewhere in "between". I believe in being modern in thought. We are not completely modern but we are a little modern [..] I was modern in my way. Binita (a middle aged high caste married woman)

Binita positions herself in 'between' the normative tradition and modern divide explaining that women of her age in Nepal are not completely modern because they are not aware that of their rights. According to her, women are only trying to follow certain cultural trends but are not modern in reality.

Maya, a middle-aged teacher who had been married for 35 years, said that her desire to look attractive and fashionable was curtailed after her marriage. This betrayed her idealized notion of a modern married life. She said:

> I am not a fully conservative *kattar* Hindu, I like to be fashionable, educated, earn a lot. Wanted to look beautiful and be fashionable before marriage. (Maya, a high caste married woman)

The main challenge these women encountered was to maintain balance between modernity and traditional values. In doing so, they became aware of their identity that gets constructed in this process of balancing. Both Binita and Maya found a good way to recognize their position by understanding themselves and appropriating their experiences within.

Now, I present the accounts of two urban Nepali women, Nabina and Salina who lived in USA for years. I had a chance of interviewing for my research work. Their testimonies are examples of how they imagined possible lives for themselves following their residence in a foreign country. Here, concepts of 'possible lives' in the 'imagined worlds' offer a good analysis of the construction of a new 'self identity' in both Nabina's and Salina's cases . These urban returnees expressed finding a sense of modernity itself through their experiences in the USA.

While Nabina claimed to have discovered new identity in the USA, Salina found it novel to see Nepali men living in USA helping in their households chores. Nabina said the following about her experience:

> After coming back from USA, I can talk back and say what is right and what is wrong. And to me this confidence is being modern. I had my own identity. Here, I cannot work in stores. I also want to do the same work here but I have not yet decided that I can go and work in a store here. Because people will know me, recognize me. You carry so much of the reputation of the family on your shoulders. (Nabina, high caste married woman)

By wanting to work in a local store in Kathmandu just like she used to do in the USA, Nabina faces a conflict between breaking away from the traditional ways and adopting modern ways of life that resemble those of Western women who participate more freely in urban work place. Nabina is concerned about her family 'reputation' that needs to be taken into account if she decides to work in a store in Nepal. Women are hierarchically placed low in the Nepali patriarchal hierarchy and often 'responsible' to carry the reputation of the family. In Nabina's case, she adopts her behaviour according to her social position and gender after returning from USA to fit into the society.

In addition, approaching this issue from a different angle, it also provides a good example of a nexus of relations between modernity and the social conventions. It is important to remember that gender as a socially constructed concept is significant in the search for modernity and identity for Nepali women. Therefore, this following section focuses on the connections among appropriating modernity and retaining the identity.

Pragati Shah (2008) in an attempt to understand the Nepali women's conundrum facing global flows states that:

> Since Nepal is undergoing globalisation, women find it much more arduous to discover their self-identity than when Nepal was more isolated. Thus, as a traditional patriarchal society entering a modern era, women struggle to explore selfhood in the midst of cultural change. (2008, 4)

As exposure to global process has brought about a shift in people's social identity urban Nepali women are constantly challenged. Since the 1990s the media, gender development and modernity, women are playing a paradoxical role to understand their own subjectivity and identities. Using their agency, they are constantly working to create identities that put them into appropriate position.

As identity is one aspect of the 'self' of a person as well as the actions and behaviours that go along with the 'imaginary self', in this respect urban Nepali women are in a way constructing multiple identities. This is they are adopting different identity in every different context. Multiple identities provide them more opportunities to exercise their agency. Moreover, the awareness of multiple identities can also bridge

the traditional-modernity dilemma that urban Nepali women experience during their life.

In this regard, Melissa Butcher (2003), examining the role of transnational TV in defining identity and meaning of being an Indian, argues that people and communities move in and out of multiple identities. This situation creates a fracturing of culture and everyday practices that go "in accordance with the modern individual" (125). She further explains that "this adoption and awareness of multiple identities requires the dichotomization of space to accommodate new roles and relationships" (2003, 197).

Taking the same consideration into understanding the context of urban Nepali women's identification with multiple identities, it can be argued that they keep these identities to maintain respectability. At the same time, this kind of identification offers them with a sense of self through using their own agency to improve their low status in the social structure.

In the earlier section of the chapter, some of the younger generations of urban Nepali women expressed their ideas of modernity in terms of progressing in levels of education, decision making, financial in dependence, ways of dressing, and desire for a different lifestyle to generation of their mothers and grandmothers. However, younger urban women also identify with the gender roles and identities that are considered 'respectable' in Nepali society. Ideas of respectability *ijjat* (see more on section 5.2) resonate with identifying appropriately modern as Nisha, a young unmarried high caste woman said:

> My sister-in-law had to completely change and adapt to the circumstances, I feel sorry for her. Changes like saying *Hajur* instead of *Tapain* though it is such a trivial thing but it did matter a lot. [..] Things did start from the kitchen and both my mother and sister-in-law did not compromise in the beginning. And other thing was dress, my mother did not want her daughter in law to wear jeans and wear and behave like a daughter-in-law from an *ijjatdar* family.

In the above narration, Nisha, representing many ideals of modernity, gives a depiction of her household where an individual identity goes through transformation in the process of being modern. Nisha gives an account as her mother trains her sister-

in-law to perform different cultural practices in terms of her gesture, speech and eating habits that are appropriated as 'respectable' for middle- class family in urban Nepali society. Because of this notion of *ijjat* both women of Nisha's household, her mother and her sister-in-law positioned themselves in the middle of opposing to new identities and that which almost resulted into a cultural dispute.

By telling the story of her household, Nisha is trying to suggest that her ideas are different from that of her mother and sister –in- law. She is stepping back from the conflict and appropriating herself into the situation by not interfering. Even though she feels inner dilemma about the situation with her mother and her sister in law, she avoids any further action.

In acknowledging what constitutes the actual understanding and practices of modernity amongst urban Nepali women, I argue that they are concerned with issues of *ijjat* while coping with their day-to-day life.

4.2 Marriage, intimate relation and Cultural Practices:

The aim of this section is to analyse self-reflexive ideas of urban Nepali women across different generations. Moreover, I examine their narratives around their various cultural practices in their day- to-day life and explore the ways their ideas may change. Through a close examination of their experiences, this section attempts to explore how the urban women try to realize the ideals of modernity within their marital lives, gender and intimate relationships.

The section discusses women's change of ideas related to marital experiences when they constitute this shifting of place and encounter different contextual experience. However, I illustrate here that changes in personal settings, such as one household to another, due to marital commitment can influence self identity. Consequently in the new personal settings they strive to construct a new identity. As I reflect on the narratives, Judith Butler's (1999) theory of "performativity" becomes apparent, since she claims that we perform gender constantly according to social and ideological frameworks "precisely the repetition of acts, gestures and discourses that produce the effect of an identity at the moment of action" (pg. 54).

Following the above arguments, this section analyses the accounts of old and middle aged urban Nepali women followed by younger women's experiences and ideas of modernity within the sphere of marriage and intimate relationships.

The quotes are based on the narratives of older urban Nepali women, their ages ranging from 66 and above.

> I don't remember my husband; he was studying medicine around that time. People said he was really smart around that age he was doing his education pretty early. But after a year of marriage he passed away. I was 9 he was 18/19.... [..] I was not given education. What all I was taught was writing "Ram" "Ram" on Tulasi leaf. It was said that if daughters are educated, they will write letters to guys so they were only taught to write "Ram, "Ram" and nothing more around my time. My father in law was so educated in English that around that time, he knew how to translate all the documents in English, all Nepali newspapers into English to but he also never bother about teaching me. I was always kept under their control after my husband's death. Now, there would be no one to live in this condition today but few things from our generation was good, it taught us to be patient and struggle with the problems. In this house, it is all about "him", there was no one from my side. No one was mine. But I lived and survived. I know it is not good to suffer a lot which this generation does not do but what I do not like the most is clothing, *atichada* I do not like. Before marriage, girls are walking around with guys and drinking so how to get those girls to be married? (Mela, a 94 year old high caste widow)

> I was married in an extended family .But I was already working so it didn't bother me much. I would get up, do my things at home and go for work and later come back and be in my own room. And we are not "foreigners" that if something goes wrong in the family, we go for divorce but we are Nepali and we do make sacrifices. We have that in our (sanskar) that we, women shouldn't be able to bypass and "ignore" whatever had been told by the elders. We were not able fight back with them. So our culture, society and upbringing are very different than Western societies.... [...]And I don't like the word "widow". Since my husband has passed away and I am also not in the age where I would

like to put make up but I do wear "lipstick". I had been wearing "tika" and "lipstick" all my life. Timila (74 year old high caste widow)

These narratives from the old urban Nepali women group still try to associate with the cultural traditional values on the ways of living where independence for Hindu women is strongly discouraged.

Mela and Timila are two high caste widows adhering to these values that once a woman gets married then she is married forever. Their narratives mirrors how they stayed committed even after the demise of their husbands identifying themselves with the household they were married to. Even though Mela was about 10 when her husband died, it never became a reason to leave her marital identity to pursue an individualistic life. Comparing her situation with younger generation, she acknowledges that younger generation do not tolerate the "suffering" that comes with widowhood.

Timila has been able to retain her morality and *ijjat* and likes to use make up even though the widows are not expected to beautify themselves. In a way she is trying reject some of the norms that are associated to widowhood showing that her views are different from other women her age. Making herself different from 'foreigners' and also with 'other' widows, she creates a new identity which is relational to women of her generation and as well as foreigners. This resistance helps her feels special gain power as she appropriates herself in both situations. As Michel Foucault (1978) suggests everyone operation with the power relations and claims that Embedded within this view of power, Foucault claims that power works within a network of free individuals in that each one has choices and actions to take with specific spaces. As such, the individual assumes or takes on certain positions, or subjectivities within those spaces. The purpose of power is to prevail, to win, which can change and vary according to the situation and the individual". He asserts that power is relational which operates in everyday life, and also a strategic action upon the action of others.

Now moving to analysing the narratives of middle aged urban Nepali women ranging from 51-65 change in generational attitude compared to women described above as they do not hesitate presenting less ideal marital situation. They openly discussed sexuality issues, marital woes and their religious beliefs in comparison to older generation women. They offered a more realistic pictures of their daily, intimate and

gender relations. Dolma, a non-high caste married woman, for example, openly admitted of being in a bad marriage however, at the same time being unable to come out of it.

Describing her marriage as a failure, Dolma explains her unhappiness and frustration within that marriage. She stayed in her unhappy marriage. However, according to Dolma, her daughter went forward and married a person who was just like her father. Now with her daughter divorced, Dolma acknowledges her daughter's pursue of a divorce of such a husband was well worth the effort. She compares herself with her daughter and appreciates her daughter who went forward to challenge the traditional gender expectation unlike herself. She said

> I think I made a mistake by getting married. I wanted to be an air hostess and ended up in this "mess" because my husband is awfully short -tempered and I didn't know that back then. Only after a year of marriage when I was pregnant with my daughter that I realized "oh my God, he is this way" he won't listen to anyone... so I kept on tolerating it and I am used to it now. It was a love marriage; I have brought up my daughter on my own. I sent her to live with my sister and she did her schooling from India so she was not exposed to her father's anger. . But she got married to someone who was just like her father. I said just for that reason, she shouldn't have married him but she was adamant and now she is divorced. ..[..]Well, she did the best thing by divorcing that guy. She got out of that situation very quickly…she is much better than I am. She was able to cut off links with this guy really fast. She is happier now, she made the right decision. I think I kept on with it and it is too late to divorce also, it has been a way of life and I kind have accepted it. We are Buddhists, we have different philosophy but it is almost similar to Hinduism and more than that, we live in the same society. In my case, my brother already said that if you want to get married to that man, I wash my hand off you. Dolma (non high caste married woman)

Dolma by supporting her daughter's divorce was able to subconsciously connect to her past and come in terms with her own conflicts through imaginary performance.

