

Queer Visibility in Mainstream Nepali Cinema: Between Stagnation and Progress



SUDIPTA KARKI 
Université de Liège

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6327-7693>

Abstract: Despite Nepal's international recognition for advancing the rights of sexual and gender minorities, the relationship between queer visibility and cinematic representation in mainstream Nepali cinema remains insufficiently explored. This article focuses on commercially oriented films produced within Nepal's domestic film industry and examines representations of queer and gender-nonconforming identities from the early 2000s to the present. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and José Esteban Muñoz's work on queer visibility, dominant publicity, and disidentification, the analysis considers films featuring cross-dressing characters, trans women, third-gender protagonists, hijra communities, and same-sex relationships. The findings indicate that queer representation in mainstream Nepali cinema has been shaped by both progress and stagnation. Although queer visibility has increased over time, these representations are frequently framed through humour, pity, melodrama, violence, and spectacle. Rather than indicating a linear progression toward inclusion, mainstream films often perpetuate familiar stereotypes and commercial conventions that limit queer subjectivity. The article argues that mainstream Nepali cinema reveals a movement from invisibility to stereotyped visibility, in which queer identities become increasingly present on screen while remaining constrained by dominant representational frameworks. By interrogating the relationship between visibility, representation, and social change, this study contributes to the limited scholarship on Nepali cinema and queer screen cultures in South Asia.

Keywords: Nepali Cinema; Queer Representation; LGBTQIA+ Rights; Gender Nonconformity; Mainstream Film; South Asian Film Studies

Résumé : Bien que le Népal soit reconnu à l'échelle internationale pour les progrès réalisés en matière de droits des minorités sexuelles et de genre, les liens entre la visibilité des personnes *queer* et leur représentation dans le cinéma népalais grand public

ont jusqu'à présent été peu étudiés. Cet article s'intéresse aux films commerciaux produits par l'industrie cinématographique népalaise et analyse les représentations des identités *queer* et des personnes transgressant les normes de genre depuis le début des années 2000 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. S'appuyant sur la théorie de la performativité du genre de Judith Butler ainsi que sur les travaux de José Esteban Muñoz concernant la visibilité *queer*, l'espace public dominant et la désidentification, cette étude examine des films mettant en scène des personnages travestis, des femmes transgenres, des protagonistes appartenant au troisième genre, des communautés hijras et des relations entre personnes de même sexe. Les résultats montrent que les représentations *queer* dans le cinéma népalais grand public sont marquées à la fois par des avancées et des résistances au changement. Si la visibilité des identités *queer* s'est accrue au fil du temps, ces représentations demeurent souvent associées au registre de l'humour, de la compassion, du mélodrame, de la violence ou du spectacle. Loin de traduire une progression linéaire vers une plus grande inclusion, les films grand public continuent fréquemment de reproduire ces stéréotypes récurrents et des conventions commerciales qui limitent l'expression de subjectivités *queer* plus complexes. L'article soutient ainsi que le cinéma népalais grand public est passé d'une relative invisibilité des identités *queer* à une visibilité largement stéréotypée. Si celles-ci occupent désormais une place plus importante à l'écran, elles restent souvent enfermées dans des cadres de représentation dominants. En interrogeant les liens entre visibilité, représentation et changement social, cette étude contribue à un champ de recherche encore peu développé consacré au cinéma népalais et aux culturelles visuelles *queer* en Asie du Sud.

Mots clés : cinéma népalais ; représentation *queer* ; droits LGBTQIA+ ; non-conformité de genre ; film grand public ; études filmiques Asie du Sud

Introduction

Nepali cinema remains among the least examined film traditions in South Asia. Although scholarship on South Asian cinemas has expanded, critical analysis of smaller industries, such as Nepal's, remains fragmented. Within this study, mainstream Nepali cinema is defined as commercially oriented feature films produced within Nepal's domestic film industry and distributed through conventional theatrical and media networks. While Nepali-language films are also produced in India, particularly in regions such as Darjeeling and Sikkim, this article focuses exclusively on films produced within Nepal's domestic film industry.

Within the limited body of existing scholarship, recent studies have primarily addressed themes of gender, culture, and social representation in Nepali cinema (Karki, 2019; Shrestha *et al.*, 2021; Bista, 2021; Sherma, 2025). However, sustained scholarly engagement with queer visibility remains limited, with most discussions occurring in media and public discourse rather than in academic research. As a result, both the historical

development and the sociocultural implications of queer representation in mainstream Nepali cinema remain underexplored.

Nepali cinema originated in the mid-twentieth century, marked by the opening of Janasewa Hall in 1949, where audiences predominantly watched Hindi-language films (Sharma, 2016: 49). These films featured escapist narratives characterised by songs, melodrama, spectacle, and depictions of the lifestyles of India's middle and upper classes (Whelpton, 2005: 172). The formal establishment of the Nepali film industry in 1964 introduced filmmakers trained in Bombay (now Mumbai), who incorporated Bollywood conventions that shaped the narrative and visual style of early Nepali productions (Sharma, 2016: 65). Consequently, mainstream Nepali cinema became heavily reliant on commercially successful Bollywood-style formulas, constraining creative experimentation and limiting sustained engagement with Nepal's social and cultural realities.

The development of Nepali cinema must also be situated within broader socio-political transformations, particularly shifts in the legal and cultural recognition of gender and sexual minorities. Although industrial conventions have shaped mainstream storytelling, Nepal's legal and social landscape has been undergoing significant reconfiguration. Nepal has made substantial legal progress in LGBTQIA+ rights, positioning itself as one of South Asia's most progressive nations in this regard. For instance, the 2007 Supreme Court decision recognised the rights of gender and sexual minorities, directing the government to implement anti-discrimination measures and to legally recognize "third gender" identities. This progressive momentum continued with the 2015 Constitution, which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2023, a Supreme Court order permitted the registration of same-sex marriages, marking a further step toward equality. In 2026, the Court delivered a final verdict granting same-sex couples full and equal marriage rights. Implementation of these rights is ongoing.

Despite notable legal and social progress, the everyday experiences of gender and sexual minorities in Nepal continue to be shaped by cultural stigma and persistent marginalisation. While legal protections have expanded, many individuals remain unaware of their rights or lack adequate social and institutional support to exercise them. As Sunil Babu Pant (2023) emphasises, gender and sexual diversity in Nepal have long existed within local cultural traditions and cannot be understood solely through contemporary Western frameworks of queer identity. Identities such as *maruni* in the hill regions, *meti* in eastern Nepal, and *hijra* in the Madhesh-Tarai have historically occupied distinct social, cultural, and ritual roles within Nepali society, indicating that forms of gender diversity were culturally recognised long before their formal legal recognition.

by the state. However, this historical visibility has not necessarily translated into contemporary social acceptance or equality, underscoring the complex relationship between cultural visibility, legal rights, and lived experience.

