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DISTORTION OF TRADITION AND HISTORY IN SHAH'S FACING MY PHANTOMS

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ABSTRACT

The research paper aims to analyze how Sheeba Shah distorts the mainstream Nepalese tradition, convention and history of Nepal in her novel, *Facing My Phantoms*, through the narrative of two narrators, Sanjeevani and Sanat. The research tools used to survey the text are the postmodern tropes such as parody, irony, intertextuality, and meta-fiction advocated by such postmodernist theorists as Linda Hutcheon, Jean Francois Lyotard, and others. Using parody and intertextuality, Shah not only subverts Nepalese history from the 1930s to early 21st century, but also attempts to rewrite it in the novel by borrowing references from Nepalese history, culture and society. Sanat's narrative represents the prevalent ideology of Nepalese society from the 1930s, while Sanjeevani's story represents contemporary Nepalese society after the Maoist insurgency. The research finding is that Sanat's story ruptures the historical facts, and Sanjeevani's narration critiques the patriarchy, and feudalism, Maoist insurgency in Nepal by utilizing parody and intertextuality. It is expected that researchers aiming to probe the postmodernity and intertextuality in Nepalese fiction can take the paper as a reference.

INTRODUCTION

If modernity began in Nepalese literature with the creation of Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Postmodernism in Nepalese literature is marked in the fictional works of Sanjeev Upreti, Kumar Nagarkoti, and Subin Bhattarai (Paudyal, 2016; Thapa, 2010). Bista (2020) analyzes the Nepali novelists like Krishna Dharabasi, Sarada Sharma, Nayanraj Pandey, Neelam Karki Niharika, Manisha Gauchan, Sheeba Shah, and others portraying socially imposed characters from the Nepalese soil and raising voices for equality in their literary narratives. The paper is concerned with exploring the disruption of

Nepalese history in Sheeba Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*, published in 2010, through the techniques of parody and intertextuality, and to mark how it turns out to be a postmodern novel. Intertextuality is fabricating, building the meaning of a text with another text, or contesting using parody, quotations, and allusions (Kazmierczak, 2019; Kennedy, 2017). The intertextual parody is a technique for viewing contemporary history critically and offering "a sense of the presence of the past" (Hutcheon, 2002). Shah parodies the history of Nepal from the Ranarchy in 1903s to the present world to reflect the common people's attitude towards the Rana regime and their criticism of the Maoist insurgency in her novel. Mulmi (2010) identifies Shah as a great critic of the feudalism practiced for a long period in Nepal to represent the voice of Nepali people, excluded socially, marginalized economically, and culturally for a long time. *Facing My Phantoms* records "the story of a village girl in Kailai making an uncomfortable transition to the bustling metropolis" (Baral, 2011, p. 10).

The two narratives overlap in the novel, *Facing My Phantoms*. The two characters, Sanjeevani and Sanat, relate the stories of the present and past respectively. The aged grandmother, Sanat recounts how she left her home at an early age to marry middle-aged Raja Shaheb, and how she became a widow at the age of 20 after having two sons. Sanat narratives embody the suffering of people living during the political transformation of Nepal from the 1930s till the present (Acharya, 2010). This implies that she is parodying Nepalese history from the 1930s. On the other hand, Sanjeevani's narrative reflects the painful experiences of Nepali people living during the Maoist insurgency. It is a parodic representation of the novelist's experiences and perspectives towards the contemporary historical, social, and political period. Sanjeevani criticizes the ideology carried by the Maoist Cadre Chandra when she asks, "How can the People's War call itself a People's War if it results in the random and indiscriminate killing of innocent people" (p. 129)? People's rebellious spirit against the tyranny of Ranarchy during the 1930s and against the Maoist civil war in the early 21st century is captured through parodic reflection. Shah had subverted the ideology grounded on patriarchy, feudalism as well as Marxism. The rationality of the paper lies in probing how Sheeba Shah judges history in the present work by making skillful use of postmodern techniques such as flashbacks, parody, intertextuality, meta-fiction, and making it an experimental novel.

