



The Performative Body in Ibsen's *A Doll House* and Saput's *Sakambari*: Rebellious and Reclaiming Women's Power Dynamics

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Abstract

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House*, directed by Bernice Garfield-Szita and Prakash Saput's *Sakambari* showcase a similar performative body of women, resisting the patriarchal societal system despite having existed in two distinct spatiotemporal contexts. In this light, the paper comparatively examines the performative bodies of Nora in *A Doll House* and Sakambari in *Sakamabari* to analyze how their body acts serve as a site of submission and resistance simultaneously. In doing so, the study employs qualitative methods, mainly textual analysis for visual texts, lyrics, and dialogues in a multi-modal approach, using the Butlerian concept of gender performativity, "not biology but culture," and the Foucauldian concept of body and sexuality. It examines how the performing bodies epitomize submissive and resistive agencies for autonomy and justice. Nora's and Sakambari's performative bodies in different phases – the plain, commodified, and beyond – in one way to another challenge the masculine disposition and advocate for liberation. The analysis reveals that the two characters employ contrasting approaches to resisting the existing social structure. Nora exhibits direct submission and defiance, while Sakambari explicitly submits and implicitly resists. While both of them challenge the status quo of society, the performative bodies in different layers of resistance empower them to contest patriarchal societal foundations even though their paths to liberation differ from one another.

Keywords: Gender inequality, gender performativity, performative body, feminist resistance

Introduction

In tracing the route of feminist resistance and discourse, Ibsen's *Doll House* [Play] directed by Bernice Garfield-Szita, and Prakash Saput's *Sakambari* [Nepali music video] as seminal works transcending the spatial-temporal and cultural boundaries pose profound insights into gender politics and dynamics. The portrayal of Nora in *A Doll House* in the nineteenth century and Sakambari in *Sakambari* in the twenty-first century

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offer a similar form of embodied conformation and resistance for liberation. Although they belong to two different epochs, both of them face similar kinds of predicaments imposed by the male authority. Nora who turns a loyal housewife into an independent rebel in the domestic sphere, and a young girl, Phoolmaya who journeys from a village to the city to fulfill her dream of being a successful actor characterize female protest in a silent and loud voice intermittently against male chauvinism through bodily acts, ordeals, and transformations. The docile Phoolmaya in the country turns into a glamorous and colorful Sakambari in the city, while the ideal Nora transforms herself into a resolute rebel. As a result, Sakambari's decent body gets metamorphosized into the commodified one in the town, subsequently being a transformed body, whereas Nora's dolly body changes into a liberated one. Both of them undergo happiness, agony, perseverance, and inner realization each day, and the world they live in and confront transforms their decent and fetish body into tolerant, and liberated bodies.

Against this backdrop, the study explores the performative body of Nora and Sakambari, embodying a site of submission and resistance to the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries male-dominated society. Nora's performative body in two phases –the enchained in the city and liberated in beyond, and Sakambari's in three distinct phases – a modest body in the country, a fetishized in the town, and a transformed body, beyond herald the pursuit of subverting the dominant practices and culture. Delving into the issue, the paper centers on two primary research questions: (a) How do the body performatives of Nora and Sakambari disrupt the foundation of the male-centered society in different phases and different spatiotemporal contexts? (b) In what ways do their bodily acts and performative challenge the prevailing societal norms for female rights and liberation?

Literature Review

For long, scholars have researched the multi-layered relationship between women's bodies and the male-centric societal structure in which the body performatives have been shaped by socio-cultural values. This research delves into examining the performative body of female protagonists – Nora and Sakambari. To understand how women's bodies represent social values and expectations, Judith Butler's concept of performativity is a critical lens that she discusses in *Gender Trouble*. She argues, "the gendered body, although it does not hold 'ontological status,' is performative and that it consists of several acts that shape reality" (185). Bodily acts in different situations are the performative bodies that constitute the reality one perceives and experiences. The political and cultural intersection embeds 'gender' within its structure to assign performatives and roles to display in social interactions. Women's bodies become unique sites upon which societal rules and codes are inscribed. In this respect, Grosz argues that "the traditional way knowledge is produced ignores the body, especially the female body, which empowers the existing patriarchal system to control knowledge. If we acknowledge the body, particularly the women's body, as a source of knowledge, challenge and transform the system" (187-88). The sexed body can change how we approach knowledge and who has the right to produce it.