This disconnect between legal rights, social visibility, and social acceptance is also reflected in mainstream cinematic representation. While cinema is often regarded as a reflection of society, it also actively constructs cultural meanings and identities. Cinema has become a significant medium for examining identities and sexualities due to its widespread cultural presence and ideological influence (Muraleedharan, 2005: 79). In Nepal, mainstream cinema continues to be shaped by commercial imperatives and dominant cultural norms, which in turn influence how gender and sexual identities are represented on screen. Consequently, film plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of queer identities and in mediating the relationship between social attitudes, legal developments, and cultural understandings.

To account for how such representational patterns are produced and stabilised in cinematic discourse, this study draws on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, which understands gender as a repeated and socially regulated performance rather than a fixed identity (Butler, 1990), and on José Esteban Muñoz's work on queer visibility and dominant publicity (Muñoz, 1999). While dominant cultural forms often regulate the terms under which marginalised identities become visible, Muñoz's concept of disidentification also provides a framework for considering how queer subjects may negotiate, appropriate, or partially resist these representational constraints. In this context, even limited forms of visibility may function as ambivalent spaces of recognition, while remaining shaped by dominant heteronormative logics. Together, these perspectives, situated within broader queer and feminist film theory, enable an analysis of how Nepali cinema constructs, constrains, and occasionally negotiates queer subjectivities within dominant representational systems.

This article investigates the construction and marginalisation of queer identities within mainstream Nepali cinema, considering how these representations reflect broader social attitudes and Nepal's evolving legal recognition of gender and sexual minorities. By tracing the trajectory of queer representation, the article contends that mainstream cinema does not follow a linear progression from exclusion to inclusion. Instead, it demonstrates a shift from invisibility to stereotyped visibility, where queer identities become more prominent on screen but continue to be mediated through stereotypes, caricature, and heteronormative frameworks.

Historical and Sociopolitical Context

Before the 1990s, Nepal lacked both public recognition and linguistic frameworks necessary to articulate sexual or gender diversity. While queer individuals were present, their lives remained socially invisible and conceptually unacknowledged. Sunil Babu Pant, who later emerged as a leader in Nepal's queer rights movement, first encountered open discussions of sexuality while abroad. This highlights the pervasive silence that shaped Nepal's social landscape (Pant, 2023). The Panchayat era (1960-1990), an authoritarian political system in which the monarchy held absolute power and political parties were banned (Whelpton, 2005: 86), reinforced this silence through strict state control over civic life and cultural expression. The regime banned political parties and independent associations, promoting a singular national identity focused on monarchy, unity, and nationalism (Shah, 1967, as cited in Adhikary, 1995: 13-14). Film production was largely state-sponsored and functioned to disseminate Panchayat ideology. In the 1970s, government films specifically promoted loyalty to the monarchy and reinforced nationalist ideals, thereby limiting creative experimentation and critical reflection (Sharma, 1981: 238-239). Within this highly regulated cultural context, sexuality, gender, and individuality were suppressed, further entrenching the invisibility of queer identities in Nepali public life.

The People's Movement of 1990, a mass democratic movement led by the Nepali Congress Party and communist alliances against the Panchayat regime, represented a decisive shift from decades of authoritarian rule, culminating in the restoration of multiparty democracy (Hutt and Onta, 2017: 2). The end of the absolute monarchy created new social and political spaces in which previously suppressed issues of sexuality, gender identity, and ethnicity could gradually enter public discourse (Greene, 2015: 12). In 1996, the Maoist insurgency, known as the "People's War," emerged with the aim of replacing Nepal's constitutional monarchy with a communist republic (Ashraf, 2002). The resulting civil war (1996-2006) and the subsequent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 further reshaped Nepal's political and social landscape, opening new possibilities for renegotiating relationships between people, law, and the state. These transformations created spaces in which new discourses surrounding sexuality and rights could emerge, enabling sexual and gender minorities to advocate more visibly for recognition and equality (Boyce and Coyle, 2015, as cited in Greene, 2015: 12).

Within this evolving context, activists such as Sunil Babu Pant played a pivotal role in advancing Nepal's queer movement. Pant established the Blue Diamond Society in 2001, the nation's first organization dedicated to

advocating for the rights and health of sexual and gender minorities (Blue Diamond Society, 2023), followed by the formation of the Mitini Support Group in 2002 (later formalized as Mitini Nepal in 2005), a non-governmental organization that advocates for the rights, inclusion, and well-being of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and other sexual and gender minority communities in Nepal through advocacy, support services, counselling, and empowerment programs (Mitini Nepal, 2023). Collectively, these initiatives provided the foundation for the public visibility and legal recognition of LGBTQIA+ communities in Nepal. The legal recognition of queer rights in Nepal emerged through a series of significant judicial and political developments during the late 2000s and early 2010s.

In 2007, the Supreme Court of Nepal issued a landmark decision in *Sunil Babu Pant and Others v. Government of Nepal*, recognizing gender and sexual diversity as fundamental human rights. The ruling affirmed that same-sex relations could not be treated as criminal and directed the state to amend discriminatory laws and consider legalizing same-sex marriage. By asserting that no individual has the authority to question the private lives or relationships of consenting adults, the Court reinforced the rights to privacy, dignity, and self-determination as core rights (NJA Law Journal, 2008: 261-286).

These judicial developments coincided with broader political transformations within the Nepali state. In 2008, Nepal abolished its monarchy and became a federal democratic republic (Hutt and Onta, 2017: 3). That same year, Sunil Babu Pant joined the first Constituent Assembly as Asia's first openly gay parliamentarian. His participation contributed to the explicit prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the 2015 Constitution (Pant, 2023), as guaranteed in Articles 12, 18 and 42 (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). Collectively, these developments transformed queer rights from a plea for recognition into a constitutional mandate for equality. Subsequent court rulings extended these protections into everyday areas of life. For example, in *Suman Panta v. Ministry of Home Affairs* (2017), the Supreme Court ordered the government to grant non-tourist visas to same-sex spouses of foreign nationals (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The expansion of legal recognition extended into the 2020s. On June 28, 2023, the Supreme Court issued an interim order in *Pinky Gurung v. Government of Nepal*, directing authorities to temporarily register same-sex marriages, including couples with "other" gender markers (ILGA Asia, 2024). Following the ruling, Nepal registered its first same-sex marriage in November 2023, becoming the first country in South Asia to do so (Gurung, 2023). On June 18, 2026, the Supreme Court delivered its final verdict in *Pinky Gurung v. Government of Nepal*, ordering the government to grant same-sex couples full and equal

marriage rights (ILGA Asia, 2026). The government is still implementing the ruling, including the required legislative and administrative actions.