METHODOLOGY
The paper applies a qualitative approach to research by exploring the primary resource, that is, the text, *Facing My Phantoms*, from theoretical tools based on the Postmodernist theories chiefly advocated by Linda Hutcheon, Jean Francois Lyotard, and other postmodern theorists. Reviews and commentaries on *Facing My Phantoms* presented on various academic journals and websites are taken as secondary resources to survey the critics' approach towards it and to note the research gap. It applies the purposive sampling method by taking data from the textual lines to justify the working hypothesis. Its delimitation primarily lies in focusing on how the novelist has presented Nepalese history in a fictional way, by means of parody, intertextuality, irony, metafiction, and other tropes of postmodernist literature.

Conceptual Framework

Postmodernism rejects the boundaries between high and low forms of art, defying rigid genre dislocation, emphasizing pastiche, parody, irony, metafiction, and playfulness (Baudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1979). Postmodern art favors self-consciousness, discontinuity, fragmentation, and emphasis on the decenter and dehumanizes the subject (Lyotard, 1979). What we tend to call postmodernism in literature today is usually characterized by intense self-reflexivity and an overtly parodic intertextuality (Hutcheon, 2002). Parody, ridiculing a style of the genre, or specific text, is a part of intertextuality (Berger, 2016). Hutcheon (2002) defines, "Parody is an imitation but not always at the expense of parodied text. It is a form of ironic rapture with the past (p. 31). For the postmodern author, parody has become a means for revisiting the world, questioning its authenticity, and uniqueness.   The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction offers not just a sense of the presence of the past but also a past that can be known only from its literary or historical texts (Kazmierczak, 2019). Intertextuality is one of the techniques of postmodern literature. Every text is a mixture of references to other texts, genres, and discourses. The principle of intertextuality is a ground for meaning not from the text alone, but from references from another text. Therefore, intertextuality has problematized the status of author and authorship because it evokes the deconstructive notion of postmodern reference critiquing authenticity. Postmodern literature takes the turn of historiographic metafiction. Waugh (1984) believes that "metafiction suggests writing history in a fictional act" (p. 48). Historiographic metafiction supports the postmodern ideology of plurality.

The postmodern approaches highlighted above are useful research tools used to examine how history is ruptured in Sheeba Shah's novel, *Facing My Phantoms*.

Review of Related Literature

Sanjeeb Upreti, Govinda Raj Bhattarai, Narayan Wagle and so many other modern writers have experimented in novel writing by deviating themselves from the conventional trend of fiction writing (Paudyal, 2016). Sheeba Shah's novel, *Facing My Phantoms* has been reviewed in manifold ways by multiple critics immediately after its publication. A group of critics has explored the novel from a feminist perspective. Baral (2011) writes, "Sanjeevani is constantly inventing new challenges into her life, always battling social and sexual taboos, breaking downs the cultural barriers, and determined to chart her own course in life, unlike her grandmother who seems easily resigned to her fate (p. 10). Sanjeevani is a rebellious character who goes against the patriarchal barrier and makes a premarital relationship with Razat and Chandra though keeping a premarital relationship is a sexual taboo in patriarchal feudal Nepalese society.

Accordingly, Acharya (2010) traces Sanjeevani's feminist quest for freedom through semiotic aspects of language in the novel, *Facing My Phantoms*:

Drawing her rebellious female character Sanjeevani from the quagmire of patriarchal violence upon women, Shah has called upon Nepali women to liberate their own selves from patriarchy, and achieve is not through conflict with men but through the negation of Nepali's patriarchal system. To some extent, Shah has been able to do so in her novel by employing the semiotic aspects of language, as Kristeva suggested. (p. 10)

The novelist here urges the Nepalese women to protect against patriarchy not through conflict, but through writing or using language as done by the character Sanjeevani in the novel.