Kiran, a high caste widow narrates her difficult experience of marriage. Exercising moral responsibility, she consciously decided to keep silence against the torture her husband put on her regarding the lack of intimate relationship early in the marriage.

> Well, that was more dreadful (bhayabhawa). The same night, I went to his house, I realized that I had made the biggest mistake. From the day of marriage, he told me that he married me out of force and that he already had a girl whom he intended to marry later. That way, a month passed, two months passed three months passed and he also told me not to tell about that thing to anyone. Now, I was too shocked, he wouldn't even touch me. I am a woman and I was already 30 years of age, and if I did not have any children. I knew how the society will perceive me, that is the reality of this society. I couldn't share this with anyone else also I was really in a lot pressure. It had already been 6 months. If I talked to him about "Sex", I wouldn't know how he will perceive me but finally I had to tell him all this to have sex with me. Kiran (a high caste widow)

Kiran's experience of her married life suggests the role of Hinduism in regulating sex within a marriage. In Kiran's situation, she was deprived of negotiating her desires with her husband out of her adherence to the traditional Hindu values stating that wives have to follow their husbands' wishes. Her experience signifies that women are not expected to express their sexuality even within marriage. Yet, eventually attempting to persuade her husband to have sex, Kiran performs courageously to break norms and create a new identity.

Since Butler argues, identities are the effects which are produced from moment to moment through different repetitive performances, Kiran and Dolma can be taken as perfect examples of women who appropriated their performances to produce new identities.

Analysing the self reflexive accounts of urban Nepali women between the age 36-50, I start with Sikha, a high caste married woman, who says

> I think husband's role is also important in this. He only started taking interest in the son's upbringing when he started going to college. He was always busy with his work so he did not give much time to our son when he was still going

to school. Now, he says our son has reached a time when he should build up his career and now he is taking a lot of interest in his studies. But I think most of the fathers of today are more caring. I think it is also culture that governs these roles. Now I am able to fulfil my own dreams. I am economically independent and also capable of making my own decisions. Before, I had to kill so many desires. One has to live following rules and regulations, within the "limit". If there is no control "chada" then it is not wrong. Our children are going wild. And this is not our culture; it is "bigkreti" which can come from "outside", bahirabataayeko. (Sikha, a high caste married woman)

Sikha represents a view that is yet different from traditional marriage ideas. These ideas are alieu with the gender development discourses that is prevalent Nepal. Sikha expects her marital partner to support in nurturing their children by being more than a provider. Yet she also believes that some of the changing cultural practices are out of control and there is a need to assert "our" values among the younger generation because of western influence. By appropriating herself within these discourses, she is able to create her own identities among these contradictory views.

At the beginning when my husband had just passed away, I would feel a lot of "pain". I would not go to any function where my siblings were and we are all of a "same rank" but the treatment done by them would be different than towards me. I found that treatment even in my mother's side which was more painful for me. I know I have to maintain "harmony" with the society. I came to realize that society cannot be changed and it is "you" who has to change. So I am not so concerned about society anymore and see my own welfare. Now, things are getting better slowly. Even those relatives who mistreated back then, now started calling me again [...] this is how our Nepali society is. I was discriminated. Mamta (high caste widow)

Mamta experienced a different treatment from her family as soon as she lost her husband. Her experience show that a Hindu woman's identity and power is dependent on her husband and how it ends with husband's death. Eventually to gain respect and power, Mamta changed by distancing from her own relatives. This shows that she appropriated her performance differently to bring about a new identity.

In the earlier accounts women of relatively older generations showed less concerns about their own individualistic ideas and desires within the marital relations. The issues of sexuality are subtly 'normalized' within their marital lives. Yet in certain circumstances, although sexuality is confined to marital limits, when women faced adverse situation, the understanding of self- expanded helping them realize that some rules have to be bend in order to construct a respectable identity that allows appropriateness. As they project their ideas of modernity through self identification, the ideas of self- understanding do not seem to be only limited to the body. Resignifying them as being appropriate modern within the marital domain, it can be argued that their performances are more situated within the context and subject to change as they understood the situation.

The issue of *ijjat* becomes quite significant in this section as the older middle and younger middle aged urban Nepali women try to portray their identities. Their understanding of self is influenced by the ideas of 'respectability' that is tied to some aspect of idealized Hindu norms, and values. These urban Nepali women carry a significant meaning for being respectable in Nepal.

Going to the latter part of the section, I present the narratives and accounts of younger generation of urban Nepali women aged between 20 to 35 years old, analysing their ideas of self and marital relationship. In this section I also examine whether the ideas of respectability interplay in the understanding of themselves in comparison with the ideas imparted by older and middle aged urban women generation.

Meena, a non-high caste unmarried girl, engaged around the time of interview courageously states herself as a modern young woman who has mind of her own. An UK returnee, Meena got engaged to her long-time partner but also proudly said they never gave into pre-marital temptations. This they knew could have ruined her family reputation. Talking about the younger generations, Meena disapproves the 'careless sex' they engage into. This entails the ideas of retaining cultural values and identity. Though Meena is a non- high caste woman in Nepal, her views on sexuality incline towards Hindu philosophy.

> I think the battle is inside not outside you. But I am not like other young
> people who have "careless sex". That is openness but those things will have a
> bad effect. And it does ruin the reputation of the family, because our society

has not been able to digest these things [...] I am a modern woman and I have been able to make my own decisions. There were restrictions, obstructions from my parents' side but I fought and I am where I am and where I wanted to be. I always wanted to work for NGO and with my efforts I am here. I am a Modern woman. What I think about the definition of "Modern woman" is that someone who can fulfil her dreams despite all the obstacles and family pressure. Meena (a young, non high caste unmarried woman)

In the narrative below, a high caste unmarried Nepali woman- Nisha, tells about breaking the caste barrier by having a long distance inter caste relationship with a man. Nisha says, "I am a liberal *Brahmin* girl as opposed to my *Newar* boyfriend." Nisha tries to portray herself different by being a liberal high caste.

Adding up more stories in her narrative, Nisha expresses her concern over Nepali women for not being aware of feminism and being vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Her rhetoric regarding feminism depicts a thought pattern of values which might be considered like that of NGO culture and standard development discourses in Nepal.

I once tried a long distance relationship and it did not work out. We were very compatible though of different. Our issues matched also about future but our present ideas did not match because of the upbringing. He was a 'stereotypical' Newar guy. I was a 'liberal' Brahmin girl. People say Brahmin, Chettris are repressive and they are communal but I do not think so [...] I know friends who in the name of feminism become lustful and they also challenge spirituality and feminism. This is a very new phenomenon which is coming up in NGO culture. In Nepal, women do not know whether they are propagating radical or liberal or social feminism. If you are a radical feminist, then you do not believe in restricted sex. You do not believe in rearing children also and caring. Men have used spirituality and sexuality to manipulate women for "free sex", with no barriers. This is like be careful ladies. Nisha (a young, high caste unmarried woman)

In contrast to Nisha's narrative, Ava, another high-caste unmarried woman goes through constant struggle over the choices to create a better image of herself in the eyes of her family. In that regard, she has not been able to disclose a pre-marital sex to anyone. Moreover, she is hiding the past so that her little niece does not follow her

footsteps. Since Hindu marriage and values do not approve of pre-marital sex, it is important for Ava not to disclose it. However, maintain a respectable public image shows that she still values the Hindu institution of marriage.

> I think being modern is about knowing one's own roots, be grounded and at the same time...modern is probably a way of thinking … [...]Well, the bad thing which I thought I did was"pre marital sex" and I thought it was not good, and in my friends' and relatives' circles "pre -marital sex" is not a common. When I think about it, this is the only reason…wrong... Although now I do not think that pre -marital sex is a crime or anything wrong but back then the kind of scenario I was going through, it was like a mistake for me [...] I cannot share these issues with my friends and everyone, my school friends or my mother, I get scared because there is family reputation involved. I have a young niece at my home. Ava (a young, high caste unmarried woman)

At the time of the interview, Renu, a non-high caste woman was a separated from her husband. She narrates that 'caste' was the major issue for her separation. Renu was brave enough to break the social and cultural barriers by marrying a high caste person. Learning and conforming to the high caste values of lifestyle, adhering to the etiquettes of speaking and dressing for more than two years did not bring good changes in her life and she gave up.

> One of the reasons which created marital tensions was caste. They found faults, also my husband started nagging. I was under persistent mental torture from them and from my husband and my in-laws gradually leading to physical torture. This I could not tolerate. I used to wear *salwarkurtha* at home. I have always spoken in a different manner...*aiija, tap ain* but I l replaced to their way of speaking *aisyo, hajur*.I had immersed myself in their culture. I used to wear *sindoor*and*pote* which is not a Rai culture. For the two and half years I was married I wore only *sari* and *salwarkurtha*. Renu (a young, non high caste separated woman)

Understanding the narratives above, both Renu and Geeta find hard to follow social appropriateness in a different cultural setting. For Renu, appropriating herself into high caste etiquettes was difficult. These high caste etiquettes sets standard for women living in urban Nepali society and is related with respectability.

Similarly, Geeta, a widow shows concern over taking care of her two sons on the death of her husband. When providing her views on remarriage, Geeta favours, however she fears at the same time that society might not accept her and her sons. Geeta who comes from a non- high caste background, a group in which remarriage is not considered taboo, she should not have been hesitant about it. Yet, for an urban woman like her, remarriage is a matter of concerns since she has to be conscious of urban society to maintain *ijjat*.

> My first reaction was like how I am going to take care of these two children. [..] It is about personal life and all and financially also I feel I am insecure [...] I do not know if I will have a partner and even if I have a partner what about my two sons? If I were an individual, single, things could have worked but since I have two sons, I do not think it will be good for them. I do not think that the thought of getting remarried is a wrong option at all. Since I have two children, I think it is really difficult in my case. I don't know but it could be because I have been married once *pahilabihebhayekoaimai*, and am mother of two children, then our society's perception towards me would be different than for a childless widow. It is like *aruko* use*garekosamanjasto* things used by others. This is how they think I think. Society thinks that way I think. Lots have changed now but these perceptions have also not changed to maximum. Geeta (a young, non- high caste widow)

Nila hailing from a non- high caste background shares her experience. She has grown up seeing her mothers and aunts being faithful to their husbands who worked outside the home most of the time and had affairs. However, despite what she was taught, Nila refused to stay in a marriage with an unfaithful husband. Her mother- in- law asked her to love her husband as a mother and serve his carnal desires. Nila managed to break the social conventions that allow men to have all privileges. However, while talking about her own desire for remarriage, Nila is not quite confident about having to break rule for herself.

> I was not happy with that relationship, I ended it up and I was happier after ending it up. I will be happy because I did it for my own happiness and so there is no need to feel sad. When a Nepali girl marries, she not only marries the husband but she marries the whole house, the package where there are

many, many complicated relationships and thousands of compromises. Our culture has taught that it is only the women who should compromise. [..] I think women are more attached to sentimental values and men are more attracted for physical presence. I think in a relationship we women look more for love than a physical presence. For me, I may have physical need but I don't think I will be able to have a relationship just for "sex". I have grown up in a Gurung family and in my culture, most of the men are always abroad. Most of the men are always inclined to the British or Indian army and their wives are back home without having any kind of extra marital affairs. This is so common in our culture. All their lives they are waiting for their husbands. But I don't think men are that way too. Women have been accepting this and this is what our culture has been teaching us too. Well, my mother- in -law used to tell me that "once the husband leaves the gate of a house, he can be anyone's husband". But she would say but as a wife you have to play like a mother and also a prostitute for your husband. (Nila, non high caste divorcee woman)

The conundrum of whether to have sex or not before marriage, to follow or not follow cultural practices introduced by the older generation, and the type of identity to maintain can become a tedious process of "reflexivity" for many individuals. Since every individual in the above narration defines herself, her positions and experiences within the society she lives.