Despite ongoing activism, significant disparities remain. As Santosh Sharma Poudel (2023) notes, Nepal “still has a long way to go,” which echoes Birat Bijay Ojha’s (2024) concern over whether recent gains are genuine “landmarks or loopholes.” Although constitutional protections exist, inconsistent implementation continues to require judicial clarification in individual cases seeking recognition of their rights. While the Supreme Court recognised certain rights for same-sex spouses in 2017, including provisions related to visa entitlements, subsequent legal cases in 2022 indicate that similar claims by other applicants continued to require further judicial and administrative clarification (Fang, 2023). This gap became evident following the Supreme Court’s 2023 interim order on same-sex marriage, when local authorities initially refused to register the marriage of Maya Gurung and Surendra Pandey despite the Court’s directive. Although the couple ultimately became the first same-sex couple to successfully register their marriage in Nepal, the delays and administrative resistance highlighted the continuing disconnect between legal recognition and its implementation in practice (Yong and BBC Nepali, 2023).

Kyle Knight (2024) highlights a similar challenge through the case of Rukshana Kapali, who has challenged the Nepali government in court over fifty times since 2021. In 2024, the Supreme Court recognised her as a woman without requiring medical evidence. However, in the absence of a comprehensive national policy, many transgender individuals continue to face uncertainty and must pursue recognition through individual court cases. The Yogyakarta Principles, adopted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2006, constitute an international framework affirming that sexual orientation and gender identity are integral to human dignity and that individuals are entitled to legal recognition without medical prerequisites (Yogyakarta Principles, 2007). According to Knight (2024), these principles were endorsed by Nepali activist Sunil Babu Pant and informed the Supreme Court’s landmark 2007 ruling, continuing to shape subsequent cases, including Kapali’s.

The persistence of these implementation gaps is also evident in the everyday experiences of sexual and gender minorities. Anjali Lama, the first transgender model to walk at Lakmé Fashion Week, Mumbai, in 2017, has recounted experiences of bullying, family pressure, and employment discrimination prior to achieving professional recognition, illustrating the social obstacles that shaped her path to visibility (Jamshed & Arora, 2017). More broadly, continued exclusion within families, workplaces, and healthcare settings highlights the persistent disparity between legal recognition and lived experience (Pokhrel, 2024). Such inconsistencies

demonstrate that legal reforms have not been fully realised in practice and that societal awareness continues to lag behind legal change. As public understandings of gender and sexual diversity are shaped not only through law but also through cultural representation, media and cinema serve as important sites through which visibility is produced and stereotypes are reinforced, challenged, or transformed.

Mainstream Nepali Cinema and Industrial Influence

Despite significant sociopolitical transformations in Nepal during the 1990s and early 2000s, mainstream Nepali cinema continued to adhere to commercially driven conventions rooted in decades of Hindi cinema influences. The commercial success of several films during the 1980s established *Kollywood* as a prominent film industry and contributed to the development of a mainstream cinematic culture closely aligned with Bollywood aesthetics and narrative conventions. Mainstream productions frequently borrowed archetypal characters, romantic ballads, and *item numbers*, relying on exaggerated violence, melodramatic depictions of social issues, and formulaic storytelling that prioritised entertainment over originality or critical engagement (Karki, 2023). The *masala* genre, popularised in 1970s Hindi cinema through its combination of romance, action, comedy, and melodrama (Ganti, 2004: 131), together with the “age of violence” associated with Indian films of the 1980s and early 1990s (Biswal, 2023), shaped mainstream cinematic conventions in Nepal. These conventions not only shaped narrative and aesthetic practices but also reinforced normative gender roles and social hierarchies that would continue to structure representation in later decades.

Gender representation in mainstream Nepali cinema during the 1980s and 1990s largely replicated Bollywood conventions, reinforcing hierarchical constructions of masculinity and femininity. Male protagonists were commonly portrayed as romantic heroes whose virtue was defined through the pursuit of idealised love (Karki, 2023: 34). During the 1990s, representations of masculinity shifted toward the figure of the “angry young man,” inspired by Amitabh Bachchan’s iconic 1970s Bollywood screen persona (Ahmed, 1985: 56). In Nepal, this archetype became closely associated with Rajesh Hamal, who emerged as the defining “angry young man” of mainstream Nepali cinema from the 1990s into the late 2010s (Karki, 2023: 60-62). In contrast, female characters were largely relegated to supporting roles such as love interests, wives, or mothers, and were primarily defined through sacrifice and moral virtue. Representations of women frequently relied on rigid archetypes, including the “modern” woman portrayed as rebellious or immoral and the

“traditional” woman idealised as virtuous and devoted (Karki, 2023: 39). Gopalan (1997) identifies the figure of the “avenging woman” in Hindi cinema’s revenge narratives, arguing that female empowerment within such films often remains constrained by patriarchal norms and is frequently framed through trauma and victimhood. This archetype also appeared in Nepali films during the late 1980s (Karki, 2023: 42). During this period, films increasingly featured the hypersexualised figure of the “item girl” (Karki, 2023: 50), a female performer typically presented in highly stylised song-and-dance sequences focused on spectacle, sexualisation, and audience appeal (Nijhawan, 2016: 137). From the mid-2000s to mid-2010s, this figure developed into the dual persona of the “angry young woman,” most notably represented by Rekha Thapa, who combined physical aggression and masculine-coded defiance with glamour and sexualisation (Karki, 2023: 82-85). Although this archetype was framed as empowered, it ultimately continued to function within patriarchal structures by equating female strength with traditionally masculine forms of power and simultaneously maintaining the objectification of women in commercial cinema. These recurring archetypes, perpetuated through formulaic storytelling, reinforced conventional gender hierarchies and patriarchal values while limiting the representation of gender fluidity and queer subjectivity within mainstream Nepali cinema (Karki, 2023: 89-90).