Some other critics see the fiction, *Facing My Phantoms,* as the traumatic expression of the novelist. One critic of the novel, Mulmi (2010) marks an autobiographical note of Shah in the novel, *Facing My Phantoms* in these words:

Shah's work can be read as an expression of the tumultuous times Nepal has been in the last decade. She is a member of every class that the 2006 revolution brought over through, but she understands the revolution as a historical process. She has been wronged as well; her ancestral lands were taken away, while her brother was murdered. Yet, she takes these events as being a conclusion to the larger nature of Nepali feudal history. (p. 8)

In the novel, *Facing My Phantoms*, Sanjeevani, the narrator herself is from the feudal as well as an aristocratic class but she is seeking progress in it. She understands that change is inevitable. Thapa (2010) argues that Shah's fiction synthesizes the national and personal traumas of an affluent family that experiences a socio-economic fall because of conflict. The novel delineates the traumatic situation of people during and after the war (Acharya 2010; Thapa, 2010). The nation also carried the traumas with the fall of economic growth and development by the war. Therefore, the country moves forward without any destination.

Although this novel has been analyzed from different perspectives, none have yet thrown light upon *Facing My Phantoms* from the perspective of postmodern techniques where parody, irony, intertextuality, and metafiction are used to subvert Nepalese history. Hence, the research gap is marked here. The research paper, therefore, analyzes the text to note why Shah has distorted history.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Sheeba Shah ruptures the conventions of patriarchal society, the mainstream history of Nepal from the 1930s to 2010s in her novel, *Facing My Phantoms*, and the trend of fiction writing using some postmodern tropes. Postmodern literature emphasizes parody, irony, intertextuality, metafiction, and pastiche to evaluate prevalent ideologies critically (Baudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1979). Shah's novel also carries postmodern elements like parody, irony, intertextuality, metafiction, and pastiche to demonstrate common people's critical perspective on feudalism and patriarchy. Shah's skill lies in the manipulation of two narratives in fiction. Sanat's narration is concerned with

the reflection of the past, whereas Sanjeevani's narration focuses on the historical judgment on the novelist's contemporary era.

First, Sheeba Shah takes the weapon of irony to make a critical survey of Nepalese politics and history in the fiction, *Facing my Phantoms*. Irony is one of the postmodern tropes predominantly used to subvert fact, existing social practices. Hutcheon (2002) states, "Postmodernist irony is one that rejects the resolving urge of Modernism toward closure, at least, distance complicity always attends its critique" (p. 95). Sanjeevani is a modern, self-conscious as well as radical female who ironically does not bother about the patriarchal norms. She says, "I am going to be thirty in a few years and I am still unmarried and shamelessly seeing a married man" (*FMP*, p. 12). The postmodern irony is characterized by multiplicity, inconsistency and paradox to question the meaning of life. Sanjeevani does not like "being a second woman and a mistress to a men" (*FMP*, p. 12). She goes against her ethnic norms and falls in love with a man, Razat who is a Marwari and does not belong to her caste. She proudly asserts that Razat is "A good man, but a Marwari. Razat is a Marwari. At home. he speaks a different language and although he is a Hindu like myself, his traditions are different, his customs are different" (*FMP*, p. 12). Patriarchy is probably the oldest form of exploitation of one part of the population by another (Ruth, 1990). Shah mocks at the patriarchal norms of marriage by ironically depicting a revolutionary protagonist, a radical feminist, Sanjeevani.

Shah utilizes the technique of intertextuality to rupture Nepalese history. Intertextuality is a process by which two stories are juxtaposed to compare and contrast what changes have occurred in the modern scenario (Waugh, 1984). Identical to other postmodern novels, *Facing My Phantoms* juxtaposes two stories ironically. The narration of Sanat is juxtaposed with the narration of Sanjeevani. The story of Sanat flows with coherence, order, certainty, and unity. At her wedding ceremony,

Sanat crouches in fear and anxiety. Strange faces peep and peer, and even poke at her tear-stained face; some with curiosity, some with animosity, and some merely to feel the gleaming, impeccable skin that stretches down from Sanat's face down to the rest of her lanky body. (*FMP*, p. 26)

Sanat was brought from Achham into the durbar of the Raja of Kanda on a palanquin.   Through Sanat's narrative, Shah questions the feudalism and patriarchy practiced in Nepalese society. She confronts many problems after getting married in her childhood. Sanat's childhood marriage is a symbol of the feudal system. Sanat was married forcefully to an aged man who is from the Durbar of Raja of Kanda (Mulmi, 2010). Tara, the guardian of the Durbar describes, "Change the Rani Shaheb's attire before she is taken down for her meal…Get the Rani Shaheb ready for the Dhara Puja (*FMP*, p. 28). This explains the feudal norms of society where ordinary people are treated in a bad way.

