



# IMAP Reader

## A Collection of Essays on Art and Theatre in Kathmandu

Edited by **Sanjeev Uprety & Robin Piya**

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# Introduction

The Interactive Mapping and Archive Project (IMAP) was inaugurated in March 2009 with the aim of mapping the cultural spaces of the Kathmandu Valley, especially in terms of fine arts and theatre. The main goals of the project were to preserve the materials concerning the art and theatre of the Valley by digitizing them, and to provide a digital database for artists, scholars, art students, and researchers. Following these aims, IMAP generated more than one hundred and fifty database profiles of key institutions and selected artists, which include a brief description of the artist or institution, photographs, catalogues, reviews, video interviews (about 150 hours of footage so far), and other related materials.

In addition, IMAP purposed to bring together people from various walks of life—including painters, theatre artists, urban planners, and architects—to open a dialogue about the cities of Kathmandu. With this aim, fellowships were given to scholars working in the fields of contemporary theatre and art, as well as traditional art forms such as Mithila, Poubha, and Punjya. Other fellowships were given to scholars studying architectural and sociocultural aspects of the city. This publication includes essays by IMAP fellows, as well as other scholars, who used materials in the digital archive to write about the cities of Kathmandu and their art and theatre forms.



IMAP also organized workshops and talks under an ongoing project titled “Artists in the City.” IMAP’s workshops and discussion forums raised important questions concerning the urban spaces of the Valley and the aesthetic practices in those spaces. These included questions related to the issues of modernity, globalization, and urbanization: How have reproductions of foreign plays shaped the modern spaces of Nepali theatre? What is the relationship between theatrical practices and donor agencies in the context of globalization? What is considered “normal” in the post-Jana Andolan Nepali modernity? The essays included in this volume try to answer some of these questions.

Pratima Sharma’s essay on Nepali theatre studies the constructions of normalcy and stigma in contemporary plays. Her paper begins with a brief mapping of the history of Nepali theatre and goes on to analyze how stigmatized subjects—including widows, women with disabilities, the mentally ill, and those belonging to a third gender—are represented in Nepali theatre. By discussing plays such as *Bahula Kajiko Sapana*, *Talak Jung Bharses Tulke*, *Psychosis*, *Miss Margarida*, *Ugly Duckling*, *Green Finger*, *Inside the Brain*, and *Ghanchakkar*, she studies the politics of exclusion and inclusion that shape their representations of stigmatized characters.

Amrita Gurung, meanwhile, investigates the role of female theatre performers and the gender barriers they have constantly redefined since the days when female actors were discouraged from taking to the stage. She assesses how women’s theatrical roles have transformed from helpless and destitute to bold and outspoken, and she looks at how women have resisted both critics and societal norms. Gurung’s essay stands as a reference to the lives of early female performers and the challenges they posed to contemporary theatrical practices in Kathmandu.

Bal Bahadur Thapa's essay analyzes the nexus between theatre for social change and donor agencies. While many critics are of the opinion that the quality of Nepali drama has deteriorated because of this nexus, Thapa argues persuasively that it has had a positive impact on two major fronts: social transformation and the preservation of Nepali theatre in general. Discussing both the street plays of Sarwanam and Kachahari Natak of Aarohan Gurukul influenced by Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, he shows how the productions of these two major theatre groups have addressed social problems at the grassroots level. In addition, he also discusses how other theatre groups such as Bageena Samuha (Surkhet), SEED Nepal (Parbat), Kalika (Kapilvastu), Anaam (Dharan), Narayani Kalamandir (Chitwan), and DABALI, and M.Art Theatre, Shilpee, and Kusum (all based in Kathmandu) have partnered with donor agencies to produce plays addressing current social issues. According to Thapa, such a partnership not only allows the theatre groups to contribute toward social transformation, but also helps them survive, especially because they are not supported by the state.

Prakash Subedi has studied Nepali adaptations of foreign plays by analyzing Gurukul's reproductions of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Albert Camus's *The Just (Assassins)*. *Putaliko Ghar*, the Nepali version of *A Doll's House*, was performed at a time when the call for women's rights and equality was being raised for the first time in Nepali society, while *Nyaya Premi*, the Nepali translation of *The Just (Assassins)*, was enacted before the backdrop of the Maoists coming to the political mainstream after a decade-long guerilla war. While Sunil Pokhrel, the director of Arohan Gurukul, took liberties in adapting *A Doll's House* and turned it into a typical Nepali play, *Nyaya Premi*, on the other hand, was presented

as a completely foreign play. Subedi concludes that while it is better to adapt foreign plays as much as possible to local contexts, the political backdrop against which *Nyaya Premi* was staged must have made it difficult to give a Nepali coloring to Camus's play about Russian revolutionaries trying to kill the czar's uncle.

Other interesting questions were raised during IMAP's workshops, discussion forums, and artist interviews. These included questions concerning not only modernity in the arts and humanities, but also the definition of modernity itself in relation to art. While art critics like Mukesh Malla insist upon the need to categorize art into groups such as "modern art," "traditional art," and "postmodern art," artists like Shankar Raj Suwal and Sashi Bikram Shah reject the validity of such neat divisions. Suwal argued during an IMAP interview that all forms of art that are being produced now—including traditional Poubha, modernist painting, performance art, and installation art—should be considered under the rubric of "contemporary art." Well-known Poubha artist Udaya Charan Shrestha similarly questioned the borders separating contemporary and traditional art. While Poubha, like Punjyan, is considered traditional, it is important to note that artists like Udaya Charan and Deepak Kumar Joshi often create Poubha with a modern flavor. Is it possible, then, to describe Poubha artists like Charan and Joshi as "contemporary" Poubha painters? How are they different from traditional Poubha painters like Lok Chitrakar? Does the field of contemporary Nepali art include all current forms of aesthetic production, whether traditional or modern in nature?

While the essays included in this volume do not answer all these questions, they try to illuminate specific aspects of various contemporary art forms. Archana Thapa, for example,

has analyzed a performance by artistit Ashmina Ranjit to show how art can function as a tool of cultural intervention, and how aesthetic forms—such as performance art and installations—can raise important questions regarding the female body and the cultural ideologies that construct femininity.

In her essay, Thapa studies Ranjit's solo performance "Search Inter-definite: No result found" held at Siddhartha Art Gallery in the last week of August 2008. She argues that Ranjit's two-hour-long silent performance not only centered on the themes of social gendering and sexuality but also sought to "reclaim woman's personal experience in between the frames of socially defined roles and rules." She contends further that the performance proposed a strategy of cultural resistance "by showing that one is not born a woman, but becomes one through a reiteration of rituals—like putting bindi on the forehead daily—associated with femininity."

Promina Shrestha's essay similarly discusses the technical changes that have occurred in the field of Poubha painting. Traditionally, Poubha required artists to perform a certain ritual before commencing work. As this form of painting was considered a means of meditation, artists needed to clean themselves—physically and mentally—before they could begin. Brushes were mostly made from bamboo, with sheep, goat, or calf hair fixed to them, and an artist's line drawing needed to be proportionate and follow the conventions of iconographic and symbolic representation. Such conventions were passed from scholarly masters to pious pupils, and the knowledge was kept within a closed circle.

Shrestha argues that a number of changes have occurred over the last few decades. These days, artists use readily available brushes from the market rather than making them from bamboo and animal hair; the ritual practices of mantra

and worship do not accompany the painting process; teachings and techniques are openly passed to the students; and most Poubha have become aesthetic and lost their religious function. While Shrestha laments the decline of traditional materials and techniques, she concludes her essay by saying that for the survival of Poubha it is essential that it adapts—changes should be welcomed, but the customs should not be forgotten.

A number of artists also spoke during the interviews about how misdirected modernization has led to an uneven development in Kathmandu, unleashing chronic inequality and poverty. Similar sentiments were also expressed by urban planners, architects, and engineers like Sudarshan Tiwari and Biresh Shah, who were invited to the IMAP workshops.

The rapidly expanding metropolitan limits of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and Kirtipur are merging these historically autonomous areas into a multicentered metropolitan region. Problems of over-urbanization are prevalent in many concentrated areas of the city. Overcrowding has strained local resources, depleting them in many cases. A massive supply of labor from peripheral areas has led to a rarity of regular, full-time jobs, a high unemployment rate, a depression of wages, underemployment, and an under-utilized labor force. The rapidly expanding city has no provision for urban infrastructure and collective-consumption commodities like public housing, education, and healthcare.

A number of questions were raised during the discussions between fine artists, theatre artists, urban planners, and architects:

- What is the historical relationship between Kathmandu (city) and the periphery (country)?
- How did Kathmandu emerge as a dominant space of

political, economic, and cultural activity in the nation-state of Nepal?

- How have dominant forces within the city and outside it created complex nexuses that connect the two spaces?
- How have progressive elements in Kathmandu been able to compensate or cope with the demands from the countryside (since it would be impossible to even conceive of a city like Kathmandu without the countryside)?
- What is the meaning of urbanization in the context of Kathmandu?
- What are the important factors changing the visible landscape (built environment) of the city?
- How are these changes brought about in terms of policy?
- Who are the stakeholders and what are their individual interests?

The last two essays in the volume try to answer some of these questions by focusing on two different urban spaces: Thamel and Kirtipur. Shiva Rijal's essay on Vikramshil Mahavihāra in Thamel studies not only the spatiocultural location of the *vihara* but argues that city planners should emulate similar structures in other spaces in order to create architecturally healthy cities. He concludes by saying that this *vihara* is not only representative of the strong socio-architectural forces of the past, but that it functions as a source of inspiration for the cities and its artists. In addition, the *vihara*—which refuses to be hired, rented, or transformed into yet another utilitarian piece of urban architecture—stands as a morally unconquerable space that remains “unconsumed,” unlike other spaces located in the midst of the tourist hub of Thamel.

Ramesh Rai's study of Kirtipur shows how the processes

# The Changing Ethos of Women in Nepali Theatre

■ AMRITA GURUNG

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Nepali theatre has evolved over the last sixty years in the decades since it gained independence from the 104-year-old Rana oligarchy in 1950. After 1950, it was natural for theatre to grow as a form of entertainment, as for many years the only other means was Radio Nepal, which was established in 1951. At the time, plays from Darjeeling and neighboring India were being staged in Nepal. Man Bahadur Mukhiya from Darjeeling staged *Ani Deurali Runcha* during the mid seventies. (Subedi 2006, 139) The staging of plays in Kathmandu from neighboring cities indicated the movement of people into the valley, and, indeed, the 1960s saw a rapid increase in migration from across Nepal into Kathmandu Valley. The influx of people belonging to diverse cultures and ethnicities from varied geographical locations led to the creation of a hybrid society. Today Kathmandu and its arts and culture can be seen as a microcosm of the whole nation as

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people from across the country have carved a niche for themselves, thus expanding the expression of individual art forms within the Valley's own Newari tradition.

The movement of people also meant the movement of genders. Women, like men, searched for their identity. The theatre garnered men and women alike into the field. However, Nepali theatre was born with the absence of women artists. For many years Nepali theatre was conducted without female performers for two main reasons. Firstly, it involved glamour, a vice not meant for women, and secondly, being an orthodox country, Nepal did not approve of women in the public arts or theatre. The involvement of women in songs and dances was limited to the mansions of the rulers. On the public stage, men played the part of women; they wore women's clothes, applied makeup, and readily slipped into female characters. Today Nepali theatre has come a long way, and the roles of women in Nepali theatre are changing.

### **Background**

It was only in 1950 that a young theatre actor, Shyam Das Vaishnav, directed and translated the Hindi play *Ratan*, introducing for the first time two women, Chunu Devi and Buddhi Devi, to the stage. (IMAP interview with Vaishnav.) Vaishnav had to get the consent of Buddhi Devi's family before she could perform, and he was only given permission under one condition: someone had to take charge of her. A man named Mitra Bahadur (a theatre actor) declared Buddhi Devi to be his wife, therefore giving people involved in theatre the license to cast women in a play for the first time. (Vaishnav.) What started as a fresh beginning for women in theatre, however, ended on a rather disappointing note. There is an assumption that Buddhi Devi was stigmatized by society because she was



involved in the play. The last thing Vaishnav heard about her was her untimely death, which was linked to an overdose of deworming medication. (Vaishnav.) It is not known whether she committed suicide or whether it was just an accident.

Others, however, contest this story of the introduction of women into Nepali theatre. Living Nepali theatre legend Prachanda Malla writes in his latest book, *Kantipurko Rangamanch*, that in 2004 BS (1947 AD) a theatre troupe from Dillibazar asked permission from then prime minister Padma Shumsher to bring women into Nepali theatre for the first time. In 2005 BS (1948 AD) the troupe found a woman named Buddhi Devi Dangol from Naxal, but she would not act until she got married to her boyfriend, Kute. Kute, though, did not have enough money to marry Buddhi Devi, so the troupe collected the funds for their marriage. (Malla 2009, 156) In her late teens Buddhi Devi got the main role in the play *Swargiya Milan* opposite the actor Hari Prasad Rimal. (Malla 2009, 156) Malla writes that just after this Buddhi Devi did a play called *Ratan*, which was translated from Hindi. In addition to Buddhi Devi, the play featured actor Shyam Das Vaishnav and the writer Chittaranjan Nepali.

Still another account of the first woman actor is told: according to Govind Bahadur Malla, “Gothale,” Buddhi Devi was brought to the theatre only after a man, to whom she was already married, accepted her as his wife on paper. (Malla 2009, 157) Unfortunately, not enough is known about Devi to determine which tale is correct, and her true story remains uncertain.

The tragic death of Buddhi Devi indicated that the entry of women into Nepali theatre was not sustainable, and women were ultimately not welcomed onstage by society. Fortunately, the show did not stop there, and women artists like

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Shanti Maskey (*Pharkera Herda*, 1976), Shakuntala Gurung Sharma (*Pharkera Herda*, 1976), and Shanti Adhikari (*Prahlad*, 1965) took up theatre as a full-time profession. This opened the doors for newcomers and allowed more vibrancy and richness to Nepali theatre due to the participation of women. Today there are many women in the theatre with a determination to make it in the field.

Since theatre was traditionally considered a source of entertainment rather than a profession, the taboos surrounding women involved in theatre were obvious, and in many cases female performers were not appreciated for their skill. In her teens, Shakuntala Gurung (Sharma) used to be beaten and threatened by her parents for her involvement in plays. (Ghimire, 2009, 104) Meanwhile, Nisha Sharma recalls that her family was supportive enough. (Subedi 2006, 180) Sarita Giri (*Miss Margarita*), Aruna Karki (*Tara Baji Lai Lai*), Diya Maskey, and Pashupati Rai are a few of the current full-time actors at Aarohan Gurkul, a contemporary theatre group based in Kathmandu. About these actors who have made acting their profession, Subedi writes, "Their versatility and their ease, confidence make them capable of playing roles in plays from the classical to the postmodernist orders with the same degree of ease and expressionistic projections of moods." (Subedi 2006, 180)

#### Scope and Structure of Research

My research attempts to highlight the changes in the portrayal of women in Nepali theatre by first studying two female characters from both old and new plays. Second, the paper will examine the two women protagonists closely and illustrate what makes them prominent women characters in Nepali theatre. For this purpose, I have specifically chosen

to look at Gopal Prasad Rimal's magnum opus, *Masan* (The Graveyard, 1945), and Professor Abhi Subedi's *Agniko Katha* (Fire in the Monastery, 2004). These two plays have been instrumental in changing the roles of women in Nepali theatre.

## **Masan: The Changing Ethos of Women**

### *Summary*

*Masan* was written by Gopal Prasad Rimal (1918-1973) in the 1940s, but was not staged until several years after its publication. (Subedi 2006, 173) The play was directed and performed by renowned theatre personality of the time, Hari Prasad Rimal, at the Rastriya Nach Ghar in 1976. Staging the play was in itself a big affair since it introduced a new avatar of woman on stage: a rebellious role, uncharacteristic of plays from that period. The play is regarded as the most influential masterpiece of the time in that it not only defied social norms but proved to be the major breakthrough for subsequent women artists. The play brought a sort of revolution to the theatre scene, which for the very first time casted and portrayed a woman as a real hero. The two protagonists were portrayed as outspoken and headstrong people, indicating the changing ethos of women in Nepali theatre. The play reflected the changing mindsets of individuals and collective society in general.

*Masan* is the story of a wife who has failed to give birth to a child. Frustrated and forlorn, one day she asks her husband to marry again so that she can have a child, if not biologically. Her husband, Krishna, marries for his wife's sake, and he and his second wife have a baby. But is justice served to the second wife? The first wife finds out that she

has not able to get pregnant because her husband has secretly been giving her pills that have prevented her from getting pregnant. The play concludes with the first wife leaving her husband, and the second wife dying (Rimal, 2002).

### *Analysis*

*Masan* is a social play. The story is developed within the periphery of a family's desires. The story is about the desire to have a son, the desire to have a beautiful wife, and the desire to exercise one's rights as a wife and as a mother. The three protagonists—the first wife, the husband, and the second wife—present the societal needs of humans. As a social critique, *Masan* digs into the social facades concerning the needs and wants of people in general to make it through their everyday lives. Several major incidents in the play, described below, support my claim that the roles of women in Nepali theatre are changing.

"Even if I marry again and have a son he would not be your son," says the husband. "When I can't give birth how can I have a son? It is sufficient that it is your blood and I will be very happy. He will be closer to us than our nephew," replies the wife. "Yes, he will be close to us, and he will also be your step-son." (Rimal 2002, 4-5) The conversation between the husband and the wife makes it clear that the situation of the wife is very desperate. In Nepali society, sons are given priority over daughters, as sons carry the legacy of a family and father new generations unlike daughters who are married off to other families. "Childless women are seen as frustrated mothers, as somehow incomplete, condemned to a marginal life. Having children is seen as women's ultimate goal, irrespective of whatever else they may have achieved in life, so that the lack of children often has to be explained

by some problem—the woman’s psychological inadequacies or her lack of feminine qualities.” (Abbot and Wallace 1997, 130) It is because of this belief that a woman must beget a child, and more importantly beget a son, that the first wife persuades her husband to marry again. And it is because of this that she is willing to mother a child that is not her own. The desperation of the woman to have a child points to the pressures women bear from family members and society. It is her fear of and insecurity about what society will think if she cannot have a child that drives the wife. A man marrying for the second or third time is not a big issue in Nepali society, but a wife begging her husband to get married again is not just ridiculous but unthinkable. Her desperation and frustration only make her more determined. Sharpe says, “Young women tend to regard marriage as a main concern and to find their expectations shaped entirely by marriage, which for them is a career.” (Abbot and Wallace 1997, 112) When the wife says to her husband, “It is sufficient that it is your blood and I will be very happy,” it shows the dissatisfaction within her of not being able to bear a child, which according to her will only vanish if she gets the blood of her husband. As one reads the lines, one cannot help but feel sorry for the woman; what looks like ridicule in the first few lines gradually forms into an inevitable self-obsession to be the mother of the blood that is not her own.

The role of the woman is manipulated, twisted, and turned to suit the story. The woman is headstrong one minute, then weak and self-pitying the next. The changing role of women can surely be traced in the numerous acts the woman takes up—from getting her husband remarry to tolerating a new woman in the house; the first wife has been decisive and has suffered, too. Dr. Keshab Prasad Upadhyaya writes, “Masan

marks the third stage of the development of Nepali theatre. The play also brings reality and the rise of the feminist perspective in the theater." (Upadhaya 2004, 22-3)

There is another incident where the second wife is fed up with the way she is treated with sympathy by the first. She is also fed up with the husband who only maintains a physical relationship with her. She is the mere puppet of a man who lied to her (that his first wife was sick) and made her bear a son only to take him away. Unable to fight for her rights as the second wife of the house, she simply gives in. In one of the arguments with the first wife she protests, "I'm not a child that I can't take care of myself. I too respect myself. But please stop looking at me with sympathy." She adds, "You don't give me sympathy. I'm the mother of my son. I too have some rights in this house. I want my rights, I want justice, not sympathy." The new bride's strong protest to the ways she is looked down upon in her own house suggests the change in the typical roles one can find in Nepali plays. If she had truly given in to the way she was treated she would not have dared to speak her mind; she would not have summoned enough courage to point out their mistakes. That this character knew and felt she was looked down upon and that she protested against the whole family shows that the role of women in Nepali plays was (and is) gradually changing.

On the other hand, when the first wife finds out that she was being cheated by her husband, devastated and full of pity for herself, she asks for the new bride's forgiveness. "I thought I was being loved, but in reality it was suffering. More than you it was me who had the injustice." (Rimal 2002, 59) After this we realize that both the women protagonists are the victims of domestic violence. They have similar stories and sufferings. "Patriarchal ideologies have the effect

of disguising the actuality of male-power. Males define themselves as powerful because of their ability to master nature—to be dominant. Women because of their biological role in reproduction are defined as being closer to nature than men, thus justifying their domination by men.” (Abbot and Wallace 1997, 10) It is the husband’s attempt at domination over his two wives to demonstrate his masculinity that has led to their suffering. To put it crudely, they both are no more than sex objects to him. The husband wanted his wife to be forever an object of pleasure. “Women’s domestic and caring roles mean that they cannot be ill because they have to care for their families,” say Abbot and Wallace. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of these two female protagonists. It was the husband’s expectation that a wife should always care for him that led him to murder his second bride. It was because the husband wanted his first wife to give him pleasure forever that he gave her pills to stop her from becoming pregnant, as he feared that giving birth would lessen her beauty and he would no longer be able to get satisfaction from a worn-out woman. “Ageing itself is a problematic process for women in a society which values physical attractiveness as the defining feature of women,” state Arber and Ginn (Abbot and Wallace 1997, 129) It is because it is socially accepted that ageing decreases physical attractiveness that the husband feels he is entitled to prolong his wife’s ageing as long as possible.

But what we see in the main female protagonist of this play that supports the claim that the roles of women in Nepali theatre are changing occurs toward the end of the play. The first wife decides to leave her home and everything she owns behind and live on her own. Where is the wife going without her husband? “I’m not going to elope. I’m going alone. Women can stand on their own feet,” says the woman. “Yes,

I'm leaving. I cannot for a second live in this graveyard where women are dead while they are still alive." (Rimal 2002, 61)

## **Agniko Katha: Empowering Women**

### *Summary*

*Agniko Katha* (Fire in the Monastery) written by Professor Abhi Subedi was published in 2004. It is based on the lives of monks and nuns who take separate paths in life after a fire destroys their library. Its protagonists are women who fall and rise, but ultimately realize their potential. The realization of the two nuns to do something in their lives makes this play powerful. There are mainly three characters in this play. A nun named Purnima and a singing nun talk about their lives as nuns, their lives as women, and their past. Through their conversations on various topics relating to life and destiny, the play tells the personal stories of each character in the play. In 2003, the play was brought to the Aarohan Gurukul theatre by director Sunil Pokharel. It cast Nisha Pokharel as the main female character, Purnima, and Sarita Giri as the singing nun.

### *Analysis*

*Agniko Katha* is the answer to the question it attempts in the dialogical setting of its characters presented by the nuns and monks of a monastery. Highly influenced by the doctrines of Buddhism, the play seeks to find answers to the questions that arise from the need of its female characters to understand themselves. A take on the life of its central protagonist, *Agniko Katha* is intrinsically an interactive play that churns the varying moods and levels of the character and her needs. In all its dramaturgy, the play is seemingly a casual narrative that nonetheless brings out the issues of the present times



through the lens of a woman, one that elevates women to greater potentialities.

The nuns and monks are horrified by the commotion that arises after a library is destroyed by a fire in the monastery. Although it is often expected that they do not know the value of the books that have turned into ashes, it is evident that the members of the monastery are saddened by the knowledge that the words of Buddha have been lost. It is in this environment that the fears of the nuns are reflected. "What would others say if we stay as if nothing has happened?" asks Purnima. "So you want to worry because you're afraid what others might think of you," replies another nun. (Subedi 2004, 46) What Purnima says is the fear not just of her own but of women in general. What her line presents is the long-standing expectations of women's submissive role in society, which can become a threat if a woman does not behave as she is expected to. The latter line, meanwhile, can be said to present another dimension of women that is changing as it expects women to be who they are and not what simply is expected by other people. The portrayal of these two dimensions reflects the changing roles of women in Nepali theatre.

In yet another instance Purnima says that she feels like she wants to vanish from the place where she is praying. Her nun friend replies, "You should not feel like that. You know you're a nun. Otherwise you go and get married and have a family." Where will she go? "There is no place for me to go," asks Purnima. "How unusual this is! Buddha is everywhere, but if we leave this place and go outside then even he will have difficulty in looking after us. They say if we leave the monastery there won't even be God to look after us. Women therefore can't leave the monastery like men can easily." (Subedi 2004, 47) The dialogue makes the boundary between the public and

private sphere clear. "Masculinity (man) is equated with the public sphere; to be a man is to be a person who does important things outside the domestic sphere—who does man's work." (Abbot and Wallace 1997, 10) The manifestation of masculinity is present everywhere and the monastery is no exception. Nuns are expected to play the traditional roles of women, marrying and having children after they leave the monastery, while men can choose to live their lives as they like. Such divisions show the gaping inequality between men and women.

But *Agniko Katha* separates from the traditional role of women. When Purnima decides to leave the monastery in search of Gyan (her friend), she says, "I'm leaving to prove what a female nun can do in her life." (Subedi 2004, 79) It should be noted that Gyan, who is represented as a person, is metaphorically presented as wisdom. Documentary maker Shekhar Kharel writes in Nepal Magazine (2002) that the nuns and monks find themselves with the interpretation more than the meaning of the word gyan (wisdom) in the play. The nuns who set out on the journey in search of Gyan the person come back with "gyan" the wisdom. They return with the answers to the questions they sought to find, with the realizations of the translation of the words of Buddha that they saw burned in front of their eyes.

Purnima's leaving the monastery and willingness to face the real world tells a lot about the changing roles of women in Nepali theatre. "When the nun Purnima left the stage, she was asserting the power of a woman. This first journey of a woman inside Sama Thetare to search and prove the meaning of a woman's existence and her power heralds a new time for women," states Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi. (Risal 2004 in Subedi 2004) Purnima, who represents women in general, rises above the traditional norms and ethos as she takes

up the challenge to live up to the capabilities of a woman. Shiva Risal argues that the decision she takes in the play is a protest and demand of the time. (Risal 2004 in Subedi 2004) Purnima's character is important as it empowers women with a much-needed protest that highlights the issues of the present.

### **Comparison of *Masan* and *Agniko Katha***

The comparison between *Masan* and *Agniko Katha* leads to the conviction that the roles of women in Nepali theatre are changing. Although set in different time periods, they are both written in favor of women's rights, and they have women as their central protagonists. But there are differences, too, that must not be left out. First, *Masan* is a social play while *Agniko Katha* is based on the more personal plight of its characters. Second, *Masan* deals with the issues found and treated inside a home, within a family, whereas *Agniko Katha* deals with the individual issues of each character.

*Masan* tells a story about the members of a family where the happiness of each character is dependent on the other character. The first wife's happiness is dependent upon a child who is not hers; the husband's happiness is dependent on her youth and vigor; and the second wife's happiness is dependent on the cost of her own son. The husband's attitude toward the first and second wife is only concerned with pleasure, and this attitude reveals that he is objectifying his two wives. *Agniko Katha* on the other hand presents the needs of women that are much bigger than what Nepali society has presented them with. It reflects the challenges of women in modern times. In *Masan*, women struggle within the periphery of a household while in *Agniko Katha*, Purnima struggles with the outside world.

*Masan* conveys the story of husband and wife. It is a broken family when a wife has to share her husband with another, but it is even worse when two wives share not just a husband but a child, too. In this unspoken awkwardness, made difficult by a battle of claiming and owning the love and respect of family and society, *Masan* brings out the perverseness and vulgarity of Nepali society. It continues to challenge the people's conduct of yesterday and today.

Purnima, like many nuns, is suffering because she, like any other monk, lives in a monastery where she is cut off from the outside world. But nuns are usually deprived of the freedom that monks enjoy. Perhaps many of the nuns know about this indifference, that, although they lead a similar life in the monastery, they are curtailed from the freedom of monks. This is why Purnima, in her consolation, says to Gyan: "For me this is the world. This is the place where my father brought me after my mother died, this is my world. My world is not as free as yours. I'm a woman. A nun is a woman too. I've friends here. Here my sun rises and sets. For me this is the world not a prison." (Subedi 2004, 45) For women everything is set; there is no other option than for Purnima to accept what she has in her hands. This is the reason she says her life is not as free as Gyan's: because, as a woman, there is no choice but to accept her life the way it is.

One of the common problems women suffer from is a loss of identity, since most things are decided for women by men in a male-dominated society like Nepal. This is what is reflected in *Masan* and *Agniko Katha*. In *Masan* the husband decides for the two wives, while in *Agniko Katha* the patriarchal norms of society decide for Purnima. It is only through rebellion that these women find their place and recognition in society. In the end, their decision is to leave their homes to take up the chal-

lenge to do better, to prove to society that a woman can rise above the traditional facades of gender.

## Conclusion

Since 1960 the role of women in Nepali theatre has changed for the better. Quite an impressive number of women appeared in theatre but soon disappeared due to the lack of viability of the profession. The subject of women in the theatre has been discursive and changes have taken place, although clumsily. Whether we look to *Masan's* first wife or second wife or to *Agniko Katha's* Purnima, these plays clearly show how women have suffered and risen above the patriarchal society. The changing times and changing perceptions of the old and new generations of actors and plays suggest that the ethos of women in Nepali theatre has been changing, albeit amid the disapproval Nepal's conservative society.

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# Performance Art: Feminine Representations as Cultural Intervention

■ ARCHANA THAPA

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For the last few years, a number of art shows and performances have been challenging the essentialist constructions of femininity in Nepal. Some of the art workshops by *Sutra*, *Lasana*, and *Kastamandap* should be taken into consideration. In this paper, I will analyze one piece of performance art by Ashmina Ranjit to show how she has tried to resist the traditional concepts of femininity through a silent performance.

For a long time the art of performance was associated with the notion of *mimesis*. Ancient philosophers looked at it as *maya*, or illusion. Plato defined performance as an imitation or mirror reflection of society. He regarded performance as an act of mimicry and a way to imitate reality.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle also

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1 See Plato, *Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip Rouse (New York: John Clive Grave House, 1956). Also see Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug and Company, 1994) 81-93.

maintained that the purpose of stage drama was to imitate the actions of real life. In a way, performance, thus, has always been associated with falsehood, faking, or copying.<sup>2</sup> However, contrary to such mimetic acts, the feelings, attitudes, and emotions aroused in the audience during and after a performance have always been acknowledged as real, and it has been believed that such emotional effects always lead spectators to real, emotional consequences.