Ibsen's *A Doll House* presents Nora's expedition from an innocent to a realized one that makes her understand how she has been treated as a "doll" by her husband and society. As a result, that realization, culminating in her act of defiance by leaving her home, has been analyzed by the scholar Joan Templeton, who asserts that "Nora's struggles against societal expectations and her ultimate defiance are core feminist themes" (28). Julie Holledge et. al. reveal a recurring theme of female rebellion by portraying Nora's symbolic protest "to leave her husband and her children, educate

herself, and strive to live as a self-determining human being" (6). Interestingly, this transgressive portrayal was absent in productions featuring female dancers. Only the final section of this study offered a critique of how the female body has been historically depicted in Western art.

The music video *Sakamabari*, directed by Prakash Saput, gained significant public attention. It sparked both criticism and acclamation at the same time since its release on 13 April 2023. Being the number one trending video on YouTube for several months, it rocketed with more than fifty-eight million views within a year. The impact of the video has been extended beyond Nepal, generating discussions and debates among Nepalis from diverse backgrounds and locations because of socially unanticipated the heroine's body performativity, and her bold relationship with the males. Sugam Gautam observes that "Saput's *Sakamabari* brings him into 'the spotlight' in two ways: accusing him of 'objectifying women' and 'failing to justify women characters' on the one hand while 'lauding him for bringing the masterpiece to life' (1) on the other. The social opinions and audiences towards the body performative in the video divide them into two poles: the supporters and the opposers of the body performative of *Sakamabari*. Rina Muktan asserts that the characterization of women in the video generates two types of notional discussions. One section of society asks why object to the issues of the society depicted in the video, while the other section questions whether the characters and subjects depicted are not politically justifiable (m trans.; 2). The divided public opinion on the song and the body performative of *Sakamabari* emerged from the non-conformist body exposure and exhibition along with the deliberate actions. The socio-cultural structure shaped by the patriarchal values in Nepal implicitly seems neither to deny nor to accept non-conformist body acts.

While extensive research prevails on *A Doll House* and very few on *Sakamabari* on feminist issues and representations, there exists a research gap in scholarship specifically comparing Nora from nineteenth-century Europe to *Sakamabari* from contemporary South Asia, Nepal in terms of their body performatives to rebel against the dominant social system. The comparative analysis illuminates the universal explicit and implicit rebellion against the male dominant power structure and how these struggles are manifested through the performative body across cultures and epochs. The study provides deeper insights into the specific challenges women face in nineteenth-century Europe and contemporary Nepal. The exploration of the body performatives of two female protagonists from the feminist perspective builds existing scholarship on gender performativity, women's submission and resistance in the play, and the music video. It sheds light on how performative bodies serve as stagnant, neutral, and dynamic political trajectories to attain liberation across cultures and times.

Body Performativity and Sexuality: A Theoretical Perspective

This study adopts qualitative methods, focusing on visual discourse analysis and textual analysis employing Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Michel Foucault's notion of body and sexuality. In this regard, Butler argues that "the notion of sex and gender challenges the male-centered idea that biology determines one's destiny. It is the cultural values that construct gender, suggesting that it is not causally dependent on sex and is not as fixed" (8). By expressing heretical ideas and exhibiting unconventional performatives about gender norms and values that are inscribed in the gendered body, the performative body of Nora and *Sakamabari* claim and reclaim their agency to resist the power dynamics. Foucault states, "Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a

linchpin, for the most varied strategies" (103). Sexuality functions as a flexible tool while power dynamics operate in complex ways. The sexual body performative can manipulate situations in many ways to achieve goals. It can play a key element retaining different power plays together. Regarding how bodies play a significant role in shaping the ways one performs, Butler asserts, "The body is not only the site of such a history but also the instrument through which the belief in contemporary obviousness is reconstituted. Thus, it operates magically, but in the same sense that Bourdieu reserves for the operation of the performative" (Excitable Speech 153). The bodies do not just carry societal values and expectations, they are also actively involved in forming codes and conducts of social norms. The performative body builds up a sort of social magic similar to the way Bourdieu defines performativity where bodily acts reinforce the practice of what they simply appear to reflect.