Facing My Phantoms parodies the history of Nepal like postmodern fiction. Postmodern artists find parody a useful tool precisely because the convention denies priority to any single narrative (Habermas, 1987).   Sanat's story

represents the political history of the Rana regime in Nepal. Raja Saheb, the husband of Sanat, was involved in abolishing the Rana rule and assisting King Tribhuvan to ascend the throne. But then he was exiled. The worker of Durbar, Chanda says to Sanat, "Your husband is in exile; Rani Saheb… the Teen Sarkar in the capital doesn't want him to needle with the politics there" (*FMP*, p. 50). All parodic narratives have double narratives: A story followed by an antidote. The writer is critical of the culture of the rulers where the inferior workers approached the poor people in a derogative manner.

Sanat's story is followed by the antidote of Sanjeevani. Shah presents the story of Saneevani in an incoherent, complex way. The story of Sanjeevani begins in the form of a flashback recalling what her Jijumua, Sanat used to tell her when she was a child. Postmodern literature exploits the flashback techniques which challenge coherence going beyond the traditional pattern, and blurring the generic boundaries in a fragmented style (Hutcheon, 2002). This novel is set in far-western Nepal in particular and the entire country in general. Sheeba Shah recapitulates the history in flashbacks. Saneevani remembers the stories of Sanat:

Her stories laid bare the primordial fact of the wild woman blended with wild nature. It was her fairy tales, myths, and stories of the woman, the bad woman, the daring woman, the evil woman, and the wicked woman reigning in the world of the clouds…the self that is wild; the self that is a wanderer, and the self that never stays constant. (*FMP*, p. 2)

Sanjeevani's story bewilders us because it does not flow in a linear manner. However, it challenges the Nepalese patriarchy. Sanjeevani is portrayed as a radical feminist. Radical feminists seek to protest the biological essentialities view of gender (Beauvoir, 1974). Sanjeevani is a central, powerful, multidimensional character who challenges essentialist assumptions regarding gender. Sanjeevani says:

Very early, in my growing-up years, I began to sense the differences between the way they treated me and my brothers. Why can I not go out to the market? Dada is going. Because he is a boy and you are a girl. (*FMP*, p. 32).

Sanjeevani did not like adhering to the conventions of patriarchy from her teenage days. She further says, "I would want others to think I was a boy. I liked my hair short, wore only pants and completely stayed away from female fancies" (*FMP*, p. 32). Sanjeevani revolts against the Nepalese social and patriarchal structure.

Sanat represents the entire feminine of the past, the uncivilized, gentle, submissive person. Sanat was exploited sexually at an early age in Danda Durbar by her husband, Raja Shabeb who was an aged man:
There is a stirring in Sanat, hot and consuming, and she is suddenly filled with a desire she has never known. A fire burns between her legs. She can feel his hands push her thighs apart. Before she could gasp for air, he is on top of her and pushing into her-a piercing pain. (*FMP*, p. 53)

The submissive nature of Sanat does not impel her to go against her husband though she is being exploited sexually. She stands for a woman in the patriarchal era. Patriarchal societies exploited women sexually, economically, and socially (Susan, 1995). The tendency to exploit a woman is ridiculed by the novelist, Sheeba Shah. Thus, irony has a subversive function. Shah emphasizes Sanjeevani, a narrator whose dissatisfaction is reflected through her use of fragmentary composition, self-reflection, and metafiction. Sanat is a traditional figure of innocence beauty, goodness, and a moral person, which symbolizes the victory of good over evil. But Sanjeevani's identity is immediately undermined. She is depicted as a morally corrupt lady who has to struggle with contemporary, consumerist cultural society. Sanjeevani spends time drinking with her lover, Razat who is a married man. She iterates, "Words drifted out from my mouth, that was already steaming out vapors of the vodka and tequila that I had vigorously consumed… words undersigned and imprompts" (*FMP*, p. 41). This shows how Sanjeevani refutes adopting the role of a submissive woman by drinking alcohol and spending the days with a married man. Here lies irony as well.