The terms *performance* and *performance art* sound similar, but there are significant differences between them. The definition of performance has been highly contested and slippery; it has always slid across a range of meanings from one to another, resisting any stable definition. Nevertheless, the term *performance* is applied to theatre, rituals, parades, protests, and performance art. This very term suggests both process and product at the same time. Unlike traditional theatrical performances, modern performance art pieces are conceptual and often reflect different cultural contexts. However, theatrical (stage) performance and performance art (conceptual art) both illustrate the existence of social agents and challenge the constituted social reality through language, gestures, signs, and content. Performance art has enabled artists to question the assumptions of traditional art and culture with respect to contemporary issues that are often considered subversive and controversial. In *Performing*

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2 Aristotle referred to paintings and visual arts in order to make a point about poetry. He believed both paintings and poetry are forms of mimesis. His contention was that human beings are by nature prone to engage in the creation of likenesses and to respond to likeness with pleasure. He explained this instinct by reference to the human desire for knowledge. See Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, 104-120. Also see Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991) 211-219.



*Pedagogy: Towards an Art of Politics*, Charles R. Garoian defines performance art as, "A method of exploration and expression grounded in postmodern thought, performance art has enabled artists to critique traditional aesthetics, to challenge and blur the boundaries that exist between the arts and other disciplines and those that separate art and life. With regard to cultural identity, it has provided artists with a position from which to engage historical ideologies, to question the politics of art, and to challenge the complexities and contradictions of cultural domination in the modern and postmodern worlds." (Garoian 1999, 19)

The term *performance art* usually refers to a form of avant-garde or conceptual art that grew out of the visual arts by resisting commodification.<sup>3</sup> Performance art became popular in 1960 in Europe and the United States as a challenge to commodity art objects like painting or sculpture, where the objects constitute the work. In their works, artists such as Yves Klein, Yoko Ono, Barbara Kruger, and Allan Kaprow used various types of performances that were sometimes termed "happenings." The earlier happenings were much discussed, often criticized, and mostly pondered over because the conceptual underpinnings of such works were often very abstract.<sup>4</sup> Challenging the notion of art as an object that could be preserved, bought, or sold, performance art, which is basically conceptual art, redrew art's conventional borders. It simply ignored the rules and boundaries of the art world.

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3 Amelia Jones, "Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning," *Performing The Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999) 36-52.

4 See Roselee Goldberg, "Performance Art from Futurism to the Present," *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader Vol. 2*, ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (London: Routledge, 1996). Also see Daniel Marzona, *Conceptual Art* (London: Taschen, 2004) 212-216.

Performance art can happen anywhere, at any time, for any length of time. It can take place in any situation, requiring only four basic elements: time, space, the performer's body, and a relationship between performer and audience. Although some performance artists consider theatre, music, circus acts, gymnastics, and other relatively mainstream activities to be performing arts, the dividing lines between performing and performance arts are very thin and blurred.

In the initial phase, (Western) performance arts sounded radical because such conceptual works challenged the nexus between art and the market—including the galleries where artworks were displayed, the media institutions that promoted art shows, and the collectors who bought art like any other commodity—and forced audiences to think in a new, unconventional way about art that resisted the processes of commodification. Similarly, they challenged the notion of theatre and performance by breaking conventions of traditional performance arts and questioned the very nature of art itself. For example, even though in most cases performances are conducted in front of audiences, often audience members also become performers by participating in them. A performance may be scripted, unscripted, or improvisational. It may incorporate music, dance, song, or complete silence. The audience may buy tickets for the performance, the performance may be free, or the performer may pay the audience to watch.

With the advent of the civil rights movement in the West, the fields of art, music, and literature dramatically affected the intellectual climate of the seventies. The art centers of the United States and France, in particular, saw many changes. As they did in the fields of education, medicine, and politics, marginalized groups, including women, sought equality and economic parity in the field of art. With the seventies'

feminists' credo "the personal is political," women artists also celebrated their sexual otherness and sought to reclaim history. Consciously uniting the agendas of social politics with art, feminist artists generated new subjects, introduced different art techniques, and embarked on new areas of aesthetic investigation while questioning and challenging the male-dominated art world.

Performance art proved to be an ideal medium for the feminist agenda of the seventies: it was personal, immediate, and highly effective in communicating an alternative vision of women and their power in the art world. The feminist performance art of that time served diverse purposes while refusing to organize itself under any single philosophical system. Feminist artists and women artists who were looking for new aesthetic expressions explored autobiographies, female bodies, myths, and politics, playing a crucial role in developing and expanding the very nature of performance art. The performances of one of the major feminist artists of the time, Paula Treichler, were an example of art revolving around the idea that women are people and that feminism can manifest as aesthetic intervention to prove this point. "Unlike the traditional disciplines of visual art, dance, music, and theatre, the advantage of performance art has been its free associative and improvisational strategies, a postmodern means by which to explore new and dynamic relationships among the body, technology, society, and art." (Garoian 1999, 23)

There is a mismatch between the chronologies of modernism and postmodernism when we compare the history of art in the West with what unfolded in Nepal. While the sixties signified the beginning of postmodern art in America—including pop art, conceptual art, installations, and performance art—this period saw the flowering of Nepali aesthetic

modernism with painters like Lain Singh Bangdel, Uttam Nepali, and Urmila Garg Upadhyaya experimenting with varieties of expressionism, cubism, and other modernist forms. The modernist vein in Nepali art of the seventies and eighties continued with painters such as Sashi Bikram Shah, Manoj Babu Mishra, and Durga Baral experimenting with surrealism, while others like Kiran Manandhar and Krishna Manandhar produced works ranging from expressionism to abstract expressionism to abstraction proper.<sup>5</sup> Artists began to work with postmodern forms in Nepal only in the nineties, with Ashmina Ranjit, Sujan Chitrakar, Sudarshan Rana, Sunita Rana, and Subina Shrestha staging public displays of installation and performance art in different parts of Patan, Kathmandu, and Bhaktapur. In this paper, I have included one of Ashmina Ranjit's performance art pieces because it created a site of transformation and proposed a paradigm for cultural resistance in the context of the post-Maoist–Government War era in Nepal.

Understood generally, terms like *to perform* or *performance* tend to evoke some event or process, whether in the form of a narrative or a lyrical expression. Ashmina Ranjit's performance titled, "Search Inter-definite: No results were found" served both as process and product to identify and unmask the ambiguities and inequalities that operate beneath cultural appearances. By using performance as an expression of dissidence and as a form of alternate knowledge, she addressed the issue of subjugated knowledge stored in the feminine space and located cultural representations of power, identity, and sexuality while challenging and unmasking stereotypes

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5 Mukesh Malla, *Modern Art: Essence and Manifestations* (Kathmandu: fineartsnepal.com, 2004). Also see Mukesh Malla, *Aadhunik Nepali Kalaka Samakaleen Sandarbha* (Kathmandu: Lalita Malla, 2003).

and pervasive gender clichés. By no account do I intend to claim that this work was guided by the political upheaval in the country or that it was motivated by the armed conflict. The fact remains, however, that her performance was staged at a time when the nation was still struggling to regain its sanity, a time when not only older political structures but also older ideologies—like those concerning femininity—were undergoing revision.

In the last week of August 2008, Ranjit staged her solo performance, “Search Inter-definite: No Results were found” at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Babar Mahal Revisited in Kathmandu. Ranjit is considered one of Nepal’s most prominent performance artists. Her installations and performances have provoked audiences to think about art in non-conventional ways. In this particular performance, she made the theme of resistance evident through the silence of the performer. The act wordlessly challenged the established and accepted concepts of homogeneous femininity.



**Ashmina Ranjit**

*Photo from the author's personal collection*

Ranjit's nearly two-hour-long performance centered upon women's ambiguous liminal spaces, cultural roles imposed upon women, social gendering, and sexuality. Her performance pointed out the manifestations of culturally imposed femininity while simultaneously seeking to reclaim woman's personal experience in between the frames of socially defined roles and rules. The performance started with Ranjit entering the stage with dance-like movements, swirling and humming in front of a tall mirror that was balanced on the center of the stage. Repeatedly looking at herself in the mirror, she started to apply cosmetics to her face and eyes, and then she placed a *bindi*, or *tika*, on her forehead with a cheerful expression. As she looked at her image in the mirror, gradually her cheerful mood shifted to a somber one. She picked up an earthenware pot from the stage and started to decorate it with bindis similar to the ones she had put on her forehead. She continued to simultaneously stick bindis all over her face and the earthen pot. For almost two hours, she silently repeated this movement with a sad expression while the audience could occasionally hear faint sobbing. Approaching the end of the show, she raised the pot, which was now nearly covered with bindis, balanced it close to her face, and stared at the mirror with a sad look. The hushed audience in the room could clearly see the reflection of an uncommon expression on Ranjit's face, which had come to resemble the decorative earthenware pot.

The culture of performance art in Kathmandu has not yet gained wider currency. Therefore, at the time that Ranjit conducted her performance, for some in the audience, her concept was abstract. However, as a viewer, I found that her performance created a site of transformation and proposed a paradigm for cultural resistance by showing that one is not born a woman, but becomes one through a reiteration of

rituals—like putting bindi on the forehead daily—associated with femininity.

Performance arts (in the modern context) have a dual purpose: first, the act of performance in front of the audience itself becomes the process; and second, the complete performance delivers the product. In a very general sense, to perform has always meant to carry something into effect, whether it is a story, an identity, an artistic artifact or a specific memory, or an ethnography. Like Victor Turner's provocative concept concerning liminal spaces, Ranjit also used the term *liminal* to signify a state of consciousness, a space for the female protagonist to cope with ambiguous space (Ranjit's leaflet borrowed the term from Turner). Turner believed that liminal spaces resist domination and attempt to reconnect with the individual's non-constructive self.<sup>6</sup> Ranjit's performance also showed that the act of resistance may not always be in direct confrontation, but its forms can be traced in silence, starvation, or illness. Her performance silently resisted the cultural codes that are inscribed on a woman's body and simultaneously evoked the two most significant concerns of women in Nepal today: first, the cultural belongings or cultural reiterations of women; and second, the cultural constraint imposed on the female body in a patriarchal society. The performance started with "consent" to cultural constraint and ended with a projection of a female's object-like status.

Her performance unmasked the invisible space of women and the anxieties of feminine performativity that position

6 Victor Turner formulated the theory of liminality in the late sixties. In his essay "Liminality and Communitas," Turner defined liminal individuals or entities as neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony. See Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," *The Ritual Process: The Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969) 94-113.

them between gender and cultural appropriations. Through her performance, she explored and questioned her female self as a cultural idea, promulgated by patriarchal norms. Her mechanical repetitive act of putting tika first on her forehead and later all over her face projected her boredom and anxieties about gender fixity.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir analyzes ways in which the female body is disciplined and constrained. At times she even seems to conclude that, unlike the male body—which she sees as unproblematic—the female body constitutes an intrinsic handicap for women in the attempt to achieve perfection. Beauvoir questions and argues, what is woman? How is she constructed differently from man? Sexual oppression continues because, according to Beauvoir, gender roles are learned from the very earliest age and reinforced perpetually. The famous phrase that opens the second volume of *The Second Sex*, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” means that there is no pre-established feminine nature or essence. Here, Beauvoir adapts the existentialist’s notion that “existence precedes essence” to the ways in which gender identity is experienced.<sup>7</sup> In the same manner, Ranjit’s work, I believe, tried to address this issue by implying that within the patriarchal structure, femininity is sexually objectified like the earthenware pot. At the end of her performance, Ranjit’s face looked like a lifeless decorative object, similar to the decorative pot that she was holding. Ranjit demystified the feminine mystique through her performance, and her mimesis took a form of cultural intervention that unmasked female body politics. The silent performance was enacted to dislocate the social frame within which femininity is still staged, a frame

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7 Quoted in Ursula Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir: Routledge Critical Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2004) 51.



within which women are still described as objects of beauty to be appreciated and appropriated by the masculine gaze. As a rebellious artist, Ranjit has struggled to seek an identity that has been denied to her by the patriarchal law that creates this social frame for the masculine gaze and its object—the body of the woman that assents to the cultural logic of that gaze.

French psychoanalysts like Jacques Lacan believed that since subjectivity is ruled by signs and images, the “lack” tracing feminine subjectivity can never become equal to that very phallic symbol representing the law of the father. According to Lacan, a human subject passes through the “mirror phase” before entering the symbolic world of language. It is in the mirror phase that a subject develops a sense of a personal identity or “I” for the first time, an experience of plenitude or fulfillment that is disrupted forever as a subject enters the symbolic order.<sup>8</sup> Ranjit’s cheerful beginning of the performance assured the artist to identify with the ideal “I” in the mirror reflection, but at the same time the artist’s body remained detached from the ideal image in the mirror. It is within that split between reflection and real, between the ideal and its imperfect bodily rendition, that the artist exemplified the social constraint that one experiences after entering the symbolic order. Inspired by the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage, I am led to look at the split between the artist’s anticipation of the ideal and her actual experience of her own alienated image in the mirror. As a woman, she realized that her desire to look beautiful was a cultural reality, constructed by shared cultural codes. Her existence can be

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8 See Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as formation of the function of the I,” *Jacques Lacan Ecrites: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977) 1-7. Also see Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction* (London: Routledge, 1991) 24-47.

understood in relation to the image of the ideal “I”, which is without an autonomous identity. As a human subject enters the symbolic order, with the father the sign of law and the mother the sign of lack, the gender hierarchy is constructed, therefore inducing vulnerability in all subjects failing to identify with the law of the father.

This interesting mirror reference also points out the narcissistic element that is often attributed to women in most Western and Eastern cultural texts. Gayatri Spivak, in her essay “Echo,” for example, outlined the formation of ethics through the ethical relation in the myth of Echo and Narcissus. Spivak described how, after turning to Freud, she located the “richest example of narcissism among women.”<sup>9</sup> After rereading Ovid’s and Freud’s narratives of Narcissus and Echo, she wondered how it was that Freud and others, like Christopher Lasch, had attributed narcissism primarily to women even though Narcissus was a man. Spivak raised the question of the disappearance of Echo, the woman in the mythical story. Her feminist reading of the mythical narrative is “an attempt to ‘give voice’ to Echo, to deconstruct her out of traditional and deconstructive representation and (non) representation, however imperfectly.” (Spivak 1996, 176) It seems to me that Ranjit’s performance attempts to fulfill a similar goal.

After the completion of the performance, spectators got no chance to communicate or question Ranjit about her work because she refused to say anything about it. Ranjit later

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9 Following her works with Bimal Krishna Matilan, Distinguished Fellow of Oxford in Indic ethic and epics, Gayatri Spivak admits in her essay that she feels very uneasy using psychoanalysis in cultural critiques since it is very cultural specific in its provenance. See Spivak, “Echo,” *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 175-202.

explained that she prefers a silent performance in order to resist the discourse that for many feminists is considered to be a regulatory mechanism of the phallogentric system. It is instructive to remember once again that feminists like Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig had argued that language is not a neutral medium and that it functions as an instrument of the patriarchal system. In *Desire in Language*, Julia Kristeva also talks about a substitute language, a mother-centered realm of expression, as the semiotic that is opposed to symbolic order organized around the law of the father.<sup>10</sup> While elaborating the Freudian theory, Lacan extended the notion of the imaginary, a pre-Oedipal state in which the child is not in the world of language. According to Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, a world of symbolic order (language) is ruled by the "law of the father." Therefore, when a child enters the symbolic stage, he or she is introduced to a language that is a mixture of socially fixed meanings and metaphors instilled by that law. This is a law that works both at the grammatical level, as well as at the level of social codes and conventions—the "grammar" of society. Since the social meanings attributed to gender manifest at the level of both language and social conventions, the law of the father intervenes to impose fixed meanings and metaphors on gender.<sup>11</sup> The French feminists used the concept of *écriture féminine* in the seventies, an antithesis of masculine writing, as a medium by which women could escape from the tyranny of the symbolic order into a realm of the unthinkable

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10 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

11 Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction*, 147-183. Also see Lacan, *Jacques Lacan Ecrites*, 1-7.

or what remains unthought. This concept was tied to the idea of inventing new words to disrupt the discourse of symbolic language, or adopting silence as a form of resistance.<sup>12</sup> Hélène Cixous first used the term in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” which literally meant gendered women’s writing placed experience before language.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, Ranjit’s silent performance exploded the sign rather than interpreted the concept through language. For this reason, her performance can be interpreted as an act of resistance to phallogentric language. Her performance started with her consent to traditional feminine norms when she cheerfully applied cosmetics to her face. Later, however, her silent actions resisted Nepal’s prevalent patriarchal culture by showing that traditional femininity itself is a matter of performance and that one becomes a woman only by repeating the rituals of femininity. The performance was accompanied by the sounds of her sobbing. It showed that she was unhappy with the traditional role of a woman she was expected to perform; it did not consist of a joyous affirmation of the image of ideal femininity. Rather, the performance showed how women experience a sense of alienation even when performing their role according to social expectations. As de Beauvoir suggested, one is not born woman but becomes one, implying that a society or the culture of a society constructs gender. Ranjit’s monotonous act of putting bindis on her forehead symbolized the monotonous reiteration of femininity that is carried out through cultural appro-

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12 See Helene Cixous, “Sorties,” *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) 286-293.

13 See Helen Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa,” *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1997) 347-362.

priation of feminine roles. Like the decorative earthenware, Ranjit's body transformed into a passive medium onto which cultural meanings were inscribed; her body became an instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determined cultural meanings. Our society is consequently structured to perpetuate patriarchal ideology, and women willingly maintain an inferior position in the society. This persistence of patriarchal ideology throughout history has led both men and women to assume that men have a right to maintain women in a subordinate state. Women also internalize and adapt to this oppressed state.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses the performativity of gender that consolidates and freezes both "masculine" and "feminine" in socially and culturally appropriate traits. She states that, "gender is what causes gender." (Butler 1997, xii) Likewise in Ranjit's performance, the violence of rigid gender normativity—that women should look pretty—was assumed as a natural manifestation of femininity. Using her own body as a conceptual frame, Ranjit first questioned the meaning ascribed to bindis and the notion of the feminine body as a decorative object. Secondly, she challenged the prevalent tendency of framing and reading the signifiers of genders in terms of their fixed meanings. Her silent performance directed the audience's attention toward undictated thoughts and undemarcated spaces, and explored the undescribed experiences of a woman. In the leaflet that she handed to the audience, she raised a concern for the "quest of an ephemeral self," the experience of the ephemeral being of her feminine self in between "Her" desire and "Other's" expectations (leaflet). In other words, there was a gap or a split between the desire of the woman and her socially expected role that she is supposed to perform repeatedly. It is within

the space of that gap that the ephemeral self is constructed. Through her performance, Ranjit successfully subverted the notion of performance as mimesis; instead, she unmasked mimetic feminine roles that are culturally assigned to women in a patriarchal society.

In her introductory speech, Sangeeta Thapa, the curator of the gallery, elaborated that Ranjit's performance was an attempt to explore the liminal space located between vanity and modesty, Kali and Sita, aggression and submission, voluntary and compulsory, existence and nonexistence. By pointing out the dominant epistemologies that not only link knowing with seeing but also construct rigid gender significations, Ranjit's silent performance attempted an alternate meaning and sought an autonomous identity. It showed that meanings are often masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in culture. In addition to her rejection of the meanings ascribed to traditional femininity, Ranjit's performance was also an effort to reject traditional bourgeois art forms. For nearly two hours, the hushed room of Babar Mahal Revisited was transformed into a spectacular theatrical space. After the show, the artist stepped down from the dais without saying anything about her performance, and the audience dispersed with varied emotions and questions. Though the purpose of the performance was to break traditional performance barriers and vicious gender roles, the raised dais and absence of dialogue turned the aesthetic act into a one-way form of communication, and the artist somehow constructed an unseen boundary between herself and the audience.

Contrary to Aristotle's belief that performance is merely an effort to imitate the reality of the world and is thus twice removed from reality, Ranjit's performance was not simply a cultural imitation; rather, it was a cultural intervention.

Victor Turner suggests that we should conceive of performance not solely as mimesis but as *poiesis*, which he views as making, not faking. In his essay, "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Rituals and Drama?"<sup>14</sup> Turner strongly argues that within societies there are different classes, ethnicities, regions, neighborhoods, and people of different ages, and they each produce versions of reality and each performance they produce becomes a record, a means of explanation. For Turner, performance is never an act of mimesis but *poiesis* because it is germinated in its redressive and reflexive phases. Therefore, each performance constructs new meaning for different audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

In a similar vein, ethnographer Dwight Conquergood took a radical step to define performance from "faking to breaking and remaking." He introduced the concept of performance as a strategy for staging interventions. He elaborated that performance is an art that possesses the power to transgress boundaries, and which breaks oppressive structures and remakes social and political rules. Conquergood defines performance as kinesis, believing that it not only sustains but subverts tradition, culture, and dominant values. Thus, one could argue that Conquergood has rightly claimed that performance has moved beyond faking to breaking and remaking. (Bell 2008, 13) Ranjit's performance also faked a feminine role; broke with tradition by making art without any codified, conventional object; and remade the cultural identity of the self. Jean-François Lyotard called it "*novatio*."<sup>15</sup>

14 Victor Turner, "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Rituals and Drama?" *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, ed. E. Turner (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985) 291-301.

15 See Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answer to the Question, What is the Postmodern?" *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 378.

The attempts of novatio performative discourses are used to reach beyond the surface of the real and to subvert previous modes of meaning-making strategies. In Western art centers, feminist performance artists rightly saw performance as the work of imagination, as a pragmatics of inquiry—both as model, as method, and as simultaneous tactics of intervention in a struggle for alternate meaning. It seems reasonable to conclude that Ranjit's performance was imbibed by a similar aim—that of opening a new cultural and aesthetic space within which alternative meanings of Nepali femininities could be staged.

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# A Study on the Nexus between Theatre for Social Change and Donor Agencies

■ BAL BAHADUR THAPA

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This paper deals with the dynamics resulting from the nexus between Nepali theatre groups and donor agencies. This nexus has led theatre groups to perform for educational purposes or social change, like community theatre and *Kachahari Natak*. Of course proscenium theatre, too, transforms society; however, its impact is not as direct as street theatre in terms of disseminating awareness. Therefore, theatre for social change in the present paper refers to various forms of street theatre.

Professor Abhi Subedi does not deny the social reforms brought about by theatre for social development. Commenting on the Kachahari plays in his text *Nepali Theatre as I See It*, Subedi, however, says that he is not ready “to give them the adjective of good plays.” (Subedi 2006, 210) Many scholars and critics, following the line of Subedi, argue that the quality of Nepali drama has deteriorated because of

this nexus. According to these critics, this nexus has driven theatre groups toward money-generating projects in such a way that they have forgotten serious theatre performances. Subedi, in his write-up “Nepal” for the tenth edition of *The World of Theatre* published by ITI Centre Bangladesh, claims that theatre groups “use funds to perform propaganda for the native and foreign organizations.” (Subedi 2008, 218) Subedi finds the problem in the very approach of theatre for social change: “A trend to mix Boal’s Forum Theatre with propaganda theatre is a problem. . . .” (Subedi 2008, 218) Likewise, in his research on Nepali theatre, *Rupantarankalagi Rangamanch* (Theatre for Change), Yubaraj quotes Birendra Hamal, who claims, “Propaganda has crushed street theatre. If so, why call it street theatre rather than propaganda theatre!” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 211) Hamal does not find the aesthetics of theatre in street theatre. Subedi argues that “mediocrity has become a very serious problem with Nepali theatre. Several theatre groups do not seem to bother about the seriousness of the serious art of theatre that requires skills, knowledge and training.” (Subedi 2008, 218) Anup Baral, too, has reservations about street theatre. He argues, “Street theatre has its own significance, but its task is propaganda.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 224) He also points out the transitory nature of street theatre: “I believe that a play performed on a particular issue does not become universal.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 224)

Likewise, some critics are worried about the commodification of theatre while others fear the corruption involved in development theatre or theatre for education. Monica Mottin, in her article “Drama for Social Change: Theatre for Development or the Development of Theatre?” points out the “commercialization of theatrical performances as a result of external funding.” (Mottin 2007, 332) “Street drama,” she

adds, “risks being turned into a cultural commodity reinforcing a reflection upon reality mediated through the ‘development’ lenses.” (Mottin 2007, 332) Furthermore, there is an issue of exploitation of the artists involved in theatre groups. Many critics believe that the theatre of the oppressed has changed into the theatre of the oppressors. They believe that the theatre has reduced itself to a propaganda-disseminating machine. Ramendu Majumdar and Mofidul Hoque, in their editorial for the tenth edition of *The World of Theatre*, caution theatre artists in this way: “[The only] concern of theatre makers should be to keep in mind the aesthetic aspect of theatre so that it doesn’t become a blunt propaganda theatre and lose public interest.” (Majumdar and Hoque 2008, xiii) Despite all these problems, doubts, and anxieties surrounding street theatre, this paper argues that the stigma of street theatre does not arise out of the nexus between donor agencies and theatre groups. Instead, our theatre has been stigmatized due to megalomania, greed, insincerity, laziness, inefficiency, and a lack of solidarity, commitment, and democratic culture on the part of the artists and directors involved. In fact, this nexus has proved quite fruitful on both fronts: social transformation and the preservation and promotion of theatre in general. Moreover, this nexus has led theatre groups to experiment with the new poetics of theatre: the poetics of the oppressed.

Discussing the history of Nepali theatre, Yubaraj argues, “We must pay attention to cultural-religious tradition and text while exploring the history of Nepali theatre. If we consider the cultural basis, Nepal’s first theatre, as per the facts found till date, is the 2,400-year-old Harisiddhi dance.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 20) The concrete theatre culture of Nepal, however, dates back to the Lichhavi dynasty. Prachanda Malla, in his *Nepali Rangamanch* (Nepali Theatre), claims, “Nepali artists

are found to have had the skills to render lively form to the stone. The dance gestures and postures depicted below the statues of Uma-Maheshwor sculpted during the same period illustrate that acting had reached its peak." (Malla 2037 BS, 27) However, the emergence of street theatre took place in Nepal during the 1980s. Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold, a world-renowned Russian director, is supposed to have first introduced street theatre in 1917 to mark the first anniversary of the October Revolution. He staged Vladimir Mayakovsky's poems in different parts of Saint Petersburg.

Every political change tends to have its impact on art. In Nepal, too, the student movement of 1979 that erupted against the Panchayat system brought street theatre via street poetry revolution. According to Ashesh Malla, director of Sarwanam Theatre, "The street poetry revolution of 1979 has a close relation to street or political theatre. This street poetry revolution was the climactic mode of the effort to bring theatre out of the closed room." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 179) Raman Ghimire, discussing the political bent of street theatre in his *Ek Darjan Ek* (One Dozen One), argues, "It won't be an exaggeration to say that street theatre was born out of the consciousness against the Panchayat system." (Ghimire 2009, 122) Ghimire adds, "Street theatre was an artistic, awareness-oriented, and expressive weapon born against the climactic suffocation of restriction imposed on political and civil rights by the system of the time." (Ghimire 2009, 122) Ashesh Malla claims, "Street theatre commenced formally with the performance of *Hami Basanta Khojirahechhau* [We Are Looking for Spring] at the premises of Tribhuvan University on September 5, 1982." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 180) He claims, "The play takes place in the theatre but the street theatre creates theatre on its own." (Ghimire 2009, 120) Malla adds, "The street theatre is a strong

theatrical technology engendered by want.” (Ghimire 2009, 120) Therefore, it emerged at the moment when the Nepali theatre was undergoing a crisis.

In the context of Nepal, street theatre is just a continuation of Greek open theatre via *Dabali* theatre. Yubaraj explains, “In the early years of twentieth century, theatre came out of the closed room. So it was named street theatre. But street theatre, in modern theatre, was initiated with the objective of political transformation.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 88) From the very beginning, Sarwanaam has been performing street plays replete with sociopolitical messages. Street theatre, as per Ashesh Malla, came to end traditional theatre: “The street theatre was born to end this tradition. This is the result of the desire to get rid of traditional theatre and presentation.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 179) In a way, street theatre came as an alternative to traditional theatre. Obviously, it has been working with various national and international donors to educate people through street plays.

Time and again, however, *Sarwanam* attempts proscenium theatre. Likewise, Aarohan has been doing both kinds of plays: proscenium theatre and street theatre. Because of Sunil Pokharel’s exposure to Augusto Boal’s Forum Theatre, Aarohan Gurukul performs Kachahari Natak, a Nepali version of Forum theatre. In Kachahari Natak, the viewers turn into actors. In the beginning, the actors present the intended problem. As the problem is highlighted, the actors ask the audience how the latter would solve the problem. Then the viewers are supposed to either take the stage or come up with the solution, which will instantly be enacted by the actors. This approach is quite effective in exploring the grassroots of society’s issues and problems. Clarifying the impact of street theatre performed by Aarohan, Pokharel says, “Our expe-

rience says—wherever there is monitoring of the message disseminated by theatre, the street theatre is good over there.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 204) Regarding the involvement of INGOs and NGOs in theatre, Pokharel says, “The artists have become self-dependent because of I/NGOs. A lot of works have been done. The effort of theatre workers only is not sufficient to get the work done.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 204)

Yubaraj sheds light on the impact of Kachahari Natak on the alleviation of negative social practices like the Kamalari system: “The Kachahari performed by ex-Kamalari have initiated discussions on the Kamalari system in Kathmandu and other cities across the country. Kachahari theatre has launched an initiative against the Kamalari system.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 137) Besides this, Aarohan has staged plays like *Oedipus Rex*, *Fire in the Monastery*, *Putaliko Ghar* (a Nepali adaptation of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*), *Mahan Shilpi* (a Nepali adaptation of Ibsen’s *The Master Builder*), and *Ghanachakkar* (Labyrinth) among many others. With its two theatre houses, Rimal Theatre and Sama Theatre, and its in-house professional artists, Aarohan is currently the most significant theatre group in Nepal.

Aarohan is an embodiment of the beautiful blend between theatre for social change and proscenium theatre. Trailing the achievement made by Sunil Pokharel’s Aarohan Gurukul, Raman Ghimire reveals, “Now his [Pokharel’s] dream is to extend the branch of Aarohan Gurukul all over the country.” (Ghimire 2009, 135) Obviously, Aarohan, in the absence of the state’s support, has been working with donors like the B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation, the Embassy of Norway, the European Union, MS Nepal, the Asia Foundation, and Alborg National Theatre. One, therefore, must not forget that Aarohan has achieved this success



because of its partnership with different donor agencies.