Thus the elements of general norms regarding marriages may have been changing over the time with women of younger generations opting varied ways and expressing different ideas, yet societal structures and pressures may have discouraged women from completely adopting new cultural practices. As in the process of doing so, they become more integrated into the ideologies of respectability and cultural practices support and reinforce it. Therefore being appropriately modern includes an idealized concept of respectability. So in this context, the notions of modernity are not completely detached from the earlier native cultural values and norms but intertwine with those ideals in the forging of altered identities.

NicosMouzelis (2012) states that in globalized modernity, individuals go through the conditions of detraditionalization, adjusting to their own set of rules. Further he argues that

> …detraditionalization creates a situation where routines lose their meaningfulness and their unquestioned moral authority. It creates a situation where individuals can resort to neither traditional nor collectivist truths when taking decisions in their everyday lives. Deprived of traditional or collectives guidance, they must, in order words, deal with 'empty spaces'. (209).

Here, I argue that it is worth exploring whether this concept of 'empty spaces' may be source of unease, anxiety or fear for urban Nepali women. The 'empty space' represents a situation of identity crisis, hence adhering to some sort of cultural belief system and norms is a way to construct an identity. Identities may be negotiated and transformed through the process of reflexivity, reflection on new conducts and behaviours seen in Indian visual media but through the process of enduring resistance to cultural and social changes, a new identity may emerge. (Chakrabarty 2003; Fernanadez 1996)

4.2.1 Cultural practices on gender roles:

Carrying the argument forward about urban women becoming appropriately modern, here I present more of their narratives. They apply certain strategies in their gender and intimate relationships in order to be appropriately modern in their own eyes. Certainly, there have been many cultural practices which could be termed 'modern' in the current Nepali society and the ways urban women seek cultural equilibrium in their lives.

Urban Nepali women use their agency to negotiate these situations and perform appropriate modernity. I argue that urban Nepali women can manoeuvre influence within their gender, intimate relationships and construct this imaginary identity. As Benedict Anderson (1974) asserts it is through imagination that people change their identification and attachments from the local communities to the larger symbols of the nation state, which he states as "the imagined communities". I argue here that by urban Nepali women strategizing performances could be understood in a similar way,

with urban women in some cases subverting and in other cases maintaining power relation in their day to day lives to retain the appropriate identity.

Below are the accounts of some urban Nepali women who have gone through difficult marital relations despite abiding by the traditional Hindu norms. For example, Rekha talks about an incident from her previous marriage where letting her husband carry a heavy bag of potatoes was frowned upon by her mother-in- law. Though she had let him carry the bag because it was heavy, the mother-in-law approved it as being disrespectful towards her son. However, her second husband does not mind polishing her shoes, which means he doesn't see working for his wife as disrespectful. Rekha's experience in a traditional marital relationship was not fulfilling for her, whereas for her second marriage, she chose someone from a totally different cultural background. This may be interpreted as example of being appropriately modern, for Rekha not wanting to be entirely different, adopts this strategy to negotiate with the existing values.

> I married a non Nepali man this time and he is someone who is very flexible. Neither of us feel any religious difference, though I have a cross hanging and I read my DurgaKawaj and I have Ganesh. We go to the church and temple and all kinds of things. But this has nothing to do with us being the Christians. It is just being spiritual. He closes his eyes and sees Jesus and I see Ganesh. He goes to temple with me where he is allowed to and I go to church with him, we have that understanding. Our values have held us together.. (Rekha, a middle aged high caste woman)

Similar experience is of Leena, a high caste divorced woman. Leena describes the difficult situation for single women in Nepal in finding partners. Leena is an NGO worker, but also understands the current social practices of urban Nepal. However, while looking for companionship for herself, she uses internet sources to identify Nepali men who are living abroad. Her strategy to find Nepali men living abroad, ones with exposure to a different culture reflects an assumption that those men would be more receptive to a divorcee than local ones.

> It is very hard to find single men like unattached men like separated or divorced. I am not going to look for married men if you are doing that, you are looking for a problem. We are also changing with the need. But with

migration, I think so many societal things have also changed. If husbands are away and wives are here or vice versa who is going to fulfil their sexual needs so I think extra marital issues have also increased here. So people are in a way accepting "extra marital" affairs. For me, my strategy is that I talk with the friends on Skype who are all Nepalese but who are living abroad. If I find that person is fine then I go into deeper level of talking. I am not going out that married men. But maybe if I find unmarried or single guy and we get along then there would be no problem. But in Nepal, we find most of the guys married. And also it is very difficult to identify such persons. We do not have such meet up groups and so it is indeed very difficult to identify. Abroad there are such groups and clubs for single but here it is not that way so it is easy to get along there. Leena (younger middle aged high caste divorcee woman)

In contrast to the above mentioned single urban women's experiences, Mamta, a high caste widow adopts a strategy to avoid wearing white clothes, the usual dress worn by Hindu widows. Mamta does not want to remarry as opposed to Leena, who seems to want to attract men. So by boldly dressing in coloured clothes, she wants to protect her identity as a widow so that she is not approached by 'men'. Mamta's action could be seen as a big attempt in respect to the 'Red colour movement',that has gained momentum in Nepal. However, Mamta adopting this strategy is not only mere alliance with the movement but she is trying to be strategic to protect her identity.

After my husband's death ritual, my sisters advised me to wear white clothes women should wear. They thought if I do not wear "white" people will talk. But then I realized that I am a working woman so I decided to wear all colours including red. Actually, I am living in my husband's memory and I should be wearing everything that had been given to me by him in my marriage, including red coloured clothes. And I was only 38 then so people would try to sympathize with me. And now I have realized that if I dress up strongly and present myself boldly then people will be less hesitant to approach me. (Mamta, a younger middle aged high caste widow)

Now the narratives I present below are of two generation pairs of women, one of mother –in- law- daughter- in- law pair and one mother-daughter pair.

I have understood my daughter in law's problem too. And I have let myself become modern. I know now that daughters in law should be given opportunity to be able to work and study further. I know it is important to work and earn and understand the importance of money. I have allowed even my daughter to go out of home and work and I have full trust in her… [..] I know if it had been marriage within Brahmin, there would have been show off but with different caste; you don't know much about anything other's culture so it is fine. Between my daughter in law and myself, there is no expectation so there is kind of harmony maintained. But within the same caste, there could have been more back biting and expectation. Madhuri (mother- in- law)

The narrative below, Madhuri, the mother-in-law shares her experience of understanding the importance of working outside home. She considers by letting her son marry a girl from a different caste and then letting her daughter-in-law work outside home, she was becoming modern. This is an anomaly as a mother- in -law has negotiated to accept her daughter- in- law that comes from a different caste. If one were to look at traditional practice, families prefer to get married in similar caste, cultural values so that the societal structure and the cultural practices are not broken. However, in this case Madhuri realizes that the inter-caste marriage is not a bad option. She feels relieved that she is not bound by the status quo that would have come from same caste marriage.

Samira, the daughter- in- law coming from different caste shares her experience of adjusting to the new household. One of the difficulties Samira experience is in her speaking etiquettes which she thinks is not as polished as her husband or mother- in- law. So in order to avoid making mistakes, she remains silent. At the same time, cooking Newari (Samira comes from Newari caste) dishes can be understood as a strategy Samira has adopted to fit in and be accepted within a totally different caste household.

I think my mother in law is also modern to accept me. She is an educated lady and she is so casual. Even a small attempt I make in this house is so appreciated. I never used to cook a lot at my maternal home but here my Newari dishes are so appreciated. But sometimes, I have difficulty. For example, I know Brahmin's speaking etiquettes are different; they might

expect me to speak in that way also. That kind of language doesn't come to me naturally. I do not have that fluency. Sometimes, I get confused and I fear I may make mistakes while speaking. May be my husband is also expecting same from me. I know he has been speaking in that way all his life and I come from different caste background. I am learning how to speak like them but sometimes out of that fear of making mistake, I prefer keeping silent. Samira (daughter-in-law)

Similarly, in the narrative provided below of a mother and daughter, both women use different approach to construct an identity that helps them remain appropriate within the larger context. This difference in experience and perception between these mother and daughter couple is interesting. Clearly each one of women is appropriating her experience differently seems that the external influences on each of them might have differed considerably. And obviously the mother and daughter are talking from contrasting social contexts.

People who saw me really praised me that I managed my daughters, household and the job. My husband wouldn't help me help in anything at all. I didn't get his help, he wouldn't care a lot. But few years back, I fell ill, since then my husband has started taking care of household things. Now I am like a father and he is like a mother to my daughters, ma chahi baa uhaaamajasto. He buys things for them, asks their each needs the way I used to do before. He would get angry at everything before. He was a short tempered person. He never looked after my daughters when they were young. I think he was aware that I needed his help in rearing children. He tried to keep all the daughters in proper discipline. But now I know why I get scared. I think we women are brought up in fear all the time. That fear starts from the "maiiti", (maternal home), as a daughter, there are so many factors one has to be careful with. So a daughter is always under threat before marriage also. Then after marriage, a girl has to obey her husband's family. Maya (married high caste mother)

Maya shares her experience of her husband who changed completely after her illness. She sees this change as a reversal of gender roles and practices between her and her husband since now her husband is fully involved in household chores and showing interest in their daughters' lives. As this transition happened, Maya realized that she

had been and was conditioned to live in fear. In a way, Maya saw fear as a strategy to control their daughters earlier so that they stayed in the limits of societal boundaries and not necessarily as an unloving expression. Moreover, she takes pride in the fact that due to those disciplinary actions, her daughters are married in a good family.

Maya's experiences suggest that by accepting her husband's changing roles before and after her illness itself was her strategy to remain appropriate...By not challenging and confronting her husband's controlling behaviour, she believes to have achieved this current status. Her husband's is a changed person as his responsibility of protecting his daughters has ended as they have been handed over to their husbands. He seems to have been liberated after he was done with his responsibility as a protective father as desired by the society before marriages for women. This implication can be validated by the daughter's account who feels that her father is much more accepting of anything she does now.

> My father was really strict. I had to ask permission from my father even to wear pants but my mother was a loving, caring and devoted mother and she would encourage me to wear pants. I did go to co-education school and used to have many male friends but those friends were never allowed to come to my home. My father did love us but I think my mother and father had a completely different ways of expressing them. It is not because they did not have love marriage that they did not have this understanding .May be, it has to do with different nature altogether…. [..] My husband is really "cooperative". He has full support for me if I want to go for further studies. I have joined University again after marriage. At times, he prepares lunch for me my daughter also. He is supportive. Indira (high caste married woman-daughter)

Indira, the daughter justifies her father's protective nature around her younger days. The father's behaviour is understood as normal. While at the same she is now thankful for the supportive and cooperative husband who has let her pursue her University degree and doesn't mind preparing lunch for their daughter. Indira's experiences with two men of her life at different social contexts and time frame suggest the changing gender roles for men in urban Nepali society. And a woman like Indira seems to be appropriating accordingly to the situation. In Indira's case, she

appropriated herself when her father was controlling and protective and when she is married, she is again appropriating it as with her family environment.