Sheeba Shah emphasizes the irony of criticizing traditional Nepalese norms where drinking and sexual activity were taboos for women. The irony is "More playful than ridiculous, more critical than destructive" (Hutcheon, 2002, p. 202). Sanjeevani is rebellious, erotic, and enjoys the pleasures of commercial popular culture, the pleasure of having sexual relations with two men, Razat and Chandra, A Maoist Commander, and the consumerist life-style. Here, Sanjeevani narrates:

I was then too drunk to comprehend… I had disentangled my hands from his grip and taken hold of his head, and forced it down; placing my lips, which are always craving for his, on his forehead. I had hissed him all over his face, tasting his skin, his warm flesh feeling along with the breath of life that emanated out of each pore of him. (*FMP*, p. 60)

The postmodern consumer culture is reflected through the activities of Sanjeevani who ruptures traditional social rules and structure by indulging in drinks and sex. Modern women challenge patriarchy by penetrating into restricted subjects (Tyson, 2006). Sanjeevani penetrates into the sex taboos to show how modern women refute to internalize the feminine role imposed on them in the past.

Novelists employ believable characters to reflect their social issues (Diamond, n. d.) Shah depicts Sanat as a traditional character whose actions reflect the history of Nepal in 1930. Sanat reports Sanjeevani that "In 1903, Sapkota had started his weekly paper, calling it 'Gorkhali'" (*FMP*, p. 74). But the rulers couldn't tolerate someone having the privilege of speaking against them. Therefore, Chandra Shamsher, " the then Prime Minister, shuts it down with the help of the British in India" (*FMP*, p. 75).

The novelist is taking references from history. Intertextuality is used to make people conscious of the changes in conventions (Kazmierczak, 2019). By using the fictitious character, Raja Shaheb, Shah suggests the people of Nepal

began revolting against the autocratic Rana regime. Raja Shaheb represents the feudal lord. Another character, Tara represents the commanding figure of the Durbar, who mobilizes other workers in the palace. We see Sanat as a mythic figure having the qualities of innocence, beauty, goodness, and a moral person. However, Shah is not satisfied with the submissive character of Sanat. Therefore, she employs Sanjeevani as a bold character. Sanjeevani's identity is undermined since she is taken as a morally corrupt lady (Mulmi, 2010). People assume her as a corrupt woman because she protests the Nepalese status quo. Sanjeevani's function in the contemporary world manifests itself in Shah's use of self-reflectivity and meta-fictional strategies.

Shah presents the contemporary and the traditional societies comparatively by means of such post-modernist tropes as self-reflexivity, meta-fiction, and the construction of multiple stories. Postmodern meta-intertextuality undermines the centralized meaning and context to expose people's voices against any rule and government that endeavors to suppress the people (Berger, 2016). Reporting the political history, Shah balances history and fiction carefully. Shah narrates:

B. P. Koirala has sent out a press release from Patna Staling that an inevitable political change in Nepal is now evident following the independence of India. He has taken an initiative to form the Nepali National Congress and the party is determined to launch a movement in Nepal to replace the Rana regime with a constitutional monarchy. (*FMP*, p. 101)

The imaginary character, Raja Shaheb, the husband of Sanat is involved in the revolution against the Rana regime. The following extract proves how history is blended into fiction. The party in its Calcutta session has even received complimentary messages from noted Indian leaders such as Acharya Kriplani, Vijay Laxmi Pundit, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar. Lohiya and Acharya Narendra Dev: "Raja Shaheb has recently returned from Calcutta, attending as a member of the Prajatantrik Party led by Subarna Shamsher, a joint session that his party had with the National Congress led by B. P. Koirala in Calcutta's Tiger Hall" (*FMP*, p. 101). This is a good example of intertextuality. A meta-fictional device, intertextuality distorts existing norms to address changing values of modern society (Waugh, 1984). Shah uses intertextuality that denies the historicity of the past. Shah's action parodies the innocent past and Sanjeevani's actions parody contemporary popular culture. The function of such parody is to point out a difference between past and present forms of experiences (Hutcheon, 2002). Shah uses parody to survey the representations of the realistic past critically, to erase the difference between the past and present.