The performative bodies integrate speech with body involvement for the meaning one intends to convey at individual and institutional levels. Butler further maintains, "That the speech act is a bodily act does not mean that the body is fully present in its speech. The relationship between speech and the body is that of a chiasmus. Speech is bodily, but the body exceeds the speech it occasions, and speech remains irreducible to the bodily means of its enunciation" (55-56). Butler implies speech is intertwined with the body, but bodies convey deeper meaning beyond what words articulate, producing a complex interplay in which neither of the two completely assimilates the other. Foucault argues, "The politics of the body does not require the elision of sex or its restriction solely to the reproductive function; it relies instead on a multiple channeling into the controlled circuits of the economy –on what has been called a hyper-repressive desublimation" (114). The traditional values confine female sexuality solely to reproductive functions. The concept of sexuality by Foucault emphasizes channeling female sexuality into controlled economic circuits. The 'hyper-repressive desublimation' directs women's desires toward specific behaviors that benefit the economy. This idea highlights sexuality is not just a personal matter, but a site where power is exercised to control women's bodies and behaviors. The idea of disciplining the body and sexuality gets disrupted by the covert and overt resistance of Nora and Sakambari. The embodied defiance they wage on disrupts the idea that there exists a single normal way for women to be sexual beings.

Apart from performative and the notion of body and power, the paper utilizes the multi-modal approach to analyzing the visual and narrative lyrical texts as proposed by Gunther Kress and van Leeuwen, who argue that "not only the cinema and the semiotically exuberant performances and videos of popular music but also the avant-gardes of the 'high culture' arts have begun to use an increasing variety of materials and to cross the boundaries between the various art, design, and performance disciplines towards multimodal Gesamtkunstwerke¹ multi-media events" (1). The multimodal approach pervades from high culture to popular culture, transcending the boundary while analyzing single or multiple texts from diverse disciplines for inherent themes and meaning. The visual discourses of the performative body in the form of screenshots and photographs accompanied by dialogues, narratives, and lyrics in the play and the music video additionally function as the data. For the analysis, *Sakambari's* narratives and lyrics have been transcribed and translated from Nepali to English.

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Saput's *Sakambari*: Critical Analysis

Ibsen's *A Doll House* directed by Bernice Garfield-Szita, and Saput's *Sakambari* reflect similar struggles of women and powerful critique of gender roles. Nora in *A Doll House*, who transforms from a compliant wife into a defiant rebel challenges social

values in the domestic sphere through overt performativity while Sakambari in *Sakambari* who journeys from village to city contests the social expectations through a covert performative body. Sakambari transforms her docile body in the country into a commodified one in the city to defy the socio-cultural values. However, both protagonists struggle against male authority and societal constraints on women through physical transformation and performative bodies. The journey both of them embark on depicts a universal contestation of female liberation despite their belonging to two distinct spatial-temporal and socio-cultural settings. The submissive housewife, Nora turns herself into a resistive rebel, while Sakambari's performative leads her from being a subservient girl to a subversive change agent. In both works, both female protagonists stand out as rebellious figures to subvert the existing socio-cultural values. Nora boldly advances the direct body performative to resist her husband, who stands for the social values of time, while Sakambari uses her body to subvert the existing social structure.

Submissive Embodiment: Performing Domesticity

Both Nora and Sakambari's performative bodies initially conform to societal expectations. Being an obedient wife, Nora's fashionable clothing and playful nature mirror her as a doll expected by her husband while Sakambari's simple attire and domestic chores in the village reflect her role within the domestic sphere, prioritizing family needs and being expected to perform physical labor. Although Nora lives in the city as a dutiful wife and Sakambari in the village as a dutiful daughter, both represent the expected feminine characteristics of both societies. The following images show how both of them conform to social expectations through the submissive embodiment.



Fig. 1. Nora busies with household chores (00:01:00)



Fig. 2. Phoolmaya performing domesticity (00: 08:00).