From Invisibility to Stereotyped Visibility

Since the inception of mainstream Nepali cinema, queer and gender-nonconforming identities have largely remained invisible, marginalised, or framed through comic disguise and stereotypical representation. Although queer visibility has increased over time, mainstream portrayals continue to be shaped by humour, pity, melodrama, violence, and familiar commercial conventions. The following analysis traces this transition from invisibility to visibility, examining how different forms of queer representation have emerged within mainstream cinema while often remaining constrained by stereotypes that simultaneously enable recognition and reinforce marginalisation.

Cross-Dressing and Comic Disguise

An early example of gender disguise in mainstream Nepali cinema appears in *Buhari* (2001), a romantic comedy in which the male protagonist disguises himself as a maid to enter the household of the woman he loves and gain her affection. His father also adopts female attire to support

the deception, creating a comic spectacle in which both characters perform exaggerated forms of femininity. The sequences echo cross-dressing comedies in Hindi cinema such as *Chachi 420* (1997), a remake of *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) (Bose and Bhattacharyya, 2007: 130) and *Aunty No. 1* (1998). Although framed primarily as comedy, these scenes can be read as revealing the performative nature of gender. Drawing on Judith Butler's argument that "the parodic repetition of gender exposes the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance" (1990: 200), the film exaggerates gestures, costumes, and even employs a dubbed female voice, presenting femininity not as an innate quality but as a set of repeated and recognizable performances. Similarly, Annette Kuhn argues that cross-dressing narratives destabilise culturally fixed distinctions between masculine and feminine identities, describing sexual disguise as "a play upon the fixity and the fluidity of gender identity" (Kuhn, 1985: 53-54). In *Buhari*, however, the comedy depends upon the audience's continuous awareness that the protagonists are "really" men beneath their exaggerated performances of femininity. As Kuhn further suggests, the humour of cross-dressing films relies upon the spectator's privileged knowledge of the disguised character's "true" gender identity (Kuhn, 1985: 64).

A comparable use of gender disguise appears in *Saavadhan* (2006), an action-comedy that combines political commentary with commercial spectacle. The film addresses social unrest in post-1990 Nepal, including corruption, labour migration, and the killing of twelve Nepali workers in Iraq (BBC News, 2004), yet presents these issues through melodrama and humour. In one scene, the male protagonist adopts a female disguise to conceal his identity while confronting a group of goons, assisted by a female police officer who assumes an active role in the action sequence, challenging conventional gender expectations associated with female characters in mainstream Nepali cinema. Like *Buhari*, cross-dressing functions primarily as a narrative device, remaining detached from any exploration of gender nonconformity or queer identity.

A similar pattern emerges in *Dal Bhat Tarkari* (2019), a comedy-drama centred on the Diversity Visa (DV) lottery and aspirations of migration to America, where cross-dressing once again serves as a source of humiliation and comic relief rather than an exploration of gender identity. **Nearly two decades after *Buhari* (2001), little appears to have changed in the cinematic use of cross-dressing as a source of comedy and spectacle.** In one scene, a male character cross-dresses to evade the police, leading to comic chaos as the disguise is exposed, he is beaten, and his clothes are torn apart. Before the reveal, the feminised body is presented as an object of visual attention and comic spectacle, illustrating Laura Mulvey's notion of *to-be-looked-at-ness* (Mulvey, 1999:837). The

exposure of the disguise subsequently transforms this performance into a moment of humiliation. His artificial breasts, represented by apples, fall to the ground, echoing a recurring comedic gag in *Buhari*. Both characters then cover their bodies and perform exaggeratedly feminine gestures of “shyness.”

As a result, these films briefly challenge traditional gender norms but ultimately reinforce patriarchal and heteronormative expectations by presenting femininity as comedy, spectacle, and disguise.

Trans Women Representation: Humour, Violence, and Pity



As mainstream Nepali cinema gradually moved beyond cross-dressing narratives to include visibly trans women on screen, albeit rarely, one of the earliest mainstream examples appeared in *Sano Sansar* (2008). Nepal’s transition towards digital filmmaking in the late 2000s introduced new urban aesthetics and cinematic styles influenced by the cosmopolitan youth culture of early-2000s Bollywood cinema. Released during this period, *Sano Sansar* (2008) exemplifies this shift through its youthful urban sensibility, recalling films such as *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001), which Asha Kasbekar (2006: 203) identifies as central to the emergence of “New Bollywood”, characterised by urban middle-class narratives, innovations in colour grading and editing, greater emotional nuance, (Viswamohan and John, 2017: 49), and deeper explorations of character relationships (Dwyer in Wright, 2015: 169).

The film’s only queer representation occurs in a brief comic sequence, in which a transgender character pursues the male protagonist, with her exaggerated gestures played for slapstick humour. While this character constitutes one of the earliest visible trans woman representations in mainstream Nepali cinema beyond cross-dressing disguises, her role remains limited to comic excess and ridicule. As José Esteban Muñoz argues, dominant cultural forms often impose restrictive identities on marginalized subjects, while simultaneously reinforcing broader social hierarchies and norms (Muñoz, 1999: 168-169). In this sense, the film’s comic framing contains queer visibility within ridicule rather than allowing the character fuller subjectivity or narrative agency. The film reflects a transitional moment in queer representation, shaped by the continued influence of Bollywood conventions from the 1990s and 2000s, where transgender characters were frequently portrayed as comic caricatures, horrifying villains, sexually predatory figures, or objects of spectacle (Nigam, 2021; Anandu, 2021: 11). Within mainstream Nepali cinema, however, queer characters were more commonly framed through ridicule,

marginalisation, pity, and melodramatic vulnerability rather than explicit villainy.

By the early 2010s, mainstream Nepali cinema increasingly adopted darker urban narratives characterised by violence, colloquial realism, and hypermasculine spectacle. The commercial success of *Loot* (2012) catalysed the emergence of “New Kollywood,” prompting many subsequent mainstream productions to employ similar urban-crime formulas, crude humour, and spectacle-driven storytelling influenced by modern masala¹ and Mumbai noir² cinema. Within these narratives, masculine characters occupied positions of agency, violence, and narrative centrality, while female characters were largely confined to emotional, domestic, or sexualised roles (Karki, 2023: 95-98). While this transition introduced innovative cinematic styles and urban sensibilities, mainstream films continued to depend on stereotypical gender portrayals, sexualised humour, and sensationalised depictions of violence and sexuality. Instead of challenging the patriarchal structures that persist within Nepali society, such representations frequently reinforce the limited visibility and heightened vulnerability of women and sexual and gender minorities (Karki, 2023; UNDP/USAID, 2014: 20-21).