To subvert the prevalent history of Nepal, Sheeba Shah employs pastiche, another postmodern technique that has affinity to the term intertextuality. By using this technique, Shah implies that the text is constructed in an idiosyncratic style, using different linguistic variations and references from history, newspapers and politics. Jameson (1991) elaborates, "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the

wearing of a linguistic mask of speech in a dead language" (p. 13). Sanjeevani narrates the story of the Maoist People's war. She is not satisfied with the killing of the mass in the name of revolution. Her own brother, Sanja was killed by the Maoist cadres. Commenting on war, she asks "How can the people's war call itself people's war if it results in the random and indiscriminate killing of the innocent people" (*FMP*, p. 129)? Sheeba Shah uses pastiche to the merged conditions of the earlier division of popular or high and low culture. Throughout the novel, *Facing My Phantoms*, a variety of subjects are merged: The anti-Rana movement before 2007, the people's movement in the 1990s, the Maoist people's War, the story of Jamjhutwa (a ghost-like character), political corruption, FIFA World Cup 2002. Shah brings these events which form the text with a neutral parody that is pastiche. Shah is using this material, not for satiric analysis but she is reflecting the changing public consciousness.

Shah subverts the convention of fiction writing by making unique use of minimalism. Minimalism is used to judge a change provoked by radical perceptions of modern society (Longa & Lorenzo, 2008). Shah demonstrates the bankruptcy of language and literary tradition is seen pervasively in the novel which can be seen in the form of parody. *Facing My Phantoms* is created out of a variety of narrative styles, bringing different literary sources. Shah's novel is further fabricated from a hodgepodge of styles, repeating different parodies, colloquial and slang, academic cliché, and jargon. Shah uses different slang words, for instance, "The mother fucker" (*FMP*, p. 241). She also uses regional varieties of language, namely from the Tharu community. For example "Moro kale Tharu" (*FMP*, p. 216), "Maiya ree, hamar Maiya" (*FMP*, p. 91), "Eee ka hui gail" [What has happened] (*FMP*, p. 91). The writer gives the sense of minimalism, a tenet of postmodernism, by using these regional languages. Culler (2007) theorizes that literature is an interdisciplinary work where the structure is merged with anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and Marxism. Sheeba Shah makes her work interdisciplinary. Using the languages from different communities, the narrator subverts the Nepalese social construction based on feudalism. Bakhtin (1971) writes "Languages are not merely for scientific and descriptive activities, rather they are always polemical and or political" (p. 292). Shah uses heteroglossia to subvert the voice of the univocity. Sanjeevani moves to her birthplace, Kailali searching for peace. Sanjeevani describes the locality as "the place most affected by the Maoist insurgency" (*FMP*, p. 77) during the Nepalese civil war period from 1996 to 2006.

Sheeba Shah records history through the method of such postmodern and postcolonial issues as dislocation or displacements. Bhabha (1994) argues, "Even the relation between oppressor and oppressed, center and periphery, negative image and positive image can undergo shift and invites the problem of dislocation and displacement" (*FMP*, p. 16). Sheeba Shah describes the scene of the ten years long underground war conducted by Maoist where "Sanju, Sanjeevani's brother was killed by Maoists in Kailali district" (*FMP*, p. 77). Suffering from the atrocities of the Maoist, "Sanjeevani and the parents moved to Kathmandu and sheltered in a small rented room" (*FMP*, p. 78). They became refugees in their own country. It means they become dislocated.

Shah displays how the problem of dislocation and displacement can arise in a nation because of the clash between ideologies.