In this sub section, I provided certain accounts of urban Nepali women encountering with different situations where they perform strategically so that they maintain their appropriate identity. I argue that urban Nepali women's agency put them into reflexive modes about understanding the situation and assert them in appropriating their performances.

4.3 Conclusion:

The experiences and narratives of different generation of women suggest that the notions of discussion within the concepts of 'culture' and modernity are problematic. Urban Nepali women's exposures to the flows of media and development discourses have been contributing to the ideal of modernity in them. These flows have been helping to construct an idea of modernity and in urban Nepali women of different generation encounter these ideals in their everyday life, in their gender and intimate relationships.

Reflecting on the responses from the urban Nepali women, it is clear that in all their experiences they had to go through a process of negotiation while understanding about the modernity. In the context of Nepali modernity, urban women go for the option of different modes of negotiation to understand and situate themselves within different contexts. The narrative and the experiences of modernity do vary within the understanding of the different generations. However, I argued that urban Nepali women's understanding of modernity is still governed by their caste and cultural identity which is largely focused within the context of *ijjat.* Urban women are trying to adopt the modern cultural practices in their everyday lives while keeping their caste identity.

Throughout the chapter, I presented the accounts of urban Nepali women who have in some ways performed appropriately to remain within the dialectic of local and global. They are constantly using their agency to make certain choices within the paradigm of being *thikka*modern. Hence, it can be said that urban Nepali women are appropriately performing and practicing modernity and strategically using *ijjat* as agency to balance what they prefer as *thikka* modern in every situation.

In the chapter I also argue that Liechty's concept of 'suitably modern' in consumption is similar to performing appropriately modern. I argue that being 'suitably modern' may not be too suitable for urban women as they have no parameter to judge the 'suitability' hence; they perform 'appropriateness' or *thikka*in their day-to-day lives while retaining their own identities of caste, class and values which is their own justified position of being in- betweeness and fitting into the context.

Urban women of several generation, castes and marital statuses identify themselves as appropriately modern without having complete knowledge of the options and opportunities available for them while they choose to remain appropriate or*thikka*. Experience and understandings of modernity and the interplay of culture in their day-to- day life can be understood as performative acts in a situated context.

5 CHAPTER: WOMEN AND EXPERIENCES OF LOVE, INTIMATE RELATIONS AND MEDIA

This chapter analyses the interviews of urban middle-class both high and non-high caste Nepali women of different generations to illustrate their changing roles, varying receptivity to Indian visual media and its influence in transforming the day to day experience of women in living in urban spaces in Nepal. Urban middle-class Nepali women's narratives presented in everyday language shed light on their ideas about modernity, cultural practices experienced and imagined through watching Indian visual media. Through their interviews it is possible to explore changes that have occurred in their gender roles, familial and intimate relationships.

I have divided this chapter into two major sections. Each section focuses on urban middle-class Nepali women's subjectivity, identification with, acceptance of and also resistance to with Indian visual media and co-relate with their day-to-day experiences. In the first section, I present my general views on ideas of modernity in narrative and interpretations found in Indian visual media and the ways they contextualize those experiences in their day to day life. My second section presents ideas of modernity found in the Indian visual media that urban Nepali women's offer hostile resistance. Moreover, these sub-sections altogether entail the ways urban women's day to day experiences are transformed through watching Indian visual media.

5.1 Media, women and intimate relationships:

In this section, I focus on the meaning of intimate relationships such as sex and love, as both mediated and real experiences of urban Nepali women and the impact on their overall cultural practices and lived experiences. The section also discusses their images of womanhood. I analyse narratives of four generations of urban Nepali women in what ways Indian visual media is helping them change views of on romantic love, sex and intimate relationships and how they perceive these changes for improving their position within their familial and intimate relationships.

Arguing, urban Nepali women closely link their real-life relationships emotions of sex and love with depictions in Indian films and serials, I examine narratives of urban women to show in what ways they employ acceptance and resistance on their experiences after watching Indian media.

Although women of all generation find many conflicting situations of global modernity in current Indian films, 'love' that is the most contested theme. The depictions of love and romance presented in Indian visual media have a major influence on urban Nepali women and bring forth various experiences whilst portraying different meanings from film-representations of 'love'.

As Desai (2004) asserts, romance and family are significant features in the depiction of cosmopolitanism and 'Indianness' in Indian films (Bollywood) where heteronormative romance must accord to the needs of the family. She critiques that the narratives of Bollywood cinema normalizes the sexuality by constructing 'heteronormative romance' and 'Hindu normative' vision of India and Indian diaspora ignoring other factors such as gender, sexual,ethics and it religious differences in the films. She argues that these narratives are central to the gendered construction of tradition and modernity and the identities negotiation of in South Asia and its sub-continental diaspora. Since, Nepal is part South Asia; it is interesting to observe how urban Nepali women are negotiating with these narratives.

I will begin this section with the narratives of the young generation of urban Nepali women's ideas, feelings and experiences with the most significant 'love stories' presented in Indian films and serials. Their words show the intersection of with modernity and their desires.

> Frankly, in our socialization we are not allowed to show "love", it is a closed issue. In our socialization we get to see our parents quarrelling but we never see our parents patching up and little gestures like hugging and mild kissing. We see mom and dad fight but we never see them reconcile as it is always inside their room. So we have learned about "love" from Indian films. It was only through these films we understood how love should be, otherwise there were no other ways in our society. (Nisha, 28 unmarried woman)

> I believe in that, I think it is Hindi films that have inspired "love" in me (laughs) .There was a film named *Love, Love, Love* which tells you that you love one person and get married to the same person. I think my love relation was very inspired by Hindi films. I was like blindfolded . I thought if I do not marry that person, something bad will happen to me. I always say that my love

life had been inspired by Hindi film. I believed that "You will only marry your first love. (Shikha, 25 married woman)

I really like that old Hindi film, *PyassaSawan.* Now, I can relate my life to the film. Nowadays when I watch film, I can understand my own life better. In this film, the relation between the hero and the heroine is very good but later the hero starts getting too much involved into making money and the heroine is sad. When she is about to die, then the hero realizes his mistake. When I watch a film, I immersed myself in. I put my situation in it. I tell my husband sometimes, when he doesn't come home on time, I get worried and I cannot sleep. Then I remind him that just like in that film, he may have to miss me later if he is too focused in his work only. (Dipali, 25 newly married)

The narratives that these women illustrate here are the ones that they identify with positive emotions such as love, romance along with the new forms of modernity emanating from films and serials. Shikha and Nisha are discussing the nature of 'love', portrayed within 'normative heterosexuality' prevalent in Indian films. Shikha, a high caste young urban woman who is married to non high caste man points to how the 'true love' perspective has influenced her own love life as she married for love. They idealised on the notion of "true love". Shikha is fascinated by in the depictions of romance and sexuality in Indian film which also involves the cultural, religious and social identities issues. These issues have always been interrelated within the popular Indian films, these identities generally reflect a conflict between tradition and modernity as much as the urban women's reactions and experiences. As Banaji (2006) states these depictions always "contribute to conservative understandings of sex and sexuality within the viewing community".

Similarly, Dipali's desire to love and be loved signifies an ideal love shown through Indian films. Shikha and Dipali, both who had inter-caste 'love marriages' expressed their experiences to show how Indian film helped them construct an ideal of love providing emotional pleasure.

Meena Khandelwal (2009) argues that differences on cultural issues can be brought forth by use of the English phrase 'love marriage' in South Asian contexts it mostly is used in opposition to 'arranged marriage', hence, giving the impression that 'love marriage' is a new phenomenon in South Asia. She argues that the binary discourses

of love and arranged marriage could problematise the projection of Euro-American marriage onto marriage in non western nations. She further critiques;

> …… romantic love in South Asia may leave intact assumptions that romantic love was invented by Western modernity and then exported elsewhere (even if transformed in the process). The method proposed here addresses notions that romantic love like all things modern, is a Western invention. (2009, 599)

On the other hand, Khandelwal argues that not only the Hindu myths but even contemporary researches on globalisation demonstrate that the sentiments of sexual desire and romantic love are not new to South Asia. Following Khandelwal's argument, it can be argued that the young urban Nepali women claiming to have learnt 'love' leading their 'love marriage' were referring to imitating love seen in foreign media as gestures and practices.

While at the same time, 'love marriages' between inter-caste couples, have to undergo certain adjustments and practices as they transgress certain social norms. Losing or protecting *ijjat* underlie fears of a threat to caste reputation since "caste honour" (*jatkoijat*) enhances the reputation of patriline and household" (Cameron,1998,138)

Similarly, Tanika Sarkar (2001) presents a similar view on marriages within South Asian context stating that nationalists in these contexts have tried to emphasise love as the foundation for the Hindu marriage. According to her, nationalists do not agree that the production of sons was the only aim of Hindu marriage rather they view Hindu marriage as a beautiful union of love, and ensuring that marriage was important for women since they would not only get the affection from their husbands but also better security in society.

Either way, there always have been intricate relations between relative caste statuses or *ijjat*, the prestige assigned to caste affiliation for both arranged or love marriages. So young women who are learning practices of romantic love from Indian media, and those who had a 'love marriage' show shifting marriage patterns culture in urban Nepal. It can be said that these practices are relatively new in Nepal.

Similarly, the middle aged urban Nepali women also interpret 'love' and 'sex' within their intimate relationships using the context of Indian visual media as a backdrop for their understandings. I now show the interrelationship between middle- aged women's

everyday lived experiences and love and sex depicted in Indian visual media. My discussion of women's real-life relationships with their husbands and partners resonate with Indian films (Bollywood) and serials situations. I argue that the Indian visual media serve as a powerful stimulus to portray urban middle-class Nepali women's emotional as well as sexual desires and pleasures.

In the responses below, Salina refers to the positive response of 'love' depicted through Indian films focusing on how love can conquer the world.

> I know media also help to teach us negative things such few serials are like that. But the Indian film I watched today is about 'love'. The hero loves the girl so much that she finally accepts him. It was all about love, it taught me that love governs the world. I do not want any wealth I need just love. (Salina, 43, Married woman who is self employed.)

> Most of the films have happy ending but if it is sad ending, then I feel bad. When I watched Ghajini I really was sad because the actress dies in the film, it did not impress me at all. That film had more violence, more pain and suffering. I like where everyone is good, and has a good relationship with a happy ending. (Seema, 41, married)

Seema, a high caste Hindu married woman looks for the pleasure in the "happy ending" plots in Indian films. She was not impressed with the film where the actress had to die in the end. Mediated through Indian film, middle aged urban Nepali women fantasize good relationships, happy environments and happy endings. A 'happy ending' is one of the audience expectations which Indian films are notorious for though this sentimental and predictable gesture is fast disappearing from modern Indian films. This kind of ending leads to a different expression in Seema who herself is in a happy marital life and expects every film where hero and heroine meet fall in love and ultimately settle into 'marriage'. Here, she signifies 'marriage' as a beautiful union for Hindu women.

The emphatic comments above demonstrate middle-aged urban women's pleasure in watching Indian films. These housewives discuss emotions related to love and sex, a theme that is close to their life with Indian film situation. Below is the remark of

another high caste woman, a middle aged widow, Kiran states a different view of marriage and love and Indian films.