Illustrating this trend, *Sadanga* (2015) introduces one of the few transwomen characters in mainstream Nepali cinema, portraying her primarily through violence, humiliation, and fear. Kalu Yadav, a hypermasculine character, whose interaction with a trans woman sex worker occurs within a confined interior setting as he attempts to extract information through intimidation and threat. Across an extended sequence lasting nearly nine minutes, the camera lingers on her fear and discomfort as flirtation gradually escalates into psychological violence. The use of tight, enclosed framing visually reinforces the character’s vulnerability and social marginalisation. This representation reproduces broader patterns of violence and social precarity experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals within marginalising social and institutional structures (Kanak and Bhusal, 2025: 154). Such vulnerability is further intensified for sex workers in Nepal, who remain among the most stigmatised and legally vulnerable groups, with limited institutional protections (Adhikari, 2019: 15). Framed through a rhetoric of “realism,” the sequence perpetuates violence without critically examining the social structures that expose trans women and sex workers to harm. The film reduces the trans woman to a spectacle of humiliation and danger, denying her the depth and complexity of a fully realised subject. In this sense, the sequence reflects what Judith Butler, drawing on

1. “Modern masala,” epitomised by *Dabangg* (2010), combines action, comedy, and romance with heightened style and the staple item number (Blaxell, 2012: 10-11).
2. “Mumbai noir,” inaugurated by Ram Gopal Varma’s *Satya* (1998), introduced urban grit, criminal underworlds, and moral ambiguity into mainstream Indian cinema (Ahmed, 2015: 9).

Monique Wittig, identifies as the positioning of feminised and marginalised genders as subordinate and “particular” rather than fully recognised social subjects (Butler, 1990: 158-159).

While *Sadanga* frames trans woman visibility through violence, humiliation, and fear, *Maruni* (2019) marks a partial shift toward emotional centrality and narrative focus. A romantic drama with psychological and thriller elements, the film is among the first mainstream Nepali productions to depict gender transition and centre a trans woman protagonist. The film features a cisgender woman portraying a trans woman, and the character’s transition is presented as a sudden narrative twist rather than a nuanced process.

The title derives from the traditional Nepali folk dance *maruni*, associated with the Magar community, in which male performers dress in feminine attire and perform stylised, graceful movements. Literally meaning “a person who dances and sings in the disguise of a woman,” the term reflects a long-standing performative tradition practiced across the hill regions of Nepal (Ojha, 2025; Dixit, 2019). Abhimanyu Dixit (2019) argues that despite its potentially powerful subject matter, the film frames its trans character through pity rather than empowerment, repeatedly reinforcing the idea that she will “never be enough”. Dixit further argues that the film associates trans identity with emotional instability and fear through melodramatic and horror-inflected cinematic choices while offering little social or psychological insight into trans lived experience.

This association is further reinforced by the film’s portrayal of childhood gender nonconformity. *Maruni* (2019) presents gender-nonconforming children as visual symbols of future suffering rather than as individuals with distinct experiences and perspectives. Both the opening and closing scenes briefly depict a young boy applying makeup, prompting a reaction of shock from the mother. Accompanied by dramatic and suspenseful background music, these scenes encourage the audience to interpret the child’s gender expression as troubling and ominous rather than as an ordinary form of self-expression. The mother’s response functions as a form of social regulation, signalling the boundaries of acceptable gender expression within the family and reinforcing normative expectations surrounding gendered behaviour (Butler, 1990). The absence of dialogue between parent and child in these scenes leaves little room for understanding or acceptance. The opening scene positions the child’s behaviour as an early indication of the protagonist’s later transition, thereby linking childhood gender expression to a life marked by hardship and suffering. The final scene returns to this imagery through the child of a heterosexual couple connected to the protagonist’s past, establishing a circular narrative that suggests a recurrence of the protagonist’s experience. Since

opening and closing scenes are instrumental in shaping audience interpretation, their use in *Maruni* positions gender nonconformity as a source of social discomfort. As Dixit (2019) observes, although *Maruni* departs from the ridicule and comic stereotyping that have long characterised LGBTQIA+ representation in Nepali cinema, its portrayal remains shaped by pity, tragedy, and constrained subjectivity, reflecting the persistent limitations of queer visibility in mainstream Nepali cinema.

Collectively, *Sano Sansar* (2008), *Sadanga* (2015), and *Maruni* (2019) demonstrate that increased trans women visibility in mainstream Nepali cinema has not been accompanied by narrative agency or representational complexity. Despite their generic differences, these films repeatedly frame trans women identities through ridicule, vulnerability, fear, or pity.

Third Gender Representation and Cultural Identity

By the mid-2010s, queer and gender-nonconforming characters began to appear more visibly in mainstream Nepali cinema, although such representations remained rare and were often shaped by contradictory forms of recognition and marginalisation. Released in 2016, *Shakuntala* marked a significant development by centring a third gender protagonist within a mainstream commercial action-drama. Upon *Shakuntala*'s introduction, the film's public dialogue frames the character through visual ambiguity and social categorisation: "Who is this woman? She looks like a man," one-character remarks, followed by, "Yes, it is a man, you know, third gender... she is a very popular social worker." This exchange indicates that the film conceptualises third-gender identity primarily through external appearance and public perception.

Nepal has often been internationally recognised for its acknowledgment of a "third gender" category; historically, this term has described individuals whose gender identity or expression diverges from cisnormativity expectations associated with male and female identities (Lesnikowski cited in Knight and Bochenek, 2012: 13). However, transgender activist and lawyer Rukshana Kapali contends that the widespread assumption equating "transgenders" with "third genders" collapses distinct gender identities into a single category, thereby reinforcing the notion that all transgender individuals exist outside the male/female binary (Kapali, 2024). In response, Kapali and fellow activists have developed Nepali lexicons, semantics, and gender-related terminology, introducing the term *paralaingik* ("transgender") to distinguish transgender identities from the broader *tesrolingi* ("third gender") category. This linguistic intervention has facilitated more precise discussions of gender identity and legal

recognition, particularly for trans men and trans women who identify within the gender binary (Kapali, 2024).