Likewise, DABALI, spearheaded by Puskar Gurung, performs Community Theatre, yet another version of street theatre. In this kind of theatre, in addition to the professional actors of DABALI, actors from target communities are selected. All the actors are trained together. The play is made during a training-cum-workshop incorporating the stories, culture, and other relevant pieces of information of the artists involved in the making of the Community Theatre. Finally, the artists are deployed to the concerned communities with the intended messages. DABALI, however, is not confined to street theatre. It has produced plays like *Journey into Thamel*, *Medea*, and *Jalpari*, a Nepali adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea*.

There are several other theatre groups like Baageena, Surkhet; SEED Nepal, Parbat; Kalika, Kapilvastu; Anaam, Dharan; Narayani Kalamandir, Chitwan; M.Art Theatre, Kathmandu; Shilpee, Kathmandu; Kusum, Kathmandu, and more, each performing their own version of street theatre. Interestingly, these groups also assay proscenium theatre. Shiva Rijal, in his "Rangamanchama Loktantra" (Democracy in Theatre), sums it up in the following passage: "In Nepal, a number of theatre groups, with the support of NGOs and INGOs, perform plays on contemporary social and political subjects. Most of such theatre artists want to be assimilated into the Nepali mainstream theatre. Though they, with a proposal bearing an issue forwarded by a silent NGO, want to do something new by getting themselves assimilated into mainstream theatre." (Rijal 2008, 180) Furthermore, apart from their theatre for education, these groups attempt proscenium theatre and take part in regional, national, and international theatre festivals. These theatre groups are also creating new

theatre audiences by disseminating awareness and information about the significance of theatre.

Because of the creation of these new audiences, theatre in Nepal has been protected from the crisis it is facing in other poor parts of the world as pointed out by Ramendu Majumdar and Mofidul Hoque: "Some countries witness a happy growth of theatre going public, but a vast majority are finding it difficult to bring in audiences to the theatre." (Majumdar and Hoque 2008, xiii) Street theatre has played a vital role in sustaining theatre culture in a country like Nepal since it can be performed without a hall and the other technologies of the traditional theatre. Presenting Sarwanam as an example, Raman Ghimire argues, "The economic problem of the private organizations loomed large like a naked sword hanging over the head. They failed to perform the play because of expensive hall rent. Sarwanam's street theatre was born to get rid of this very problem. For this, Sarwanam did away with all the traditional technologies like light, sound, decoration, etc. used in the theatre performance and came up with an idea to perform the play in an open place. Another purpose was theatre the fee. The audience could not watch the play by paying an expensive fee." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 9) In such a context, "Sarwanam," according to Ghimire, "took an objective of directly reaching the audience by changing all these concepts." This is how street theatre has played a key role in preserving and promoting theatre culture in Nepal.

Here the bone of contention is the nexus between theatre groups and donor agencies. In Nepal, INGOs and NGOs have been stigmatized in such a way that people often forget the good things they have contributed to the development of different sectors. Organizations are frequently portrayed as money-churning machines. And because of this, it is very

natural that when theatre groups receive funding they, too, are stigmatized in the same manner. As cited in Heaton Shrestha's PhD dissertation, Mottin argues, "The stigma goes beyond a wider crisis affecting the development industry: NGOs are often suspected and accused of self-interest, lack of concern for the poor, corruption, opportunism and nepotism." (Mottin 2007, 325) That is why critics see theatre groups as NGOs and their street plays as NGO plays. The activities of the theatre groups are perceived in the way that the activities of donor agencies, INGOs, and NGOs are. But this is an example of a sheer over-generalization. We must not forget to look into the activities of theatre groups even when they work with donor agencies. Most of their activities, no matter what their plays' intended messages are, are all about the production of the plays. We should not forget that, regardless of which donors they work for, these groups care for the production of plays first.

Theatre groups involve theatre artists, who want to create something new. However, the theatre so far has not been supported by the state. Therefore, our theatre faces a severe crisis in dealing with the survival of artists. Thus, partnering with donor agencies is one strategy for survival in this context. Artists get opportunities for training and workshops on acting, direction, and the theatre-making process because of the projects these theatre groups undertake. Without a doubt, trainings and workshops on theatre making are an inalienable part of the package; without them, no Kachahari Natak or Community Theatre is possible. Every street theatre performance involves a theatre-making process: direction, blocking, costumes, props, scripting (though sometimes improvisation), acting, etc. Unlike proscenium theatre, street theatre demands more wit and more improvisation from the artists.

Without proper training, an artist cannot be a good street theatre artist. More often than not, collaboration with donor agencies provides theatre artists this opportunity. In spite of his reservation over the seriousness and quality of theatre for social development, Subedi confesses that such theatre, in the context of a poor country like Nepal, has contributed a lot to the development of Nepali theatre: "Many groups around the country have become active; they have found ways to support themselves and created small theatre halls; they have found ways of interacting with each other across the country." (Subedi 2006, 212) In addition, theatre for social change has made interaction and cultural exchange between Nepal and other countries possible. "'Development' theatre has also been a stepping-stone toward the 'outside,' facilitating connections between Nepali and foreign artists and funding bodies as well as being a platform for diffusing Nepali artistic and cultural theatre abroad." (Mottin 2007, 340)

Now times have changed. We cannot cling to the past when theatre was all about the relationship between artists and feudal patronage. Many theatre artists and critics long for that past. They long for the aura theatre and theatre artists used to bear in the past. Now consumer culture backed by liberal capitalism has swept over the whole world. In such a context, everything, even human relationships, has been commodified. As Walter Benjamin argues, it is the age of mechanical reproduction that makes goods, services, and arts available even to the poor and marginalized people. Definitely the theatre cannot be an exception to this cultural change. "The modern theatre cannot escape the market-oriented culture." (Rijal 2008, 179-80) Had the theatre retained its aura, it would never have been accessible to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Do we still want the theatre limited to a handful

of elites? Certainly not. Thus, the commodification of theatre is not a big deal. Frederic Jameson argues that the “aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production. . . .” (Jameson 1991, 5) As a commodity, theatre is now accessible even to marginalized people from the Karnali region. We must cope with the present. In the absence of feudal patronage and state support, it is not unwise on the part of theatre workers to collaborate with donor agencies.

Many critics believe that theatre artists are ideologized. Previously, the styles of plays were influenced by the ideologies of the kings, who used to be patrons of playwrights and artists. Now the styles of plays are determined by the ideologies of the people who have authority over the theatre houses and artists. “The ideologies of the people who have control over the sources and means for the production of theatre, like theatre houses, technologies required to stage the play, and marketing, determine the styles of theatre of that society.” (Rijal 2008, 179-80) Therefore, theatre groups are in the position to determine their own styles as long they work in alliance with INGOs and NGOs. If so, what is wrong about disseminating awareness about health, sanitation, democracy, human rights, the Constituent Assembly, and ILO C.169? Is it wrong to empower people on these issues through street or proscenium theatre? Certainly not. Raman Ghimire sums up the role of street theatre in this way: “The street theatre plays the role of a watchdog against every kind of encroachment and extremism prevailing in the society or nation. It makes citizens aware of their rights and gives them strength and [a] way to raise [their] voice against every kind of oppression.” (Ghimire 2009, 123)

Minap, the only theatre group to perform Maithili theatre in Nepal, has been conducting both street theatre and prosceni-

um theatre. Through its street theatre it has addressed issues concerning the Constitution Assembly election, AIDS, and sanitation, among others. These days it has concentrated itself on the dowry system. Ramesh Ranjan highlights the commitment of the artists of Minap in this regard: "In the latest phase, Minap has launched a programme against dowry system. . . . Under this programme against the dowry system, every artist of Minap has decided not to give or receive dowry." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 219) Minap has conducted hundreds of plays on the dowry system. Ranjan points out the impact of Kachahari Natak on society in this way: "Dozens of youths have promised to get married without receiving dowry while the play is going on. 'We didn't receive dowry in the marriage after watching your play,' they have told us on the telephone. In this manner, we have realized that the initiative against social evils is slowly marching ahead." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 219-20)

Anup Baral, too, is not against addressing sociopolitical issues in a play. He believes that a play can reflect the times only if it raises contemporary sociopolitical issues. "The current time appears in the theatre only if the theatre workers are politically conscious. But many people think that politics is only direct speech. It is not. There are many ways of speaking. The lack of political consciousness is our problem." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 223) Asserting the use of theatre for social change, Mottin explains that "those development workers who are using theatre in their projects are enthusiastic of its potentialities in reaching marginalized communities . . . helping to break the 'culture of silence' that characterizes Nepal where there is no habit of opening discussions and oppressions are often accepted with fatalistic attitude." (Mottin 2007, 325-6) Despite his reservation about the quality of street theatre, Birendra Hamal does not deny the change it can

bring in the districts outside Kathmandu Valley. He argues, "Street theatre works for awareness in the district but it has been made very cheap. We can bring a radical change if we manage the street theatre performed in the district." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 211)

Augusto Boal believes that we need the Theatre of the Oppressed to foreground the issues of the oppressed and marginalized people. Citing George Ikishawa in his essay "The Theatre as a Discourse," Boal argues "that the bourgeois theater is a finished theater." (Boal 2002, 80) He adds, "The bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, their world, and is able to present the images of this complete, finished world. The bourgeoisie present the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet know what their world will be like; consequently their theater will be rehearsal, not the finished spectacle." (Boal 2002, 80) Furthermore, this rehearsal of "a resistance to oppression will prepare him [or her] to resist effectively in a future reality, when the occasion presents once more." (Boal 2002, 86) This is how the oppressed person is able to think and act for himself or herself. Therefore, such "poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation. . . ." (Boal 2002, 86)

Indeed, in conflict-ridden countries like Nepal and Sudan theatre can be quite a useful tool for peace building and reconciliation. According to Shams Eldin Younis, "[The] Sudanese theatre movement now is taking its place to play a significant role in the promotion of peace and capacity building and draw attention to theatre as a tool for sustainable development. In Sudan, theatrical activities are 'more directed towards applied theatre.'" (Younis 2008, 275) The Sudan ITI Centre, in collaboration with the German ITI Centre, has been training artists on Forum Theatre so that artists can use theatre for

peace building in conflict-ridden areas. As per the needs of the times, Sudanese theatre has “moved gradually towards the developments community theatre.” (Younis 2008, 275)

In Kuwait, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) supports theatre for education in order to expose children to “the Arab and Moslem cultural values.” (Obeid 2008, 203) Even Majumdar and Hoque, the editors of the tenth issue of *The World of Theatre*, acknowledge the contribution of theatre for social change in the following words: “In many countries, particularly in the developing world, theatre has taken a new role. . . . Development theatre or theatre of social intervention is the new trend where theatre is being used as medium of behavior change communication. This educative role of theatre can’t be ignored. . . .” (Majumdar and Hoque 2008, xiii)

Therefore, the problem is not about the nexus between theatre groups and donor agencies, nor is it about the theatre groups bent toward theatre for social change. The problems, real as well as fabricated, arise from egotism, greed, insincerity, laziness, and a lack of solidarity, commitment, and democratic culture on the part of the artists as well as their groups. In grabbing for financial opportunities, many theatre groups have reduced street theatre to propaganda theatre. The established theatre artists, according to Yubaraj, say, “The quality of theatre is deteriorating in the name of propaganda theatre.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 110) Yubaraj clarifies this problem: “Many established theatre workers are not happy with the groups born to do the propaganda theatre. On the one hand, the I/NGO’s attraction toward it is increasing and, on the other hand, the trend of doing the I/NGO’s theatre without training or knowing anything about theatre is skyrocketing.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 109) Here, it is obvious that the problem lies with the



theatre workers, who ironically do not seek to learn theatre. Therefore, "it is another dilemma that the artists do not have the will power to 'learn' theatre. Since the main objective of many organizations like this is their 'financial budget', they put major effort in making the I/NGO happy. Consequently, the presentation becomes tiresome as only the slogan and message are kept in the play." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 110) Mottin, too, argues along a similar line: "In general, the artistic quality of street plays decreased, as actors could not balance donors' thematic requirements with their need for theatrical coherence." (Mottin 2007, 328-29) Here, Mottin points out the inefficiency of theatre artists. Theatre workers are busy flattering the I/NGOs to earn funding rather than sharpening their skills. Because of this tendency among theatre workers, even veteran artists like Anup Baral are apprehensive about doing street theatre. "I don't want to do issue based street theatre. There are no aesthetics and art in the street theatre running at present. I don't have a problem regarding the street theatre but the quality of style and subject are quite important for me. I have not done it out of fear as I have not found the artists and group required for street theatre." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 224)

Minap started doing street theatre with the performance of *Ghurik Gonu Ayela Gam* in 1994. Ramesh Ranjan claims, "The group received money by doing theatre for the first time. If we explore the reality, the problem started in the group after receiving money." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 218) Here, the problem does not lie with Minap's alliance with the NGO. Instead, it lies in the greed of the artists and their lack of organizational management. In this regard, Rijal, in his article "Modern Theatre in Nepal: A Need for Aesthetic Acculturation" argues, "Theatre practitioners too do not seem to have realized the need of creating and managing such resources need-

ed to create theatre democratically so that their fellow artists (both professional as well as amateur) could explore, invent and develop skills and talents." (Rijal 2007, 47)

Regarding the involvement of donors, even the proscenium theatre is not an exception. Monica Mottin, too, agrees in this regard: "Proscenium theatre is reliant on foreign funding." (Mottin 2007, 341) Moreover, theatre groups use the money saved from street theatre to produce proscenium theatre. "At present, Nepali independent proscenium theatre is linked to street theatre. . . ." (Mottin 2007, 340) Our theatre groups have approached various embassies and donor agencies for financial support for the production of their plays. This nexus has brought many brilliant results in the form of brilliant plays. For example, Anup Baral's *Pratibimba*, in association with the Embassy of India, presented *Baanki Ujyalo*, a Nepali translation of Girish Karnad's *Kannad* play *Anjumalligya* (Frightened Flower). Aarohan, too, has been producing many plays like *Putaliko Ghar*, *Mahan Shilpi*, and others in association with Alborg National Theatre, the Embassy of Norway, and other local partners. Likewise, DABALI produced *Jalpari*, a Nepali adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* with the support of the Embassy of Norway and the Nepal Norwegian Alumni Association (NNAA). Therefore, it is not the nexus that is a problem. The theatre groups, in the case of proscenium theatre, leave no stone unturned to make their production a great success. Why do the artists not put as much effort and perseverance in the production of street plays as they do in proscenium theatre? Indeed, they have undermined their very task. Theatre artists do not work hard to make street theatre artistic and serious. They consider it as a potboiler only, and, consequently, it has been stigmatized.

Despite its stigmas, street theatre bears immense potential-

ity for aesthetics, innovation, and experimentation. Birendra Hamal believes that “street theatre should be as artistic as proscenium theatre. To say it should be in language that can be understood by common people does not mean that a play done in simple language cannot be artistic at all.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 211) Therefore, it is high time theatre artists thought of blending theatrical aesthetics with the intended message in their street theatre. In her article, Mottin claims, “The street play’s aesthetic quality is the parameter through which artists distinguish street theatre from ‘NGO’ theatre.” (Mottin 2007, 338) If the artists manage to maintain aesthetic quality, street theatre does have its own integrity as a variant of theatre. However, since theater artists focus themselves on a message at the cost of aesthetic quality to make donors happy, street theatre gets stigmatized as “NGO” theatre.

Discussing the improvisation and innovation he undertook in the street theatre he did after receiving the Ashoka Fellowship in 1988, Pokharel says, “I wove local folk songs and tales. We performed theatre by turning the real balcony, house, etc. into a stage. I didn’t want to perform like the *Nukkad* theatre I had seen in India or our usual street theatre while working in the village. I worked as per the circumstance.” (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 204) Pokharel makes it clear that the Nepali theatre workers, by deriving rituals, folk tales, folk dance, and folk music from the concerned community, can raise street theatre to a new height. It can be innovative, artistic, and appropriate to the target community at the same time.

Moreover, its educative role has allowed theatre groups to appropriate projects to develop the artistic theatre further. “So far donors’ funding has indirectly, as an accidental by-product, supported artistic theatre via street theatre in the absence of government support and a theatre culture. But it would be a

mistake to assume there is an ideological dependence of theatre on project work. Donors had their own agendas in relation to theatrical performances but theatre groups have also appropriated projects and sometimes social theatre has been used as a tool to develop artistic theatre." (Mottin 2007, 340)

Regarding the appropriation of projects, Sarwanam serves as a significant example. Ashesh Malla unflinchingly claims, "With the money received from that [the donor agencies], the organization ran. That money was used to run organization, publish newspaper, offer the Sarwanam Puraskar etc. Redbarna's support made it easier to do many other works." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 182) Malla adds, "The director must find alternatives to make theatre active. Theatre cannot survive in a vacuum. Financial source is indispensable. Our desire is to perform theatre and if somebody helps for theatre, that's a good thing." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 182)

Actually, the present appropriation of funds received from NGOs and INGOs for the sustainability of theatre culture is just a tentative strategy to protect and promote theatre culture in the present transitional context. Regarding the involvement of I/NGOs in theatre, Ranjan says:

"We have been working on such social issues with the support of NGOs and INGOs. But they terminate the programme midway. It is necessary to work on such grave problems for a long time. Minap has taken the initiative on such subjects. But the theatre groups cannot give continuity to such initiative due to their financial limitation. I/NGOs need to provide regular support to an issue for a long time if we want to change society." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 220) Ranjan's answer proves that there—as the state is silent on this issue—is a dire need for sustainable alliances between theatre groups and donors for bringing about change in society. Perhaps

the theatre groups should pay attention to organizational management and the artists should strive to win donor confidence for a sustainable alliance to succeed.

Regarding the involvement of INGOs and NGOs in theatre, Sarubhakta thinks that theatre artists are compelled to take help from donor. "I consider it as a compulsion. The condition is such that the country has to depend on foreigners. If possible, we should be self-dependent. If not, we are compelled to take support. This condition would come to an end if the government paid attention to it." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 195) Sooner or later, the state has got to support theatre groups and artists for the sustainable development of theatre in Nepal. Theatre groups, therefore, must create a synergy to put pressure on the state to come forth for the sustainable development of theatre culture in Nepal. To help establish sustainable infrastructures and "to train theatre workers fully, we need a full-fledged strong institution that receives endowments and recognition from the cultural organizations of the government." (Subedi 2006, 212) Pokharel, too, lays emphasis on the need for government support for the sustainable development of theatre: "The government should create ambience. Like in other sectors, sports, agriculture, education, the government should invest in culture and theatre. It can organize festivals, build small theatre houses all over the country, train artists and organize discussions on theatre." (Yubaraj 2066 BS, 205) This, however, demands synergy among all theatre workers. And the conflict, whether real or fabricated, among or between theatre groups must come to an end. "The theatre," argues Rijal, "becomes successful when artists start speaking and understanding the language of their time and working with democratic ideas and manners at the professional

level.” (Rijal 2008, 181) Even though artists work for money, they must not forget that they are working for the development of their country. For “their emotional involvement and attachment ma[kes] ‘the difference’” (Mottin 2007, 340)

Most of the problems in Nepali theatre have arisen because of the unhealthy competition between and among a handful of theatre groups based in Kathmandu. The theatre groups, in order to bag projects, are engaged in petty squabbling and tarnishing the image of each other. Frankly, there are so many projects that they, if they work together, do not have to risk their reputation and integrity for the sake of work. Because there is a lack of communication and unity among the theatre groups, they let critics portray them as packs of hungry wolves. If they were united, they would be able to bring substantial change in the country and thereby in the condition of theatre as well. Mottin articulates this problem in these words: “Groups are not pooling energies or sharing experiences but trying to secure their individual projects, contacts and spaces. This also affects artistic competition. No collective effort to grab public support through art advocacy actions could be documented during the period of my field-work either.” (Mottin 2007, 342) While there is ITI Centre Nepal, theatre groups have failed to make it their umbrella organization. This is just an example of the disintegration rampant among the Nepali theatre groups.

In conclusion, stigma does not arise out of the nexus between donor agencies and theatre groups the way many critics believe. As illustrated above, we see that this nexus has proved quite fruitful on both fronts: social transformation and preservation and promotion of the theatre in general. Moreover, this nexus has also led our theatre groups to experiment with the new poetics of theatre: the poetics of the

oppressed. Nevertheless, our theatre has been suffering from several problems brought about by megalomania, greed, insincerity, laziness, and a lack of solidarity, commitment, efficiency and democratic culture on the part of the artists as well as their respective groups. These problems are more about the individuals involved in theater groups than the concerned nexus, which has been the whipping boy of critics. All the same, this nexus is just a tentative strategy. At present, theatre groups do not have any option other than appropriating the opportunities provided by the nexus. Ultimately, the state must support artists and their groups for the sustainable development of Nepali theatre. It is high time theatre artists and their groups worked together in collaboration to get rid of these problems so that they can lobby for the state's sustainable support. If theatre groups received concrete support from the state, they would work independently. Even if they worked with INGOs and NGOs, the latter would come forth with their proposals rather than the other way round, and artists would be in a better position to aestheticize theatre for social change. In all, drama for social change in the Nepali context serves two purposes: theatre for development and the development of theatre.

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# Bringing the Playwright Home versus Sending the Audience Abroad

*Nepali Theatre Adaptations of A Doll's House and The Just (Assassins)*

■ PRAKASH SUBEDI

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In 2003, Aarohan Gurukul Theatre performed the Nepali adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* as *Putaliko Ghar*, and it was an instant success. It almost became a phenomenon for the voice of women and the feminist cause at a time when Nepal was undergoing a sweeping sociopolitical transformation. The play has seen more than two hundred performances so far in Nepal and abroad, and Gurukul's Rimal Theatre is crammed with enthusiastic audiences even today. A few years later, in 2007, Gurukul adapted Albert Camus's play *The Just (Assassins)* into the Nepali *Nyaya Premi* and performed it at the same venue. It also remained popular among audiences, though it did not create the kind of waves that *Putaliko Ghar* had. The similarity in the translation and adaptation of these two plays, both directed by the eminent Nepali director Sunil Pokharel, was that they belonged to language and culture very different from the target language

and culture, or, as Anuradha Dingwaney puts it, in both cases the translation and adaptation of the texts were between cultures that were not “civilizationally linked.” (Dingwaney 1996, 1) Similarly, in both cases there was an attempt to match the sociopolitical context of the country with that of the play. *Putaliko Ghar* was performed when the call for women’s rights and equality was being vocalized in Nepali society for truly the first time, while *Nyaya Premi* was enacted against the backdrop of the Maoists coming into the political mainstream after a decade-long guerilla war. The difference between these two performances, however, was huge, and it is this difference that this essay specifically attempts to observe.

Though *Nyaya Premi* was performed in the Nepali language, the play’s original character names were retained, and the director attempted to have the play resemble the original setting of *The Just (Assassins)* as closely as possible. Moreover, *Nyaya Premi* strictly followed the story and plot of the original without any significant changes except for deletions made in an attempt to cut the running time. *Putaliko Ghar*, on the other hand, took an entirely different approach. All the characters were given Nepali names, the play took place in a typical Nepali home, and every possible change was made to make the play appear entirely Nepali. Though the story and the plot largely matched the original, the director took liberties to introduce his interpretation, especially in the ending of the play. Anyone watching it without prior knowledge would have hardly guessed that *Putaliko Ghar* was a translation of a Norwegian play written nearly a century and half ago in a completely different society and culture for an entirely different audience. The obvious questions that arise at this point are: What was the reason behind these two approaches in adaptation? Did each of these adaptations do justice to the

original texts? And, what are the possible consequences of these two approaches on the original texts as well as on the audience? This essay tries to discuss these questions in light of the theories of translation, and, for that purpose, it dwells upon the major contemporary issues in translation and adaptation, discussing these two significantly different performances with those theoretical insights.

Translation has been a necessity in human transfer and sharing of knowledge and experience since time immemorial. With the rise of information-communication technology, translation has become an even more inalienable and inevitable aspect of communication in the modern world. Though it has been used in innumerable areas, the translation of literary texts has remained the most common practice and most discussed area of translation. It is an extremely complex process entangled not only by linguistic threads but also by social, cultural, historical, and political ones. As we move ahead from the translation of everyday language to the translation of literary texts, the task turns more arduous. Even within the realm of literary texts, the process becomes more demanding as we move from the translation of essays and fiction to the translation of poetry and plays. Furthermore, if the translation takes place between two completely different languages and cultures, the intricacies are even greater.

Elucidating this difficulty in translation, Anuradha Dingwaney quotes Frantz Fanon in her essay "Introduction: Translating 'Third World' Cultures." Fanon says, "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture." (Dingwaney 1996, 3) Fanon's idea is that language cannot be isolated from the world or culture within which it is embedded. Therefore, says Dingwaney, "The translator cannot merely search for equivalent words in the 'target' language to render the meaning of

the 'source'" while seeking to convey words and sentences from one language to another. Her point is that "the translator must attend to the contexts (a 'world, a culture') from which these words arise and which they, necessarily, evoke and express." (Dingwaney 1996, 3) Exploring the potential pitfalls in the process of translation, Dingwaney points to the possibility of "violence" when the culture being translated is constituted as "other." (Dingwaney 1996, 4)

Translation of every literary genre has its own complexities and nuances, but the translation of dramatic works is a comparatively challenging area. The simple reason is that translation of dramatic works involves not only the interlingual transfer of a given text between two linguistic sign systems, but also other extralinguistic elements. Astri Ghosh speaks to this issue: "The translation of theatrical texts is never easy. How do you translate the untranslatable when you work on a drama intended for recipients in one language and culture and translate it into another language? It is no easy task when the cultures are as far apart as the Norwegian and South Asian, when the source language is Norwegian and the target languages are Hindi, Urdu or Bengali." (Ghosh 2006, 195) Ghosh compares and contrasts the shades of translating a play with those of translating other texts and says, "When one is translating a novel, short story or poem, one has to solve the problem of dealing with phenomena that do not exist in another culture by writing footnotes or explaining things in a text." (Ghosh 2006, 195) But the case is different with a play because such provisions do not exist. That, however, does not limit the possibilities of translation because "drama gives one more freedom with a text, since you have more tools than just the written word." (Ghosh 2006, 195) Some issues to be taken into account while translating a play include the nature of

the play, the aim of the translation, the attributes of the translated text, the transfer of cultural content, and the position the translator assumes while translating the play.

Let us begin the discussion of the Nepali adaptation of these plays with *Putaliko Ghar*. As mentioned earlier, though this Nepali adaptation follows the original play's story and plot, a number of other elements have been changed. The most important change Pokharel has made is in the way he uses the theatre's physical space. As Kamaluddin Nilu perceptively observes in his essay "*A Doll's House* in Asia: Juxtaposition of Tradition and Modernity" this production is most importantly characterized by the fact that the concept of space is completely different from the original. Nilu explains, "In contrast to the closed door situation of the original where all actions take place in a drawing room, Pokharel makes use of the common open space concept of traditional Asian theatrical forms where the audience is seated on all sides of the performance space and observes the performance from close. The play is adapted to suit the Nepalese socio-cultural setting." (Nilu 2008, 117)

All the names of the characters, except that of Nora, (which was left unchanged for the simple reason that it does not sound too strange in Nepali) have been changed to Nepali names. Helmer, for instance, becomes Hemanta, Krogstad becomes Kedar, Dr. Rank is replaced by Dr. Rana, and Mrs. Linday by Leena. As in the original, the story takes place in a middle-class family, but in a different decade than the one chosen by Ibsen. The references to modern domestic devices like a washing machine, microwave oven, and flat-screen television hint that the play takes place in contemporary times.

Instead of Christmas, *Putaliko Ghar* takes place during Tihar, the Hindu festival of lights, in worship of the Goddess

Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth, with the music of *deusi* and *bhailo* in the background. As the story flashes back, we come to know that Hemanta and Nora had to travel to the *madhesh*, the hot plains, when Hemanta became sick. This was a change made to the original in which the couple traveled to Italy so that Torvald could recover. In several cases, the scenes are more humorous or more tear jerking than those in the original, and many more minute changes have been made as well. Pokharel even makes some changes to the original ending. After leaving the stage, Nora is found sitting outside in a contemplative mood under a placard that reads “Have you seen Nora somewhere?” Unlike Ibsen’s ending, the ending of the play here is thus completely open. (Nilu 2008, 118) In this way, Pokharel uses every device, makes every possible change, and takes every liberty in domesticating the play and in turning it into a typical Nepali production.

*Nyaya Premi*, on the other hand, appears to be a completely foreign play. This play was actually first performed by Aarohan in 1990 with a different cast, but with a similar adaptation. Bearded, rugged men in long, heavy overcoats dominate the stage filled with unfamiliar props that look very foreign to the Nepali audience. A samovar stands on the stage and a large cross in the background bears the colors of the Russian Federation flag. Time and again, Russian folk and patriotic music flood the stage, which is dictated by other unfamiliar sounds for a Nepali audience, such as the sounds of bugles and horse-driven chariots. The design of the prison, the uniforms of the prison officers, and the costume worn by the princess are typically Russian. Moreover, light filters are used to create the impression of a cold atmosphere. The story line, plot, and dialogues very closely match the original, and, as mentioned earlier, the only reductions made are to shorten

the play for the Nepali stage and to cut the dialogues based on Christian philosophy, which would have been too alien for a Nepali audience. How, then, should these two approaches be interpreted?

