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### **Mythic Women as Working Metaphors: Gender Politics and the Ideal, Social, and Sexual Woman in Nepali Lived Experiences**

Hindu cultures in South Asia construct complex notions of woman: simultaneously valorized and downgraded as triple identity: submissive-ideal, family-social, and consumer-sexual. The underlying structure which determines such representations comes from a wide range of cultural pockets, with myth, religious codes, and contemporary visual media such as popular cinema and commercials being the three main sources of representation of women. Sita of the epic *The Ramayana*, wife of Rama, is the source of woman as ideal-submissive. The epic is paradoxically widely known but not widely read, both familiar and distanced in Hindu cultural locations. The text is very familiar, not in its written original but through its everyday popular (re)depiction in popular festivals, tales, and family instructions to girls to be like Sita. Thus Sita is a text that is everywhere and nowhere, a ubiquitous but unlocated template of ideal womanhood. The second female archetype, the family-social woman, is enacted in popular cinema of South Asia in feature films in Hindi, Panjabi, Gujrati, Bengali and many regional languages. The Nepali case is not different. Cinema is as ubiquitous and dominant a source for being a moral woman as the mythical Sita. Soap operas (or “serials” as they are known in Nepal) project the same family oriented ideal woman whose sphere is happily restricted to the home. This is the famous Nora image before she leaves home. Finally, the consumer-sexual identity comes from multiple sources. One significant location is the woman’s body itself as the site of pleasure and violence (rape), the provoking commercial body, and the post-politically correct legitimization of employing the female body for women’s empowerment. In this paper I explore the three female archetypes and how they operate in the lived experiences of gender politics in Nepalese society.