Such conceptual distinctions remain largely absent in *Shakuntala*, as the film constructs third gender identity primarily through themes of trauma, revenge, and moral sacrifice. The character is portrayed by Nepal's megastar (*Maha Nayak*) Rajesh Hamal, whose established "angry young man" screen persona significantly influences the film's representation of third gender identity (Karki, 2023: 90). In the film's climactic flashback, the character's transformation is precipitated by sexual violence and forced emasculation, after which Shakuntala pledges to dedicate "his" life to protecting women by adopting a female identity. In this way, the film adapts the familiar "avenging woman" narrative from Hindi cinema, where empowerment often arises from trauma and victimhood (Gopalan, 1997). Although the film introduces a gender-nonconforming protagonist, the character ultimately continues to embody conventional forms of masculine heroism and authority.

Rajesh Hamal's performance constitutes a rare example of star-driven experimentation within mainstream Nepali cinema. Publicity for the film emphasized the novelty of Hamal performing femininity, as reflected in headlines such as "Shakuntala trailer out, Rajesh Hamal as feminist!" (Nepalimoviesweb, 2016). His restrained gestures and deliberate body language indicate an effort to portray the character with seriousness and empathy. In this context, the performance can be read as briefly gesturing toward what José Esteban Muñoz describes as disidentificatory performance, insofar as it momentarily reworks Hamal's established masculine star persona through an alternative mode of gendered embodiment (Muñoz, 1999: 196). However, the potential for a more nuanced representation is constrained by the film's commercial framework, which prioritises spectacle, action, and melodrama.

Later in the decade, *Ek Bhagavad ra Ek Gita* (2023), a romantic action-drama set in Nepal's Madhesh-Terai region, marked another significant moment in mainstream Nepali cinema through its engagement with *hijra* identity and forms of cultural specificity largely absent from earlier commercial representations. Nevertheless, despite foregrounding a traditional hijra community, the film continues to rely on familiar mainstream conventions like those seen in *Shakuntala* (2016), particularly through its use of a cisgender actor performing within the masculinised trope of the "angry young man". In doing so, the film largely bypasses the lived realities of hijra communities, relying instead on what Urza Acharya (2023) identifies as action-driven resolutions and heteronormative hero-villain conventions.

Nepali understandings of hijra identity in the Madhesh-Tarai region draw on long-standing South Asian traditions. Within this framework, hijras are culturally recognised as neither fully male nor fully female; instead, their identities are shaped through ritual roles, community affiliation, kinship systems, religious symbolism, and class relations rather than solely through sexuality or a fixed “third gender” label (Nanda and Reddy, as cited in UNDP and Williams Institute, 2014: 32).

In her analysis of hijra communities in Janakpur, Aarati Ray (2024) explains hijra *gharanas* are sustained through the traditional guru-disciple kinship system, a bond that extends across caste and religious differences and often proves deeper than biological family ties. Their main sources of income include *badhai* (ritual blessings), *challa maga* (begging), and *natuwa* (performances). Ray critically observes that society offers them “respect” only during ritual occasions, while routinely subjecting them to humiliation in hospitals, harassment by police, and everyday violence. Although the gharana provides emotional and economic support, it cannot fully protect its members from discrimination or economic marginalisation.

The film portrays the protagonist as the head of a hijra gharana, yet it does not clarify how such authority is established or how kinship, ritual obligation, and communal leadership function within these social structures. Practices such as *badhai* and *challa maga* are introduced but are subsequently overshadowed by melodramatic elements or are aestheticised through choreography and spectacle. The stylised representation is further reinforced by the use of religious architecture and cultural iconography from Janakpur and the broader Madhesh region, resulting in a visual spectacle reminiscent of Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s cinema (Shrivastava and Ghauraiya, 2025: 58). This emphasis on visual spectacle occurs at the expense of substantive engagement with the everyday experiences of hijra individuals.

The representational limitation becomes most apparent in the film’s closing monologue, where the protagonist directly addresses the camera, positioning the audience as representatives of a society asked to either “pity or accept” them. By framing hijra identity as a binary moral issue, the film substitutes nuanced cultural analysis with sentimentality and ultimately perpetuates, rather than interrogates, the social conditions described by Ray (2024).

Across *Shakuntala* (2016) and *Ek Bhagavad ra Ek Gita* (2023), the increased visibility of third gender and hijra identities remains shaped by commercial conventions, star-centred performances, and narratives of trauma, sacrifice, and moral recognition. While both films expand the

range of queer identities represented on screen, they offer limited engagement with the lived realities and cultural complexities of the communities they depict.

Gay Male Representation and Relationships

The increased visibility of queer identities in mainstream Nepali cinema has also encompassed portrayals of gay male characters. However, as with earlier representations of gender and sexual diversity, these characters frequently remain constrained by stereotypes, limited narrative agency, and commercially familiar modes of representation.

A Mero Hajur 2 (2017), a romantic comedy, introduces its sole queer character, Dada, the female protagonist's brother, through a pun in which another character's name, "Jay," is misheard as "gay," prompting a camera cut toward Dada and immediately reducing his sexuality to a visual joke. Although Dada appears more frequently than many queer characters in mainstream Nepali cinema, his representation remains confined to flamboyant excess and emotional self-pity. The film repeatedly frames Dada through loneliness and social isolation, as the female protagonist expresses concern over his lack of companionship, while Dada himself remarks that "people like us" have no friends. Constructed largely as a caricature, the character is associated with a pink, soft-toy-filled bedroom, exaggerated mannerisms, and unsolicited flirtation with a straight man. As Ankit Manandhar Khadgi (2019) observes, representations of gay men in Nepali media frequently rely on stereotypes that portray queer men as emotionally excessive figures whose attraction toward straight men becomes a source of humour and ridicule.

The film briefly imagines queer intimacy through a staged relationship between Dada and a heterosexual male character presented as his romantic partner. However, this relationship remains rooted in pretence and misunderstanding rather than mutual queer desire. This superficial engagement with sexuality becomes particularly evident in a cross-dressing fantasy sequence, in which the female protagonist imagines the supposed boyfriend dressed as a woman. The scene reduces queerness to costume and comedy rather than portraying a meaningful emotional relationship. Later, Dada's heartbreak is depicted through melodramatic self-pity, appearing more pitiable than empathetic. Existing primarily through loneliness and the pursuit of male attention, Dada is denied narrative depth, professional identity, and emotional reciprocity, reducing queer visibility to spectacle without dignity, complexity, or meaningful subjectivity.