In Fig. 1 and 2, Nora and Phoolmaya embody a form of submissiveness to existing socio-cultural structures despite their distinct spatiotemporal locations in contrasting body performances. The first image shows Nora's joy in a cozy room of the city house that seems dependent on her husband's success. In contrast, the second, working in the rural cowshed reflects Sakambari's hardship of complying with what the parental authority asks her to do. Nora's beautiful dress-up and her posture and preparation to celebrate Christmas imply conformity to social expectations of femininity. In the cowshed, Phoolmaya's downcast eyes, plain clothing, and hard-working bent-down posture suggest her compliance with familial and societal expectations. Nora sees her happiness in fulfillment of her husband's achievement, while Sakambari finds it in both her parents. The closed space in the room decorated with art and paintings Nora lives with to wait for her husband shows the narrow world where she leads her life contingent on her husband. Similarly, a closed shot focusing on the domestic chores in an open space shows Sakambari's dedication to parental order and her dependency on her father.

As shown in Fig. 3 and 4, the images show the contrasting moods of the two characters though they demonstrate submissive embodied performative. Nora looks delighted while Sakmabari is gloomy. Nevertheless, both of them conform to the values and socio-cultural rules of patriarchy despite being two different contexts.



Fig. 3. Nora delighted with her husband (00:02:58)



Fig. 4 Sakambari looking outside gloomy on a bus (00:01:53)

In Fig. 3, Nora's festive and delighted mood in the room, where open posture, smile, and quality clothes imply a life of comfort and ease. The delight grounds her husband's success in banking and financial careers, reflecting social expectations that a wife's happiness depends on her husband's success. The image manifests her husband's decision and choice, which condition her desire and the aims of her life. In contrast, in Fig. 4, Sakambari displays a miserable and gloomy face on the bus. Her image unfolds in a world far different from Nora's. The erasure of Phoolmaya and showing Sakambari in big letters signifies a loss of original identity and a transition into a new one. Lauren Langman argues that "acts of agency that challenge power dynamics, subvert established rules, and offer glimpses of the desired world through the use of body adornment and show that celebrates primitive can be interpreted as a form of resistance against economic inequality and the suppression of bodily freedom" (657). The body in adornment and performative as an agency that performs in different situations can play several roles as challenger and resistant to restore equality. In this way, both images deal with the submissiveness of female protagonists in contrasting ways. Nora delightfully performs her duties and daily chores following her husband's will and social codes, whereas Sakambari conforms to what the brother prescribes for her to do.

The shift of Phoolmaya from rural to urban symbolically marks a transition from embodied submission to resistance against the societal structure. This displays an inscribed gendered norm. As Jacqueline Coombe and Shannon N. Davis contend: "Gender ideology refers to what the individual's expectations of gendered roles are, derived part from intimate contacts with socialization" (212). The individual gender roles are framed by society as the conversation discloses the way gender roles play pivotal roles in shaping what males and females should do. As the mother says, "Babu, Phoolmaya has come under your patronage; you are there in the city from the village. It is said that city dwellers are not good. Young Phoolmaya as a flower might deviate from her path. Babu, kindly show her the righteous way. You would be blessed!" (00:00:42-00:00:56), in response, Babu [brother-in-law] says, "OK. Ok. Don't worry! I am with her" (00:00:41-00:00:59). The dialogue suggests a gradual shift from submissiveness to subtle dissent to authority. The mother's concern about her daughter's vulnerability in the city illustrates a sense of fear of her straying from social expectations while her decision to send her daughter on the journey encounters societal tradition.

The change in power dynamics from the mother at home to the brother-in-law in the city signifies a new form of dependency, transferring her agency from a known to an unknown domain. This paradox focuses on her ambivalence that she finds herself in a complex position, navigating between adhering to established norms and seeking new opportunities for her daughter. As Butler argues, "gender performativity shapes and constrains individuals within society" (189), the social norms of femininity as gender performative set Phoolmaya's body performative and trajectory from the country to the city. The role she plays in the country and city grounds on the gender performativity being confined in a particular periphery as determined by societal values. Similarly, Nora follows the pathway that society constructs for females. As a doll and easily manipulatable, Nora obeys what Helmer commands her to do or not to do in family affairs. The dialogues between Nora and Helmer unfold gender performative dynamics when Nora accepts, "As you please Torvald..." and in response, Helmer contends: "My little skylark, Nora! Guess what I have got. What is this? Nora guess what I have here. Nora: "Money!" (00:02:40-00:03:02). The dialogue displays the dynamic of the submissiveness of Nora through her gender performativity. Nora's immediate consent and Helmer's playful calling, such as 'little lark' and 'sulky squirrel,' indicate their adherence to societal scripture. Nora's hesitant tone and utter dependence embody submissiveness to her husband, while Helmer's dominance and authority of possessing money signify control over his wife. The performative body of both protagonists accompanied by language, gestures, and dialogues, reinforce the dominant authority of men over women.