Though every translation is an attempt to familiarize the foreign, a major issue here is maintaining the foreignness of the source text in the target text. According to Walter Benjamin, "All translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages." (Quoted in Ghosh 2006, 196) But by translating a text, by showing how universal it is, in a way "one is denying that it is foreign." (Ghosh 2006, 197) Many theorists see such denial of foreignness as violence to the text and injustice to the readers or audience. Therefore, Astri Ghosh, in her essay "When Nora Wears a Sari" claims: "[A]s a translator, one must also communicate the foreignness that one's translations deny in their claim to universality. One must render the foreign familiar and still preserve its foreignness at the same time. This balance is very hard to achieve." (Ghosh 2006, 197)

As an answer to this problem, Ghosh cites Walter Benjamin who feels that one way of accomplishing this balance is by the use of language. Benjamin claims that "the language of a translation can—in fact, must—let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intention* of the original, not as reproduction, but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*." (Ghosh 2006, 197) The same is true even in the case of translating the elements of culture. Mary N. Layon, while discussing the translation of Homer's *Odyssey* in the modern context, also acknowledges that the more appropriate translation of Homer's masterpiece seemed an insistence on distance and unfamiliarity. She elaborates:

This notion of translation is not a violation of the “task of the translator.” For the grittiness of a cultural text made strange rather than neatly “ours” is also translation’s “bearing a cross.” Rather than translation as the rendition of the “foreign” into the “familiar,” it is translation as a multivalent configuration of the attempt to make familiar, of the strange and silent, of the inapprehensible, and of the drawn-near. And such a configuration—the task of the translator, her translation, and the audience(s) for it—is virtually unintelligible without a consideration of the context of and reasons for, the same narrative of, the act and product of translation. (Layon 1996, 49)

If we consider the above-mentioned performances with these theoretical insights, we come to the conclusion that the Nepali adaptation of *A Doll’s House* has not been able to maintain that foreignness, whereas in *The Just (Assassins)* we find a number of those qualities. Lawrence Venuti distinguishes between the translator who chooses a “domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home” and the translator who chooses a “foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad,” and recommends the latter. (Quoted in Dingwaney 1996, 5) From this perspective, the Nepali version of *A Doll’s House* can be seen as employing the domesticating method and *The Just (Assassins)* the foreignizing.

The same director, mostly the same cast, and the same theatre: what could have prompted Pokharel to take these two approaches? In a recent interview with this essayist, Pokharel put forth his explanations for this choice and said



that this was done more for political reasons than anything else. Pokharel explained that while performing *Nyaya Premi* in 1990, the thirty-year Panchayat system had just ended and the communist parties in Nepal had come to the forefront of Nepali politics. Similarly in 2007 the play was performed just after the Maoists had entered the political mainstream after a ten-year subversive guerilla war. Adapting the play in the Nepali context at such times, according to Pokharel, would have been too obvious. Pokharel confessed that it is difficult to say which method is better, but his personal opinion was that it is good to adapt a play to the local context as much as possible. For him, it is not an act of violence or injustice to the original in any way, and the director is free to interpret the play in the way he or she wants.

Pokharel says the choice depends also on the extent to which the “untranslatables” exist in a play. The linguistically untranslatable primarily include “metaphorical and idiomatic expressions, proverbs and puns, and the concepts that do not have their corresponding referents in the target language.” (Subedi 2007, 75) The same often happens with pragmatic and cultural aspects as well. The more untranslatable linguistic and cultural concepts present in a play, the less effective the adaptation or translation is likely to be. (Subedi 2007, 75)

A play, or for that matter any text, can be adapted for various reasons, but the tendency, as John Milton puts forth in his essay “Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies,” is to adapt much more when we are translating from a language that is further away from the source language than a language that is grammatically closer. (Milton 2009, 54) A number of processes such as “recontextualization, tradaptation, spinoff, reduction, simplification, condensation, abridgement, special version, reworking, offshoot, transformation, remediation,

and re-vision" can be brought into practice for adaptation. (Milton 2009, 51) One important discussion Milton raises in his essay is that of a distinction between *adaptation* and *appropriation*. An adaptation, Milton explains, will usually contain omissions, rewritings, and maybe additions, but will still be recognized as the work of the original author, where the original point of enunciation remains. This is similar to Dryden's classic definition of *paraphrase*. (Quoted in Milton 2009, 51) Appropriation, on the other hand, is similar to Dryden's definition of *imitation*: the original point of enunciation may now have changed, and, although certain characteristics of the original may remain, the new text will be more that of the adapter or rewriter. (Milton 2009, 51)

What the aim of a performance is can answer what kind of adaptation should be made to perform it. For instance, if the purpose is to use the play for social, cultural, political, or other motives, or even some kind of experiment on rendering the unfamiliar familiar, adaptation to the point of appropriation or absolute familiarity can be clearly more effective. But if the idea is to make audience members witness a timeless piece of art and then leave them free to individually craft any interpretation they like or any lesson they might learn, a closer adaptation, bordering on the original with a glimpse of its foreignness, would be more justified. As far as these two Nepali versions of the classic Western plays are concerned, *Putaliko Ghar* clearly falls into the first of Milton's two categories and *Nyaya Premi* into the second.

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of urbanization have caused massive changes in the cultural spaces of this historical city. His essay begins with a historical overview of Kirtipur and then studies the commercial and political pressures that have formed the city's modern urban landscape. Rai also examines the complex relationship between Tribhuvan University (its central campuses are located in Kirtipur) and the local inhabitants of Kirtipur, and discusses how this has affected the city's changing cultural identity.

Concepts such as modernity, globalization, and urbanization are plural and heterogeneous, rather than singular terms. Just as there are multiple modernities in different parts of the world, the way people experience those modernities, including their architectural and aesthetic forms like art and theatre, are necessarily plural. The artists interviewed by IMAP did not have any singular narrative about the cities in which they live. Their responses to modernity and the urban forms inspired by its technologies, were manifold and plural, both positive and negative. Similarly, the essays included in this volume do not propose any grand meta-narrative about the art, theatre, or city spaces that they examine. What they provide are a number of windows and perspectives from which to view these areas. It is hoped that such perspectives will inspire still newer points of view and motivate scholars to do further research on the urban landscape of Kathmandu, its architecture, theatre, arts, and performances.

# Stigma in Nepali Theatre: A Political Representation

■ PRATIMA SHARMA

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The aim of this research is to explore the history of Nepali theatre culture by examining the ways in which inclusion of the disabled comes at a cost. Stigma in Nepali theatre offers a critical framework for understanding cross-stigma representations. However, theatrical representation of stigmatized characters and their lives has a political dimension in which such representation binds some and excludes others. The major objective of this paper is, therefore, to map how stigma is currently being represented in Nepali theatre and to analyze the hidden politics behind the inclusion of stigmatized characters. This central issue will be discussed focusing on theatre groups like Aarohan Gurukul Theatre and Yaubanika and their adoption of these subject matters within Kathmandu Valley.

The first section of the paper begins with a short mapping of the history of Nepali theatre so as to understand the politics

of inclusion and exclusion in plays. The second section will include the definitions of stigma, its types, and its representation in Nepali theatre from 1960 to the present. In the final section, I will analyze some of the texts (plays) that have been staged within the last eighteen months by various theatre groups working in the field of disability and stigma.

The exclusion and inclusion of subject matters and characters on stage is highly political. It has been seen that any form of representation in a play and the staging of such plays reflects a power relation. Sunil Pokharel, a director of Aarohan Theatre says, "Nothing exists out of politics. Even our dress codes reflect our political attitude. If any artist says that he or she is out of politics, that very statement can be regarded as a highly political statement. That's why theatre, too, is not free from politics. The politics of the theatre is to stay in opposition to the ruling government."<sup>1</sup> This indicates that the selection of subject matter for performances can also be a political act. In other words, the politics of the exclusion and inclusion of different subject matters at different times is itself dramatic and reflects the exercise of power in the theatrical cosmos. Such exercising of power in theatre helps to create discourses<sup>2</sup> related to those subject matters.

Theatre provides a platform to the people who are devoid of a voice. Monica Mottin, in her research article "Dramas for Social Change: Theatre for Development or the Development of Theatre?" writes that dramas can have a decontextualizing and transformative power. They create a different social

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1 Sunil Pokharel, in an interview with the author September 15, 2009.

2 Michel Foucault, in his book *Truth and Power* (1980), talks about *discourses*, which are more than simple statements as they bear a truth. Those who create such discourses are empowered and represent the other.

space where anything can happen, even magic. People who don't usually have voice can express their opinion because a willing suspension of disbelief allows for the acceptance of atypical events. (Mottin 2007, 323) Theatre can be the best tool for the representation of those voices that remain unheard in society. In Nepali theatre, too, marginalized voices are being represented in different periods of time. Thus, theatre helps to create discourses and empowers those voices that are in the margin.

Professor Abhi Subedi argues in *Nepali Theatre as I See It* that "Nepali theatre is a mirror of Nepali cultural and political history, the focus of which are the ordinary human beings. . . . The power relations that subsist among the various groups in this country are mirrored in the theatrical practices." (Subedi 2006, 13-14) Here, Subedi makes it clear that theatre in Nepal helps to reflect the politics of the time. Thus, the drama of politics affects the inclusion and exclusion of issues in Nepali theatre, which in turn dramatizes politics.

### **The History of Nepali Theatre**

Nepali theatre has undergone various theatrical and cultural changes since its development. Though theatre was basically meant for entertaining elites in its early days, after the restoration of democracy in Nepal, it gained momentum and diversified its subject matter, becoming a mode of expression. Though entertainment seemed to be the primary objective of theatre, politics was in its womb since the beginning.

Abhi Subedi maps the development of Nepali theatre by arguing that it has undergone changes in terms of its subject matter, audience, and various theatrical practices. The subject of Nepali theatre has ranged from the religious to the historical, further evolving into the real, natural, and surreal.

Prachanda Malla claims, "The eastern philosophy regarding the performance art asserts that if human life is full of sorrows then why perform tragic plays? So religious plays and comedies were performed in Nepali theatre in its early phase."<sup>3</sup> Malla's statements reflect the fact that the existing discourse in the past influenced the selection of the subject matter to be staged in the theatre. The history of the content of Nepali plays, therefore, reflects the politics of the inclusion of various issues in different epochs, which valorized one over the other.

Subedi says that theatre in Nepal in its early days was reflected in the form of *Jatras* and festivals. Thus Nepali theatre at its inception adopted religious issues as its main theme, excluding all other realities of the time. The real protagonists used to be the monarchs, as performances got their validity only when members of the monarchy graced them with their presence. Newari *Jatras* and festivals, which were even sanctioned by the monarchs, became so dominant that they overshadowed all other social and cultural events. Subedi claims that even Prithvi Narayan Shah sanctioned such performances: "He used the performances and the dance rituals of the people of the valley as the most important forms of power that could be used to resist the colonial intrusion then being experienced in this cultural zone. Such intrusions came through 'foreign' cultural forms and the activities of proselytizers." (Subedi 2006, 16)

However when theatre in Nepal began to be more precise and theoretically charged, it was restricted to the palace, turning it into merely a means of entertainment for the elites. Though the performers came from the general public, common citizens could not view the performances. These

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3 Prachanda Malla, in an interview with the author July 21, 2009.



early theater artists staged plays that had religious significance. They also brought in historical subjects that essentially valorized the warriors of the courts. Theatre, thus, was taken from the “mass to class.” (Subedi 2006, 32) Though a new form of theatre called Parsi Theatre arrived in Nepal in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was again restricted to the palaces. Subedi claims, “When Parsi theatre came in Nepal it acquired a status of power and prestige as it was the exclusive means of entertainment for the ruling families of Nepal” though it was introduced by citizens like Keshab Man Tuladhar, Ratna Das Prakash, Hari Prasad Rimal, and Bekha Narayan Maharjan. (Subedi 2006, 76)

The interesting fact of these performances is that women were always excluded and never played any roles other than those of audience members. Satya Mohan Joshi remarks, “There were only males on the stage performing as women through cross-dressing.” Whether the performances were about goddesses or historical events involving women, female roles would always be played by men, excluding female artists from the theatrical arena. Prachanda Malla in an interview explained, “It was only in 2004 BS [1947 AD] that female artists started performing in Nepali theatre.” Similarly, Satya Mohan Joshi describes how “Buddi Devi Dangol was the first woman actor from the general public to perform in the Nepali theatre.”<sup>4</sup>

The control of Nepal’s rulers over the theatre slowly started to lessen with the change in Nepali politics during 1960s. Sanjeev Uprety, in his article “Nepali Modernities and Postmodernities,” mentions that with the arrival of Bal Krishna Sama and Gopal Prasad Rimal the dawn of

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4 Satya Mohan Joshi, in an interview with the author August 12, 2009.

modernism began in Nepal. He says, "The writers of plays, fiction and poetry began to use the lives of ordinary, common folk as the subject of their texts thereby displacing the stories of Gods and Goddesses, and kings and courtiers that were the main source of inspiration for the earlier generation of writers." (Upreti 2007, 235) Thus the marginalized issues of ordinary people and their lives made inroads into theatre. Theatre, in a way, became a means to exercise the power to challenge the existing "truth,"<sup>5</sup> sometimes even helping to assert the truth.

In such representations, some subject matters get prominent space in theatre and some are simply sidelined. This selection of subject matters is historical and culture bound. Satya Mohan Joshi says, "The play *Bagh Bhairav*, which bore religious subject matter, was in fact a political play that resisted the anarchy of the time." Thus, the selection of religious subject matter and latent politics in *Bagh Bhairav* reflect its historical and cultural nature.

With the introduction of street theatre in 2038 BS (1981 AD), theatre stepped into a new dawn as the excluded realities of everyday life began to make inroads in the theatrical arena. As a result, theatre slowly became much more inclusive. These street theatre performances even explored issues related to human health, civil rights, women's education, etc. More importantly, street theatre began with a political agenda. The treatment of the subject matter in these street performances had its roots in the time of its emergence. Street theatre began during the Panchayat system, which banned all other activities that spoke against it. The first prominent street theatre

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5 In *Truth and Power* (1980), Michel Foucault argues, "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of its power which it induces and which extend it."

group, Sarwanam, staged a drama with a political message that called for freedom from the anarchy of the Panchayat system. That play was *Hami Basanta Khojirahechhaun* (2040 BS, 1983 AD), which symbolically meant the desire or dream for change or freedom in life. The dramas of that period basically bore the same political message, in a way sidelining other issues of the time.

However, after the People's Movement of 2046 BS (1990 AD), Nepali theatre has been affected by the politics of the margin, which has widened the scope of the subject matter, performers, and audience as well. Moreover, the People's Movement II in 2062-3 BS (2005-6 AD) broadened the horizon of Nepali theatre. Now a wide range of issues that affect marginalized groups and performers from these marginalized groups are challenging the discourses of the time. The size of the audience has also increased, and the impact of such performances challenges the existing notion of theatre.

### Stigma in Nepali Theatre

In any society there are different people who are categorized into *normal* and *stigmatized*. The criteria for normalcy<sup>6</sup> and stigma are sociocultural constructs, so they vary according to the sociocultural values of the respective society. It seems, though, that in all societies people with disabilities

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6 Lennard J. Davis, in his work "Constructing Normalcy," has defined the concept of norms in relation to disability. He says, "The concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. The norm pins down that majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell shaped curve. . . . Any bell curve will always have at its extremities those characteristics that deviate from the norm. So, with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes." Here the deviants refer to people with disabilities, or in other words, those who don't fall under the norms are the abnormal or disabled.

have a high chance of being stigmatized. *Stigma*, as Erving Goffman says, simply refers to “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” and is sometimes also called “a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap.” (Goffman 1997, 204) However, “the sense of being stigmatized or having a stigma is inextricably tied to social context.” (Goffman 1997, 218) So what may be stigmatized in one sociocultural setting may not have a similar regard in another society. Nepali society has its own sociocultural norms and values, where the category of *women*, for instance, is stigmatized in specific contexts. Widows, from this perspective, often become the recipients of “triple discriminations” and are highly stigmatized. (Hans 2006, 19) Though the situation has changed to some extent, when we make an evolutionary study of Nepali society, we understand their subjugated position. Such variations in social perception bring variations in the representation of these categories in art and literature as well.

My major thrust in this paper is to analyze the representation of some of the categories of stigmatized people such as women, widows, women with disabilities, the mentally ill, the physically disabled, the third gendered, etc. in Nepali theatre. I will try to focus on the politics of the exclusion and inclusion of such subjects and the effects of their representation in the theatrical arena.

The sociocultural construction of Nepal has led to the subjugation of women. Though Nepali society has been worshipping woman as a “living goddess,”<sup>7</sup> the actual treatment of women is something different. From the beginning, women are treated as “the second sex”<sup>8</sup> and their secondary position

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7 The *Kumari*, a virgin girl, is worshipped as a living goddess in Nepal.

8 Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), talks about the otherness that has been conferred upon women. Woman is always

in society has resulted in their marginalization in the theatrical arena as well. As mentioned above, before 2004 BS [1947 AD], the roles of women were played by males in women's clothing. Prachanda Malla highlights the social perception of women in society at the time, "When Shyam Das Vaisnav and his colleagues asked for the permission of Chandra Samser to let women perform in a play, Samser first hesitated."<sup>9</sup> This reflects that the category of women was stigmatized, and any activity women did that went against social norms and values stigmatized the whole family. As a result, women were not given space in the theatrical arena before 2004 BS. However, issues related to women did get some space in the theatrical world before that.

Today, issues related to women with stigma are staged in Nepali theatre. *Masan*, a play by Gopal Prasad Rimal, deals with a woman who is forbidden from enjoying motherhood due to her husband's concern for its effects on her beauty. As a result, the woman suffers as females who are not blessed with motherhood are stigmatized in Nepali society. Prachanda Malla says, "*Masan* does have some influence from *A Doll's House*, which advocated the right to happiness of women."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, many plays dealing with widows have also been staged in both proscenium and street theatre. *Putaliko Ghar*, which has been staged many times by Gurukul,<sup>11</sup> presents a character who is a widow. Though the widow undergoes various problems, the whole drama actually revolves around another woman who is living a well-settled married

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"othered" in society. In her text, Beauvoir has tried to clarify that even men are other to women, thus this secondary category prescribed to women is simply a patriarchal construct.

9 Malla, interview.

10 Ibid.

11 A school of theatre.

life blessed with marital bliss. Nepali society dehumanizes widows, so they are doubly discriminated against. Though *Putaliko Ghar* brings in the character of widow, the role has again been relegated to a secondary position.

Similarly, *Maya Deviko Sapana* by Abhi Subedi, presents a widow character named Maya Devi who not only holds a respectable position in society but also works toward establishing peace even when her own son is a guerilla fighter. However, if compared to actual widows living in Nepali society, the representation of Maya Devi seems to be highly political as it tries to challenge the existing truth about the condition of widows condition in Nepal. Birendra Hamal<sup>12</sup> has also raised issues related to widows in his plays. Similarly, many plays like *Bahula Kajiko Sapana*, *Talak Jung Bharses Tulke*, *Psychosis*, *Miss Margarida*, *Ugly Duckling*, *Oedipus Rex*, etc. have been staged in proscenium theatre, portraying stigmatized characters like the mentally ill, the third gendered, lesbians, the physically disabled, the visually impaired, etc.

Though these different forms of stigma have been represented in theatre for some time, people with actual disabilities rarely received an opportunity to perform on stage in the early days. Only a few directors broke with tradition. In an interview with the author Suman Rayamajhi, he comments that in 2046 BS (1990 AD), "Director Sunil Pokahrel worked with the characters who were themselves deaf." Similarly Ghimire Yubaraj, in his book *Rupantarankalagi Rangamanch*, writes, "In 2046 BS [1990 AD], Aarohan staged a play entitled *Aawaz* that included the deaf and people with disabilities,

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12 Ghimire Yubaraj, in conversation with the author. Yubaraj asserted that he has forgotten the name of the plays, however he remembers several in which there were many widow characters. The plays were mostly street plays.

which was performed again only in 2058 BS [2003 AD]. In the play *Manchhemanchheharu*, which was written and directed by Krishna Sahayatri and staged at the National Theatre Festival by Jyoti Punj Shine Theatre, deaf people acted on the stage. The characters used sign language in the play while a narrator explained in Nepali."<sup>13</sup> (Yubaraj 2066, 125) Similarly, in 2058 BS (2003 AD), the actors from Gurukul School of Theatre and other actors with disabilities staged a play directed by Sunil Pokharel. Speaking about the play, one of the actors, Tika Dahal, who herself has a disability and who works with the Nepal Disabled Women Association (NDWA), said, "[T]he play was about disability. It was staged to inform people that within disability, too, there are different types. Also, the play reflected the professional, familial, and other problems that the people with disability and their families undergo. The play mirrored the different problems of women with disability."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the limited presence of the disabled on stage in the early days of Nepali theatre, at present there are some directors and institutions that work with people who are stigmatized. The Blue Diamond Society (BDS) staged a play *Aba Pariwartan Hunuparchha* in 2008 in which the actors were third gendered. The Disability Human Rights project also staged a drama in different parts of Nepal bringing characters with different forms of physical disability, like blindness, hearing impairment, etc., onto the open stage of street theatre. Similarly, Suman Rayamajhi has directed plays such as *Green Finger* and *Inside the Brain*, in 2009, in which visually impaired actors as well as prisoners' children acted in the proscenium theatre. Also, under the campaign

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13 Translation by author.

14 Tika Dahal, in conversation with the author December 12, 2009.

“Kritika” and with the leadership of the Nepal Disabled Women Association, the play *Doshi Ko Ho?*, written and directed by Bishnu Bhakta Phuyal, was staged on March 8, 2009. The play was related to the issues of the doubly-stigmatized and triply-stigmatized women with multiple forms of disabilities. The actors, too, were stigmatized women.

### Representation within Performance

In this section, I will be scrutinizing some theatre groups and institutions and the plays they have staged within the last eighteen months, especially those that represent stigmatized subjects. Their representation in Nepali theatre reflects the politics within and outside plays, especially when we consider some of these organizations that claim to have worked on the issues of stigma and disability.

Nisha Sharma, in an interview with the author, shares her experience: “After playing the role in *Psychosis*, I felt like a patient of psychosis.”<sup>15</sup> The play *4.48 Psychosis*, written in the form of a suicide note from the character Sarah Kane, is the story of an intersexed woman who is in an asylum. The confession of the character’s self-stigmatization reflects her confusion and fragmentation, i.e. the different voices of the self. Her social identity is affected through the “occupation” which turns into stigma. (Goffman 1997, 203) Her social identity is discredited by the power of a single attribute: that of being intersexed. Sanjeev Uprety in his article “*Swastha Manasiktako Manchitra*” writes, “*Psychosis* is about a woman who is mentally fragmented. . . . She calls herself ‘poor half woman.’ Because of her homosexuality, she condemns society for her self humiliation. . . . However, she is not ready to accept

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15 Translation by author.



the biased social norms that control her sexual behavior.”<sup>16</sup> (Upriety 2009, 6) Though the play reflects a western sociocultural setting, its inclusion in Nepali theatre has widened its theatrical boundary. Upriety, highlighting the significance of the play in the Nepali context, questions, “Do homosexuals have to survive tolerating the traditional ideologies of society, searching the ultimate suicidal choice and the fear of daily life in New Nepal?” Despite its address of this taboo subject, the play could still be seen as exclusive as the actor who performed on stage was not herself intersexed.

*Maya Deviko Sapana*, which was again staged by Aarohan, presents a character who is mentally ill as well as physically handicapped as his arm was amputated. Instead of passively accepting the experience of stigma, this character, who in a way is the mouthpiece of the playwright, challenges the existing truth and wants to replace it with his own truth that empowers him. He says, “People call me mad, but it’s people who are mad.”<sup>17</sup> (Subedi 2065 BS, 22) In a society like Nepal such statements are simply seen as the babble of the insane. The inclusion of such a stigmatized character, who even tries to challenge the discourse of his time—the play takes place during the Maoist-Government War<sup>18</sup>—reflects the writer’s politics. These politics challenge the existing reality of stigma in Nepali society. It presents a stigmatized character who is challenging the existing truth of the time. Thus, the play reflects the writer’s politics of inclusion, but at the same time is exclusive as the person who plays this character is not actually mentally ill.

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 The Maoist-Government War in Nepal lasted for ten10 years; it began in 2052 BS and officially ended in 2062 BS.

*Ghanchakar*, a novel by Sanjeev Uprety, was dramatized by Sunil Pokharel and staged by Aarohan Theatre at Old Baneshwor. The protagonist of the play is a lecturer at Tribhuvan University and is a columnist for the fictional paper *Shantipur*. The troubled politics of the country create a sense of unease, or even abnormal state of mind, in him. The play represents the psyche of a psychologically unstable but not necessarily mentally ill human being. It tempts us to rethink the notions of “madness” as Michel Foucault discussed. The protagonist of the novel is chained by norms but cannot follow them and thus becomes “abnormal.”

*Ghanchakar*’s protagonist is explicitly turned into a lunatic. But the implicit sanity that his actions and thoughts carry should convince most readers otherwise. Nevertheless, it doesn’t overshadow the portrayal of important characters like student Ranganath and an ascetic Dilbarnath. The protagonist grieves, “I am helpless, Ranganath. The doctors here are even refusing to re-examine me. They have already put me on the ‘mad’ list.”<sup>19</sup> (Uprety 2007, 183-4) He murmurs and talks to himself between his lectures and often moves to places that are less frequented by the so-called sane. Even his wife and colleagues are skeptical of his nature and are thinking of sending him to a lunatic asylum. In the meanwhile, the protagonist visits the ascetic Dilbarnath and spiritualist Freinz Reiner, who each have their own set of predictions for him. Surprisingly, as their predictions start turning into reality, his madness intensifies. This phenomenon is described by Lerita M. Coleman: “[Those] who are stigmatized or acquire stigma lose their place in the social hierarchy”; power is always enjoyed by the majority. (Coleman 2007, 218) The main character’s suicide attempt is taken as

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19 Translation by author.

proof of his complete insanity as a doctor's comments reveal, "The insane had already planned for his suicide."<sup>20</sup> (Upriety 2007, 54) In the hospital, the man is under disciplinary power to be observed, as Foucault calls "panopticism."<sup>21</sup> The play reflects not only the madness of an individual but also that of our society and way of thinking. It looks back on the sequence of political developments from *Khoj* to *Jana Andolan* and the present political circumstances. Bishnu Sapkota, in his review of *Ghanchakkar*, writes, "This allegorical episode is a powerful satire against a society which is accustomed to interpreting individuals on the basis of a rigid set of rules: those whose characteristics do not fall within a set of predetermined categories are doomed to be labeled 'abnormal.'" (Sapkota 2007, 389)

Ultimately, the central character in *Ghanchakkar* is neither completely sane nor insane; he is just different from the "normal" people around him. The "problem" is thus not with the protagonist, or minority, but with "the way normalcy is constructed" by the majority. (Davis 1997, 9) In a similar manner, the way Lati<sup>22</sup> sings a song and the dialogues delivered by Riksa Wala create humor in the play. What makes them funny, or different, however, is defined by the majority.

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20 Ibid.

21 Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" (1977), clarifies how panoptic modality helps to maintain discipline and thus to exercise power. The disciplines provide, at the base, a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies, and punishment against the violation of disciplines finally helps to make effective mechanisms of power. Thus panoptic modality puts bodies and forces under the regular observation of power through discipline and punishment.

22 Lati in *Ghanchakkar* is one of the play's two female characters. Her name suggests stupidity in the Nepali language. She is given no identification except this. Also, the character is mentally ill and is sexually abused by Riksa Wala.

Audiences laugh at Lati and Riksa Wala the way the Armies laugh at Riksa Wala in the play. The majority of people in society find them foolish and treat them simply as a source of laughter. Just as stigma reflects the production and consumption of popular culture, the manner in which these stigmatized characters—Riksa Wala, the *madheshi* laborer, and Lati, the woman—are included in the play reflects their exclusion in Nepali society. However, as seen in so many other plays, such inclusion of stigma in the theatre becomes the victim of political exclusion. The performance of stigmatized roles by “normal” actors is itself indicative of the politics of the exclusion of the disabled and can therefore never be an authentic representation.

*The Green Finger*, directed by Suman Rayamaji, is a play involving a visually impaired person (VIP), which has brought change to the theatrical arena in the sense that visually impaired actors acted on the stage. The plot revolves around the emotions and feelings of a VIP and tells us the story of five friends setting out to make a documentary and the obstacles they face. It is an attempt to do something new and to bring together those who see and those who see things a bit differently. The visually impaired actors were able to portray expressions of anger, confusion, happiness, sadness, love, pain, and many emotions in between in a very effective manner. Using disabled actors to perform on stage like so-called normal actors is a new experiment in proscenium theatre in Nepal. The writer’s naming of the visually impaired character *Drishya* counters the established definition of visually impaired people. *Drishya* is visually impaired in the play and in real life as well. Yet the playwright has empowered this actor by making him the most dominant character in the play; he can “see” and understand the situation much better

than the other characters. Drishya, when he says, “The blind man was playing the music but the music was not blind,” is trying to assert his identity while at the same time articulating that though he cannot see with his eyes, he can understand better.

The inclusion of VIPs in the theatre is a mere political, institutional power. Once the actors leave the stage, they are excluded again. Nevertheless, their inclusion and participation in the theatrical arena opens the gate for their empowerment. Kunta Shrestha, who is physically disabled and has performed in a play staged by DHRP, shares her experiences: “After performing on the stage, the fear that was ruling me due to my disability has been wiped away, and I feel like I can also do something in my life.”<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of stigmatized characters and actors in Nepali theatre excludes the other similarly stigmatized people from the mainstream. It shows that the inclusion of some stigmatized people in theatre empowers them among other stigmatized people. These few actors simply try to represent the rest of the stigmatized groups.

The Disability Human Rights Project (DHRP), which was established in 2009, has provided a platform to people with disabilities to act on stage. They staged a drama<sup>24</sup> in the open theatre in which stigmatized subjects such as the hearing impaired, physically disabled, and visually impaired, etc. acted to advocate their rights for a dignified and better life. The play was based on the experiences of people who bear a mark

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23 Kunta Shrestha, in an interview November 27, 2009.

24 Suresh Chand, in an interview November 27, 2009. As the director of the play, Suresh Chand said that they did not give a name to the play because it was focused more on social awareness as it included the actors’ experiences with disabilities.

of disgrace due to their physical disability. In such plays, the actors are not just working for the theatre, rather, they believe that theatre can be the best means for advocating their rights. Suresh Chand, the director of the street play and the founder of DHRP, argues, "Disability is not a different subject. It is a reality that every person stands the risk of being disabled in the course of life."<sup>25</sup> In other words, imposing stigma upon people with disabilities is a malpractice. Chand believes "[p]lays help some of the groups to represent themselves for the social debate. So, theatre can be the best means for advocating the rights of the people with disability." He cited the example of Brazil where more than twenty laws concerning the disabled were drafted due to advocacy through theatre. He believes that such advocacy conducted by his organization is a maiden step in the theatrical space of Nepal. Similarly, Maheshwor Ghimire of the same organization believes that such an approach in theatre by his organization is an experiment and "can be the most effective tool for making people realize such malpractice of social discrimination towards the stigmatized people."<sup>26</sup>

The Blue Diamond Society (BDS) staged a play *Aba Pariwartan Hunuparchha* (2008), which was written and directed by Badri Pandey, advocating the rights of third gendered people. It was staged in 2007 in the proscenium theatre at Gurukul though the script demanded the spaces of the street. All the actors in the play belonged to the third gender. Pandey comments on his play: "It includes the experiences of third-gender people. The play staged the problems faced by these people like problems concerning citizenship and their family's and society's attitudes towards them. It

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25 Ibid.