> I do not think, there is any Hindi film which can depict my story. There is nothing like "aha"situation in my marital life. In a country like ours, there is only one objective, people here get married to produce children only. I think even, parents do not get their daughters married off for their social security, neither parents get their son married off so that he can have a companion. Whether you have money or not, it does matter. What is required is that you need someone to carry on with your 'lineage'. (Kiran, 45, widow since 20 years)

Kiran's opinion on marriage here, comes as a strong point that reject's Sarkar's argument above that 'love' is the foundation for Hindu marriages. Kiran's narratives also suggest the fact that Hindu marriages are still based on caste ideology that has *ijjat* as a mechanism and which helps to construct a basis for patriarchy. Carrying on lineage is a part of *iijat*.

However, it is especially the middle-aged and older middle-aged generations of urban middle-class Nepali women who negatively identify with the depictions of modernity demonstrated in Indian visual media. The emerging pattern in images, storyline and actions is mainly contested by these women. Any values, behaviours, practices portrayed that were inappropriate for their subjectivity were referenced as 'modern'. The current practices going on in the society such as remarriage, divorce and fashion were the negative projections which according to these women are influenced by Indian films and serials.

> I do not like the films of today (Indian films), I do not understand their concepts. I do not think they are films that a family can sit together and see. They are *laazmornu*(embarrassing). I think there are lots of criminalities going on around the societybecause of these films. Films show that they (women) switch from one person to another and are ready to do whatever they want. Well, I have also remarried but I did not marry to have sex, nor I was too modern but it was more dignified. (Anita , 56 ,remarried high caste Hindu woman)

In her remarks, Anita projects her subjective dislike for the stories of current Indian films suggesting their inappropriateness for family viewing. Anita, who herself is remarried after her first divorce claims that Indian films of today are proliferating criminality in society and projecting negative representations of women who frequently change partners. She struggles to contrast her own "remarried" status which she perceives as fulfilling women's need for protection with women represented in Indian films of today who they can engage in 'whatever they want'.

As an educated, working urban Nepali woman, she is aware of social and cultural modern currents that are going around her. At the same time, she withdraws to a position of 'superior distance' (Schroder, 1988, 76) expressing criticism of Indian media. It is not only surprising but also paradoxical to know that Anita considers that her remarriage was neither a modern practice nor a celebration of her womanhood but as a part of the *ijjat* phenomenon. This also shows the continuing significance of *ijjat* in urban women's lives.

The portrayals of women in the Indian visual media, wearing scantily clad dresses or doing sexually provocative dances are considered to be *bakwas* (worthless) by most urban Nepali women. Significantly, women of this group constantly compare films and struggle to reflect their experiences and understanding of modernity. These current changing trends of Indian films also indicate points of embarkation where urban Nepali women associate their cultural and social identities with Indian media.

The excessive display of youthful romance on screen, their dances, contemporary outfits and issues of divorce and remarriage in today's Indian films and serials is perceived as both distinctively modern and incompatible with the prevailing cultural *status quo*.

> [..] 'design' is so different now, it is all about songs and dancing , I like old songs…(laughs) songs today are not good for me, I don't like the dance either..I like the dance and song of *Baijanthi Mala, Me ena Kumari, Mala Sinha* and the old actresses. (Gayatri, 73, widow)

Gayatri expresses her liking for romance and dance of mature actors and actresses of her time and compares them to modern-day screen performances. Expressing condemnation, moral prejudices, she mentions "…women are dancing in small

underwear and short blouses, they are *uttaulo* (vulgar)". She tries to justify her claims by saying:

> [..] saree, is long fabric to cover till your feet but if you start showing stomach and buttocks while wearing saree then it is not good. Girls, nowadays wear pants, and if they bent down one can see their underwear also. It was not like that before. My granddaughters wear such pants, but at least in front of me they do not sit like that.

Like Gayatri, the majority of elderly women show utter disdain for modern ways of romance depicted in Indian films. Furthermore, they justify their some of their uncertain claims by relying on practices differing from Indian screen shots that are currently prevalent in Kathmandu.

One symbolic object of modernity, is the emergence of the transitional issue of divorce that women claim is a consequence of modern Indian visual media. Older women view an increasing divorce rate as having a negative effect to the Nepali traditions and general way of life.

> Films are teaching women bad things. That marriage in USA, you think that is also a marriage? Women leave their husband over small disputes like if their husbands snore. Do you think that is marriage? that is not marriage at all. We are Hindus, we have our own *rithi, th iti* (life style) and we have to follow them. (Mela, 95 a child widow)

> […] we are not "foreigners" that if something goes wrong in the family, we go for divorce and all. Rather we are Nepali and we do make sacrifices. We have that in our *Sanskar* (culture) that we, women should be able to bypass and "ignore" whatever had been told by the elders. We could not fight back against them. So our culture, society and up brining is very different than that of Western societies. Now there is TV which is spoiling the society. (Timila, 74 , a widow)

These quotes from above answer the question, how elderly middle-class women in Kathmandu establish a defensive nationalistic or cultural discourse with expressions like , "we are not foreigners" , "we are Hindus", "we make sacrifices" with emphasis on complying with the cultural values of Nepali women and forcefully condemning

divorce as Western modernity. The idea of intimate relations depicted in the Indian media is not accepted by women of their generation. They evaluate social relations in terms of existing boundaries between themselves and 'others'. Understanding these values within the larger socio-historical context of Nepali modernity, they show how urban women deal with contradictions on social change and modernity, subsequently. Being trapped between the "imagined tradition" and "patriarchal modernity" that threatens privileged middle class values , relations and cultural practice (Liechty 2010). Hence, "moral distancing" may plausibly explain rejection as a defence mechanism that claims a conservative place for their femininity within the emerging discourse of modernity.

In analysing the viewers' narratives of Hindu and Muslim of serial Ramayan, (a Hindu mythology) Purnima Mankekar (1999) uses conceptions of the Self and the Other constructed amongst the viewers. Most of the Hindu viewers consolidate their Hindu identity watching this serial and thus naturalize Hindu culture as Indian culture and also identifying the construction of gender discourses depicted in it and claiming them as part of their culture. A similar statement could be made in relation to the above excerpts where most of these urban women resist any discourse of culture which does not represent 'their' culture. It also seems their resistance for other culture is linked to reputation issues and therefore to *ijjat,* which is conveyed through their narratives.

However, the middle aged middle-class urban women show mixed reactions to understanding and critiquing the representations of modernity and women in Indian media. As Liechty (2001:36) asserts South Asian women have been attempting to establish a "suitably local femininity from dominant discourses and representations of modernity", it is essential to point out here how urban Nepali middle aged women adapt and critique the current discourses that are prevalent in society. I argue that these educated, working, middle-aged urban women are aware of the ongoing changes, yet find it difficult to envision the possibility of substantial alternatives for their own lives.

> I did not like that film *KabhiAlvidanaKehna* at all. The girl is loved by her
> husband and the guy is also loved by his wife but they neglect each other's
> spouse. I think in our society , it is not that much approved. I was little angry

towards them. (laughs) May be it was good from their point of view. When a woman is not satisfied with her husband then she starts looking for such affection outside. If the husband is always torturing you and you cannot be satisfied with him, then you start looking for affection outside. That is one of reasons. But still it is difficult in our society. I still do not believe if such things happen? (Seema, 41, married, teacher)

Yes, to a large extent. I think it is TV serials that are spoiling our women. They are having extra affairs while legally married. Divorce is because of men and women have no patience at all. The media is developing this. This is not Nepali culture. There is *bikreti* (downfall) also. (Salina,43 married, self-employed worker)

We are also changing with necessity. I think so many societal things have also changed. If husbands are abroad and wives are here or vice versa who is going to fulfill their sexual needs so I think extra- marital issues as shown in film*KabhiAlvidanaKehna* have also increased in Nepal. So people are in a way accepting "extra marital" affairs. That kind of "flexibility or unseen type of acceptance" exists in Kathmandu. (Leena, 41 divorcee)

The voices of these younger middle-aged urban women of different marital statuses indicate their perceptions of modern sexuality depicted in Indian visual media are difficult to process and accept**.** The rationale for their criticism also derives from what goes on around them yet the reason for their criticism is founded on the basis of experience and blaming the Indian media. Shikha implies Indian serials are promoting extra- marital affairs which she affirms as *bikreti*. Similarly, Seema's dislike of the Indian films' portrayal of extra-marital affair was not suitable for the Nepali society. She doubts if such sexuality can exist in her society. However, Leena who is a divorcee and who works in an INGO (International Non Governmental Organization) accepts extra- marital affairs as "flexibility or unseen type of acceptance" as a part of Nepali social change. Her remark contradicts discussion on the kinds of sexual behaviour other women identified as threatening.

Thus all the films mentioned by these women above interrogate many of the mainstream cultural conventions. Their narratives challenge the South Asian gender narratives on thematic issues such as divorce, alternative sexuality, live-in and extra-

martial relationship and do create a disruption of the dominant Indian film plots. While all these films give prominence to women's sexuality and desires by articulating different themes (Shaju 2005), these new and modern representations are received with fierce resistance by elderly middle class urban Nepali women. It can be argued that elderly women contend against the sexuality represented in the modern Indian visual media influencing culture and society in urban Nepal.

Now, I show in what ways the middle-class urban Nepali women's acceptance of and resistance to the interplay between fantasy and reality through situations depicted in Indian films and serials. These middle-class urban women are also conscious and reflexive of the meanings and role of fantasy within real-life situations. I want to argue that those urban middle-class Nepali women's emotions and fantasies of Indian films and serials are intimately linked to the real-life experience to which they find easy resemblance.

As watchers of Indian films and serials, middle-class urban Nepali women share cultural and social background connections with women of other generations. Urban middle-class Nepali women are aware of the rational forms of India media domination in their personal lives, nevertheless, they derive immense emotional and personal pleasure from watching them. Constantly making strong relevance to their life, the urban middle-class women choose of Indian visual media due to its "degree of realism" (Liechty 2003,169). The preference for Indian films that women discussed also showed the extent to which urban women in Nepal can articulate their social relations and roles and give meaning to their own identities.

Anjali Monteiro (1998,202-204) offers an interesting explanation in this respect. According to her description on the concept of "spectator-subject" experience on a specific community of television viewers in India, she says it is the subjectivity of the viewers that ranged from resistance to negotiated acceptance of the subject positioned by the television discourse. What fostered their generation of meanings and identity formation was 'subjectivity' .Monteiro asserts that while subject as a spectator may feel powerless, at the same time as an agent, still she may be able to regain some agency using discourse as a resource. Thus, these positions are not separate but are linked like two sides of the same coin. Therefore, resistance is important in exercising power, every subject "wields power as well as resists power". This concept is relevant

in the context of urban Nepali women accessing Indian visual media. The television and cinematic narratives of the Indian visual media allows women to engage and integrate the information into the day-to-day life where they wield power over patriarchal culture through these narratives as well as resist power when showing a dislike for certain cinematic narratives.

Here is an example of an educated urban middle aged woman of Nepal suggesting that the pleasure of watching Indian films is emotionally linked with real life situations. Underlying this remark is the assertion that this urban mother's "emotional realism" around her daughter's future situation. Menuka, perceives the story of the films and relates that to her own subjective experience of the world.

> Films, now have changed a lot in terms of clothing and boy/girl relationships are different like they are living together, having extra marital affairs and so forth. I feel bad about the films and the characters in those films. That film with *PrietyZinta* and *Saif Ali Khan*, I really found them pitiable. They fell in love and the girl gets pregnant and there is no one to look after her I felt pity for them. I think, I have a daughter that is why I felt pity about the character of *PreityZinta*, she somehow reminded me that my daughter may get into a similar situation. (Menuka, 51, married woman)

> In a film *DilwaleDulhaniya le Jayange*, where the girl is fasting for her boyfriend and later her boyfriend makes her drink water. But her mother sees both of them together. At first she is shocked to see that but then she realizes, she has lived her life in a controlled manner and then she is not going to let her daughter go through the same. I was so touched by that scene, it reminded me of myself and my daughter`. (Maya, 56, married)

These educated middle-class and middle-aged urban Nepali mothers are concerned about their daughters are reminded of possible problems in their actual family life, mediated through the text of Indian film situations. Menuka pities the character of *Preity Zi nta* assuming her own daughter might be involved in a similar situation. Likewise, Maya regrets not speaking up for her daughters just as the character did not in the Indian film, *Dilwale Dulhaniya le Jayange* against the patriarchal figure, the father. These films stimulated these two middle-aged mothers to think about possible scenarios in their daughters' lives.