Five years later, *A Mero Hajur 4* (2022), a romantic comedy, reproduces stereotypical queer representation through a flamboyant gay male character whose exaggerated gestures and interactions with heterosexual men function primarily as comic relief. As Dixit (2022) observes, the film recycles conventions from earlier Bollywood and Nepali commercial cinema, as well as previous instalments within the franchise itself, continuing to rely on clichéd and problematic representations. Between *A Mero Hajur 2* and *A Mero Hajur 4*, the series demonstrates little development in its approach to queer representation, instead reproducing commercially formulaic characterisations.

Like *A Mero Hajur 2*, *Feri Resham Firiri* (2025) integrates same-sex male intimacy within a broader commercial narrative. This comedy-drama revisits the Diversity Visa (DV)-to-America storyline previously depicted in *Dal Bhat Tarkari*. As with its predecessor, the film utilizes ensemble comedy, rapid scene transitions, and orchestrated confusion, presenting migration primarily as a comedic device rather than engaging in substantive social commentary. Nevertheless, the film's continued focus on DV migration contrasts sharply with the current realities of Nepali labour migration, which are increasingly defined by precarity, exploitation, and migrant deaths abroad (Kafle, 2024). Beyond the comedic framing, Colin Stewart (2025) observes that queer and transgender migrants encounter heightened risks abroad, including unsafe labour conditions, criminalisation, sexual violence, and limited state protection. Drawing on the insights of activist Sunil Babu Pant, Stewart further contends that LGBTQIA+ migrants are frequently subjected to imprisonment, assault, and legal vulnerability due to hostile laws and the Nepali state's failure to provide adequate protection, information, or institutional support. Consequently, queer migrants are often compelled to navigate transnational forms of precarity and violence without meaningful assistance.

Feri Resham Firiri builds its queer storyline around a father's fear of dishonour after discovering, through an intimate video, that his son is in a relationship with another man. The father seeks to separate the couple and protect the family's reputation. He follows the advice of others and arranges for his son to travel with the film's male protagonist, who has won the DV lottery. In a patriarchal society, where the father's authority and honour structure family dynamics, this moment could have fostered understanding between parents and queer children, a pressing need in a context where sexual and gender minorities are still commonly viewed as *vikriti*, a form of social deterioration associated with abnormality and degeneracy (Green, 2013: 6-7). Although the film is among the first in mainstream Nepali cinema to depict a queer couple, their relationship remains largely defined by exposure, shame, and separation rather than by the development of a shared emotional life. Despite a brief statement

that “everyone should have the right to love whoever they want,” the narrative devotes little attention to the couple beyond the circumstances of their discovery.

The film avoids explicitly naming queerness, relying instead on vague phrases such as “he is that way” or “that kind.” For instance, those advising the father to suggest that a visa to America will be granted easily “for people like your son” and add that “even Nepal has recognised it,” without ever articulating what “it” refers to. These evasive expressions appear almost exclusively within comedic sequences, turning queerness itself into part of the confusion that fuels the film’s humour.

This slapstick persists in a chase where the son’s boyfriend collides with a woman, entangling her saree in his clothing. The ensuing joke strips the woman of her saree, turning her into a visual punchline, while the boyfriend ends up wrapped in it. The scene relies on humiliating both: it feminises the boyfriend for comedic effect and treats the woman’s partial undressing as a source of humour. Collectively, the gag suggests that both queer and women’s bodies are positioned as objects of ridicule. Following the chaotic efforts to depart for the United States, the narrative abruptly shifts from the unresolved queer storyline to a sudden expression of patriotism. The male protagonist’s final voiceover announces his decision to remain in Nepal and “contribute to the country,” accompanied by the instrumental version of the patriotic song *Rato ra Chandra*³. By abruptly pivoting from its queer storyline to contemporary nationalist sentiment, the film subsumes its queer narrative into a broader national framework, ultimately reinforcing the silence surrounding queer experience.

Collectively, *A Mero Hajur 2* (2017), *A Mero Hajur 4* (2022), and *Feri Resham Firiri* (2025) demonstrate that increased gay male visibility in mainstream Nepali cinema remains largely structured through flamboyance, comic misunderstanding, and emotional excess. While same-sex desire becomes more visible, queer male characters are rarely afforded sustained intimacy, narrative depth, or fully realised subjectivity.

This conclusion illustrates a broader pattern observed across the films analysed. Queer-coded characters are routinely depicted as caricatures, spectacles, or objects of pity, suggesting a systemic representational tendency rather than isolated creative choices. Queer visibility is permitted only within familiar and socially sanctioned frameworks, such as comedy, trauma, flamboyance, or moral sacrifice, none of which fundamentally challenge prevailing gender and sexual norms. The repeated casting of cisgender actors in queer and gender-variant roles further underscores

3. *Rato ra Chandra*, one of the national songs that later become emblematic of the Gen-Z anti-corruption protests of September 2025 (Post Report, 2025).

the commercialisation of queer visibility, presenting difference as a marketable commodity rather than lived experience. These representational strategies exemplify what José Esteban Muñoz (1999) describes as “dominant publicity,” whereby dominant cultural formations regulate the terms under which marginalised identities become visible. Drawing on Fraser’s critique of the public/private divide, Muñoz argues that visibility is often structured in ways that maintain existing social hierarchies (Muñoz, 1999: 169). Rather than a linear progression from exclusion to inclusion, the films examined here reveal a movement from invisibility to stereotyped visibility, in which queer identities become increasingly present on screen while remaining constrained by commercial conventions and heteronormative representational logics.

Comparing mainstream Nepali cinema with Hindi cinema reveals how persistent these representational patterns have remained. During the 2010s, Bollywood cinema experienced a marked increase in women-centred films that depicted female characters with enhanced narrative significance and complexity (Zaidi, 2020). These broader shifts in representation also facilitated more empathetic portrayals of queer identities, as seen in films such as *Kapoor & Sons* (2016), which depicted gay protagonists with emotional depth and dignity, providing relatively rare instances of empathy within mainstream Hindi cinema (Anandu, 2021: 13). Following decades of queer activism and the Indian Supreme Court’s 2018 decriminalisation of Section 377, new forms of queer representation emerged within commercial cinema (Arora and Sylvia, 2023). In the years following the ruling, films such as *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019) and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (2020) brought same-sex relationships into the commercial mainstream, leading critics to describe these films as “trailblazing,” “pioneering,” and historically significant (Chopra, 2020; Roy, 2020, as cited in Arora and Sylvia, 2023). More recent films such as *Badhai Do* (2022) further expanded queer representation by portraying queer kinship and what Kath Weston (1997) describes as “families we choose” as emotionally ordinary and socially integrated rather than tragic or exceptional.