26 Interview.

shows how one person who is stigmatized in such a socio-cultural context starts earning the livelihood for his family members who have treated him badly most of his life.”<sup>27</sup> The message espoused through such performance threatens the existing view of the public towards third-gender people. As a result, it demands society to correct its perception of them and advocates for their civil rights. The inclusion of third-gender people in theatre helps them to be empowered.

Speaking about the play *Doshi Ko Ho?*, Tika Dahal says: “The play was an effort to show the diversities within disability. People with physical disabilities, the third gendered, *dalits*, and women who give birth to only daughter have different experiences. So these differences should be valued equally, and their rights should be assured. However, there is discrimination in the implementation of the government policies.” *Doshi Ko Ho?* “raises questions on our value systems, social organizations and systems of governance.” (Hans 2006, 27) The play is highly political as it advocates for the rights of women with disabilities and thus provides the foundation for “essential shifts.” (Hans 2006, 27)

These institutions that have staged plays related to the issues of stigma reflect different facets. Groups like Aarohan have staged such plays, however, they have tended to exclude real stigmatized actors from the proscenium. Meanwhile, institutions like DHRP, NDWA, and BDS have mostly staged plays for awareness building rather than aesthetic effects. Such awareness is supposed to dismantle the earlier discourses about the existing notion of disability and people with disability so as to rid society of stigma.

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27 In conversation with the author.

## Conclusion

This research highlights the representation of stigma in Nepali theatre throughout various historical phases. People with different forms of disability seem to have been stigmatized in Nepal. Their inclusion and exclusion in different stages of history mirrors the politics of the time, which in turn is highly political. The representation of the disabled in earlier phases reflects how they were “othered” in Nepali society. However, after the 1960s, the change in Nepali politics changed the theatre as well. Earlier cultural forms were dismantled and paved the way for stigmatized bodies to be represented in Nepali theatre. As a result, stigma also became a dominant issue in performance. Today the inclusion of the stigmatized is still not free from politics.

The representation of stigma after the 1960s did not bring many changes in Nepali theatre. Sometimes “normal” people represented the stigmatized, and other times the stigmatized represented themselves. The inclusion of real stigmatized actors in theatre has helped them reflect upon their “different” ability. Though theatre became an effective tool for raising awareness and advocating the rights of the stigmatized, such inclusion reflects the politics of exclusion.

The institutions working for stigmatized groups are more like the propagandists for whom theatre merely becomes a means of establishing “institutional power”<sup>28</sup> rather than

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28 The staging of plays by different groups formed specifically to work for people with disabilities has been creating a discourse that the members of such groups are the only people working for marginalized people. Such discourses have helped these groups grab the attention of the general public and donor agencies as well. As a result, the plays they have staged have become the source for generating income to regulate their organization and thus establish their organizational power in society. Also, the directors of such plays are empowered to explore



empowering the people they claim to help. Though some people with disabilities get the opportunity to explore themselves and reestablish their identities on stage, many of them are simply left to relive the same lives they had before the performance. Such institutions function more as NGOs rather than groups promoting theatrical art. Hence the inclusion and exclusion of stigma in Nepali theatre mirrors the inclusion and exclusion of stigma in Nepali society. On the one hand, it reflects the power relation between the “normal” and the so-called “disabled,” and, on the other, it becomes an effective tool for boosting institutional power.

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# **Poubha in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

## **A Comparative Study of the Stylistics and Iconography of the Traditional Art of Kathmandu Valley**

■ **PROMINA SHRESTHA**

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No generation is interested in art in quite the same ways as any other; each generation, like each individual, brings to the contemplation of art its own categories of appreciation, makes its own demands upon art, and has its own uses for art.

— T. S. Elliot

### **Preface**

The Newars (Newa) have generally been acknowledged as one of the original habitants of the Kathmandu Valley, descending from various ethnic and racial groups that settled and ruled the Valley during its two-millennia history. They have been credited with the religious architecture throughout the region, and their art and religious practices have given the area its culture.

There are many similarities between the Newar culture

and that of ethnic and civilized groups from the Sino-Tibetan Plateau and Indian Subcontinent. This leads to the theory that there was a significant amount of human movement through the Valley over many centuries, and with this movement came the steady acceptance, adoption, and diffusion of diverse ideas and cultures. The Newar community has been described as a “pre-dominantly Mongoloid people practicing an Indo-Aryan culture.” They are culturally unique, being that their practices and beliefs revolve around their composite Hindu-Buddhist-Tantric religious core.

### Introduction

Art in Kathmandu Valley has always been deeply rooted in religion, religious philosophy, and myth. *Poubha* is a traditional style of art belonging to the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley. It is a sacred art form that translates religious texts from Hindu, Buddhist and Tantric philosophies into visual interpretations. This art form has a sophisticated use of symbols, colors, and iconography. An early example of Poubha art from Nepal is the *Ratna Sambhav*, dating from the thirteenth century, now on display at the Los Angeles County Museum in the United States.

Historically, this art was used in the spiritual pursuits of enlightenment and served as a narrative, depicting myths, folklore, religious philosophies and more, with a deep-rooted tantric affinity. Today Poubha is displayed for people to see and celebrate during auspicious events such as the festivals of Buddha Jayanti in Swayambhu and Bisket Jatra in Bhaktapur.

Traditionally, Poubha was also part of a family's personal celebration of an elder's advent to seventy-seven years, seven months, and seven days, known as *janku*. The family commissioned a *Chitrakar* (artist) to write a Poubha for this occasion.

The Poubha was part of the ritual and tradition releasing the person from all worldly responsibilities.

Nepali art has frequently been a topic of study for cultural, social, and political purposes. Poubha is specifically studied in the religious context of Nepal as a whole, that is, in regard to its intricate relation to Buddhism (*Vajrayana* and *Mahayana*), Hinduism, and Tantricism. However, very few have delved into the question of the modern transformation of traditional art forms. The social dynamics of the Newar community have transformed immensely with globalization and the era of mass information. Today, this traditional art form survives with elements of modernization. Artists maintain the basic rules of iconography and line drawing but introduce their own style, motifs, and interpretations of the religious philosophy. The question is, then, can a traditional art form, such as Poubha, face the challenges of an influx of external influences and still maintain its core elements? And if so, how? Furthermore, what are the stylistic and iconographic influences that its practitioners have incorporated, and how are they shaping twenty-first century Poubha?

In an attempt to answer these questions, interviews were conducted with museum curators, art historians, professors of art, and researchers. Museum paintings were viewed and analyzed along with readings of published research and historical books. Interviews mainly focused on artists and each provided a set questionnaire from which parametric parallels were drawn. This research is an attempt to analyze whether the traditions of Poubha—its original methods and materials of practice and its artistic spiritual ritual—still survive.

This research was conducted to analyze the stylistic and iconographic variations that appear from the mid twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first in Poubha art. The

research analyzes historical influences and compares them to the works of three prominent twenty-first century Poubha artists: Deepak Kumar Joshi, Lok Chitrakar, and Udaya Charan Shrestha.

A qualitative benchmark was established to act as a comparative in terms of the basic mathematics of the painting (iconometry), iconography, and presentation. The ritualistic, methodological, and spiritual parts of the tradition were based on readings and interviews. The study was conducted with reference to previous studies and research publications, interviews and consultations with artists, arts and culture professors, museum curators, and art historians. Paintings from museums of various centuries were analyzed and compared to those of artists in the twenty-first century. The research was conducted in reference to published books, articles and reports by both national and international authors, in the context of Newa art and Nepali history in general. Paintings from museums were analysed and compared to those of the artists today, comparing the following parameters: iconometry, geometry, proportion, color use, iconography, decoration, and symbolic elements. An opinion poll was conducted during a group discussion amongst artists, historians, professors, and curators.

## Findings

Nepal has historically been a center for trade and cultural exchange between its neighbors, particularly India and China. Depending on the time period, Poubha art had varied influences from neighboring countries in regard to its style and motifs, as well as iconography. According to A. W. Macdonald and Anne Stahl, "Two periods can be distinguished in Newar painting. The first lies between the fourteenth and the

sixteenth centuries and the second end of eighteenth century. In the early fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Indian influence is very strong. If in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Newar painters left their mark on Tibetan paintings, at the end of the eleventh century and above all during the eighteenth century, one notes influence at work in the opposite direction; Tibetan painters impose their style and Newar painters begin to copy Tibetan thang-ka."<sup>1</sup>

In the twenty-first century, globalization and access to information has broadened the artistic pallet, including that of the contemporary Poubha artists of Nepal. For instance, Lok Chittrakar has stated that he has taken some aspects of Japanese traditional art and incorporated them into his own Poubha paintings. Throughout its history Poubha has been continually influenced by various factors contributing to its evolution. This fact has been largely overlooked and needs to be taken into consideration. During this research, it was found that some quarters of the traditional art community do not accept the changes to the present Poubha art. A few propose that the new art forms and trends appearing within the traditional Poubha realm should be subcategorized as "Neo-Poubha."

Poubha has long been considered not just a painting but also a ritual integrated into the tradition and specific methodology of its practice. Today, a rise in the demand for Poubha art has transformed it from a religious practice to aesthetic art pieces. For a majority of artists it is not feasible to practice the Poubha rituals, as there is no demand for them. One could argue that in the present context, owing to changes brought about by modernization, Poubha as an art form is losing its

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1 A.W. Macdonald and Anne Vergati Stahl, *Newari Art: Nepalese Art during the Malla Period* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1979), 127.

spiritual value. A few argue that there are no new revised rules or specific guidelines to the Poubha tradition, hence the present day artistic works cannot be subcategorized or labelled as proper Poubha.

### **Poubha : Then and Now**

Poubha is a painting executed (written) in mineral- and plant-based colors on a specially prepared, rectangular-shaped cotton canvas, depicting images of religion. The word Poubha comes from the Sanskrit word *pata* or the Newa word *patibahara*, which translate to “religious scroll.” Poubha involves precise line drawing, which is proportional, balanced, and iconometric.

According to dedicated practitioners of Poubha, the quantization of colors used in writing a Poubha is, in essence, functions of different energy states depicting the state and condition of the subject. Iconography and symbolism are highly developed in Poubha art. In the words of Pratapaditya Pal, “Here multiple forms of artistic and philosophical symbols conjoin in a richly esoteric representation.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Creation of Poubha***

#### ***The Artist***

The artist was not merely an artist, but rather a medium for creating visual philosophy; he was a devotee of the divine, meditating in the process of painting. The artist had a deep understanding of iconological principles and expansive knowledge of the philosophical themes relevant to the subject. For purity, only male artist were allowed to practice.

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2 Pratapaditya Pal, *Nepal: Old Images, New Insights* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2004), 21.



The artist's identity was anonymous. Therefore, he would not sign his masterpiece, but might portray himself at the bottom of his work along with the patrons and worshippers.

According to a Buddhist text, "The painter must be a good man, no sluggard, not given to anger, holy, learned, who is a master of his senses, pious, benevolent, free from avarice, such should be his character."<sup>3</sup> Pal states in his book, "After manifesting the painting or sculpture the artist 'dissolves' into the art, denying his separate identity. There is no artist's signature, nothing identifying a particular maker. He does not intend to be the 'creator' of the 'object' created 'outside' his mind"<sup>3</sup> and "he accepts himself as an instrument for its manifestation."<sup>4</sup>

Poubha artists were mainly from a working-class caste of artisans known as the *Pun* or the *Chitrakars*. Today anyone who has an interest can pursue the training and the teachings of Poubha; one need not be a Chitrakar, nor even a Newar. Not all contemporary artists are well versed in the religious philosophies as they were in the past. And today a Poubha can be recognized to be the work of a specific artist by his or her signature or mark. Poubha is no longer a purely male-dominated tradition, though only a few women have pursued it.

### *The Theme*

Poubha art was interrelated and unified, reflecting the country's domestic philosophy, which was based on Buddhism, Hinduism and Tantricism. It is no coincidence that the themes of these paintings were religion and beliefs. The inspiration for the subject of the work varied according to its period in time. Macdonald and Stahl quote Pal, "It is certain

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3 Pal, *Nepal: Old Images*, 22.

4 Ibid.

that the majority of the pata and the illuminated manuscripts are Buddhist creations. It is very seldom that one finds brahmanical pata before the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>5</sup>

Buddhist philosophies, the life of Buddha, and the cosmic relations were the central themes of Poubha art. According to some Poubha practitioners, the image itself is considered to represent the elevated subconscious state of the mind, something beyond reality—a relation to the cosmos and the surreal. Stella Kramish explains, “It is in this last phase of Newari creativeness, that tantric way of knowledge, that the utilitarian real was given support by images of frenzied grandeur.”<sup>6</sup>

Amita Ray states, “This is evident not only in its thematic content but also in its spirit and atmosphere, irrespective of whether the religion is Buddhist or brahmanical. Buddhism in its Vajrayana and Tantrayana versions is holding sway in the main.”<sup>7</sup> Pratapaditya Pal concurs: “Nepalese tantric art, on one hand, is singular in its aesthetic vision, while on the other, it is an extension of the widespread tantric heritage that stretched from Bengal in the east to Kashmir in the west, and from the Himalaya in the north to the ocean in the south.”<sup>8</sup>

The themes of Poubha have not changed. All of the artists interviewed in this research are well versed in religious philosophy and consider it to be significant in their working knowledge. They adhere to the strict rules their predecessors laid down. One artist stated that changing the subject of a traditional Poubha or attitude of an icon and what is depicted

5 Macdonald and Stahl, *Newari Art*, 127.

6 Milan Ratna Shakya, *Ganesha in Medieval Nepal* (New Delhi: Rupa Co., 2006), 105.

7 Amita Ray, *Art of Nepal* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1973), 47.

8 Pal, *Nepal: Old Images*, 21.

in the image borders on blasphemy. But all artists have experimented with presentation and with integrating new influences that have impressed them.

### *The Ritual*

Traditions have rituals, especially those intrinsic to religious philosophy. The rituals of Poubha were created for a spiritual purpose, in which the process of creating the Poubha itself was considered to be a form of meditation. Min Bahadur Shakya describes these rituals as detailed in the tantric text, *Manjushrimulakalpa*, dating from the third century AD:

“An officiant (Acharya/Bajracharya) who may either do the work himself, or employ a painter who works under his directions, conducts the whole painting ritual. Pure colours are to be used. The painter, beginning his work on an auspicious day, should work from sunrise to midday seated on a cushion or kusha grass, facing the east, his intelligence awake, his mind directed towards the Buddhas and bodhisattvas; he takes in his hand a delicate brush (vartika) and with his mind at ease, begins to paint. After the prescribed divinities, etc. have been figured, he should depict the officiant himself, in a corner of the canvas, according to his actual appearance and custom, kneeling with bowed hand, holding an incense burner.”<sup>9</sup>

In his writing, Shakya also quotes a text extracted and translated by Farrow and Menon in 1992 from the Hevajra Tantra. “Bhagvan said: A fierce looking portrait must be painted

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9 Min Bahadur Shakya, *Sacred Art of Nepal; Nepalese Poubha Painting: Past and Present* (Kathmandu: Handicraft Association of Nepal, 2000), 14.

using the five colours, which are placed in a skull by a painter who follows the observance of the vow or else by practitioner who follows the vow. The large portrait must be painted with a brush made of hair from a corpse. The one who spins the thread and the one who weaves the canvas for the picture should both be maidens, who, by practicing the empowerment of the observance of the vow, are keepers of the vow.”<sup>10</sup>

As a type of scroll intended to hang on the wall, the *pata* or *Poubha* required a certain ritual to be performed by the artists before commencing work. The canvas was kept in an isolated, quiet room, covered with a cloth. Both the artist and *Bajracharya* observed a *brata*, or fast. Before beginning, the artist had to be cleansed. It was also necessary that he be in a pure disciplinary and meditative state. Before the painting was commenced, it was initiated with a prayer to invoke the deity to be produced. When the artist entered the room, the *Bajracharya* would do a *puja* on the artist's hand, known as *hasta puja*. Then the same ritual would proceed onto the canvas, as well as the tools to be used by the artist, before removing its cover so the deity or demon could be invoked into entering the canvas. Then the *Bajracharya* would read a text to describe the deity, and the artist would sketch it. This marked the first day's ritual. At the end of the day the painting would be covered, and the same process would be repeated every day until completion. On the last day, the eyes of the image would be drawn in a process known as *Akha Kholne*. The artist would look sideways at the painting, as looking straight at the deity was considered ill fated and would prevent the it from being invoked into the image. It is believed that a *mantra* was then inscribed on the back of

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10 Shakya, *Sacred Art of Nepal*, 14.

the Poubha. This process was confirmed by Chaunni National Museum officials, and most Poubha artefacts in the museum collection do have inscriptions on the back.

Today, however, these ritualistic practices of puja and mantra are not pursued, as most commissioned or written Poubhas have become aesthetic and have lost their religious significance.

### *The Canvas*

According to historians and artists alike, the Poubha canvas was woven by the artist, or, in some cases, by virgin girls. As Min Bahadur Shakya's quotation of the ancient description of Poubha says, "The cloth is to be woven by a pure virgin (kumari girl), and its preparation is accompanied by an elaborate ritual."<sup>11</sup>

Once the canvas had been made and cut to an appropriate size, it was then be stretched on a wooden frame and coated with a mixture of evenly applied *saresh* and *sapeta*. It would then be placed in the shade to dry. Once dry, it was wetted and repeatedly burnished (*ghotne*) with a smooth stone, which absorbed the moisture. Some applied this gothne process with a conch shell. The process was necessary to give the canvas surface a slippery, flawless finish, making it ready for the application of colors and smooth brush strokes.

Today, the artists interviewed do not weave the canvas material themselves, as it is available in the market. The method for preparing a canvas is not followed thoroughly; some artists even use paper instead of canvas. The purity factor also does not play a major role in today's context as most Poubha are no longer written for religious purposes.

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11 Shakya, *Sacred Art of Nepal*, 14.

### *Colors*

Poubha colors are mineral and plant based. Each color that is used on the canvas has a specific meaning, and each deity has a representative color that translates a meaning and purpose according to the philosophical texts. Each color needs to follow specific rituals and must be addressed with knowledge and faith. The ink lining of the painting is either real ink or made from stone colors.<sup>12</sup> In traditional Poubha, red tones and dark colors were applied mostly in the early centuries; therefore resulting in paintings that resemble the manuscripts of that period. Later, lighter tones appeared in the background, maintaining the color application of the deities accordingly. Decoration was initially minimal and became more elaborate with time.

Lok Chitrakar and Deepak Kumar Joshi use mineral stone colors for their Poubhas. According to them it is their part in preserving a tradition whose purpose is longevity. (Lok Chitrakar explained that stone colors are available in ready-to-use forms imported from Japan.) Udaya Charan Shrestha uses stone colors as well as acrylics, oils, poster colors or *gauche*, and powder colors.

### *Brushes*

According to Sabitri Mainali, a professor at Tribhuvan University, and artist Lok Chitrakar, Poubha brushes were originally made from bamboo with calf, goat, or sheep hair fixed with wax. Such brushes were known as *tulika*. According to art writer and Kathmandu University professor, Madan Chitrakar, there were special brushes prepared from goose

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12 Cinnabar (red); indigo (dark blue); orpiment (yellow); shell powder (white); pine soot, mixed with herbs (black); malachite (green); lapis lazuli (light blue); crimson lacs (dark red); pure gold and silver.

feathers during festivals. The feathers were meticulously sorted to use only the finest pieces.

Today the market supplies artists with readily available animal-hair brushes, such as those made from sable or mongoose hair, and artificial brushes in various sizes.

### *Process and Technique*

The traditional process of drawing and painting the Poubha followed the principles passed down for centuries. The line drawing or sketching needed to be proportionate (iconometric or a finger's breadth in measurement, called *Angul*) and follow the codes of iconographic and symbolic representation. The main deity was, and is, always placed centrally, with other deities or decorative borders surrounding it. Single or double borders were also added.

Presently, the sketch is either freehand or iconometric depending on the artist, but the process remains unchanged. Today's Poubhas may be replicas of the work of previous masters or self-created and envisioned. (See Annex I)

### *Framing*

There were either two or three borders of a single color tone applied to the Poubha. It would then have been placed within a cloth border or frame with a cover. According to Udesb Lal Shrestha at the Chaunni National Museum, the borders and cloth were not just for decorative purposes, but protected the central image from disintegration since the applied colors were bonded with saresh, causing flaking with age. The cover was also used to protect the Poubha from impurities, or *jhuto*, and fading from exposure to light.

Today, the cloth cover and frame is mainly substituted by either a simple wooden frame or a frame with glass.

*Teaching Methods*

Like most traditions, the Poubha tradition was typically passed from father to son or to a member of the same family or caste. It was passed from a scholarly and well-read master to pious pupils. The techniques were kept secret within a tight circle.

Today, different artists choose different methods of educating novice practitioners who can be of either gender and any caste. The teachings are passed on openly to students. Lok Chitrakar prefers to apply a teaching method where his pupils are initially given the meticulous task of material preparation where he observes their dedication and patience. He follows this with the selection of promising pupils to then learn the methods of sketching and painting. Udaya Charan Shrestha rarely takes on an apprentice, while Deepak Kumar Joshi teaches the theology and philosophical meaning of Poubha in places like the Nepal Handicraft Association. Others take on students, allowing them to learn from copying, observing, and experimenting.

**The Influence of Poubha**

In his book *Nepal: Old Images, New Insights*, Pratapaditya Pal states that “The Himalayan kingdom of Nepal preserved a unique tantric practice that was extinguished elsewhere, because the Malla kings who founded the unique fusion of the Hindu Vedic system with Shakta tantric traditions, for about a millennium. The Newar community, under the rule of Malla kings, developed a unique style of art and architecture that is vibrant in its artistic nature.”<sup>13</sup>

Nepali Poubha in the past has had links to not just its South

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13 Pal, *Nepal: Old Images*, 21.



Asian neighbors but also the Middle East. Through the centuries, it has adapted to and adopted various inspirations and emerged as a unique and sophisticated art form of the indigenous Newa culture. Like the metal and stone art of Nepal, it, too, has been suggested to have later traveled to Tibet where it was developed into a monastic practice known as *Thangka*.

According to Mary Shepherd Slusser, “[W]hile the Valley’s cultural debt to India is unquestionably immense, it must be recognized that the Nepalis have always exercised choice and fashioned new combinations that formed the unique Valley culture, one by no means ‘provincial Indian,’ but distinctively Nepali.”<sup>14</sup> She also states, “Nepal was a gateway to the great monastic centers of the south, through which constantly passed by way of Lhasa, Buddhist monks and teachers traveling the route between India and China.”<sup>15</sup>

Macdonald and Stahl in their book *Newari Art: Nepalese Art during the Malla Period*, express that Poubha can be distinguished into two distinct periods, namely one from around the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, which indicated strong Indian influence, and the other from the eighteenth century onwards, indicating a Sino-Tibetan influence.

According to Michael Hutt, “Nepali style quickly became livelier and more expressive than its Pala prototype, employing bright masses of primary colours. The sophistication of Nepali Buddhist paintings was reinforced by the arrival of refugee artists from the great Buddhist centers of north India after the Muslim invasion in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. . . . Mughal and Rajput influences appeared during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in portraiture, which had a strong emphasis on

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14 Mary Shepherd Slusser, *Nepal Mandala, A cultural Study of Kathmandu Valley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 12-13.

15 Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, 35.

profiles. With the adoption of secular themes, there also came a different format, more like a Western book-page. Mountains and curly Chinese clouds entered the repertoire of decorative motifs after the 18<sup>th</sup> century. New spatial perspectives were borrowed from Persian schools via Rajasthan, especially in narrative scrolls."<sup>16</sup>

Previous research in the advancement of Poubha practices suggests that Poubha has undergone a subtle yet continual transformation over time. Michael Hutt describes this change: "The earliest examples are quite simple two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional images. Later, however, painters did not limit themselves to the depiction of icons, but produced pictorial representations of narratives and myths, and incorporated a wide variety of stylistic influences."<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, it is accurate to suggest that Poubha as an art form matured and morphed over time into its current form and is still on an evolutionary curve. In comparing works of respected artists in this field today, such as Lok Chitrakar, Deepak Kumar Joshi, and Udaya Charan Shrestha, the similarities and idiosyncrasies noted in their respective styles may provide clues to the changing traditions within the Poubha art form.

## Conclusion

As a rule, art is not confined to conformities; it is flexible and it grows with time. Modernization in terms of art is a means of progress in the morphology of a cultural perspective. The changes that occur within its traditional genre bear direct and indirect connotations with the variations and atti-

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16 Michael Hutt, *Nepal, A Guide to the Art and Architecture of Kathmandu Valley* (Edinburgh: Kiscadale, 1994)

17 Hutt, *Nepal*, 64.

tudinal evolution of its artists and practitioners.

Poubha, as with most traditional arts, has its restrictions in terms of iconography, philosophy, and matter of technique and method. Nonetheless, twenty-first century Poubha in form and practice is in a process of continual evolution, and in its wake can be seen the erosion of its core elements. Artists no longer practice the rituals that were an imperative part of Poubha. The use of traditional materials and the practice of traditional preparation techniques are in decline. Many have abandoned the rituals and traditional techniques, citing the redundancy of traditional practices like fasting or performing ceremonies. The traditional methods of practice have been replaced by more commercial aspects and viability. The art of Nepal has become more of a tourist event rather than a cultural upkeep, claims the museum curator of Bhaktapur.

From this research it can be theorized that over time and in accordance with the demand, purpose, integration, and variation of influence in style and iconography, the Poubha tradition has transformed. It can be assumed that in the present century, from the time of Tej Bahadur Chitrakar (1898-1971) and Siddhimuni Shakya (1933-2001), with the opening of political borders and the rising admittance of artists into Indian and European art schools, changes have visibly occurred in the traditional arts. Paintings became more dynamic with an emphasis on bringing them to life via shading and three-dimensionalism.

Poubha art to this day continues to follow the basic patterns of geometry, proportion, composition, iconography and color use. From the images compared during this research (*See Annex II, list of images*) it is also clear that the main deity plays an important role and is placed in the center of the painting, surrounded by other deities in the form of a border

and protective pattern. The superstructure is continuous and similar. The early Poubha from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries was symmetrical, geometric, and proportionate compared to the Poubha of the twenty-first century. It has become an occupation no longer entwined with the religious aspects of the Newar culture.

Today artists have a broader pallet to choose from, and there is a wider exchange of information with the modern media and availability of information. Artists do reflect the teachings they have received, yet each artist has brought his or her own signature of change. Artists like Bijay “Sarga” Maharjan have experimented boldly with elements directly borrowed from Western art forms like surrealism.

All three artists interviewed in the study are well versed on matters of religion and iconography, eschewing practicing copy work and ensuring the continuity of iconographic principles.

To the layperson it would appear that there are minimal changes in the Neo-Poubhas of today, but a closer look reveals that factors such as color use, regional influences, and so forth vary, though the basic principles of the superstructure are still intact.

For the survival of Poubha it is essential that it adapts to environmental and social changes. Misrepresentation and commercialization of traditional art seem to be important factors governing its future. For example, Newa Poubha is frequently confused with Tibetan Thangka due to commercialization. There needs to be a distinction between these two similar yet unique art forms. Also, efforts to foster the practice and disseminate authentic information on the Poubha are severely needed.

## ANNEX

**I. Procedure**

1. First lining—done with ink, black.
2. First colors coat, from the outside to the central icon, followed in a specific colors code method. The initial color applied is red followed by blue and green then yellow and last white.
3. Second lining—after the first color coat is applied, a second fine lining is applied. Black for blue and green tones, red for red, yellow, and white.
4. Shading—done in gradations. This is done in a wet-on-dry method, with a single thin brush, from a dark tone to a light one.
5. Ornamentation—first with yellow ochre, then gold and silver are applied. These fine powders are applied to the ornaments “as act of completion to the deities.”<sup>18</sup> For gemstones, different colors are applied depending on type, and shaded. The gold and silver are polished to give a shine.
6. Borders are painted and decorated depending on artist.
7. Eye opening—*Akha Kholne*—signifies that the painting is complete. This means that the art piece is finished and the deity has been invoked to enter the image. According to Pratapaditya Pal, “The painting then receives the ritual act of life installation, and transforms into the divinity itself.”<sup>19</sup>

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18 Renuka Gurung Pradhan, *Poubha Painting the Traditional Art of Nepal*

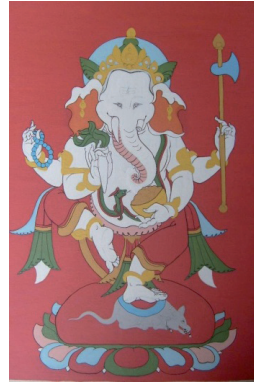
19 Pal, *Nepal: Old Images*, 22.



a



b



c



d



e



f

a. sketch of Ganesha, b. filling of colors, c. detailing,  
d. lining, e. shading, f. completion

## II. Paintings

1. *Maha Ganapati*: The twelve-armed Maha Ganapati (Ganesh) is from the sixteenth century. In the National Museum.
2. *Dancing Shiva*: Poubha of the seventeenth century. In Bhaktapur Museum
3. *Shakti sahit Ganesh*: Ganesh with his consort, Shakti. From the eighteenth century. In Bhaktapur Museum.
4. *Sahsrabhuja Lokesvara*: A Visva Rupa Poubha from the nineteenth century. Located at the National Museum.
5. Lok Chitrakar: *Chintamani Lokesvara, Shankata, Chakrasambara*
6. Deepak Kumar Joshi: *Vajrayogini, Aryavalokieshwor, Bajra Pani, Shiva Nateshwor, Dharma Dhatu, White Jambala*
7. Udaya Charan Shrestha: *Mahalakshmi, Shakti, Ardhanarishvara, Ganesh*

## Glossary

<i>Acarya/Acharya</i> :	Preceptor, a teacher who may or may not have the function of a guru or a spiritual guide
<i>Akha Kholne</i> :	“Opening of the eyes,” a tradition in Poubha painting: after completing the painting the deity’s or deities’ eyes are opened
<i>Angul</i> :	Finger measurement, fingerbreadths
<i>Bajracharya</i> :	Learned master
<i>Bisket Jatra</i> :	Carrying of palanquin of deities across to the town square; a festival in Thimi, Bhaktapur
<i>Brata</i> :	Fasting (for religious purposes)
<i>Brahman</i> :	Overriding divine principle
<i>Brahmin</i> :	Learned person in the Vedic lore, traditionally custodians of sacred knowledge
<i>Brahmanical</i> :	Pertaining to Brahmanism, designating the

	priestly culture of the late Vedic times
<i>Buddha:</i>	Enlightened being, awakened one, wisdom, awakening
<i>Buddhism:</i>	Philosophy following teachings of Buddha, spiritual tradition founded by Gautama Buddha
<i>Buddha Jayanti:</i>	Celebrating the day Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, and Nirvana
<i>Caste:</i>	Elaborate and complex social system based on occupation, culture, ethnic or tribal affiliation, and so forth
<i>Chitrakar:</i>	Traditional Newar painters, specifically of Poubha, from Sanskrit <i>chitr</i> , meaning image, and <i>akar</i> , meaning shape
<i>Ghotne:</i>	Scrub, rub
<i>Hasta Puja:</i>	Hand puja, hand worship
<i>Hinduism:</i>	Ancient religious tradition of Indian subcontinent, the dominant culture of the Indian sub-continent, theoretically based on the sacred beliefs and tradition of Brahmins
<i>Iconometry:</i>	Iconic geometrical measurements, symmetry, and analysis
<i>Iconography:</i>	Imagery, symbolic, study of identification, description, and interpretation of content of images
<i>Janku:</i>	Celebration of 77, 87 and 97 years, relieving a person of worldly responsibilities
<i>Jutho:</i>	Impure, not pristine, unclean
<i>Kumari:</i>	Virgin, pure (girl)
<i>Mahayana:</i>	Great or large vehicle
<i>Malla:</i>	1200 AD to 1769 AD rulers of Nepal Valley (Kathmandu), wrestler, athlete, victor.