A middle-aged urban Nepali woman, Mona shares her experience with immigration issues and life in USA.

> My husband and myself saw that Indian film *Namesake* in the USA. We had decided that we would live in the USA for the rest of our lives and we were not thinking of returning. Anyway, after watching this film and seeing the lives of "immigrant", we changed our minds. The actor is coincidently a professor and we thought maybe our lives would become like that and we both cried. My husband was also thinking of taking up a job after his PhD. The lives of the immigrants and their children and when the husband (actor) died, how the wife cried, it really touched us. So this film did make us think over our decision of staying in the USA forever. (Mona, 48, married, USA returnee)

The extract above shows an overseas urban Nepali woman's interest in the detailed presentation of ordinary human condition in Indian film in relation to her own life. This also shows the power of media in influencing behaviours of an individual. Mona, precisely invests her emotions into the film which is located in a diasporic setting and cultural condition of the diaspora where she could associate particular intentions and feelings that were already governing her life. Her husband also shared the same emotion and they both agreed on returning to Nepal. This film resonated strongly with their lives as "immigrants". Moreover, the context of different locations, contrary to their prior ones, also helped them to understand the situation beyond their usual patterns of family life.

"Diaspora consciousness" is constituted as one of the important elements of spectators' desire within the Indian and South Asian diaspora in Indian films where the culture of homeland is mediated through foreign experience (Mishra 2003). The Indian film above mentioned by Mona which locates the texts in the idea of global migration and explores social tensions with the diasporas, identifies the opposition between diaspora and homeland. Diaspora is threatening and insecure, while the homeland is safe and secure. Mishra (2003) states that though Indian films would be incomplete without the theory of diasporic desire, however, they cater to the diaspora by constructing an imaginary transmigratory community for those in diasporas. In this case, both Mona and her husband could identify with themselves as imaginary

diasporic persons who had similar migratory experiences and emotions similar to those as depicted in the film.

However, ShakuntalaBanaji's (2006) work on the young British Asian and Indian viewers offers an approach that challenges the binary of emotion and reality within the diasporic community. She uses an approach of psycho-social investigation to understand the relationship between social contexts of Indian films, individual experiences and the politics of the viewers. This relationship gives a viewer a better understanding of the life-worlds of other viewers. She states that young viewers respond to fragments of the films than the whole film. In this context, she questions the contested cultural and political environment in the understanding of diasporic communities whilst analysing the content-significance of Indian films on the consciousness of South Asians in Britain. Banaji (2006:21) suggests in a similar manner that less attempt is made to understand how diaspora itself is often constructed and more effort devoted to the possibility of diasporic "performative identity and hybridity".

In this section, I have argued urban Nepali women of different generations relate, accept and also resist the ideas and narratives of Indian visual media. For young educated middle-class urban women, love and sex in Indian visual media often evoke memory, nostalgia and even realistic alternatives in their everyday life. While 'love' is the most contestable theme learnt from Indian visual media, it is older middle class urban women who do not approve of portrayal of Western culture such as divorce, extra- marital affairs and even romantic love depicted Indian visual media in the context of modernity. I argue here the urban women's experiences are influenced by *ijjat*consequences. With the younger and middle aged urban women, there was more acceptance with certain aspects of current Indian visual media text while older middle class urban women were reluctant to embrace the new ideas. It can be said that *ijjat*which has multi-faceted meanings in urban Nepali women's lives is mediated by Hindu culture and religion.

5.2 Ultramodern sexuality: A "Foreign" Sexuality

In this section, I analyse how urban middle-class Nepali women respond to the modern sexuality presented through Indian visual media. Women from all generations, both old and young critique and condemn the representations of sexuality

and modernity in current Indian visual media. The content of Indian films and serials seemed to offer a problematic representation of sexuality which they identify as 'ultramodern' 'spoilt' or 'Western' sexuality. Most women responded with embarrassment and hesitation while talking of the recent Indian films. Nevertheless, although they condemn this "modern sexuality", there is also a desire to familiarize themselves with the content articulated in the various media to engage in modern Nepali society.

The discussions here of these women about morality, othering and negation of modern sexuality in their narratives affirm their shared subjectivities. Through these discussions, they are problemitising their subjectivity. Their narratives and subjectivities are inextricably linked which explain how they are produced through narrative and performance. Many urban middle-class women's narratives suggest that the content, images of women and modern sexuality depicted in Indian visual media is difficult to process in their day-to-day life. So in this final section I show the complex mediated issues of sexuality in relation to dominant Western values. I argue that *ijjat*is the underlying means that helps them to make this distinction.

> I should say that my thinking is "modern" I am not "ultra modern" like wearing fashionable clothes, going to parties, drinking and not taking care of house and family. My thinking is "modern"but at the same time, I know my responsibilities toward my family. Neither I am that traditional. I think the Indian serials are promoting traditional concepts. There are modern serials also but mostly they show "ultra modern" things. The film I recently watched *No o ne killed Jessica*, the actress, *Rani* is like today's ,woman, she is very modern and she smokes and she believes in "free sex". She also uses rough language. So I found her "ultra modern" but she fights for the right I like *Rani's* character in the film. I don't think our society has gone that far. I do not believe in that also. Like smoking and having "free sex" is Western thing. I observe that "sex" is more important for them (West). Sex is important in their life. Even in first encounter, they go for "Sex", I really feel amazed with that. For us, that is a huge issue. (Seema, 41 married)

Seema, who is a high caste, married Hindu critiques modern sexuality. She speaks of her experience of watching the films and appreciating Rani's (the actress's) courage to

fight for rights but then separates her sexuality from Rani contesting the sexuality she depicts in the film. Most of these women use a strong language like *ati* modern, *bikreti (d estruction)* showing disapproval of Western sexuality thus contesting, rejecting and criticizing it. The excessive use of "free sex", "careless sex" distances them from the immorality of Western sexuality shown in Indian films and serials. At another extreme was a high caste woman in her mid-seventies and who had been a recent widow. When asked about the widowhood and sexuality, she replied:

> [..] another issue about the widowhood in Nepali women is that with the Matwali castes(Ethnic castes) are "Sex free" (free sex) castes. But within Brahmin, Chhettri groups we are little conservative. They are "sex free". These castes, talk, flirt and go around, even remarriage and they don't mind. But we are little conservative. We were taught from the beginning that being a girl, you should not laugh aloud. (Timila, 74, widow)

Her remarks states that the moral codes which high caste women live by as opposed to what she assumes of non-high caste ethnic women who do not have to resort to moral rules of sexuality even after becoming a widow. She provides a rational explanation for her repudiation with issues of sexuality of "others" remarking them as "free sex caste". Both of these high caste women are contesting the sexuality and stating the importance of sexuality for them. Not all the contents and images of Indian films are taken as appropriate images and behaviours that can provide the acceptance or incorporation and it also suggests that Hindu women should protect *ijjat*.

It is evident that the *ijjat* concept runs through urban Nepali women's subjectivities and also in the choices they make. While changes such as women's choice, courage and mobility are positively appreciated, sexual freedom is highly contested and rejected which shows how the recent films highlighting contradictions between women's class and gender subjectivities also.

> What I think, there are different concept projected in the films. ..[..] I do not like to be "ati modern" like people, girls see films and do things that way. They may be going according to the time but sometimes it is really "over". "Over" in regards to dress up and other things. My sister in law is young and she has a boyfriend so we keep reminding her to not to overly dress up and not

to meet her boyfriend too often because the society is that way and we have to think about our*ijjat.* (Sumira, 26, married)

[..]Because , I am not that liberal. I am not like "Westerners".More than liberal, it is apersonal choice. I think we should give our "virginity" or "pureness" to the right guy. There are things both, positive and negative. The negative is they are involved carelessly in "sex", I know some youngsters have delivered babies some come for abortions too. But positive is that our society has begun to accept that girls having boyfriends and boys having girlfriends is normal. I think women of Kathmandu are "spoilt modern" (laughs). (Meena, 30, soon to be married)

It is worth noting that these young women's criticism of Western sexuality above is derived from watching Indian films, yet they are mostly illustrating and portraying ideas of Western society encountered in their personal lives. Both of these women who have been educated in the West and recently returned to Nepal. Their rejection and negative depictions of Western sexuality as these images do not reflect the relevance of their own moral identities. Sumira's choice of words like *ati* modern, "over" and Meena's "spoilt modern" separate them from Westerners and the world they had lived in. In fact, Meena identifies women of Kathmandu as "spoilt" and Sumira tries to remind her young daughter- in- law about the destructive consequences of being too "modern". Both these young women distance themselves from others and believe in the persistenece of traditional cultural values and the retention of their sexual mores while living in the West. Here, I argue that *ijjat* shapes the lives of people from South Asia regardless of their location.

Female *Ijjat* is not only associated with the virginity, chastity and fidelity but also with feminine attributes Indian films and serials have been representing these issues, as Ashis Nandy (1998,203) states that the representations of women in the Indian films have always been based on the "fractured concept of femininity" the old and the new, the bad and the good. Ashis Nandy(1998) points out that Indian commercial films may "romanticize or even vulgarise the dilemma of those trying to survive victim-hood and alienation let loose by modernization", but the image of women in Indian films are always in divided image of femininity. And this has its basis in recent globalised Indian films where the ideal woman now also integrates sensuality in her

character which is understood as Western. What Nandy correctly points out can here be related to urban middle-class Nepali women's resistance to the new representations of women on the emerging Indian visual media.

The viewing experience of urban Nepali women is not only individual and local, but also can be regarded as connected and national, at the same time forming an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). This kind of common identification on viewing of the western sexuality in Indian visual media by urban women and their narratives on lived experiences and ideas on sexuality are embedded within a similar culture. The excerpts of the urban Nepali woman who spoke regarding moral distancing were those of the mother of a young girl who lives in the USA but who was in Kathmandu around the time of this interview. For this woman, presenting her daughter from adopting Western (USA) modernity is important. She continues to keep up with some elements of traditional values such as not letting her daughter wear short dresses fearing the threat "male gaze" and possible sexual activity.

On one hand, she asserts that her daughter is "matured" enough to reject Western "spoilt" modernity in her absence but on the other hand, she cannot "guarantee" anything. This woman is negotiating the experience of the Western world and her projected and "imagined" cultural sexual values. As ArjunAppadurai (1996) rightly puts it that the collective experience of the mass media can create a "community of sentiment" where Mona in the excerpt, despite her diverse location and experience "imagines" and "identifies" with other women in Kathmandu.

> Sometimes my daughter would come up to me and say, why can't I wear shorts and halter dresses? Mostly, I wouldn't allow her. I would never let her show her skin, why are there crimes because women are mostly showing off their bodies. As a woman, you don't feel anything seeing another woman showing her body unless you are a lesbian. But it is different with males; they see your body with the male gaze. I would ask my daughter what would be gained from wearing those kinds of dresses. But I do not fear even though now I am not there with her in the US. I know her mind has "matured" and she is ready to handle most of these things. I cannot "guarantee" anything but I know that she would not be "spoilt" as these are the things of "modernity" I think. (Mona, 48 married)

Nowadays, sex topics are discussed among by the young generation in their Nepali context which was not the case in recent times. The remarks of these two single urban women offer a very good example of the intertwining of traditional morality and modern desires.