Compliance to Challenge: Shifting Embodied Resistance

The performative body of Nora and Sakambari in different spatiotemporal contexts progresses along with the advancement of the plot. Both of them experience a phase where their bodies become commodified and their bodies become the tools for determining their identities. Sakambari seduces the director by saying, "Don't you offer me dinner?" (00:09:40-00:09:43) when the director proposes to her stating "I want you to launch in my music videos" (00:09:35-00:09:40). The body she exposes with glamor serves a tool to crumble the male ego as Foucault argues that the body functions a tool for the class to perform identity and class standing (124). The performative either in sexual or simple looks, shows up to the class and challenges the tradition. Nora, though seemingly free within her home, realizes she has been treated as a possession by her husband. She refutes her husband asserting, "You have never understood me and I have never understood you" (02:00:44- 02:00: 49). She performs to defy male-dominated values and attempts to establish her own identity. Nora directly contests male authority isolating herself while Sakambari defies assimilating to the existing social structure.



Fig. 5. Nora arguing with husband (00: 06: 52)



Fig. 6. Sakambari disrupting gender stereotype (00:06:52)

In Fig. 5 and 6, Nora and Sakambari in the consecutive images display a transition from submissive to a more emancipated embodiment. The path they take, however, differs from one another. Dale Pattison states that "the characters in Hurston's novel actively engage with the porch as a stage for performance, play, and creative verbal exchanges, breaking down traditional boundaries between private and public spaces and challenging established notions of blackness and gender" (13). Similar to the characters who play the roles undermining the canonical values, Nora and Sakambari move from submitting to resisting the conventional norms. Helmer and the brother are authorities who immediately permit them to underpin the existing power dynamic. Nora directly confronts her husband by holding her head high and contrasts her previous submissive posture. The assertive stance openly defies and potentially uses voice and body language to challenge the male authority. Her bodily and verbal resistance implies a confrontation with the power structure. Sakambari on the other hand reflects subtler and symbolic protest since her act of smoking with two men intervenes in the established social norms. Drinking with men indicates a potential social transgression and rebelliousness and the way Sakambari resists society seems strategic with the system itself. This aligns with Butler's point that "individuals perform gender roles and other identities according to societal norms that have been internalized and established through repetition" (191). Gender is not what something is fixed and born with, but rather a performative. Sakambari, however, does not conform to social expectations rather her body performance fits into the notion of fluid gender. The following images clearly show how performative bodies are shifting to resistance to masculine regimes.



Fig. 7. Nora distancing with her husband (01:53:12)



Fig. 8. Sakambari showcasing symbolic defiance (00:09:20)

According to Fig. 7 and 8, the two images present contrasting narrative experiences of women directing societal pressures and expectations. In the first image, Nora dissents with her husband creating a physical and emotional distance. This is not a complete break from the relationship but rather a challenge to the established tradition. She refuses to be a passive participant in her own life. This act of dissent, though confined to the domestic sphere, disrupts the idea of unquestioning obedience expected from a wife. In line with the idea of how body performative plays an important role in shaping and reshaping values, Naomi Jacobs states, "The body itself must be the locus of utopian and dystopian transformations, whether the transformation is to be brought about by liberating the body or by more effectively subduing it" (3). Body performatives are powerful forces that form societal values, functioning as a transformative platform where the body can be liberated or controlled, eventually manipulating the ways of the utopian or dystopian world. This rebellion of norms not only contests prevailing norms placed on women's bodies but also weakens the gendered power politics that sustain oppressive

apparatus. It is a seed of rebellion, a pushback against the order that dictates complete conformity to a husband's wishes.