<i>Mughal:</i>	1526 AD to 1858 AD rulers in Indian subcontinent
<i>Newa:</i>	Newar signifies indigenous people of Kathmandu Valley, Tibeto-Burman language speaking ethnicity
<i>Puja:</i>	Religious worship
<i>Pun:</i>	Newar artisan
<i>Rajput:</i>	Landowning patrilineal clans of central and northern India; Kshatriyas
<i>Sapeta:</i>	White clay
<i>Saresh:</i>	Buffalo glue
<i>Shah:</i>	Rulers in Nepal from 1769 AD to 2007 AD
<i>Shakta:</i>	Doctrine of power or the goddess, focuses on worship of Shakti or Devi (Divine Mother), absolute or ultimate
<i>Shastra:</i>	Teaching, textbook
<i>Surrealism:</i>	Style developed in 1924 with the publication of Andre Breton's "Surrealist Manifesto." Path for expressing irrational and uncontrollable ideas of psycho-analytical investigation of the subconscious and dreams
<i>Tantra:</i>	System of philosophical practices that embrace aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jain beliefs; used as a synonym for <i>shastra</i> , derived from the root <i>tan</i> , meaning to extend, expand. Indicates the pan-Indic religious system that was emulated in Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain circles. Often understood as having an erotic component.
<i>Tantricism:</i>	The religious philosophy and culture expounded in the scriptures known as tantra

<i>Thangka:</i>	Tibetan scroll painting, contemporary to Newa Poubha
<i>Tulika:</i>	Paintbrush
<i>Vajrayana:</i>	Tantric Buddhism, incorporates tantric ideas and practices
<i>Vajra:</i>	Thunderbolt or diamond, translates to “the way of the thunderbolt”
<i>Veda:</i>	Knowledge, refers to the oldest portion of the sacred canon of Hinduism: <i>Rig-Veda</i> , <i>Atharva-Veda</i> , <i>Yajur-Veda</i> , and <i>Sama-Veda</i>
<i>Vedic:</i>	Adjective to Sanskrit word <i>vaidica</i> meaning <i>pertaining to the Veda</i>

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7. Deepak Kumar Joshi, Artist
8. Madan Chitrakar, Art writer and professor at Kathmandu University
9. Renuka Gurung Pradhan, PhD student and researcher at Prince Charles University for Traditional Arts, London.
10. Min Bahadur Shakya, Professor at Tribhuwan University

# Visiting Vikramshil Mahavihāra: Redefining Urban Spaces in Kathmandu

■ SHIVA RIJAL

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I started to conduct this research about Than: Bahil also known as Vikramshil Mahavihāra, an architecturally and culturally important space that is located in Thamel, one of the busiest tourist zones of Kathmandu, in the first week of September 2010. I made over a dozen visits to the vihara, observed the space at different times and moods, interviewed its custodians (the senior Pradhans from Thamel), visited libraries located in Kathmandu, helped a team from IMAP to prepare a video documentary about the space, and finally prepared a research article that is going to be published in an anthology. This research revealed to me that the location and historical importance of this space demands that the cultural policy makers and urban planners of the Valley manage and emulate similar structures in other spaces in order to create architecturally healthy cities. As a researcher of Kathmandu's performance cultures, and also

its traditional architecture, I think that this vihāra is:

- a) representative of strong socio-architectural forces of the past
- b) an important memory of the cities of the Valley
- c) an important source of inspiration for the cities in the Valley to carve out their new architectural and urban policies

As an outsider, I noticed that the Pradhans living in Thamel hold a great affinity for the Vikramshil Mahavihāra. The space merits serious anthropological attention as it contains spaces where important rituals and cultural activities of the Pradhans of the Newar community take place throughout the year. The *chudakarma*, or the sacred thread-wearing ritual of the sons of the Pradhan community, takes place in the *tun chukka*, the open space that contains Buddhist shrines in the south-western area of the vihāra. The three-storey temple constructed in a pagoda style is the main center of the Pradhans' faith. On the ground floor of the temple stands a life-size figure of Singhasartha Bahu, who art historians say resembles Dipankar Buddha. There are several other metal statues of Buddha placed in the room adjacent to this temple, which are exhibited on the occasions of various pujas and processions in the open space across the road in front of the vihāra. The famous book in gold and silver letters, the *pragan-paramita*, is exhibited right in front of the place where this particular Singhasartha Bahu is located. To the north of the temple is an open space, Agam Chowk, where the *dewali puja*, a special ceremony celebrated in memory of the ancestors of the Pradhans, takes place. The building in front of this space contains various rooms that are used for Kumari puja and

several special rituals. The Pradhans' secret pujas take place in one of the bigger rooms in the building. Their *khadga jatra*, a ritualistic celebration of a special ancestral sword, starts from another room in the building. There is a kitchen where foods for Singhasartha Bahu are cooked during every especial puja and ritual. The first storey of the building in front of the temple is used for the feasts that the Pradhans must organize at different times and occasions. Thus this vihāra is part and parcel of the cultural identity that the Pradhans have lived by for centuries, and this could be one of the reasons why they do not like everyone to enter it.

The Pradhans use this space to distinguish themselves and their vihāra from other Newar communities and similar spaces in Kathmandu. They and their vihāra first and foremost represent Mahayani Buddhism, not to be mistaken for other forms of Newar Buddhism. Unlike other vihāras that belong to the Shakyas, Vajracharyas, and Tuladhars, this one belongs to the Pradhans, a fact that members of the vihāra keep emphasizing as they sit to explain the space. They also say that unlike other Newar communities, the Pradhans were not and are not merchants, but very much trusted bureaucrats of this nation. They were associated with the powerhouses that ruled over the city's kingdoms at different times in history, and they carried out several major responsibilities given to them by former kings and ministers. Gopal Pradhan believes that his forefathers were Rajputs from India and that they were invited to Nepal by the then-ruling families.

Members of the families responsible for managing the Vikramshil Mahavihāra tell multiple narratives about the genesis and history of the space. Their narratives become many meta-narratives. Linguistically as well as culturally, they try to capture this history in fragments. In their narra-

tives, they often refer to the stories about this space that their elders had lived by. They try to recall what their late fathers and grandfathers had been told by their forefathers. They refer to books and researchers that hold more information. This indicates that the Pradhans, even as insiders, also find it hard to carve out exact stories about this space. However, the common force that binds their narratives is that this vihāra prospered during times when the Kathmandu Valley lay along one of the trade routes to the states in today's India and Tibet. The stories also constantly refer to a particular legendary and enlightened hero, Singhasartha Bahu, without whom the space would not have a historically and culturally strong presence.

This vihāra has lived a millennium-long history, one much older than several nations in the world. Therefore, it drags the nation and its several governmental acts and policies into its narrative folds to project its long and important past, as well as its difficult present and future. Historians point out that the present Thamel, the busiest touristic district in the Kathmandu metropolis, was known as the *Tham gram*, or village, named after this vihāra, and was located at the periphery of the first kingdom, founded by the king Guna Kamadev (BS 1043-50). This was the reason why the people living in the Tham locality were viewed as rustics and were much mocked by the people who lived in the center of the kingdom. In this regard, Bhuwanlal Pradhan writes, "This area did not lie within the famous four administrative zones: Thathu puin (from Thahiti kwa: Bahal to Asan's Machha Dewata), Dathu puin (from the Machha Dewata to Makhan Bahal) and Layku Puin (from Makhan Bahal to Maru Sattal or Kastamandap Sattal) that the Kantipur kingdom then lived and functioned by." (69) At present, this vihāra is known by the names Bhagawan Bahil,

Than Bahil, Vikramshil Mahavihāra, Dharma Dhatu, and Raja Bihar.

The god that occupies the central location of the temple of this vihāra is Singhasartha Bahu, an enlightened entrepreneur-turned-king who is believed to have maintained the vihāra that was installed by no other than Manjushree, the god himself.<sup>1</sup> The legend of Singhasartha Bahu evokes the historical experiences that the Newars in the Valley lived with. Traders and monks were the ones who made the maximum use of the vihāras in Kathmandu. Singhasartha Bahu, a legendry trader, was blessed by Karunamaya and later became a very helpful king at a difficult time, thus revealing great economy, spiritualism, and political power folded into a single character. The more we dig into the remote past of this space the more mythical it starts to become.

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- 1 Once there was a kingdom ruled by a king named Raja Singhaketu. And there lived a trader named Singhasartha Bahu. When Singhasartha was heading towards Tibet along with five hundred fellow merchants, there appeared before them five hundred beautiful demons disguised as damsels. Before his fellow travelers could fall prey to the demons, the Aryavalokiteshwor himself appeared in front of Bahu and revealed to him who the damsels were. Bahu did exactly what the god had told him. He tried his best to save his fellow merchants, asking them to ride their horses across the river and warning them not to look back at the demon damsels. Alas, the unlucky merchants, slaves to their passions, looked back and died instantly. But the great Bahu, knowing all these things, finally landed in Sankashya. The particular demon damsel that was following Bahu was very beautiful, and her beauty became news. The king, who was also a slave to his passion, called her to stay with him in the palace. She then called her fellow damsels and devoured the king and all his family members. Hearing this, Bahu ran to the palace. As soon as the demons saw Bahu, the enlightened merchant, they ran away forever. Thus Bahu started to rule and brought prosperity and peace back to the kingdom. Moreover, he ordered the construction of a vihāra probably in the same spot where Manjushree had constructed one earlier.

Ironically, the past state of the vihāra is dominant when the Pradhans sit to discuss this space with a person like me in the present. The Pradhans' narratives make one realize that the vihāra has lived through a series of fearful moments in history. The first quiver the has vihāra felt is that several similar spaces created and maintained across different times in the Valley have now disappeared or been reduced to poverty. Several cultural spaces and the property that belonged to the vihāras have been registered in the names of individuals from ruling class families. For example, former prime minister Chandra Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana (1901-1929) built a palace for one of his sons, named Kaiser, now known as Kaiser Mahal occupying a large piece of land that belonged to this vihāra. Importantly, a pond that provided water for the rituals and pujas that the Pradhans used to conduct in the vihāra fell inside the encroached land. Once inside the boundary of the Rana palace, the pond dried up in no time. This predicament that the Vikramshil Mahavihāra has gone through makes one ponder the similar fates that other vihāras in the Valley might have met especially after the Rana rulers started to construct a series of palaces in the British-European architectural forms in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Art historians and architects opine that the Ranas' palaces brought major modes of intervention to the urban settlements and architectural dimensions of Kathmandu. They opine that the cities, which maintained a "closely built, organic pattern of medieval space," started to look different as the imported architecture—in the form of Rana palaces with large areas of land within their compound walls—started to appear throughout the cities. (Department of Housing and Physical Planning 1969, 80-1) Such architectural features of



the Rana palaces naturally exploited the resources that the vihāras and other cultural spaces had survived on and prospered from for ages.

Similarly, this vihāra owned several acres of land in villages such as Manamaiju, Goldhunga, Bhirkot, Chapali, Kavresthali, Bhadrakali, and Dhanagaun, which lie in different parts of Kathmandu.<sup>2</sup> But the Land Reformation Act that passed in the early 1980s drastically reduced the vihāra's resources, mainly in the form of land it had owned. As part of this act, the farmers who had been farming the land for several years were able to register it in their names almost for free. The space that the vihāra now occupies used to be as big as the area occupied by Golko Pakha, Amrit Science Campus, Narshing Chowk, and Karmachari Sanchayakosh Chowk to the north, east, west, and south respectively. Such changes or decisions taken by the policy makers of the country have directly reduced the economic power of this space, so much so that the households adjacent to the vihāra no longer contribute money or other kinds of support to run the jatras and processions that the vihāra must organize annually.

After Thamel started to grow as a tourist space, the vihāra started to feel another bout of unfortunate change. The artesian well situated in its northern courtyard, which used to quench the thirst of gods, demons, and humans alike, started to go dry. And today, the well that lies in the southern corner of the school premises and which is used for cooking for the statue of Singhasartha Bahu, is drying up as the water level has dangerously dropped. This makes one feel the deep-seated fear that this vihāra has been living with for decades.

The Guthi Sansthan is also an unwelcome element in the

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2 Harihar Man Pradhan in interview with the author.

narratives about this space. The Guthi Sansthan, the public corporation that provides financial support to such community spaces, is bound by a legal provision to provide the vihāra a certain amount of support annually. I was told that it provides the very interest that the individual farmers had paid to have the land that the vihāra once owned registered in their names as part of the Land Reform Act. This financial support provided by the Guthi Sansthan to the vihāra is generally divided into three categories. Seventy percent of it goes to pay the salaries of three priests, three helpers, and some guards; twenty-five percent of it is spent on conducting festivals and processions; and the remaining five percent is spent on maintaining the overall architectural structures of the vihāra. The school, which is run in one of the buildings that the vihāra owns, pays a small amount of money in rent. Suresh Man Pradhan, the authorized representative of the Pradhans' guthi, is responsible for dealing with the Guthi Sansthan, the staff, and the cultural properties of the vihāra. He describes how it is very difficult to deal with the Guthi Sansthan. Every year he has to go through many frustrating bureaucratic processes to get the rights that the vihāra deserves.

The Pradhans cannot help describing how difficult it has become to maintain the architectural structures of the space. The senior-most Pradhan, Harihar Man Pradhan, explains how expensive it has become. He says, "Ten to twenty thousand rupees are no use. To maintain even a tiny part of the roof or the wall costs several thousand rupees." It has become equally difficult for them to find the local experts who can maintain the vihāra. Furthermore, it is difficult to find the proper new materials to replace the old ones. And on top of this, the Pradhans have to deal with the Archeological

Department that strictly tells them they should use exactly the same kind of materials as the originals. However, the exact materials are impossible to find in the present cultural and economic context of the Kathmandu Valley. On the contrary, the Pradhans know that they should not destroy the old face of the building in the name of renovating it every year. “The vihāra is beset with difficulties,” Harihar Man Pradhan laments.<sup>3</sup> Pradhan’s eyes look beyond the horizon as he narrates the difficulties of maintaining the vihāra.

Since there are already so many burdens to deal with, the Pradhans are very careful not to invite more of them. Ironically, though their forefathers were once the famous bureaucrats of this country, the Pradhans have come to realize that putting the vihāra into further bureaucratic networks is sure to bring the additional burdens. Therefore, they do not want to convert the vihāra into tourist accommodations though to do so would generate a good amount of money for the vihāra. Unlike other vihāras situated at the world heritage sites that are financed and managed by the Asian Development Bank, the Nepal Tourism Board, and the Kathmandu Metropolitan Office in collaboration with local Newar communities, and which are being converted into tourist accommodations as part of Nepal Tourism Year 2011, the members of this vihāra want to maintain it in its present state. They believe that the main reason not to welcome such change is that the vihāra belongs to the Pradhans, and it is very difficult to convince the Pradhans, who have always remained bureaucrats, to open this space for tourists. No Pradhan ever thinks of converting it into a commercial space, and each member of the community interviewed there emphasized this. They feel that no one

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3 Harihar Man Pradhan in interview with the author.

other than the Pradhans can understand the importance of this space. This is not a mere vihāra, it is a source of faith for them, and without this space the Pradhans would not know where to go.

The Pradhans say that tourists can visit the vihāra as a sacred place, though, so far, the only tourists are mainly Tibetans and a few Europeans who visit to observe the famous book *Praganparamita*. The Pradhans do not want to charge tourists for entering the space and taking photos. To do so, the Pradhans believe, means having to take the extra burden of appointing someone to sell tickets and worrying about how to pay the staff if tourists stop coming. Moreover, commercializing the space means maintaining a proper record of income and expenses. The senior Pradhans do not want to invite extra burdens especially at a time when their children do not show any interest in guthi activities.

The Pradhans have several stories to tell about the past, present, and future of the vihāra. I personally think that the vihāra cannot be perceived in a clear and linear form, as the stories of several origins and natures arise when one sits to articulate this space. As a non-Newar narrator, I personally think that talking about the space is almost impossible without listening to what other narrators at different times have said about this and similar places in Kathmandu. Similarly, this vihāra cannot have a separate story of its own, as there are several similar places that enjoyed similar prosperity and experienced the same ill luck. Furthermore, this space resonates with the same spatiocultural ethos as many other similar spaces in cities around the world, and the stories that they have generated so far. Thus, this vihāra evokes invisible yet very important kingdoms, forms of civilization, human settlements, and so on of the past. The experience that

we have in the vihāra becomes more vehement and articulate only when we place it alongside the experiences that we have through the commercial architectural spaces that have burgeoned in Thamel.

We hold a common belief that architecture is a central component of our culture. It reminds us of our religion, history, and cultural roots. Importantly, it also reflects our economy and developmental and urban policies and plans. In the present developmental context of cities, architectural spaces designed in various shapes and sizes become part of the services that we consume every day. Our experience tells us that cities are full of architectural spaces where people visit, stay, and pay for a certain time. Consumerism, therefore, is “an important factor in the production of architecture” in the present world. (Chaplin and Holding 1998, 7) It is also a common phenomenon everywhere in the world that architectural spaces in cities have become the most expensive entities. However, the same expensive spaces provide dynamism to urban cultures as they draw investment and provide opportunities to dreamers. Thus, architectural spaces, like commodities, are “bought, sold, rented, constructed, torn down, used and reused in much the same way as any other kind of investment. The production of space now follows its own subset of the laws of capital accumulation” in the present context of the urban economy and development. (Gottdiener 1998, 12) Furthermore, myriads of spaces that one comes across in a city are metaphors for the search that individual dreamers from different parts of the world march through, chasing their dreams. And it is argued that a city is always a “site where a newcomer can rapidly make good, and gain wealth and status.” (Kaul 2010, 220)

However, cities filled with architecture designed with the

purpose of luring dreamers and thereby making profits are also critiqued for being inhuman. Cities are full of dreamers living with bruised dreams. Michel Certeau, evoking this psycho-urban experience, writes, "The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city, they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it." (Certeau 2006, 158) Thus, we very badly need spaces that can free individuals from the thicks and thins of urban modes of life at least for awhile. People need spaces to contemplate their dream-driven lives. They need spaces that reveal the meaningful as well as meaningless searches they are on.

It is further argued by Leonie Sandercock that the city should be loaded not only with places of "visual stimulation" to lure or attract consumers, but also with spaces for "quiet contemplation, uncontaminated by commerce, where the deafening noise of the city can be kept out so that we can listen to the 'noise of stars' or the wind or water, and the voice(s) within ourselves." (Sandercock 1998, v) Sandercock writes that a city should also behave like a "cosmopolis" to its citizens, that is, it should also offer spaces where we can contemplate the spiritual side of our existence. The issue raised by Sandercock evokes the wiser, human side of the vision that urban planners and policy makers should live and work by.

The Kathmandu-based academic and architect Sudarshan Raj Tiwari writes that, given the historical reality and nature of the traditional architectural spaces designed with the purpose of holding feasts, festivals, and rituals in Kathmandu, we must confidently take up the responsibility of preserving them and in the meantime should also be ready

to provide them as much dynamism and vibrancy as people do spaces designed for commercial purposes. (Tiwari 2006, 77) The views put forth by Sandercock and Tiwari seem more pertinent to the cultural and architectural realities that the cities of the Valley of the past lived by, as hundreds of temples, Buddhist monasteries, ponds, and public spaces provided the cities with very powerful architectural dimensions. Evoking the same historical architectural reality, a Nepali historian, Mahesh Chandra Regmi, writes, "One cannot indeed envision Kathmandu without its temples and shrines. And practically every temple and shrine has some open space within and around it, and patis and other attached buildings, thereby lending Kathmandu a distinctive cityscape." (Regmi 2002, 291)

As a matter of common wisdom, we believe that our desire for material prosperity and physical gratification needs to be counterbalanced by genuine searches for spiritual meaning in our life. The same could also be said to be the case with the architectural spaces available in the city. A city needs to counterbalance spaces designed for commercial purposes with ones that could offer peace and a sense of moral order in people's lives. This is probably one of the reasons why the Valley's cities in the past developed certain ethics and laws to maintain architectural spaces designed to provide people moments to ponder over their fate and faith. For example, in the past, Kathmandu Valley had developed a whole gamut of laws that directly defined human behavior with regard to the spaces of spiritual order. The state law declared, "Foolish kings and evil-minded ministers who damage temples, rest-houses, road-side shelters, bridges, ferries, water-spouts, wells, tanks, roads, orchards, platforms under trees, etc. constructed by others, or who confiscate *guthis* endowed

by others, block their way to heaven and pave their way to hell. They make themselves objects of ridicule in the world.” (Regmi 2002, 270-1) Laws of such nature evoke the different sense of cosmopolitanism that people in the Valley lived with in the past. However, we must realize that today these architectural spaces that evoke a sense of spirituality in people are still in demand, as people across the world come to visit and spend time in and around such spaces.

But the fact of the matter is that city remains very hard to manage. The management problem of the cities in the Valley is a case in point. Traditional architectural spaces such as monasteries, stupas, temples, and the like, though they remind us about the cosmos that we belong to as well as the visions that the stakeholders of the city cultures of the past lived by, are being threatened by new patterns of urban settlement and commercial architecture. Hotels and restaurants, shops and houses have all come to engulf the architectural beauty of the traditional spaces of the Valley. Many critics have blamed the Valley’s cultural and urban planners and policy makers for this. Kamal Prakash Malla, a senior Newar scholar and a writer who critiqued the cityscapes of Kathmandu Valley in the 1960s, wrote, “Kathmandu was never built; it just grew up like weeds. That is why this city takes the knowledgeable tourist perpetually by surprise. He can never tell what next he may bump into after drifting along for a five minute distance from a golden pagoda.” (Malla 1967, 6) The architectural predicaments that the cities in the Valley have gone through need to be read along with the great many cultural and political changes that people have gone through. Thus the narratives of spaces like the vihāra blame the nation for the series of damages they have endured at the hands of state authorities.



The vihāras, as art historians and cultural experts point out, developed out of the Kathmandu-based Kathmandu-India-Tibet trading practices that coincided with the development and spread of Buddhism, and the arts and activities related to Buddhism, in the Valley. The vihāras then worked as important spaces where prominent spiritual gurus, monks, and traders met and shared their ideas and emotions, enlightenment and confusion alike. Vihāras and other cultural spaces in the Valley flourished and became popular in the times when “the basic function of the city was commerce” and “not political activities.” (Shrestha et al. 1986, 71) The Nepali merchants in Lhasa were in “a particularly favorable position” since “Nepali currency was the medium of exchange,” and the vihāras of the time were “centers for celibate monks and nuns.” (Department of Housing and Physical Planning 1969, 50) An American art historian, Mary Slusser, points out that the Valley’s specific relationship to the trans-Himalayan trade exercised a profound influence on the development and history of the vihāras in Kathmandu.<sup>4</sup> (Slusser 1982, 5)

The rise and fall of the cultures of the Kathmandu Valley that researchers have talked about did bring direct changes to the economic and cultural activities here. *The Newar Merchants in Lhasa*, a collection of autobiographical writing by Kathmandu-based Newars from different walks of life but who were all involved in either Kathmandu-Lhasa trade or Buddhist monastic practices and *Sotala*, a novel about a Kathmandu-born Newar who spends most of his life in Lhasa, written by the famous Nepali anthropologist Dor Bahadur

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4 Slusser shows the additional significance of some two dozen passes into Tibet, the lowest of which are a few miles northwest and northeast of the Valley at Rasua Garhi and Kodari, respectively, the gateways to the Tibetan entry points, Kyirong (sKyid-grong) and Kuti (Nyalam Dzong).

Bista, tell us about the Kathmandu-Lhasa journey. For many, the journey was physically difficult though commercially beneficial, while for others it was inseparable from the progress that one could make in life and in the community.

The arts and culture of the Kathmandu Valley had very strong connections with the business transactions that used to take place between Kathmandu and Lhasa. With the fall of such transactions, vihāras and other cultural institutions and modes of expression suffered. Pointing out this very sad state of affairs, historian Mahesh Regmi writes, "In these days of chronic stringency of economic resources it is sobering to remember that these temples and shrines, and the religious ceremonies and charitable functions associated with them, were almost invariably financed through the surplus wealth of the community, foreign assistance seldom being involved." (Regmi 2002, 291-2) But temples, vihāras, and other areas had already become prominent streetscapes in the Valley. Moreover, vihāras and other important spaces such as monasteries, open platforms (*dabalis*), and shrines marked them as "the segregation or segmentation of social groups," and several settlement blocks in the city were named after the vihāras. (Regmi 2002, 554, and Shrestha et al.1986, 35) Vihāras had already emerged as the main motivating force for growth in the Kathmandu Valley. Pointing out this dimension of the urban settlement, Wolfgang Korn writes, "The similarity in settlement plan and the structure of towns and villages is traceable to individual building types, such as private houses and monasteries that are found within them. The terracing of similar building elements around a temple or monastery grouping formed street spaces, courtyards, groups of houses and finally town districts or *tols*." (Korn 2007, 7)

Vihāras, as mentioned above, have undergone and experi-

enced jolts of political and economic changes that Nepal as a modern nation started to go through directly and indirectly. The victory of the House of Gorkha over the kingdoms in the Valley was a major political and cultural jolt that the vihāras endured as they and other monastic complexes, which were built for devotional, educational, and living purposes in the Malla period of the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries AD and which had prospered culturally and economically, started to lose their aesthetic charm and intellectual importance. Regarding this fate that the vihāras came to meet, the famous historian Baburam Acharya writes, “In the past, bahals were public property, though gubhajyu and bandas used to live in them. The outsider merchants or visitors who would stay here needed to pay taxes. But in course of time, these bahals became privatized. However, the chaityas inside the vihāra were allowed for the public, too.” (Acharya 2054 BS, 75, *author’s translation*) Such jolts of change remained continual. The coming of the Rana autocracy from 1846 directly hampered the architectural and cultural face and facets of the urban settlements in the Valley. Unlike the vihāras and monasteries of the past, the palaces of the Ranas remained the “key factor in the expansion of the greater city area, leading to the subsequent growth of housing for their employees around these compounds,” which resulted in the “establishment of a road system linking these palaces with one another and the core city. Thus accessed, this land became the site for most of the recent developments east and north-east of the old core.” (Department of Housing and Physical Planning 1969, 74)

The kind of indifferent cultural and art policies that the Ranas and the later Shahs ruled with caused the vihāra and other culturally important spaces to either be abandoned

or turned into entirely domestic habitations, becoming a “convenient label for Buddhist buildings,” “Buddhist shrines that are totally unrelated to monastic architecture,” “the family shrine established in domestic courtyards,” and the shrine that “contains a Buddhist image, which is the object of daily family worship.” (Slusser 1982, 136-7) Moreover, the political systems represented by the Ranas did not favor Buddhism-guided art and cultural activities. Several times Buddhist monks were banned from spreading Buddhism in the Valley, and a number of them were banished, too. The legacy of the Ranas and the Shah dynasties force one to face the stark reality that today the country “is no longer a major seat of religious scholarship and the prominence of Nepal which led Asoka or his contemporaries to establish four great *stupas* at Patan seems to have diminished.” (Bernier 1978, 8)

Furthermore, instead of providing spaces like *vihāras* a secure future, government interventions, mainly in the form of land reform, bureaucratized them, gradually causing them to become smaller and poorer. In this regard, Regmi writes, “Many open spaces under *Guthi* endowments have been appropriated for governmental use, thereby adding to the poverty of civic life in Kathmandu. The Lainchaur Park, with what is left after encroachment by the Dairy Development Corporation and the Nepal Scouts, presents a sorry sight today. The Sanogaucharan at Gyaneshwar is no longer a public park. . . .” (Regmi 2002, 294) Modernization and urban development in the Kathmandu Valley as defined by the government systems of the past worked against culturally important spaces like *vihāras*. Seen at the cultural policy level, the *vihāras* were made poorer as a consequence of modernizing life in the cities. As a result, each time the monasteries of Patan, or anywhere in the Valley for that matter, display *tanka* paint-

ings, special bronzes, and other traditional artworks, “fewer and fewer historic items are seen, for tourists, local collectors and dealers, and foreign museums have taken their toll in sacred objects given up by religious groups too impoverished to refuse the payments offered for their antique possessions.” (Bernier 1978, 9)

Thus the present state of the Vikramshil Mahavihāra as an example of the historical trajectories that the vihāras in Kathmandu Valley have taken, surveyed above in brief, cannot be excluded from the urban planning and cultural policies that the rulers of this country lived by in different times. Moreover, spaces like vihāras, though they functioned as key architectural forces and patterns of urban development in the past, survive on the periphery of policies in present times. However, they remain important architectural spaces where individuals pay visits to realize the meaning of their selves and to experience the beauty and soul of the space—an alternate but historically original urban experience.