> I don't know if that situation was really depression, may be it was just "psychosis"where I had thought then that in media and in TV my *naramro pic"* have come/shown. I don't know what had happened then, my mental state was not good that time. May be it was also because of film. My boyfriend has been taking my pictures. I thought my name was appearing on the subtitles. The bad thing which I thought I did was the "pre- marital sex" and I thought it was not good and in my friend's circle and my relative "pre-marital sex" is not a common thing and my sisters had never done that. (Ava, 30,unmarried)

Ava, an unmarried high caste woman is referring to her "psychotic" depression situation that emerged out of her pre-marital sex guilt that she had with her boyfriend some years ago. This woman implied that she believed her boyfriend could expose her naked pictures in the media, and that situation led her to suicidal condition. She identifies her sexual behaviour as "not common" for self respecting women like her relatives and herself. Ava's life was central to *ijjat* and behaviours that affected it. Gilbert et al (2004:126) assert that it is the theme of subordination that is associated with *izzat* and " …in particular being the carrier of family honour and obeying the cultural rules of family hierarchy". They are trying to explain that the feelings of subordination and fear of shame and losing *ijjat*were major issues of South Asian women not accessing mental health services in UK.(Gilbert et al 2004).

> Even in Nepal, when girls are asked if they are virgin and if they say so, people laugh at them. I have met many girls and my male friends talk about their girlfriends also. I tell my friends why you have done so type of things. We know that most of the girls are not virgin but parents still think that they are, they deny. I am comfortable with I tell people that I am a divorcee. I was in the relation for more than two years. I know about the addiction and pleasure of "sex". For the substitution, I have kept *dildos* (Sex toy) which I

learnt to use from the Blue films. I do not use them often but sometimes when I need it the most , I do. (Renu, 28, separated)

However, in the above case, Renu affirms how sex as a taboo has been slowly diminishing in the urban Nepali society. At the same time, the above excerpts show "double standard" dilemma that urban middle-class Nepali women face with modern sexuality and the ideology of chastity that they have internalized. As Liechty argues that Nepali women are at risk as they try to construct their identities as modern Nepali women, since it is a difficult to maintain a middle-class cultural practice that privileges the modern sexuality with commodified sexuality that may threaten their status(Liechty 2010). Moreover, with the experience of forces of media flow in Kathmandu, it is very likely that many urban women's experiences with their intimate relationships are also changing.

Surprisingly, an interesting remark was made by an elderly woman in her mid-seventies who evokes her memory of watching "sex films" and then enacting similar sex with her husband when he was alive. She talks about being modern in her time from her accumulated memory through the experience of watching sex films with her husband. Images reflected on "sex films" are received as modern by this woman.

> I used to see only modern films. My husband would also see blue films (pornography). I also had to watch with him and would also enact in the same way. We learnt a lot from such films. My husband loved such films so I started watching with him. I would only see modern films then , my husband was really modern. (Sarswati, 72 widow for 40 years)

In conclusion, I argue that watching Indian visual media for middle-class urban Nepali women is self-reflexive, imaginative cultural practices for hope and realism. However, the experience of modernity and modern sexuality is difficult for the urban middle-class women of Nepal to negotiate. The significant challenge these women face is the notion of *ijjat* based on traditional Nepalese values. By condemning modern sexuality as "dirty" "over" "careless" "free", they legitimized distancing themselves from "others".

5.3 Conclusion:

In this chapter, using the lens of media, I argued that Indian visual media have been making certain impacts on different generations of middle-class urban Nepali women. Given this account of women's narratives, it is obvious that Indian films and serials are challenging their subjectivities, thus making influence in their ideologies and practices.

Most of the younger urban Nepali women approved of 'love' as a practice learnt from Indian films. For older urban Nepali women, practices of divorce and extra-marital affairs are part and parcel of Western modernity depicted in Indian films and serials. But when it comes to 'sex', almost all of the urban Nepali women rejected the depictions of sexuality in Indian films and serials. *Ijjat* then surfaced as a 'normalising' factor demanding compliance by all urban middle-class Nepali women irrespective of their age and marital status while negotiating with the flows of global with the local cultural practices. I discussed urban middle-class Nepali women's experiences of watching Indian visual media and its effects in their day to day lives by the Western modernity that is mediated through media.

6 CHAPTER: CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Despite depictions of South Asian women as social beings with restricted agency and subordinate social roles, negotiations of the global and the local have increased their range of options and altered their social agency. My research on one group of South Asian urban middle-class Nepali women has focused on the negotiation of their gender roles and intimate relationships within a binary division of 'modern' in terms of ideas, practices and experiences including fashion, gestures and ways of life in contemporary TV shows and films and 'traditional cultural practices' such as issues involving caste, marriage and family's dignity. My research analysed urban middle-class Nepali women's lived experiences and their negotiation with global and local culture, principally deploying theoretical tools related to gender, cultural aspects of globalisation and agency. The narratives presented urban middle-class Nepali women's understanding of 'culture' in notions of *ijjat* or issues of respectability and also proved that they exercise agency through multifaceted forms of *ijjat*. Through the notion of *ijjat*, urban Nepali women establish a mediate position, their *thikka* modernity. This kind of modernity can be tailored to a given situation while balancing their position within local and global context.

Scholars like Mark Liechty (2010) have focused on *ijjat* as a theme urban Nepali middle class culture asserting that *ijjat* economy is as both a moral and material economy. Hence, saying that middle class is somewhere in the middle in terms of fashion, class and suitability. I agree with Liechty here, as middle class practices in urban Nepal revolve around 'suitability'. However, while *ijjat* is a crucial frame of cultural and social reference, my informants identify themselves as practicing *thikka* or (appropriate) modernity. It means for middle-class women in urban spaces in Nepal, being *thikka* modern is all about negotiating between existing local practices and cultural values and emerging global flows. While being *thikka* modernthey navigate the expectations of *ijjat* properties displaying awareness and varying degrees of agency. Thus, I argue that *ijjat* should not only be looked as moral and material economy but also through lenses of agency and social relations of middle-class urban Nepali women.

In this study, the perspectives of urban women in Nepal influenced by their experiences with global media have been the major focus. Indian visual media

stimulated women to explore, analyse and discuss their ideas on gender roles and intimate relationships. My study focused on 54 middle-class urban Nepali women's narrative accounts of their day-to-day experiences of dealing with global flow of media and information and their effects on their gender roles, familial and intimate relationships. I have applied the position of co-constructor for the knowledge production throughout the research process. Paying attention to my role as a researcher and my relationship with the interviewees, I have applied a reflexive approach to understanding the dynamics of Nepali modernity and women's experiences of it. In this study, I argued that urban middle-class Nepali women situate themselves as *thikka* while negotiating between the local and the global and *ijjat* linked to caste and social selfhood mediates this negotiation. Further, I argued that *ijjat* is a fundamental construct for urban middle-class Nepali women's gender roles , intimate and familial relations.

In the Chapter 1, I presented introduction and general setting for my research in contemporary urban Nepali society, focusing on the historical periods between 1990 to 2006. This chapter laid out the backdrop of the 'new Nepal' arguing that varying aspects of development fostered both modernity and discussion about it. In Chapter 2, I presented the literature which shaped the contexts, concepts and methods of my thesis. I discussed gender, media and modernity within the context of globalisation era. I further discussed, concepts such as *thikka* and *ijjat* that are understood as the local cultural context and theorised on intimate relations and caste within these paradigms. Towards the end of this chapter, I explained how *ijjat* is used as an agency by urban middle-class Nepali women, followed by my chosen epistemology of reflexive co-participation of women for new knowledge production. In Chapter 3, I discussed my research methods and methodological approach for this qualitative study. Next, in Chapter 4, I analysed the ways urban Nepali women situate themselves as *thikka* or in-between while negotiating between the local and the global. I also discussed why the use of *thikka* in gender roles, intimate and family relations helped my interviewees in retaining their *ijjat.* Finally in Chapter 5, I analysed urban middle-class Nepali women's narratives on the influence of Indian visual media as the basis for contemplating ideas and practices of gender roles and intimate relationships in their day to day lives.

My project began from the imperative to explore the ways urban middle- class women of Nepal are negotiating their gender roles, intimate relationships and cultural practices influenced by with the global processes. This quest emerged from my intellectual odyssey as well as my own personal and professional experiences in urban Nepali society. As part of this project, I became more interested in exploring the judgemental values of women's agency, their gender roles and relationships by understanding the local context and the background such as caste identity. As a result, I came to realise that caste identity and *ijjat* or respectability issues are inevitable local denominators that urban middle-class Nepali women think that they consider while negotiating between the local and the global concepts.

My work is grounded in my own varied experiences of Nepali modernity to and related academic literature as gender change, media and qualitative methods. Following my own experiences, I attempted to contribute to challenges to the conception of universal unrelieved patriarchy through this research. I have tried to look into urban middle-class women's lived experiences in Nepal by analysing how they are engaging with and transforming both the cultural practices and global ideologies. Aware of the research implications, I and my interviewees talked about power relations in the research and what effect they could have on the epistemological and social issues and choices in their own and their family members' lives. Consequently, using co-constructive methodology, I shaped this project in a productive way. The interviewees contributed their critiques and reflections of their own lived experiences to develop this project into a more collaborative methodology. For me, the whole process of eliciting information from the interviewees was more listening and making them reflect on their narratives rather than providing answers or solutions. The method I employed was self- reflexive which helped me to understand the ways urban middle-class Nepali women's day to day lived experiences. By engaging them and encouraging them to co-participate in this knowledge production, both their knowledge and mine were illuminated.

It is evident that Nepal has undergone a major political and social transformation, after the 1990 and 2006 People's Democratic Movement that regards the country as 'multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and democratic' secular state with all citizens 'equal irrespective of religion, race, gender, caste, tribe or ideology'. The Nepali economy has also observed a shift with more Western donors providing foreign aid as a part of

modernization /westernization process. Furthermore, with rapid migration has ultimately created major changes in the Nepali culture and society.

In this regard, the women's movement has also become significant imperative since the 1990s. The Nepali women's movement has consolidated with other mass movements advocating women rights and gender equality. A women's agenda for gender and development, and economic and literacy projects have brought women's issues and advancement into the forefront along with the mass movement but in the present situation. All these continuing initiatives involves 'mustering women's agency' (Bhadra ,2009) for sustained women's development and progress in Nepal. Nepali women are making strides socially, economically and also politically whereas in the past 'politics' used to be a 'male domain'. All this fosters a growing 'gender sensitivity' brought by the NGOs and media interventions. These trends affect women's day-to-day experiences along with different institutions such as Hindu hierarchal system, caste system, education system, different political parties association helping them understand different ideas on gender issues and expression of sexuality, in contrast to the 'traditional' Hindu ideology that identified women as always in need of protection.

However, the everyday space and organisational space in which these social movements and agendas operate can also be seen as problematic. Urban Nepali women's experiences in the everyday life seemed quite far from the movements' discourses. The other criticisms which I observed is that political party based advocates and women based NGOs have no common agenda on women's issues. There is a very little overlap or significance between political parties and NGOs on most of the urban women's issues such as sexuality or gender empowerment

Since India is a powerful nation state, dominant in the Indian sub-continent, it exerts a great influence. Culturally the India- Nepal relationship is close however at times ambiguous or unpleasant stemming from geographical issues and Nepal's dependency on Indian political, military, economic and cultural organisations. Importantly, Indian media's influence in Nepal is also embedded in this complex relationship. Hence, this study also aims in parts to bridge a research gap concerning Indian media's influence on Nepali urban women watching Indian visual media. This is a South-south impact especially of a Southern regional power on locally subordinate economy.