Postmodern art synthesizes parody, history, and fiction. Turnbull (2010) explicates that postmodernism interweaves real and unreal to give equal value to self-reflexivity and history. Shah records the history of Nepal during the violent period of Maoist's underground campaign when so many people were forced to flee from rural areas to take shelter in the urban areas. The same things happen in Sanjeevani's family. The narrator reports:

That was the night that made my family a refugee in its own country. Seeking asylum from these political bandits, they had all flocked to Kathmandu, seeking protection and even solace for their shattered egos, leaving behind all their material wealth to be devoured by the mutinous villagers who had just woken up to the down of the party. (*FMP*, p. 22)

The problems of displacement and dislocations are the effect of a society trapped in the chaos of violence and transition. Shah presents the historical and political contexts of Nepal. By presenting them, she wants to criticize the political as well as cultural realities. The transition of the traditional feudal society represented by Sanat into a modern egalitarian society represented by Sanjeevani symbolically or allegorically represents a transition between innocence and experience, between tradition and modernity, and between past and present sensibilities. The self-inclusive narrative strategies are used in which the narrator Sanjeevani asks questions rather than gives the answer. Shah's parody of the genre of the fairy tale which is in the form of history does not mean the rejection of the past but rewriting the past in a modern way.

The novelist, Shah ruptures history using local, mini-narratives, instead of grand narratives. Lyotard (1979) contends that the solution of any universal and essentialist problem is taken as a grand narrative. The political agendas demanded by the Maoists are grand narratives. Sanjeevani criticizes the Maoist ideology. When the Maoist commander Chandra mentions their strategies and activities, Sanjeevani says:

I am filled with venom that begins to spread through my body and sting my conscience. Yet, I fucked him… yet I allowed my hands to dig into his skin seeking a reprieve. Why, Sanjeevani! Perhaps, it is the hatred that I feel for this kind, for everyone around me, and evenfor myself. I want it out! I want to feel this hatred for real and perhaps even vanquish it, for good. (*FMP*, p. 135)

Sanjeevani says that the Maoists' extremism, violence makes her hate the Maoist ideology extremely. The Maoist ideology is criticized using the technique of local narrative. Any ideology, viewpoint, agenda, and program taken as the solution to the crisis belong to the category of grand narrative (Lyotard, 1979). The local narrative assists Shah to refute the voice of the Maoist cadres because it has bred nothing but violence.

The novelist, Shah distorts Nepalese convention and history by making the novel, *Facing My Phantoms,* an anti-novel through non-linear narratives. Anti-novel refers to "a work which is deliberately constructed in a negative fashion,

relying for its effects on the deletion of standard elements, on violating traditional norms, and on playing against the exceptions established in the reader by the novelistic methods and conventions of the past" (Abrams, 2001, p. 195). The linear and chronological narrative techniques and forms of the traditional novels are ruptured by Shah. A mysterious atmosphere pervades throughout the novel. Sanjeevani is a mysterious and revolutionary character who has relations with Razat and Chandra. At last, she conceives, and she gives birth to the baby, but without getting married. Lifting her baby in the air, Sanjeevani utters, "You, my baby, are my compact piece. From you, I see myself emerge from the shadows of my jeering phantoms. Cry my baby, cry, let it out. Let it all out. The baby cries, a soft muffled whimper, and she instantly springs him up in the air" (*FMP*, p. 274). Sanjeevani acts like a militant feminist. Militant feminists strive to protect women from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence (Tyson, 2006; Echols, 1989). She further says, "I've paid the price, but look how much I've gained" (*FMP*, p. 274). Though she gives birth to the baby, it is unknown to the reader about the father of that baby. The open-endedness of the plot makes the novel an anti-novel. Open-endedness is a characteristic feature of the postmodern novel (Waugh, 1984). Through this technique, Shah exposes how Nepalese society is taking the issues of pregnancy and motherhood before marriage in a modern way.