The vihāra has stories of its survival of several cultural and economic calamities, but the most important thing is that it dares to stand as a morally unconquerable space, refusing to be consumed like many similar spaces in Kathmandu Valley that are located in the midst of modern cultural tourism. During these times when politicians and ideologues are involved in a federal restructuring of the state, this vihāra, if pondered over carefully, can herald the beginning of a new architectural era in the Valley. Thus, vihāras like it should not only be viewed as forces of past days, but should be taken as motivational forces for city planners and policy makers today to move ahead. This vihāra, by denying itself to be hired, rented, or transformed into other forms of spaces, articulates an important architectural impulse that the city should

posses, i.e. that it should offer or maintain spaces where individual dreamers can visit to experience cosmic consciousness.

Inside the vihāra, individuals are no longer mere walkers along the city lane but they are bodies trying to read the intricate complexities of their lives. Moreover, the vihāra as a space also functions as an important discourse on urban planning and the city architecture of our time. And as a discourse, it demands urban policy makers, planners, and architects to invent similar spaces so that individuals can feel free from the burden of always being consumers in the city. Thus, vihāras like this have several possible beautiful stories to tell to the world, but so much depends on the city dwellers, dreamers, policy makers, planners, and architects.

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# कीर्तिपुरः बस्ती विस्तारको नालीबेली

## ■ रमेश राई

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### परिचय

यो लेख कीर्तिपुर नगरको बस्ती विस्तारसँग जोडिएको चरणबद्ध कथाहरूको सङ्कलन हो । कीर्तिपुर उपत्यकाका सबैभन्दा पुराना बस्तीहरूमध्ये एक हो । कीर्तिपुर नेवारहरूको आदिम बस्तीहरूमा प्रमुख र इतिहासमा उपत्यकाको कुनै समय राजधानी रहेको बस्ती पनि हो (सोकुही सन् १९९४, डेभिस र अरू सन् १९८०) । कीर्तिपुरको विशुद्ध नेवार बस्तीको पहिचान आजको दिनसम्म आइपुग्दा मिश्रित बस्तीको नयाँ र सहरी परिचय बनाएको नगरको रूपमा परिवर्तन भएको छ । बस्तीको पहिचान परिवर्तनमा समयको गति र मानवकृत प्रगति मात्रै जिम्मेवार छैनन् । राज्यको बनोट र त्यस्ता राज्यले अङ्गीकार गर्ने नीति पनि त्यतिकै अहं हुने गर्दछ ।

कीर्तिपुर नेपालको आधुनिक इतिहासमा सबैभन्दा बढी सामरिक अर्थ राख्ने बस्ती वा राज्य थियो । पृथ्वीनारायण शाहको राज्य विस्तारका क्रममा स्वयं उनैले पनि सबैभन्दा बढी महत्व दिएको ऐतिहासिक प्रमाणहरू पनि छन् । इतिहासमा सबैभन्दा बढी अर्थ बोकेको बस्तीको पहिचान र त्यो बस्ती विस्तारको रफ्तारबीचमा रहेको कारण र परिणामको विश्लेषण गर्न आवश्यक भइसकेको छ । यही आवश्यकता र नयाँ ढाँचामा विस्तार भइरहेको बस्तीको स्वरूपका बारेमा चर्चाको प्रयास गरिएको छ । कीर्तिपुरको आदिम बस्तीको सीमाबद्ध अवस्थितिबाट बस्तीको विस्तार कुन रूपमा र कहाँसम्म

कसरी भइरहेको छ भन्ने विषयमा विशेष विश्लेषण गरिएको छ ।

बस्ती विस्तारलाई सामान्य अर्थमा मात्र हेर्नु हुँदैन । बस्ती विस्तारको स्वरूप र सघनताका आधारमा सहरीकरणको चरित्रहरू पनि खोजी गरिनुपर्दछ । सहरीकरण र बस्तीको विस्तार भन्ने शब्दावलीका बीचमा प्राविधिक अर्थमा मात्र फरक छ । यद्यपि सहरीकरण व्यवस्थित बस्ती विस्तारलाई जनाउने प्राविधिक शब्द न हो । कीर्तिपुर नामको बस्तीको आफ्नै ऐतिहासिक महत्व र अर्थ छ । यस्तो छुट्टै इतिहास भएको बस्तीको सहरीकरणभन्दा सामान्य विस्तारमा प्रभाव पार्ने आन्तरिक र राज्य निर्देशित नीतिका बारेमा खोजी गर्ने उद्देश्यले यो अध्ययन प्रेरित छ । यो अध्ययन सहरीकरणमा नभई बस्तीको स्वाभाविक विस्तारमा मात्र केन्द्रित रहनेछ । एकै खाले भाषा बोल्ने, एकै संस्कार र संस्कृति मान्ने वा एकै प्रकारका जीवन पद्धतिमा बाँधिएका नेवार जातिको बसोबास भएको बस्तीका आन्तरिक खिचातानी पनि कीर्तिपुरे बस्तीको जीवन्तता जोगाइराख्न नसक्नुको कारक हो भन्ने विषयमा सचेतता पूर्वक विश्लेषण गरिएको छ ।

ऐतिहासिक बस्तीहरूको निजत्व र जीवन्तता आजको बजार (पर्यटन?) ले मागेको खुराक हो । नौलो वस्तु दिएर बजारको मागलाई तताउने प्रतिस्पर्धाका बीचमा कीर्तिपुर जस्ता परम्परागत तथा स्वाभिमानी इतिहास भएको बस्तीको बजार माग प्रशस्त छ । तर यो बस्ती पनि विभिन्न चरणमा भिन्न-भिन्न कारणले डोऱ्याएर अस्तव्यस्त ढङ्गमा विस्तार भइरहेको छ । कीर्तिपुर बस्तीको फैलावटमा आएका चरणहरू र यससँग जोडिएका कारणको खोजी र विश्लेषण गर्ने काम यो अध्ययनमा भएको छ ।

यो अध्ययन मूलतः अन्तर्वातामा आधारित छ । अन्तर्वातामा भिन्न-भिन्न पृष्ठभूमिका व्यक्तिहरूलाई संलग्न गरिएको छ । ऐतिहासिक दस्तावेजहरूको खोजी कार्य गरिए पनि अपेक्षाकृत दस्तावेजहरू हात लाग्न सकेन । केही निजी र सार्वजनिक पुस्तकालयहरूमा ऐतिहासिक दस्तावेज भएको अपुष्ट जानकारी भए पनि त्यो प्राप्त हुन सकेन । त्यसैले यो अध्ययन आधारभूत रूपमा नै अन्तर्वातामा आधारित छ । हालको कीर्तिपुरमा पाँगा र नगाउँ पनि पर्दछ । दुवै पुराना बस्तीहरू हुन् । तर यो अध्ययनमा यी दुवै बस्तीलाई समेटिएको छैन ।

### कीर्तिपुरको कथा

काठमाडौँ उपत्यकाको दक्षिण-पश्चिममा अवस्थित कीर्तिपुर नगर उपत्यकाकै पुरानो र ऐतिहासिक महत्वको बस्ती हो । नेवार जातिको प्रधानता भएको यो बस्ती इतिहासमा उपत्यकाको शक्तिशाली राज्यको रूपमा रहेको भन्ने तथ्यहरू पाइन्छन् । गोपाल वंशले उपत्यकामा शासन गरेको समयमा पनि कीर्तिपुरमा बस्ती थियो (प्रधान २०६५) ।

कीर्तिपुरमा रहेको बस्ती धेरै पुरानो हो भन्ने विषयमा अग्लो ठाउँ भएकोले यहाँको बस्ती स्वभावैले उपत्यका मानव बस्तीका लागि उपयोग भएको समयदेखि नै सुरु भएको भन्ने तर्क गर्ने गरिएको पाइन्छ ।

कीर्तिपुरको दक्षिण-पूर्वमा चिलिन्चो चैत्य (जगतपाल महाविहार) उत्तर-पश्चिममा उमामहेश्वर मन्दिर उच्च भागमा रहेको छ भने मध्यभागमा कीर्तिपुरको आराध्य देवता बाघभैरवको मन्दिर रहेको छ । यहाँ अन्य थुप्रै मन्दिर, बौद्धविहार, चैत्य तथा पायाः (खड्ग जात्रा निस्कने) कोतघर पनि रहेको छ । काठमाडौँको सात किलोमिटर दक्षिण-पश्चिममा रहेको यस बस्तीलाई गुँदे, पद्मकष्टपुर, पद्मकाष्ठगिरी र किपू भनेर पनि स्थानीय रूपमा सम्बोधन गर्ने गरिएको छ । कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिकाको १९ ओटा वडामध्ये ऐतिहासिक गढपखालभित्र परेको (१, २, ३, ४, ५, ६ र १७ नं. वडाहरू) डाँडा नै कीर्तिपुरको नाउँले प्रसिद्ध रहेको छ ।

जनश्रुतिअनुसार कीर्तिपुर एउटै दुङ्गामा अवस्थित रहेकाले यहाँ भुइँचालोको धक्काबाट पनि त्यति क्षति नभएको स्थानीय बूढापाकाको भनाइ रहेको छ । वि.सं. १९९० को भुइँचालोले कीर्तिपुरमा कुनै क्षति गरेन जसको कारण उपत्यकाका अन्य बस्तीहरूमा कीर्तिपुरेहरूले नै सिकर्मी र डकर्मीको रूपमा वर्षौंसम्म काम गरेका थिए । जुन दुङ्गा प्रमाणको रूपमा 'परमान द्य' को रूपमा नेवार संस्कार (जन्मदेखि मृत्युसम्म) को खुला सङ्ग्रहालय 'नेवा लहना' को प्रवेश ढोकामा यद्यपि पूजनीय छ । अभ्र स्थानीयहरूमा कीर्तिपुरको सम्बन्ध पशुपतिनाथको उत्पत्तिसँग रहेको किंवदन्तीहरू पनि जिउँदै छ ।

पाँचौ शदीको कुरा गर्ने हो भने कीर्तिपुर पाटनको अधीनमा थियो । त्यति बेला पाटनमा राजा वीरदेव थिए । उनले पाटनलाई उपत्यकाको नयाँ राजधानी बनाएका थिए । मल्लकालको तेह्रौँदेखि अठारौँ शताब्दीसम्म राजधानी पाटनमा नै रह्यो । त्यसपछि काठमाडौँमा सन्थो । पन्ध्रौँ शताब्दीको अन्ततिर कीर्तिपुर काठमाडौँका राजा अमर मल्लको क्षेत्राधिकारमा थियो । यिनै अमर मल्लले कीर्तिपुरमा नान्दुर्गा पर्व चलाएका थिए ।<sup>१</sup> सोह्रौँ शदीमा आएर मल्लहरूको राज्य तीनओटा स-साना राज्यहरू काठमाडौँ, पाटन र भक्तपुरमा विभाजित भयो । त्यसपछि कीर्तिपुर कहिले काठमाडौँ त कहिले पाटनको अधीनस्त रह्यो (सोकुही सन् १९९४) ।

कीर्तिपुर इतिहासमा स्वतन्त्र राज्यको रूपमा थियो वा थिएन भन्नेबारेको आधिकारिक दस्तावेज र कीर्तिपुरसम्बन्धी लेख-रचनाहरूमा यो विषयमा छलफल भएको पाइँदैन । कहिले काठमाडौँको अधीनमा त कहिले पाटनको अधीनस्थ रहनुपर्ने बाध्यताबीचमा

१ यो पर्वको बारेमा कीर्तिपुरमा जानकारी माग्दा थाह हुन सकेन ।

कीर्तिपुरको राजनीति अस्थिर प्रकृतिको थियो भन्न सकिन्छ । राजनीति जति अस्थिर भए पनि राज्य भने कमजोर थिएन भन्ने देखिन्छ । पृथ्वीनारायण शाहले पनि कीर्तिपुर राज्य जित्न दोहोर्‍याई तेहेर्‍याई युद्ध गर्नु परेको इतिहास छ । कीर्तिपुरको राजनीतिभन्दा पनि तत्कालीन सन्दर्भमा सामरिक महत्व बढी थियो भन्नेबारेमा उपत्यकाका अन्य राज्यहरूको ध्यान कम गएको देखिन्छ ।

कीर्तिपुरको सामरिक महत्वलाई राम्ररी आकलन गरेका पृथ्वीनारायण शाहले नेतृत्व गरेको सेनाले पहिलो आक्रमण वि.सं. १८१४ जेठ १९ गते गरेको थियो । पहिलो आक्रमणका समयमा उपत्यकाका सबै राज्य मिलेर गोर्खाली फौज विरुद्ध लडेका थिए । कीर्तिपुरको दोस्रो युद्ध वि.सं. १८२१ मा भएको थियो । यो समयमा कीर्तिपुर पाटनअर्न्तगत थियो (छोटो समयका लागि कीर्तिपुर स्वतन्त्र राज्यको रूपमा रहेको भन्ने उल्लेख गरिएको पनि पाइन्छ) । पाटनको आन्तरिक राजनीतिक किचलोका कारण त्यहाँका ६ प्रधानहरूले पृथ्वीनारायण शाहका भाइ दलमर्दन शाहलाई पाटनका राजा बनाइसकेका थिए र तेस्रो पल्टमा वि.सं. १८२२ चैत ३ पृथ्वीनारायण शाहले कीर्तिपुरमाथि विजय प्राप्त गरे । (कीर्तिपुर हेर्ने धनवन्त काजीले आत्मसमर्पण गरेको थियो (उपाध्याय २०६६)) ।

इतिहासमा स्रोतका दृष्टिले सम्पन्न र सामरिक महत्वका हिसाबले व्यवस्थित बस्तीको रूपमा विकसित रहेको भन्ने बुझिन्छ । बस्तीको वरिपरि पर्खाल बनाइएको थियो, त्योभन्दा बाहिरको भागमा बाक्लो जङ्गल र त्यसभन्दा पनि बाहिरको भागमा खालि जमिन छाडिएको थियो (इसिमोड सन् २००३) । तर, आजको दिनमा स्थानीयहरूको स्रोतमाथि बजारको नियन्त्रण र सामरिक महत्वका संरचनाहरूको अतिक्रमणले उक्त बस्तीको परम्परागत स्वरूपमा व्यापक परिवर्तन आएको छ । कीर्तिपुर तत्कालीन समयमा अत्यन्त सुरक्षित राज्यको रूपमा रहेको देखिन्छ । कीर्तिपुर स्वयं अग्लो डाँडामा अवस्थित वा विस्तारित बस्ती हो । यसबाहेक बस्तीको वरिपरि गढपर्खाल<sup>२</sup> नामको ठूलो पर्खालले बस्तीलाई घेरेर राखेको थियो । बस्ती प्रवेश गर्ने १२ ओटा द्वारहरू थिए । भनिन्छ, गढपर्खालभन्दा बाहिर वरिपरि पोखरी थियो ।

पुल्चोक इन्जिनियरिङका विधार्थीहरूले कीर्तिपुरको परम्परागत खानेपानीको उपलब्धतासम्बन्धी अध्ययनमा १८ ओटा पोखरीहरूको सूचीकरण गरेका थिए । जसमध्ये आठओटा मात्र अस्तित्वमा रहेको पनि उल्लेख गरेका छन् (राउत र अरू

२ यो गढपर्खाल कहिले निर्माण भयो? कसले निर्माण कार्यको नेतृत्व गरेका थिए? जस्ता विषयमा आधिकारिक रचना पाउन गाह्रो छ । मानन्धर र श्रेष्ठ सन् १९९० लाई उद्धृत गर्दै इसिमोडको प्रतिवेदनमा उल्लेख भएअनुसार मल्लकाल सन् ११६८ देखि १७६८ को बीचमा कीर्तिपुरको बस्तीलाई भित्र पार्ने गरी पर्खालको निर्माण गरिएको थियो (इसिमोड सन् २००३) ।

२०६४)।<sup>३</sup> यी पोखरीहरू आज पनि अतिक्रमणको क्रममा छ।<sup>४</sup> तर केही पोखरीहरू तत्कालीन गाउँ विकास समितिहरूले नै सार्वजनिक संस्थाहरूलाई दिएका रहेछन्। कीर्तिपुरको ट्याडला फाँटमा रहेको विष्णुदेवी स्वास्थ्य केन्द्र र नयाँबजारमा अवस्थित सहिद स्मारक कलेजलाई यस्ता पोखरीहरू दिइएका छन्। यी पोखरीहरू सार्वजनिक संस्थाहरूलाई दिन हुने नहुने सम्बन्धमा स्थानीयहरूको परस्पर विपरीत भनाइहरू छन्। एकथरी यस्ता ऐतिहासिक महत्वका संरचनालाई संरक्षण गर्नुपर्ने कित्तामा उभिएका छन् भने अर्काथरीको विचारमा मान्छेले अतिक्रमण गर्नुभन्दा सार्वजनिक संस्थालाई दिनु राम्रो हो। यी परस्पर विरोधी भनाइमा पनि यस्ता संरचनाहरू अतिक्रमणमा पर्ने गरेको भन्ने आशय अन्तरनिहित देखिन्छ।

कीर्तिपुरको ऐतिहासिक गढपर्खालको कुनै पनि संरचना वा त्यसको भग्नावशेष देख्न सकिँदैन। सो पर्खालको जगमा आज कीर्तिपुरमा धेरै घरहरू बनेका छन्। पर्खालका ढुङ्गाले पनि धेरै घरको जग बनेको छ भने केहीले पर्खालको ढुङ्गा बेचेको भन्ने पनि सुन्न पाइन्छ। गढपर्खालको भग्नावशेष देखेका एक वृद्धाका अनुसार पर्खालको संरचना दुई हातभन्दा मोटो पाँच फिट अग्लो ढुङ्गा मिसिएको थियो। तर अहिलेका पुस्ताले यो पर्खालको कुनै भग्नावशेष पनि देख्न पाएका छैनन्। कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिका वडा नं. १ मा अवस्थित लायकू टोल कीर्तिपुरको पुरानो दरबार रहेको क्षेत्र हो। अहिले दरबारको कुनै भग्नावशेष पनि देखिँदैन भने तत्कालीन दरबारको पूजा-आजा गरिने तलेजुको मन्दिर व्यक्तिको नाममा दर्ता भइसकेको छ। दरबारको क्षेत्रभित्र पनि दसौँ घरहरू बनेका छन्। यसरी कीर्तिपुरका पुराना राजनीतिक, सांस्कृतिक र सामरिक महत्वका संरचनाहरू अतिक्रमणमा परेका छन्। यी सबै अतिक्रमणको कारण एउटै विषयसँग जोडिएको छ, त्यो हो बस्तीको विस्तार।

### बस्ती विस्तारको क्रम

प्राचीनकालमा बस्तीहरूको विकास नदी, नाला, ताल तलैयाको किनारमा भएको अनेकौँ प्रमाण पाइन्छन्। यसबाहेक पहाडका टाकुरा, कृषियोग्य उर्वरभूमि, व्यापारिक

३ पुलचोक इन्जिनियरिङ क्याम्पसका विद्यार्थीहरूले यो अध्ययन कहिले गरेका हुन् भन्ने प्रस्ट छैन। कीर्ति अनुसन्धानात्मक पत्रिकाबाट उल्लेख गरिएको हो।

४ यो अध्ययनको समयमा पनि कीर्तिपुरको इलाका प्रहरी कार्यालयअगाडि रहेको पोखरीमा करिब २० फिट लम्बाइ र १५ फिट चौडाइ भएको क्षेत्रमा माटो थुपारेर घाम ताप्ने ठाउँ बनाएको भनेर पुरिएको पाइयो। त्यो क्षेत्र अतिक्रमणमा परेको हो वा साँच्चिकै घाम ताप्ने ठाउँ नै हो भन्ने यकिन भएको छैन। तर यसरी ऐतिहासिक स्थानहरू अतिक्रमण हुँदा पनि नियमन गर्ने कुनै आधिकारिक निकाय यति बेला यो देशमा क्रियाशील छैन वा भेटिएन।

तथा तीर्थस्थलहरूमा पनि नेपालका बस्तीहरूको विकास भएको पाइन्छ (उपाध्याय २०६६)। कीर्तिपुर पनि उपत्यकामा अग्लो स्थान भएकाले प्राचीन समयमा मानवीय सुरक्षाको दृष्टिले बसोबासका लागि भएको स्थान हुन सक्दछ। यसरी छानिएर बनेको बस्ती समयान्तरसँगसँगै सामरिक रूपले सुरक्षित हुनुपर्ने बाध्यतामा परिणत भएको हुन सक्दछ भन्ने तर्कहरू पाइन्छन्।

काठमाडौँ उपत्यकाका बस्तीहरू समग्र हिमाली क्षेत्रकै सबैभन्दा प्राचीन बस्तीहरूमध्ये पर्छन्। सम्भवतः लिच्छविकाल (इशाको ३०० देखि ८०० सम्म) को सुरुतिरै उपत्यकामा केही आकारका नियोजित बस्तीहरूको विकासका साथै स्थायी व्यापारको जग बसिसकेको थियो (तिवारी सन् २००१ र बज्राचार्य २०३० बाट उद्धृत शर्मा २०६३)। लिच्छविकालभन्दा निकै अघिदेखि नै काठमाडौँ उपत्यकामा बस्तीको विकास भइसकेको थियो। लिच्छविकालमा ती बस्तीहरू निकै विस्तारित भए (उपाध्याय २०६६)।

गोपालराज वंशावली, स्वयम्भूपुराण, हिमवत्खण्ड आदि ग्रन्थहरूमा काठमाडौँ उपत्यकामा विभिन्न जातिहरूको प्रवेशका साथै बस्तीको विकास पनि हुँदै गएको कुरा उल्लेख छ। विक्रमको पन्ध्रौँ शताब्दी पूर्वार्द्धमा स्थिति मल्लको समयमा लेखिएको गोपालराज वंशावलीमा जनश्रुतिका आधारमा कलियुगको उठानदेखि अर्थात् पाँच हजार वर्षदेखि नेपाल उपत्यकामा बस्ती बस्न सुरु गरिएको कुरा परेको छ (धनबज्र बज्राचार्यलाई उद्धृत गर्दै उपाध्याय २०६६)। उपत्यकाका बस्ती लिच्छविकालभन्दा धेरै पुरानो भए पनि लिच्छविकालमा आएर बस्ती विस्तार भएको भन्ने बुझिन्छ।

लिच्छविकालीन बस्तीहरूलाई प्रशासनिक सुविधाका निमित्त ग्राम, तल, द्रङ्ग, पुर, प्रदेश, देश इत्यादि नामबाट सम्बोधन गरिन्थ्यो। ग्रामहरूले व्यापारिक स्थलका रूपमा विकसित हुन पाएपछि द्रङ्गको रूप लिन्थ्यो। तत्कालीन उपत्यकामा आठओटा द्रङ्गहरू प्रमुख थिए। यी द्रङ्गहरूमा हंसगृह द्रङ्ग, लेम्बटी द्रङ्ग, शीताटिका द्रङ्ग, नुप्पुन द्रङ्ग, थुंतुरी द्रङ्ग, यूपग्राम द्रङ्ग, दक्षिणकोली द्रङ्ग, माखोपृ द्रङ्ग थिए (उपाध्याय २०६६)। शीताटिका द्रङ्गअन्तर्गत चन्द्रागिरि र दहचोक डाँडाको बीचमा अवस्थित बस्तीलाई सम्बोधन गरेको पाइन्छ। तर कीर्तिपुरको सम्बन्धमा कुनै उल्लेख गरेको पाइँदैन।

कीर्तिपुरको पुराना बस्तीहरूमा कीर्तिपुरको गढपखालाभित्र रहेको बस्तीबाहेक टु याङला फाँटको हाल अमृतनगरमा अर्को पुरानो बस्ती पनि थियो। नरफाँट भन्ने गरिएको उक्त बस्तीको वास्तविक नाम 'नरह' थियो। 'नरह' नामको बस्ती अहिले हाँडीगाउँमा पनि भएकोले यही बस्तीका बासिन्दाहरू नै अहिलेको हाँडी गाउँमा सरेको अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ। स्थानीयहरूले नरफाँट भन्ने गरेको यो स्थानमा पुराना ईटा र इनारको अवशेष

भेटेको अनुभव अभै सुनाउने गरेका छन् । इनारको भग्नावशेष डाँडाभन्दा तल खोल्सी परेको ठाउँमा भेटिएकाले कुनै समयमा यो स्थानमा पहिरो गएकोले सो बस्ती खाली भएको अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ । तर नयाँ पुस्तालाई 'नरफाँट' वा 'नरह' भन्दा पनि अमृतनगर मात्रै थाह छ ।

गढपखालभिन्नको कीर्तिपुर बस्ती उपत्यकाकै पुरानामध्ये एक हो (सोकुही सन् १९९४) । उपत्यकामा गोपाल वंशले शासन गरेको समयमा नै कीर्तिपुरमा बस्ती थियो भन्ने लिखतहरू छन् । पद्मगिरी वंशावलीका अनुसार राजा सदाशिवदेवले कीर्तिपुर बस्ती बसालेका थिए । उनैले कीर्तिपुर भन्ने नाम पनि दिएका थिए (सोकुही सन् १९९४) । ऐतिहासिक प्रमाणहरूले बस्तीको प्रारम्भिक स्वरूप र समयको कितान गर्न नसके पनि कीर्तिपुर उपत्यकाकै पुरानो बस्ती हो भन्न सकिनेछ । बस्तीका पुराना प्रमाणको रूपमा अहिले पनि बाघभैरवको प्रसिद्ध मन्दिर, उमामहेश्वरको मन्दिर, चितु विहारलगायत पुराना पोखरीका अवशेषहरू भेटिन्छन् । यद्यपि पुराना पोखरीहरू अतिक्रमणमा परेर मुस्किलले मात्रै थोरैको अवशेष पनि बाँकी रहेको अवस्था छ ।

कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती वरिपरि अन्य परम्परागत बस्तीहरू पनि रहेको पाइन्छ । पाँगा र नगाउँ पनि अहिलेको कीर्तिपुर भनेर चिनिने क्षेत्राधिकारभिन्न रहेका छन् । पाँगा र नगाउँका बारेमा यहाँ कुनै उल्लेख गरिने छैन । करिब २०२५/२६ सालतिरबाट कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती गढपखालभन्दा बाहिर निस्किएको तथा विस्तार सुरु भएको हो । यो बस्ती विस्तारमा थोर-बहुत त्रिविको स्थापना र योसँग जोडिएका सास्ती र सुविधाको पनि योगदान रहेको छ । आजको दिनसम्म आइपुग्दा कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती विभिन्न फाँटहरूसम्म फैलिएको छ र एउटा विशुद्ध नेवारी बस्तीले मिश्रित बस्तीको परिचय बनाउन पुगेको छ ।

### नयाँ बजार स्थापनाको काल (सन्दर्भ)

नयाँ बजार कीर्तिपुरको पर्याय नै बनेको छ । नयाँ बजारको पुरानो नाम अमल्सी बजार थियो ।<sup>४</sup> कीर्तिपुरको ठूलो जनसंख्या कीर्तिपुरको पुरानो बस्ती वा गढपखालभिन्नको बस्तीमा नै बस्ने गरेको छ । नयाँ बजार नामले मात्र नभई कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती विकासको सन्दर्भमा यो बस्तीले ऐतिहासिक महत्व राख्दछ । नयाँ बजार बसाल्ने वा बजारको अवधारणा ल्याउन एक जना व्यक्तिको भूमिका जति थियो त्योभन्दा राजनीतिक

४ नयाँ बजारलाई स्थानीयहरूले अमल्सी बजार पनि भन्ने गरेका थिए । अहिले अमल्सी बजार भन्ने गरेको सुनिदैन । केही पुराना पुस्तकहरूमा पनि अमल्सी बजार नै उल्लेख गरेको पाइन्छ ।

६ नयाँ बजार बसाल्ने विषयमा तत्कालीन चितु विहार गाउँ पञ्चायतका प्रधानपञ्च द्वारिका मर्हजनको मुख्य र निर्णायक भूमिका थियो । यद्यपि उनको भूमिकालाई लिएर टीकाटिप्पणी अभै हुने गरेको छ ।

सङ्गठनको भूमिका पनि कम थिएन । एक जना प्रधानपञ्चले तत्कालीन गाउँ पञ्चायतको संस्थागत र राजनीतिक शक्तिलाई उपयोग नगरेको भए बजारको रूपमा बस्तीको संरचना विकसित हुन्थ्यो या हुँदैनथ्यो त्यो छुट्टै विश्लेषणको पाटो हो । आज जसरी टीकाटिप्पणी भए पनि यो बस्ती स्थापना हुनुमा उनैको देन छ भनेर बुझ्नेहरू पनि प्रशस्त छन् ।

नयाँ बजारको जग तत्कालीन चिठु विहार गाउँ पञ्चायतले सार्वजनिक जग्गामा बजार बसाल्ने निर्णय गाउँ सभाबाट पारित गरेपछि प्रारम्भ भएको हो ।<sup>७</sup> चिठु विहार गाउँ पञ्चायतले गरेको यो कार्य निकै लोकप्रिय भएको थियो । किनभने यही कार्यक्रमको नक्कल गर्दै लायकू गाउँ पञ्चायतले पनि देवढोकाको उत्तर-पश्चिममा रहेको सार्वजनिक जग्गा वितरण गरेको थियो । बाटोलगायतको पूर्वाधार नभएकाले लायकू गाउँ पञ्चायतले वितरण गरेको जग्गाले बजारको रूप लिन सकेन । चिठु विहार गाउँ पञ्चायतले २० फिट चौडाइ र २८ फिट लम्बाइ भएको घडेरी रु. १००/- का दरले सुकुम्बासीहरूलाई वितरण गरेका थिए । यी दुई पञ्चायतले जग्गा वितरण गरेपश्चात् कीर्तिपुरको बसोबासको क्षेत्रमा ४९ रोपनी वृद्धि भएको थियो (श्रेष्ठ सन् १९९४) । कीर्तिपुरको भू-उपयोगको स्थिति यस्तो रहेको देखिन्छ ।

#### कीर्तिपुरको भू-उपयोगको स्थिति (वर्ग मीटरमा), सन् १९८८

बस्ती (बसोबासको क्षेत्र)	५०,०००
व्यावसायिक क्षेत्र	५,०००
सार्वजनिक पोखरी	७,०००
सार्वजनिक खुला ठाउँ	४,०००
मन्दिर क्षेत्र (संरक्षित क्षेत्र)	८,०००
<b>संगठनात्मक उपयोग</b>	
विद्यालय	२,०००
हुलाक	५०
कार्यालयहरू	१,५००
पञ्चायतका कार्यालयहरू	९५०
पुराना ढोका (गेटहरू)	७२