While mainstream Nepali cinema has historically drawn extensively from Bollywood conventions, the representational trajectories of the two industries have diverged. Although mainstream films have continued to rely heavily on stereotypical frameworks of queer representation, these limitations should not be regarded as representative of Nepali cinema in its entirety. The digital era has seen the rise of independent and non-mainstream films that engage more directly with queer lives, identities, and experiences. Although such productions remain relatively few, they have increasingly expanded the scope of queer representation since the early 2010s, portraying queer characters with greater complexity, agency, and

social realism than is typically found in mainstream commercial cinema. Documentary filmmaking had already addressed queer and third-gender rights at an earlier stage. Nani Sahra Walker's *Other Nature* (2009), for example, documents the struggles of queer and third-gender activists for legal recognition and equal rights in Nepal, including citizenship, voting rights, and protection from discrimination (Frameline, 2009). In fictional narrative cinema, *Highway* (2012) features one of the earliest same-sex male relationships in contemporary Nepali cinema and includes an appearance by transgender activist Bhumika Shrestha. In the same year, *Soongava: Dance of the Orchids* (2012) became the first Nepali film to centre a romantic relationship between two women in Kathmandu (Karki, 2023: 108). More recently, *Pooja, Sir* (2024) portrays its queer protagonist as a competent police officer in a position of professional authority (Karki, 2025), while *Elephants in the Fog* (2026) foregrounds queer and minority experiences, particularly those of the Kinnar community, through its narrative and inclusive casting practices. The film's recognition at Cannes marks an important moment for the international visibility of queer narratives from Nepal (The Kathmandu Post, 2026). Beyond cinema, the television series *Singha Durbar* (2015-16) featured an openly gay advisor to Nepal's first fictional female prime minister, contributing to the normalisation of queer visibility on national television (Khadgi, 2019).

Taken together, these examples indicate that more nuanced representations of queer identities are increasingly emerging outside the conventions of mainstream commercial cinema. As Moranta Alorda (2013:4-5) argues, cinema plays a significant role in constructing meanings related to gender, sexuality, and identity. In this context, these representations offer possibilities for understanding queer lives beyond the stereotypes that have long characterised mainstream Nepali screen culture.

Conclusion

This article has examined the representation of queer and gender-nonconforming identities in mainstream Nepali cinema within the context of Nepal's broader legal, social, and cultural transformations. The analysis demonstrates that the trajectory of queer representation in mainstream Nepali cinema is marked by a complex interplay of progress and stagnation. Over the past two decades, progress is evident in the increasing visibility of queer identities, shifting from the near absence of explicit representation in earlier films to the inclusion of trans women, third gender protagonists, hijra communities, and same-sex relationships within mainstream narratives. However, this increased visibility has not

necessarily resulted in a corresponding transformation of representational frameworks.

The films analysed in this study reveal a persistent reliance on established commercial conventions and recurring representational tropes. Although queer characters have become more visible, they are often depicted through comic disguise, ridicule, melodrama, violence, pity, trauma, and spectacle. Instead of fostering more complex forms of subjectivity, mainstream cinema frequently adapts existing stereotypes to new queer subjects, allowing for visibility while restricting the frameworks through which queer identities are interpreted. As a result, representation often operates through contradictory processes of recognition and marginalisation, simultaneously enabling inclusion and reinforcing dominant heteronormative and gendered hierarchies.

The findings further suggest that legal recognition does not automatically translate into more nuanced representations of queer identities in mainstream cinema. Although Nepal has become one of South Asia's most progressive countries regarding the legal rights of sexual and gender minorities, mainstream cinematic representation has evolved more slowly and inconsistently than these broader legal and social developments. This disparity is significant because mainstream cinema remains an influential site of cultural meaning-making, helping to shape public understandings of gender and sexual diversity. At the same time, independent films, television productions, and alternative media have demonstrated the potential for more nuanced and humanising portrayals of queer lives and identities. These observations suggest that the limitations identified in this article are not inherent to Nepali screen culture as a whole, rather reflect the persistent influence of commercial conventions within mainstream cinema.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that increased visibility alone is insufficient to transform the conditions under which queer identities are represented. Rather than a linear progression from exclusion to inclusion, mainstream Nepali cinema reveals a movement from invisibility to stereotyped visibility, in which queer identities become increasingly present on screen while remaining shaped by commercial, gendered, and heteronormative conventions that constrain the possibilities of queer subjectivity, belonging, and recognition.

Sudipta Karki (she/her) is a Nepali filmmaker and researcher currently pursuing a PhD in Performing Arts and Communication and Broadcasting Techniques at the University of Liège. Her doctoral research examines contemporary Nepali cinema in relation to social and political transformation, with a particular focus on non-mainstream filmmaking, representation, marginalised communities, and changing industry practices. She holds a specialised master's degree in Cinema and Performing Arts

from the University of Liège. Her master's research examined the evolution of Nepali cinema, particularly the influence of Bollywood on mainstream filmmaking and the emergence of non-mainstream cinema.

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Mainstream Nepali Films

- A Mero Hajur 2* (2017), dir. Jharana Thapa.
A Mero Hajur 4 (2022), dir. Jharana Thapa.
Buhari (2001), dir. Kishore Dhakal

Dal Bhat Tarkari (2019), dir. Sudan K.C.
Ek Bhagavad Ra Ek Gita (2023), dir. Jharana Thapa.
Feri Resham Firiri (2025), dir. Niroj Maharjan.
Maruni (2019), dir. Nawal Nepal.
Saavadhan (2006), dir. Dinesh D.C.
Sandanga (2015), dir. Suraj Sunuwar.
Sano Sansar (2008), dir. Alok Nembang.
Shakuntala (2017), dir. Dinesh Shrestha.

Non-mainstream/Independent Nepali Films

Elephants in the Fog (2026), dir. Abhinash Bikram Shah
Highway (2012), dir. Deepak Rauniyar.
Other Nature (2009), dir. Nani Sahra Walker
Pooja Sir (2024), dir. Deepak Rauniyar.
Singhadurbar (2015-2016), dir. Tsering Rhitar Sherpa.
Soongava: : Dance of the Orchids (2012), dir. Subarna Thapa.

Hindi Films

Aunty No. 1 (1998), dir. Kirti Kumar.
Badhaai Do (2022), dir. Harshavardhan Kulkarni.
Chachi 420 (1997), dir. Kamal Haasan.