Sakambari embodies a more radical form of resistance. The cigarette she smokes, a traditionally masculine symbol, becomes an instrument of claiming agency. Wearing a hat typically associated with the male character in the societal script is a symbolic act of rejecting prescribed roles. Tulasi Acharya argues that women in Nepal have been "othered" as the "second sex" though they develop their participation in politics, policy, and administration (197). Despite being othered in society, Sakambari disrupts the expectations associated with her femininity, whether dictated by societal norms or the confines of the script. In the interplay between submitting and resisting performative dynamics, Butler states that performativity "implies a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (190). The meaning-making process highlights how individuals meet societal expectations, encounter established norms, and pursue agency in shaping their identities and aspirations. The questions in the forms of lyrics the brother asks raise serious issues as to the Sakambari's body performativity:

An awakened desire for a sinful city

No limit to your own desires

The poison to crush religion

Gaudy-gaudy desire

Who bought you... Phoolmaya...? (my trans.; 3:51 – 4:35).

The lyrics challenge what she does not like questioning and exploring the nature of her performatives, such as her awakened desire for the sinful city, the boundless extent of her desires, the potential to dismantle religious conventions, and the vibrancy of her colorful desires. The culmination of these lyrics with the question, "Who bought you... Phoolmaya...?" (00:04: 35) adds another layer of significance to Sakambari's performative acts. It disrupts the assumption of ownership and control over her body and identity. Butler construes that "gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (191). The transformative potentiality of performative acts questions societal norms, fostering a reimagining of individual agency and autonomy. The importance of the body grew along the rise of the bourgeoisie system as the body is connected to labor value. Foucault argues that the real significance depends on how the capitalists shape the bodies through health measures and practices (125). The bourgeoisie frame the bodies of commoners to fulfill their goals of taking profits and exploiting the poor en masse. The common people especially Nora and Sakambari in turn being shaped by the bourgeoisie exert power and resistance to demolish the same system they grew up in and live.

In this relevance, the dialogue between Nora and Helmer illustrates how patriarchy and capitalism shape her that she realizes to protest. She says, "I have never felt so clear and certain in my mind as tonight"(02:07:45-02:07:49). In reply, Helmer utters, "You can say that?" (02:08:17). The bank manager, Helmer wants her wife to shape her as he wishes for the continuation of the tradition while Nora refuses to be confined within the framework of the society. The system of how she was framed makes her able to dismantle the same structure. She roars, "I don't love you any longer" which suggests she longs to be liberated from the bondage of the society. The expression reveals a subtle shift in her physicality. alludes to a direct verbal challenge to the authority. Jeremy Punt contends that "the body is shaped and influenced by the discursive practices of society. In contrast, simultaneously, the body internalizes and incorporates these practices, leading to the gradual inscription of societal culture onto the body" (363). The performative bodily act of Sakambari annihilates the power politics

inherent in the patriarchy, asserting her agency and rejecting the notion that her worth and value are contingent upon material possessions bestowed upon her by the males. Nora's embodied resistance, a combination of initial compliance followed by physical distancing and verbal refusal, marks a turning point in her relationship with Helmer. It is a subtle defiance, a herald of rebellion that eventually develops into a full-fledged rebellion.

Subtle Defiance to Overt Rebellion

Nora and Sakambari eventually defy societal expectations and claim agency and power through performative bodies. Nora decides to quit her marriage, seeking a life of self-realization and autonomy, while Sakambari reclaims her space and fights for her rights. However, the path of body performatives they take to liberation differs from one another. Deepthi Misri argues that "naked protests in India contribute to shaping and reshaping gender norms in the long run, although they don't impact immediately" (603). It is crucial to assess the nude protests as a valid means of women's protest in India, taking into account their impact on gendered norms and emphasizing the necessity of deconstructing the gender binary. Nora's bodily liberation relates to a conscious decision to break free from a stifling environment, while Sakambari's freedom might lead to a more gradual process of self-discovery and empowerment in a social structure. The images explicitly show how both protagonists resist the male-centric structure.