Shah even parodies the old national song of Nepal in the concluding part of the novel to subvert the history of Nepal. The song is recomposed in this way: "*Hatni haina dati rahane Nepali ko baani hunchha/ Kahile no jhukne sir uthe ko swabhimani Nepali hunchha/ Bishwo ko kuna kapcha ma khoja, Nepali ko mutu ma khoja, Tya singo Nepal hunchha*" [Nepali have the habit of fighting rather than running away/ Nepali are fearless people who never bow down/ Nepali lie in the heart of Nepal, in each corner of the world] (*FMP*, p. 276). The modified lines usher the expectations of the new Nepal after getting changed in the Nepalese political scenario. Parody is a vehicle of satire and awareness (Habermas, 1987). Though the narrator's identity and the situation are fragmented, Sanjeevani is celebrating. The concluding lines of the novel signify its experimental nature: "Birds make great sky circles of their freedom. How do they learn that? They fall, and falling they are given wings" (*FMP*, p. 270). If birds flock around for unity and freedom, Nepali people ought to imitate the motif symbolized by the bird. The innovative practice of concluding the fiction with reference to the birds makes it a meta-fiction. Kennedy (2017), argues, "Novels and stories that examine, experiment with, or poke fun at the conventions of fiction itself can all be classified as metafiction" (para. 1). The conventional trend of concluding with the resolution of a story in fiction is refuted in the Nepalese fiction writing by Sheeba Shah.

Meta-fictional strategies are the strategies that reveal the fictional nature of the work itself (Levine, 2015). Shah's fiction self-consciously draws attention to its status to question the relationship between fiction and reality. We find the narrator, Sanjeevani questioning about herself in a fragmented way:

Now there rages in me a war between two selves. Am I the wild woman that I am born to be, or am I the harnessed woman that I am expected to be? I ask

myself this question each day. I am trapped in this dilemma. I suffocate each day, wondering who I really am. (*FMP*, p. 2)

These lines explicitly demonstrate that Sanjeevani has been suffering from a fragmented self. This is an irony as well. Sheeba Shah dismantles the established modes of characterization in fiction by means of irony. Sanjeevani does not have a fixed identity. Postmodernism involves the literary text that tries to subvert the already established modes of thought (Butler, 2002). The novel narrates the story of the past and present by meta-fictional techniques. Shah draws the history of Nepal critically where the fictional characters, Sanat and Sanjeevani tell the whole story.

Thus, Sheeba Shah represents Nepalese history, politics, and social structure in a new context. While revisiting the past, Shah uses some postmodern elements such as intertextuality,irony, dislocation, displacement, and parody. The use of these elements not only makes the novel unconventional but also makes the readers grasp how the convention and history is challenged. The narrative floats from present to past, from one place to another, to delineate the revolutionary spirit of modern women in Nepal. The narrator tells most part of the story in flashbacks. Shah's story is deviated from the traditional genre of fiction writing to critique contemporary issues in an experimentalway.

CONCLUSION
Sheeba Shah subverts the traditional narrative convention by depicting Sanat as a traditional character to represent past history and Sanjeevani as a modern character to represent the present. The novelist has made brilliant use of irony, parody, metafiction, intertextuality, pastiche and other postmodern elements of fiction to display the gap between the past and present, popular and high culture, spiritual and physical experiences. A narrator as well as a character, Sanjeevani finds the loopholes in both the past and present and rejects them. Sanjeevani is not only a contemporary young woman but also a parodied version of the historical character, Sanat. Sanjeevani indulges in sex, alcohol, and popular culture. At the same time, she indulges in spiritual life, art, literature, education, and knowledge. Sanjeevani is presented as a bold character who challenges the patriarchy as well as the political turmoil initiated by the Maoist War with the help of irony. Shah subverts the convention of the novel using the technique of allusions, and references from different sources like history, politics, mythical stories, sports, and literature to comment on the fictional nature of the work itself. Shah emphasizes Sanjeevani's dissatisfaction with the lifestyle of Sanat through the use of fragmented story, self-reflexivity, metafiction, irony, parody, and intertextuality, in the narration. By juxtaposing the history and politics, fact and fiction, Shah establishes fiction as a multi-level text that examines the history of Nepal from the period of 1930s to the present, including the Maoist insurgency period of Nepal. Shah also makes tactful use of parody and various innovative techniques to analyze contemporary life and the Nepalese political and socio-economic structure. The local narrative instead of the grand narrative is used in the novel to criticize the Maoist ideologies and patriarchy. She suggests how her own family and the Nepali people had to go live a

dislocated life due to the Maoist insurgency. These issues have an affinity with dislocation or displacement, a tenet of post-colonial literature.

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