Nevertheless, Nepali mass media have been developing leap after political and economic change since 1990, but it has been central in the city of Kathmandu. Kathmandu residents are exposed to global televisions, national TV channels and FM radio stations, with mass media becoming an integral part of urban life. However, the coverage of gender issues where women are mostly sexualised and rhetoric on women's gender roles and responsibilities are presented on the internet and in other Nepali media seem rather problematic. While I have here observed that the Nepali mass media in both electronic and print forms seem more 'gender sensitive' than in the past. For examples are feminist articles and critiques on policies and programs published in the newspapers. But from what I have observed besides TV serials and films with the bulk of contents for women was limited to issues like 'witch-craft', 'wife battering', hardly were there any social and cultural critiques, or news on or debates about women's lived experiences. Thus media content comes across as rather anecdotal.

In such a context, Nepali audience's dependence on Indian media cannot be ignored. With growing production value and introduction of newer concepts by Indian films and serials, the Indian visual media's influence in Nepal does seem to be significant. As with the time, Indian media were covering more global topics, a level of awareness has been generated on gender issues by some Indian serials and films. In this situation, women's access to television and media is increasing in urban Nepal. Thus what urban middle-class Nepali women are watching and whether they were using the media as a strategic representational in their day-to-day lives became my research question.

My study demonstrates that some of the concerns, around the themes like *ijjat* are still central value-laden cultural domain in urban Nepal, and moreover among the urban Nepalis of all castes. It was then equally important to understand how *ijjat* operates in shifting discourses of self and modernity in Nepal, including who and how constructing these. I argued that *ijjat* should be not equated with the concepts of Western ideas of respectability and honour but must be defined in the context of cultural logic operating in South and West Asian societies. I showed the ways Indian visual media helped urban middle-class Nepali women to discuss and explore ideas of the global and the local. I also presented analysis of their acceptance of and resistance to on Indian visual media narratives. 'Love' was the most contested theme. Also most

urban middle-class Nepali women accepted and learned about gestures and concepts of love from Indian films and serials, however, topics such as 'sex', divorce, extra marital affairs were perceived as western or ultramodern and thus were rejected.

In my first analytical chapter, I argued that urban middle-class Nepali women exercise agency through *ijjat* while negotiating between local cultural practices and global flows. Four different generations of urban middle-class Nepali women mentioned *Ijjat*, a fluid phenomenon as central to *thikka* modern. They wanted to choose from available attitudes and behaviours to situate themselves as *thikka* to different degrees. Although the understanding of *thikka* varied for each individual urban middle-class woman, *ijjat* worked as a motivating value in all the interviewees. Urban middle-class Nepali women liked remaining *thikka* in different context and situation, such in terms of negotiating between their gender roles, responsibilities , intimate and family relations and also in while deciding on being modern or fashionable. *Ijjat* or the respectability, worked constantly as the guiding factor while deciding on these topics.

Significantly, my research findings also revealed the complexities of the lived experiences of urban women at neglected points of intersection across caste values. That is modernity for urban Nepali middle-class women also meant imitating and retaining certain high caste values. *Iijat* regulated by *thikka* modernity had to fit with their caste values along with 'global identification' stemming from access to global media and global information.

At a certain level, influenced by new media, they were able to create a normative world for themselves and have positive cultural representations of themselves while at times opposing to a limited extent beliefs that referred back to the dominant Nepali value system. In this way, the interviewees related experiences to their identities and added social meanings to them. The disconnection between everyday experience and new awareness of global flows reveal a lack of mutual influence between participations' perception on modernity and how society is actually mediating it. The experiences of urban Nepali women suggests that they wanted to use their *iijat* in order to negotiate contradictory values of 'modernity' and local 'cultural practices' yet allow themselves to be *thikka* modern. While doing this they retained their position of being respectable or *ijjat* while still being modern.

In the chapters, I argued that 'love' was one of the contested themes of Indian visual media that was riverting to almost all generation of urban middle-class Nepali women. However, they rejected themes such as 'ultramodern', and 'free-sex' considering them *bikreti* (destructive) and using rejection as a strategy to differentiate themselves from others. It was indeed an interesting dichotomy they created between love and sex as accepting the former and rejecting the latter within intimate relationships. Urban middle-class Nepali women of high caste group also used the similar notions to show the separation from the non high caste women. Being different and respectable Nepali women conferred *ijjat* on them, a social and cultural status whereas being in a non-high caste status did not seem to be respectable to them. This also suggests how the Indian visual narratives served to reinforce ideas of local hierarchy among urban middle-class Nepali women media viewers. Unlike the younger women, middle- aged, older middle-aged and older women seemed to be more inclined towards Indian serials than films. Especially, most middle aged and older middle aged middle-class urban women agreed that watching serials was their 'own time' when nobody would interfere with them. It was one of the strategies that they claimed expressed their own agency .Since this allowed them to have their own space, freedom and gain some power over their partners and others in many situations.

Similarly, there was some resistance to fundamental changes occurring within like inter-caste marriage, late marriage, widow remarriage. The meanings embedded in these new discourses affected urban middle-class women's understanding about gender roles and intimate and familial relationships but it seemed that local values and practices also strongly shaped their outlook despite Kathmandu connects to the rest of the world. This study shows how urban middle-class Nepali women reconfigure with the local cultural practices influenced by the global flows. Urban middle-class Nepali women use *ijjat* as an aspect of their agency to remain in between the local and the global in a *thikka* position often gaining the best of both local and global.

The implication of my work constitutes a basis for comparative study of urban lower-class Nepali women or rural Nepali women to understand increasing the impact of foreign media and notions of modernity of women in varied structural positions of Nepali women. Moreover, my findings reflect, challenge and open space for future areas of comparative research on other parts of South Asia and even globally, this

would also help in locating my work in a wider field of gender, globalisation and media studies.

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1: Demographic Questionnaire:

1.   Marital Status and number of months/years in the status:

Single_____   Married_____   divorced _____   separated_____Widow_____

Number of months/years   _____

2.   Age

20-35_____   36-50_____   50-65 _____   70 and above_____

3.   Education

Never been to school_____ Can read and write_____

School level_____ College degree level_____

4. College degree level?

Intermediate_____ Bachelor's Degree_____

Masters_____ PhD_____

5. Employment status

Full time employed_____ Part time employed_____

Self-employed_____ Housewife_____

Unemployed_____ Retired____

7.2 Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Interviewees were requested to answer some of these questions after sharing their personal narratives.

A. Childhood and family relation/practices

1. Could you tell me how were you brought up in your family as a child? In terms of household activities/attending school/ availability of opportunities? Could you describe your relation with your parents/ siblings/relatives as a child?

2. What was it like to be born as girl in the family? What do you remember as your first genderrelated information as a child?

B. Marriage and husbands's partner's relation/ practices

1. What kind of differences have you faced after being married/being in a loving relation than from before you were unmarried/not in a relationship? In terms of roles in the household/ or in your relationship with your husband/partner/boyfriend? Do you like these different gender roles?

C. Connection between media and everyday lives

1. What kind of visual media do you prefer to watch and what do you find most interesting about them? Do you think that these films and serials sometimes present situations and relationships that are relevant to daily lives of women? Could you tell me what can women learn about relationships from the serials that you watch regularly**?**

2. Have you personally gained experience / ideas from some of the films and serials? Do you discuss those with their family/friends/husbands/partners? What differences have you observed in your personal life in your relation with others (husband/partner/relatives/parents) that has resulted after watching these visual media?

7.3 Appendix 3: Flow Chart
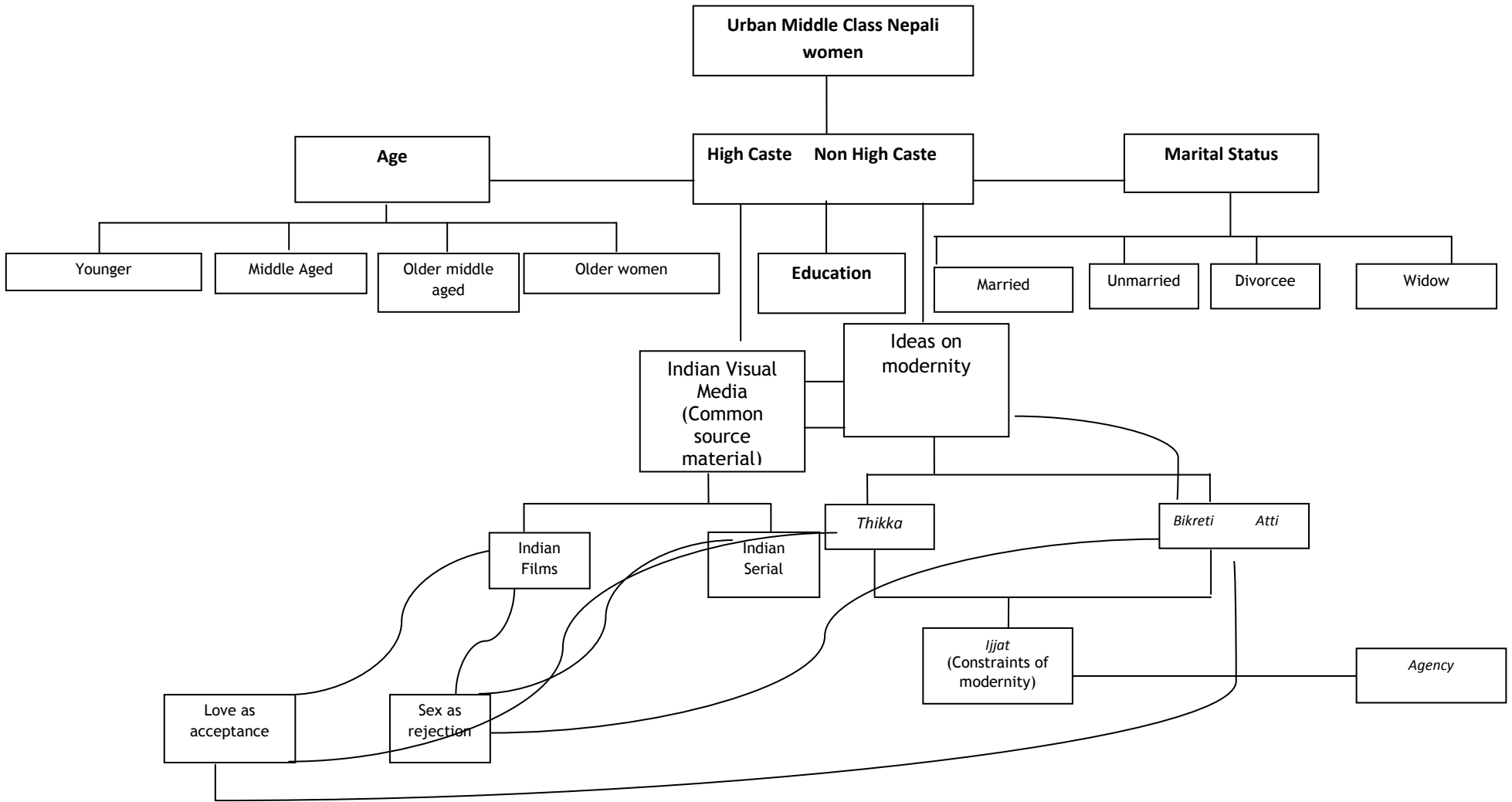
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