Fig. 9. Nora quitting her marital bondage (02:12:28)



Fig. 10. Sakambari defying the male authority (00:13:07)

The figures in Fig. 9 and 10 exhibit contrasting moments of women declaring their autonomy and dismantling societal constraints. Nora's resistance culminates in a powerful act of emancipated embodiment by removing her wedding ring and handing it over to her husband. This performative act refers to an open challenge to the male regime and her decision to break free from the marriage signifies being independent. As to bodily acts and performative both women in the images show, Praise Zenenga states, "Power of the body expresses different kinds of power, such as political power, intellectual power, spiritual power, physical power, social power, and even economic power" (65). The body can manifest and manipulate various forms of power, including political, intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, and economic growth. Both posture and demeanor further emphasize the new independence. The strength that comes from reclaiming control over her own life leads Nora to the path of freedom and equality. This act of defiance goes beyond mere rebellion; instead, it's a conscious decision to forge her path, free from the constraints of an unhappy marriage.

Sakambari represents a powerful form of resistance challenging the foundation of a male-dominated society. Although her defiance seems indirect and wavering, her occupancy in the entire frame and her confident posture, though gloomy, reflect the autonomy she seeks. In contrast, Dai/the brother tries to convince her to comply with

conventional values, but in vain, and he seems to be in the marginalized frame is clearly visible. The brother tries to stabilize the male regime by manipulating Sakambari though she protests against her will. Athena Nguyen stresses that "Butch feministsⁱⁱ need to not be an oxymoron, but a strategy for challenging domination and power" (665). Though 'butch' and 'feminist' seem contradictory, butch feminists argue that women can disrupt the power structure by embracing masculinity as a lesbian identity. In a similar vein, both Nora and Sakambari try to challenge the power structure by being in different positions and postures. Although the brother pleads for her to follow the path he paves, her gaze seems fixed forward and uninfluenced by him. This constant focus symbolizes her firm commitment to defying his expectations. It leaves no doubt that she questions the status quo, the very tradition of the society where males dictate to females. The image serves as a powerful symbol of female rebellion, indeed a battle for the space where women get empowered to make their choices. The defiance means a beacon of hope and reliance for gender equality and justice.



Fig. 11. Nora freeing herself (02:13:54)



Fig. 12. Sakambari reclaiming her autonomy and power (00:14:16)

In Fig. 11 and 12, both images display distinct forms of resistance in their own right, embodied by Nora and Sakambari. The first shows a resolute break from the confines of domesticity, while the second calculated play within the existing power structure. Nora's stance signifies physical and emotional detachment from the male regime. Her act of turning back towards her husband, Helmer, signifies a sort of disobedience and denial of the rules set by the men. The black clothes and scarf she wears indicate symbolic mourning for the life she's leaving behind. The clutching of her backpack refers to a metaphor for carrying the weight of her future, while Helmer's following posture portrays a desperate attempt to control the situation, a stark contrast to Nora's resolute stance. Nora reclaims her agency by refusing to engage with him. This body performative she shows signals her newfound strength and unwillingness to be swayed. Her resistance functions as an act of self-preservation, a necessary step towards forging an independent identity.

Sakambari's resistance, on the other hand, is a strategic politics within the existing power structure. The image portrays her confidence and self-assurance as she receives a call from an influential political figure. Regarding the notion of body performatives and politics, Marcela Fuentes scrutinizes, "the relationship between performance and politics from a broad spectrum of behaviors, subjects, and agents encompassing individual bodies as well as bodies in the acts of protest" (1). This implies that the intricate connection exists between performance and politics in which bodies, either individual bodies or bodies in protest, play crucial roles for specific purposes. Her lucrative attire and posture suggest an understanding of the game she's playing. As she questions being involved in politics, the hint of sarcasm in her expression implies a calculated decision, perhaps a way to leverage the situation for her benefit. Both Nora

and Sakambari represent potent forms of resistance against societal constraints. While their methods differ, both of them challenge the status quo and pave the way for a future where women have more control over their destinies. The dissidence that Sakambari puts forward unfolds:

SAKAMBARI: What men are you referring to, brother? What distinguishes you from these men? What difference? Tell me, what difference? Look here! You have benefited from my dreams. You have helped me. You have seduced me at a lower price! They have benefited from my vulnerability. They have paid a high price. It is the collective action of all of you that has overwhelmed me. (my trans.; 00:11:43- 00: 12.30).

In the narratives, Sakambari's body acts and exposure exert a decisive blow to the male-centered outlook for expressing her search for gender equality and justice. She solemnly questions the brother's judgment and interrogates the discrepancy between him and the men he criticizes. Here, Butler argues that "gender emanates from repetitive performatives within the social framework, indeed creating an illusion of natural and inherent identity, and the political analysis of gender dismantles the illusion by identifying and analyzing the regulatory forces that shape these performative acts" (45). This suggests that gender is constituted through recurrent performative actions within a social structure that gives an inherent identity to the members of the society in a sense, while the intuitive protest performative ruptures the political structure in another sense. Sakambari's performative expression and reply to the brother symbolize her rebellion against societal norms and her commitment to egalitarian culture. Her body's performative turns out to be an embodiment of resistance, annihilating the boundaries of conventional beauty principles.

In a similar case, the dialogue between Nora and Helmer justifies the overt rebellion against the existing societal structure. Nora says, "Listen Torvald! I have heard when a wife deserts her husband as I am doing now. He is legally free from all obligations Torvald. In any case, I free you from all obligations, you are not self-bound. You must be perfectly free from both sides. Here! Here is your ring!" Torvald replies, "Mine too?" (02:12:10-02:12:40). Nora's direct defiance against her husband equals resistance against the dominant social structure that has kept her confined and unfulfilled. Her initial compliance, juxtaposed with her reluctance and symbolic imagery, shows a struggle against imposed norms, culminating in a transformative moment of active resistance. Her decision to quit marriage and take back her wedding ring signifies the blow to male-centric values.

The analysis, on the whole, traces a trajectory of feminist resistance through bodily acts and performativity. The individual performative body subverts the male authority and conventional normalcy that imposes restrictions on the females. The same performative body of both protagonists, Nora and Sakambari embody submission and resistance to the existing social system simultaneously. The compliance both of them adopt transforms into embodied contestation. The 'doll' persona of Nora changes into a rebel, while the domicile body of Phoolmaya transforms into a fetish one to defy the social structure that engraves rules upon their bodies. The bodily transformation and their performativity become a powerful weapon to demolish male dominance. The act of disrupting domestic confinement by Nora and rejecting the constraints placed upon Sakambari's body shows the power of women's performative bodies to seek their autonomy and power dynamics.

Conclusion

Through an exhaustive analysis of the body performative images in conjunction with dialogue narratives and lyrics, the study has found that Nora's and Sakambari's body performative serve as a platform for conformity and resistance to the existing authority. The way they interact, perform, and behave through bodies with the male characters in the village, town, and beyond confidently challenges patriarchal norms and societal expectations, advocating for equality and justice. Based on the insights of Butler's theory of performativity and the Foucauldian notion of sexuality, the analysis of the performative acts further reveals that Nora's transformation and Phoolmaya's transformation into Sakambari from a rural to an urban setting signifying renewed identity formed and reformed by the societal rules dismantle the firm foundation of the dominant social structure. Nora and Sakambari claim and reclaim their agency despite facing the power politics of male chauvinism. Their bodily acts subvert the foundational structure of the patriarchal regime with repeated patriarchal oppression and objectification.

The resistance succeeding from submission they employ as a weapon in the gendered battle to inactivate the live prejudices of the system paves the way for gendered equality and justice. This results in the rupture of the orthodox norms of the gender binary by featuring their normative and non-normative body, embracing bold gender behavior, and actively challenging the rigid boundaries constructed for women in personal and public spaces. The essence of the paper is to expose how an individual body performative jeopardizes social normalcy and disrupts the patriarchal tendency that commodifies/objectifies women. The study illustrates the transformative prospects of body performance, significantly contributing to the continuing discourse on gender issues. The insight makes an essential contribution to the issues of gender roles, gender equality, and social justice. It also opens up a new avenue for new researchers from the multi-modal perspectives as the paper interprets performative acts in images, dialogues, and lyrics simultaneously to innovate new meanings and new directions.

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ⁱ A work of art that utilizes all forms or many forms of art and styles.

ⁱⁱ Butch feminism refers to a type of feminism that defines femininity through the lesbian expression of masculinity.