७ तत्कालीन गाउँ पञ्चायतले गरेको निर्णयको दस्तावेज प्राप्त हुन सकेन र मेरा सूचनादाताहरूले पनि यो कुन मितिमा गरिएको निर्णय थियो भन्ने आधिकारिक जानकारी दिन सकेनन् । तर उत्तमसागर श्रेष्ठले आफ्नो लेखमा सन् १९६९ मा चिठु र लायकू दुई गाउँ पञ्चायतहरूले सार्वजनिक जग्गा वितरण गरेको कुरा उल्लेख गरेका छन् (श्रेष्ठ सन् १९९४) ।



पानीका ट्याङ्कीरू	१४०
सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य केन्द्र	९०
सार्वजनिक जग्गा	२५,०००
व्यक्तिगत जग्गा	४०,०००
जङ्गल	३२,०००

स्रोत: प्रधान, सन् १९९४।

नयाँ बजारका लागि भनेर तत्कालीन चिठु गाउँ पञ्चायतले ६० देखि ७० ओटा घडेरी बेच्ने निर्णय गरेको थियो।<sup>८</sup> उत्तरसागर श्रेष्ठले आफ्नो लेखमा २८ फिट लम्बाइ र २० फिट चौडाइ भनेर उल्लेख गरे पनि द्वारिका मर्हजनका अनुसार ३६ फिट लम्बाइ र २४ फिट चौडाइको घडेरी बिक्री गर्ने निर्णय गरेको देखिन्छ। कीर्तिपुरको दक्षिण-पूर्वको ललितपुरतिर फर्किएको भिरालो सार्वजनिक जग्गालाई वितरण गर्ने निर्णय भएको थियो। तत्कालीन चिठु गाउँ पञ्चायतका स्थायी बासिन्दाले मात्र घडेरी पाउने व्यवस्था थियो। यसरी घडेरी पाउने व्यक्तिको जग्गा त्रिविले अधिकरण गरेको हुनुपर्ने तथा सुकुम्बासी नै हुनुपर्ने भन्ने सामान्य समझदारी बनेको थियो। यही समझदारी अनुरूप नै धेरै सुकुम्बासीले घडेरी प्राप्त गरे। सुकुम्बासीहरूको जीविकोपार्जनका लागि बजारको स्थापना गर्ने भन्ने उद्देश्यले नै यो कार्यको थालनी भएको थियो।

सुकुम्बासीको दैनिक गुजाराका लागि भनेर सुरु भएको कार्य पनि सुकुम्बासीहरूका लागि जीवनोपयोगी भने हुन सकेन। सुकुम्बासीहरूले केही समयको अन्तरालमा नै स्थानीय धनी मान्छेहरूलाई सो घडेरी केही बढी रकममा बिक्री गरे। स्थानीयको भनाइमा सुरूमा घडेरी प्राप्त गर्ने सुकुम्बासीको संख्या अहिले नयाँबजारमा एकदमै न्यून छ। पछिबाट घडेरी किनेर बस्नेहरूको संख्या नै अत्यधिक छ। स्थानीय धनी-मानीले सुकुम्बासीहरूबाट सो घडेरी किनेर घर बनाएका थिए (श्रेष्ठ १९९४)। जुन उद्देश्य राखेर यो काम गरिएको थियो त्यसको विपरीत स्थितिमा आजको नयाँ बजार रहेको छ। सुकुम्बासीका नाममा प्रधानपञ्च र वडाध्यक्षहरूले आफू निकटकालाई मात्र घडेरी उपलब्ध गराएको भन्ने आरोप पनि लाग्ने गरेको छ। यद्यपि यिनै आरोप लगाउनेहरूको आज नयाँबजारमा ठूलो घर र पसल पनि छ।

८ गाउँ पञ्चायतले गरेको निर्णयको प्रति नगरपालिकाले लगेको भनेर द्वारिका मर्हजनले भने पनि यो निर्णयको प्रति नगरपालिकामा पाउन सकिँएन। तर भूतपूर्व नगर प्रमुखसँगको कुराकानीमा उहाँले निर्णयको प्रति नभई नक्साचाहिँ देखेको तर त्यो अहिले कहाँ छ भन्नेबारेमा थाह नभएको बताउनु भएको थियो।

कीर्तिपुरलाई त्रिविको कारणले उपत्यकाको मूल बस्तीबाट विच्छेद गराएको भन्ने आरोप स्थानीयहरूले लगाउने गरेका छन् । त्रिविको स्थापनासँगसँगै कीर्तिपुरमा सडक पनि बनेको थियो । सडकको विस्तार त्रिविको घेरोभन्दा भित्र कीर्तिपुरसम्म हुन सकेको थिएन । नयाँबजार बसाल्ने क्रममा कीर्तिपुरसम्म सडकको विस्तार हुन पुग्यो । द्वारिका महर्जनको पञ्चायत प्रभावित भाषामा भन्ने हो भने 'यो सडक बनेपछि कीर्तिपुरमा विकासको मूल फुटेको हो' । यो सडक भन्नाले अहिले कीर्तिपुरको नयाँबजारमा रहेको सडकलाई सङ्केत गरिएको हो । सरकारी कर्मचारी र स्थानीय समुदायले कीर्तिपुरको खासीबजारमा गढपखालको भग्नावशेषलाई भत्काएर विश्वविद्यालयदेखि सडक विस्तार गरेपछि नयाँ बसोबासको सुरुआत भयो । यो सडक विस्तारको काम 'राष्ट्रिय गाउँ फर्क अभियान' अन्तर्गत भएको थियो (श्रेष्ठ १९९४) ।

नयाँबजारको बस्ती कसरी बसाल्ने वा व्यवस्थित गर्ने भन्ने कुनै व्यवस्थित योजना देखिदैन । सामान्य कागतमा उतारेर घडेरीको वितरण गरिएको थियो । तैपनि आजको नयाँबजार हेर्दा यसमा निकै मेहनतका साथ योजना बनाए जस्तो लाग्छ । भौगोलिक धरातलअनुसार तेर्सो धर्सोमा एउटै सरल रेखामा घरहरू रहने र प्रत्येक एक लाइनपछि बाटो रहने गरी ६ लाइनमा विभिन्न घडेरीको योजना बनाइएको थियो । प्रत्येक ६ घरपछि ४ फिट चौडाको ठाडो बाटो पनि रहने व्यवस्था गरिएको थियो । नयाँबजारका यी ठाडो र तेर्सो बाटोहरू बजारको व्यवस्थापन र मानवीय आवश्यकतालाई ख्याल गरेर डिजाइन गरेको अनुभूत हुन्छ । कीर्तिपुरमा बजारको आवश्यकता र कीर्तिपुरको बस्तीलाई विस्तार गर्ने सन्दर्भमा नयाँबजारको छुट्टै र महत्वपूर्ण हिस्सा रहेको कुरालाई भुल्नु हुँदैन ।

### फाँटहरूमा बस्तीको विस्तार

कीर्तिपुरका धेरै फाँटहरू यति बेला नयाँ-नयाँ घरहरू बनेर बस्तीको रूपमा विकास भइरहेको छ । पछिल्लो चरणको विकासलाई स्वाभाविक मान्नुपर्ने नै हुन्छ । खास गरेर नेपालको राजनीति मात्र नभई आर्थिक कारोबार पनि राजधानी केन्द्रित नै छ । राजधानी प्रत्येक नेपाली युवाहरूका लागि भाग्य अजमाउने थलो बनेको छ । नेपालका दूरदराजका गाउँहरूबाट आज पनि युवाहरू भाग्यको परीक्षण गर्न बर्सेनि राजधानी आउने गरेका छन् । यो प्रवृत्ति रोक्ने वैकल्पिक राज्य संरचना नबनेसम्म कीर्तिपुरको मात्रै होइन सिङ्गै काठमाडौँ उपत्यकाका सबै फाँटहरूले नयाँ बस्तीको रूपमा नयाँ परिचय बनाउनेछन् ।

कीर्तिपुरको फाँटहरूमा ट्याङ्गला फाँट बिल्कुलै नयाँ बस्तीको रूपमा विकसित भएको छ । यो फाँट त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयसँग जोडिएको कीर्तिपुरदेखि उत्तर-पूर्वमा फैलिएको बस्ती हो । यो बस्तीलाई सरसती घुमेर हेर्ने हो भने यहाँ बाहिरबाट राजधानी आएर

बस्नेहरूको संख्या अत्यधिक देखिन्छ। हुन त स्थानीयहरूको बसोबास हुँदै नभएको भने होइन। स्थानीयहरूको सन्दर्भमा केही फरक प्रवृत्ति देखिएको छ। द्याङ्ला फाँटमा रहेका बहुसंख्यक स्थानीयहरूको घर भाडामा लगाउने प्रयोजनले बनेको देखिन्छ। कीर्तिपुरको पुरानो बस्ती वा डाँडामा रहेको घरमा आफू बस्ने र तल फाँटमा बनेको घरलाई भाडामा लगाउने गरेको देखिन्छ। यद्यपि फाँटका घरमा स्थानीयहरू बस्दै नबस्ने भन्ने चाहिँ होइन तर यो संख्या न्यून छ (अवलोकन र अनौपचारिक वार्तामा आधारित)।

दयाङ्ला फाँटको बस्ती मूलतः वि.सं. २०४३ सालपछि बसेको देखिन्छ। वि.सं. २०४३ मा तत्कालीन लायकू गाउँ पञ्चायतका प्रधानपञ्चको अग्रसरतामा जिल्ला पञ्चायतको डोजर प्रयोग गरी बाटो खोल्ने काम भएको थियो।<sup>९</sup> यो बाटो हाल कीर्तिपुर चक्रपथको एउटा भाग बनेर रहेको छ। यो बाटो बनेपछि द्याङ्ला फाँटमा बस्ती बस्ने क्रम प्रारम्भ भएको हो। रुद्रबहादुर श्रेष्ठको जानकारीअनुसार यो बाटो बन्नु पूर्व द्याङ्ला फाँटमा जम्मा चार ओटा मात्रै घर थिए। यी चारमध्ये दुईओटा स्थानीयको थियो भने दुईओटा तराई मूलका शाह र ठाकुर थर गरेका मान्छेको घर थियो। यी दुवै बाहिरियाहरू त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयसँग आबद्ध थिए। शाह पढाउने पेसामा थिए भने ठाकुर कर्मचारी थिए। अथवा फाँटमा बस्ती विस्तार हुने वा भएको विषय कुनै न कुनै रूपमा त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालय र वि.सं. २०४६ को जनआन्दोलनपश्चात्को खुला वातावरणसँग जोडिन पुग्यो। पूर्वाधार त्यसका लागि पहिलो सर्त त हुँदै हो।

वि.सं. २०४६ को जनआन्दोलनबाट प्राप्त खुलापन र त्यसको सहउत्पादनको रूपमा विकसित भएको राजधानी केन्द्रित गतिविधिले बसाइँसराइको नयाँ प्रवृत्ति ल्यायो। फाँटहरूमा बनेका अस्तव्यस्त बस्ती यही बसाइँसराइको परिणाम हो। फाँटहरूमा बर्सेनि कति नयाँ घरहरू बन्छन् भन्ने रेकर्ड नगरपालिकासँग पनि छैन। नगरपालिका भनेको घरको नक्सा स्वीकृत गर्ने आधिकारिक निकाय हो, तैपनि आवश्यक परेको बेला नगरपालिकासँग कुनै तथ्याङ्क छैन। कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिकासँग वि.सं. २०४६ सालपछि वा वि.सं. २०५४ मा नगरपालिका बनेपछि कति घर नयाँ फाँटहरूमा बने भन्ने कुनै तथ्याङ्क छैन।

काठमाडौँ र यसका वरिपरिका बस्तीहरूमा बसोबासको क्षेत्र विस्तार हुनमा वि.सं. २०४६ को परिवर्तनसँगसँगै नेपालले व्योहोरेको दशक लामो सशस्त्र द्वन्द्व पनि एउटा कारण थियो। यद्यपि यो द्वन्द्वको प्रभावले देखिने स्तरमा बस्तीलाई कति र कुन मात्रामा

९. तत्कालीन नगर विकासको स्वीकृति लिनु व्यवस्था थियो। चक्रपथबाहिर बाटोघाटो बनाउन स्वीकृति लिनुपर्ने संस्थाको नेतृत्व तत्कालीन अधिराजकुमार ज्ञानेन्द्रले गरेका थिए। यो बाटो बनाउन पनि नगर विकासको स्वीकृति लिइएको थियो (तत्कालीन लायकू गाउँ पञ्चायतका प्रधानपञ्च रुद्रबहादुर श्रेष्ठसँगको कुराकानीमा आधारित)।

प्रभावित गन्यो भन्नेबारेमा आधिकारिक तथ्याङ्क सार्वजनिक भएको पाइँदैन। द्वन्द्वका कारणले विस्थापित वा प्रभावितहरूका कारणले पनि काठमाडौँको जग्गाजमिनको कारोबार बेलगाम बढेको भन्ने विश्वास गरिन्छ। वि.सं. २०६३/६४ पछि चुलिएको जग्गा कारोबारको प्रभाव परम्परागत बस्तीहरूमा पनि व्यापक परेको देखिन्छ। यो कारोबारको प्रभाव कीर्तिपुर जस्तो परम्परागत र एउटै समुदायको अधीनमा प्राकृतिक स्रोतको नियन्त्रण रहेको बस्तीमा देखिने गरी प्रभाव पर्दछ।<sup>१०</sup>

पछिल्लो चरणमा जग्गाको कारोबारमा आएको अनियन्त्रित बाढीलाई कसैले विप्रेषणको प्रभाव भनेका छन्। कसैले यस्तो चरित्रको कारोबारलाई दशक लामो द्वन्द्वको समाप्ति र शान्ति स्थापनासँग पनि जोडेर व्याख्या गर्ने गरेका छन्। जुनसुकै कारणले भए तापनि यसको सोभो तर नकारात्मक असर परम्परागत बस्ती र त्यहाँका रैथानेहरूमा बढी परेको देखिन्छ। कीर्तिपुरमा यो कारोबारले बस्तीको विस्तारभन्दा पनि स्थानीयहरू आज जग्गाविहीन बनेका छन्। जग्गा कारोबारको त्यो समय र त्यसको प्रवृत्तिप्रति स्थानीयहरूको प्रतिक्रिया धेरै कडा थियो। यसलाई जस्ताको तस्तै उल्लेख गर्ने हो भने 'घरघरमा दलाल थिए' भन्ने धेरै कडा प्रतिक्रियाहरू सुन्न सकिन्छ।

कीर्तिपुरको ट्याङ्गला फाँटमा व्यवस्थित बस्ती बसाउने नाम (उद्देश्य?) मा आधुनिक अर्पाटमेन्ट र आवास क्षेत्रको पनि निजी क्षेत्रबाट सुरुआत भएको छ। 'ग्रिन उड भिल्लाज' नामको यो आवास क्षेत्र कीर्तिपुरको ट्याङ्गला फाँटमा 'अष्ट डिप्लपर्स' भन्ने कम्पनीले निर्माण गरेको हो। यो बस्तीसँग स्थानीयहरूको आफ्नै खाले गुनासो छ। यहाँ राजनीतिक पहुँच भएकाहरू एवं सरकारी सेवाका उच्च ओहदामा रहेकाहरू बस्ने भएकाले यिनीहरूबाट सधैं स्थानीयहरूलाई त्रास हुने गरेको छ। खास गरेर यो आवासका बासिन्दाहरूले छुट्टै वडा बनाउन हस्ताक्षर अभियान नै गरेका थिए। यो विषयलाई स्थानीयहरूले उपयुक्त कदमका रूपमा अभै लिन सकेका छैनन्। यस्ता आवास क्षेत्र सहरी व्यवस्थापन वा सहरी सुन्दरतासँग जोडिएको भए पनि राजनीतिक दृष्टिले सही नहुने रहेछ भन्ने स्थानीयको अनुभूति छ।

१० यो कारोबारको परिणामको रूपमा आज पनि कीर्तिपुरको स्थानीय एउटा सहकारीमा करिब एक अर्ब नगद स्थानीयहरूले बचत गरेका छन्। यो नगद जग्गाको अधिक कारोबार भएको समयमा स्थानीयले आफ्नो जग्गा बेचेर प्राप्त गरेको रकम हो। अहिले स्थानीयहरूसँग जग्गा एकदमै सीमित छ। नगद छ तर लगानीकोबारेमा जानकारी नभएर सहकारीमा जम्मा भएको छ। यो सहकारीको अधिनमा अहिले पाँचओटा आवास कम्पनी रहेको छ (वार्तामा आधारित सूचना)।

### दरबार क्षेत्रको अतिक्रमण

कीर्तिपुर, काठमाडौँ, पाटन र भक्तपुर उपत्यकामा कुनै समय (पृथ्वीनारायण शाहले जित्नु पूर्व) अस्तित्वमा रहेका शक्तिशाली एवं सांस्कृतिक सम्पन्नताले पूर्ण राज्यहरू हुन्। उपत्यकाका यी पुराना राज्यहरू आज पनि कुनै न कुनै प्रशासनिक एकाइका रूपमा अस्तित्वमा छन्। कीर्तिपुरबाहेकका अन्य यी पूर्व राज्यहरूको हकमा सांस्कृतिक वैभवको प्रमाण आज पनि सुरक्षित छ। यिनै सम्पदाहरूको वैभवलाई बेचेर सांस्कृतिक पर्यटनको चर्चा हुने गरेको छ। उपत्यकाका यी जिउँदा सम्पदाहरूको आधारमा ती राज्यहरूको सम्पन्नता र सांस्कृतिक विशिष्टताको हामी कल्पना गर्न सक्छौं।

काठमाडौँ, पाटन र भक्तपुरमा रहेका दरबार क्षेत्रहरू विश्व सम्पदा सूचीमा पनि सूचीकृत छन्। यी दरबार क्षेत्रहरू आज सांस्कृतिक पर्यटनका लागि नेपालकै प्रमुख गन्तव्य बनेको छ। काठमाडौँको हनुमान ढोका दरबार त राणाकालीन राजनीतिको केन्द्र नै थियो। लामो समयसम्म यही दरबारबाट नेपालको केन्द्रीय राजनीति सञ्चालित थियो। मल्लकालका (निर्मित भनिएका) यी सांस्कृतिक धरोहरहरूले राजनीतिक केन्द्र हुँदै सांस्कृतिक केन्द्रको वैशिष्ट्य प्राप्त गरेका छन्। आज पनि हनुमान ढोका दरबारमा विशिष्ट सांस्कृतिक तथा राजनीतिक कार्यक्रमहरू हुने परम्परा कायम छ। अथवा यो दरबार क्षेत्रले नेपालको सन्दर्भमा एउटा छुट्टै राजनीतिक एवं सांस्कृतिक अर्थ राख्ने गरेको छ।

कीर्तिपुरको ऐतिहासिक पृष्ठभूमि तथा वीरताको कथा कुनै लोककथाका पात्रहरूले निर्वाह गरेको वा प्राप्त गरेको साहसको कथाभन्दा फरक छैन। पृथ्वीनारायण शाहले आफ्नो राज्य विस्तार गर्ने क्रममा तत्कालीन कीर्तिपुर राज्य जित्न ठूलो लगानी गर्नुपरेको थियो। ठूलो मात्रामा धन र जनको क्षति व्योहोर्नुपरेको इतिहासका कथाहरू आज पनि नेपालको आधुनिक राजनीतिक इतिहासमा अङ्कित छ (... )। यस्तो शक्तिशाली राज्यको राज्य सञ्चालन गर्ने निकाय वा केन्द्र कहाँ थियो ? त्यो केन्द्र कस्तो थियो ? भन्ने जिज्ञासा सधैं रहिरहन्छ। कीर्तिपुर राज्यको राज्य सञ्चालन गर्ने केन्द्र वा दरबारका बारेको जिज्ञासा सधैं जिज्ञासा नै रहनेछ। किनभने कीर्तिपुरमा दरबार छैन र प्राचीन दरबारको क्षेत्र यति बेला स्थानीयहरूको अतिक्रमणमा परेको छ। कीर्तिपुरमा दरबार हेर्ने रहर अब कहिल्यै पूरा हुने छैन।

स्थानीयहरूका अनुसार अहिले कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिका वडा नं. १ मा रहेको लायकू टोलमा बाघभैरव मन्दिर र उमामहेश्वर मन्दिरको बीचमा तत्कालिन कीर्तिपुरको दरबार थियो। लायकू शब्दले सामान्य अर्थमा राजधानी भन्ने बुझाउँछ। अनुसन्धानकर्ता प्रयागमान प्रधानका अनुसार लायकू शब्द संस्कृतबाट आएको र नेपाल भाषामा प्रयुक्त

हुँदै आएको छ। संस्कृत भाषाको राजकुल शब्द नेपाल भाषामा लायकू भएको हो। संस्कृतको रा लाई नेपाल भाषामा ला र जलाई य उच्चारण गरिएको तथा कुललाई दीर्घ (कू) भनी उच्चारण गर्ने गरिएको हो। प्रधानको तर्कलाई मान्ने हो भने अहिलेको लायकू भन्ने ठाउँमा नै कीर्तिपुर राज्यको दरबार थियो भनेर बुझ्न सकिन्छ।

### कीर्तिपुरको परिवर्तित पहिचान

नेपालमा सन् १९५२/५४ मा भएको पहिलो वैज्ञानिक जनगणनामा पाँच हजारभन्दा माथि जनसंख्या भएका मुख्य बस्तीहरू भनेर काठमाडौँ उपत्यकाका सहरहरूसमेत कुल १० ओटा बस्तीहरू थिए। देशकै ठूला बस्ती भनेर पाँच हजारभन्दा बढी जनसंख्या भएका बस्तीलाई लिने गरिन्थ्यो। कीर्तिपुर पनि पाँच हजारभन्दा बढी जनसंख्या भएको बस्तीमध्ये एक थियो (शर्मा २०६३)। साठी वर्ष पहिले नै पाँच हजार जनसंख्या भएको बस्तीको विस्तार नगण्य रूपमा भएको मान्नुपर्छ। वि.सं. २०५८ सालको जनगणनाअनुसार कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिकाको जनसंख्या ४०,८३५ थियो। यो संख्या तत्कालीन कीर्तिपुरभन्दा बाहिरका बस्तीहरूसमेतको हो। कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिकाको गठन आठओटा गाउँ विकास समितिहरूलाई जोडेर बनाइएको हो।<sup>११</sup>

कीर्तिपुरका स्थानीय गाउँ पञ्चायतहरूको रेकर्डअनुसार सन् १९८८ सालमा कीर्तिपुरको जनसंख्या १६,००० रहेको थियो<sup>१२</sup> (श्रेष्ठ सन् १९९४)। सन् १९८८ को समयलाई आधार मानेर हेर्ने हो भने यो जनसंख्या कीर्तिपुरको गढपर्खालभित्र रहेको बस्तीमा आधारित हुन सक्छ। कीर्तिपुर पहिले नै सहर थियो भन्नेहरूलाई यो संख्याले सहयोग गरेको देखिन्छ। केही स्थानीयहरूको दाबीअनुसार कीर्तिपुर पहिले नै सहर थियो, पञ्चायतले यो बस्तीलाई चारओटा गाउँ पञ्चायत (चिटु, लायकू, पालिफल, बाहिरीगाउँ) मा विभाजन गरेको थियो।<sup>१३</sup> जसले गर्दा आवश्यक स्वरूपमा, आवश्यक व्यवस्थापनका साथ सहरको रूपमा विकास हुन सकेन, भन्ने दाबी गर्ने गरिएको छ। सन् १९५२/५४ र १९६१ को जनगणनाले कीर्तिपुरलाई सहरी बस्ती नै भनेको छ। सन्

११ सन् १९९७ मा आठओटा गाउँ विकास समिति (गाविस) हरू मिलाएर कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिकाको गठन गरिएको हो। पालिफल, लायकू, बाहिरीगाउँ, चिटुविहार, चम्पादेवी, विष्णुदेवी, बालकुमारी र चोभार गाविसहरू मिलाएर कीर्तिपुर नगरपालिकाको गठन गरिएको थियो।

१२ यो आँकडा उत्तमसागर श्रेष्ठको लेखबाट लिइएको हो। तर यो लेखमा कीर्तिपुरका पञ्चायत मात्र उल्लेख भएकोले कुन पञ्चायत या एकभन्दा बढी पञ्चायत भन्ने खुलेको छैन।

१३ कीर्तिपुरको बस्तीलाई विभाजन गरेर चारओटा गाउँ पञ्चायत बनाउने विषयलाई तत्कालीन पञ्चायती सरकारको कीर्तिपुरलाई सहरी स्वरूपमा विकास हुनबाट रोक्ने मनसायबाट निर्देशित नीतिका रूपमा बुझ्ने स्थानीयहरूको जमात पनि अद्यावधि छ।

१९७१ मा आउँदा सहर वा नगरको परिभाषामा परिवर्तन आयो जसले गर्दा कीर्तिपुर उक्त जनगणनाको आधारमा सहरी बस्ती हुन सकेन (इसिमोड सन् २००३) । तर सन् १९९७ मा यसले पुनः नगरको रूपमा मान्यता प्राप्त गर्‍यो ।

कीर्तिपुर क्षेत्रमा पहिलो दैनिक बस सेवा सन् १९६७ मा विश्वविद्यालयका लागि भनेर सुरु भएको थियो । यो बस सेवाको पार्किङका लागि नयाँ बजारको पल्लो कुनो भाजंगल र पाँगा जाने दोबाटोमा थियो (श्रेष्ठ १९९४) । श्रेष्ठले उल्लेख गरेअनुसार यो बस सेवाको कारणले गर्दा उपत्यकाका विभिन्न ठाउँमा दिनभरि काम गरेर बेलुकी कीर्तिपुर बास बस्न फर्कने परम्परा सुरु भएको हो । काठमाडौँ र पाटनका विभिन्न क्षेत्रसँग जोडिन पुगेपछि वा कीर्तिपुरको भित्री बस्तीहरूसम्म बाटोको विस्तार भएपछि नयाँ घरहरू च्याउभै बन्न लागे (श्रेष्ठ १९९४) । कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती विस्तारमा बाटोको सुविधा पनि प्रमुख हो, जसले उपत्यकाका विभिन्न ठाउँमा काम गरेर कीर्तिपुर फर्कन सम्भव बनाइदियो ।

उपत्यकालाई तत्कालीन अवस्थामा नौओटा सडकहरू भएर काठमाडौँ र ललितपुरका विभिन्न ठाउँहरूबाट चक्रपथभिन्न दैनिक कामकाजका लागि आउने गरेको थियो (श्रेष्ठ १९९४) । यी नौमध्ये विश्वविद्यालय वा कीर्तिपुरसँग जोडिएको सडक पनि एक हो । कीर्तिपुर र काठमाडौँ/ललितपुर दैनिक आवतजावत गर्ने यो प्रवृत्तिलाई सहरी भूमि उपयोगको मोडेलमा राखेर पनि हेर्न सकिन्छ । ई. डब्ल्यु. बर्जेसको संकेन्द्रीय पेटिका सिद्धान्त<sup>१४</sup>को आधारमा कीर्तिपुर यति बेला पाँचौँ चरणको दैनिक आवतजावत गर्ने कर्मचारीको बसोबास क्षेत्रको रूपमा विकसित भइरहेको छ ।

सहरी भू-उपयोगका अध्ययनका सिलसिलामा विभिन्न मोडेलहरू विकसित भएका छन् । खास गरेर पश्चिमा अध्ययनकर्ताहरूको कार्यको निष्कर्षका रूपमा विभिन्न सिद्धान्त र मोडेलहरू विकसित छन् जसलाई विभिन्न अध्ययनमा उपयोग गर्ने गरिएको छ । सहरी भू-उपयोगका दृष्टिले तीनओटा सिद्धान्त एवं मोडेलहरू हाम्रो सन्दर्भमा बढी उपयोगी छन् । बर्जेसको संकेन्द्रीय पेटिका सिद्धान्त (Concentric Zone Theory),

१४ संकेन्द्रीय पेटिका सिद्धान्त (Concentric Zone Theory): सहरी भूमि उपयोगको दृष्टिले यो सिद्धान्त सबैभन्दा पुरानो र लोकप्रिय छ । यस सिद्धान्तको प्रतिपादन शिकागो सहरको योजनाको सिलसिलामा अमेरिकी समाजशास्त्री बर्जेसले सन् १९२७ मा गरेका हुन् । यस सिद्धान्तअनुसार सहरको विकास केन्द्रभन्दा बाहिरतिर एउटा विशेष क्रममा हुन्छ । जसको फलस्वरूप संकेन्द्रीय पेटिको प्रारूप बन्दछ । बर्जेसका अनुसार सहरी भू-उपयोगलाई पाँच चरणमा छुट्टा-छुट्टै पेटिहरूको विकास भएको हुन्छ । यसको मध्यभागमा केन्द्रीय व्यावसायिक क्षेत्र हुन्छ । केन्द्रबाट बाहिरतिर क्रमशः थोक व्यापार एवं साना उद्योगको क्षेत्र, निम्न र मध्यम वर्गको आवासीय क्षेत्र, उच्च वर्गको आवासीय क्षेत्र र दैनिक आवतजावत गर्ने कर्मचारीको क्षेत्र रहन्छ (भण्डारी २०४९) ।

होयट्को खण्डित मोडेल (Sector Model)<sup>१४</sup> तथा ह्यारिस र उलम्यानको बहुकेन्द्रीय सिद्धान्त (Multiple Nuclei Model)<sup>१५</sup> सहरी भू-उपयोगको अध्ययनका लागि प्रशस्त उपयोग गरेको देखिन्छ। बहुकेन्द्रीय भू-उपयोगको सिद्धान्तको विशेषता अनुसार केही क्रियाकलापहरू हुन्छन् जुन अन्य मोडेलले समेटेको देखिँदैन। उदाहरणका लागि विश्वविद्यालयले शिक्षितहरूको बसोबास, पुस्तक पसल र स्टेशनरीलाई आकर्षित गर्छ, हवाई अड्डाले होटेल र ठूला गोदामहरू खोल्न प्रेरित गर्छ। त्यस्तै गरेर बस्तीलाई असुविधा हुने गरेर जमिनको उपयोगलाई पनि निषेध गरेको हुन्छ। जस्तो: उच्च वर्गको बसोबाससँगै उद्योगहरू स्थापना गरिएको हुँदैन (भण्डारी २०४९ र [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban\\_structure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_structure), January 13, 2011)।

कीर्तिपुरको नयाँ वा पछिल्लो अवस्थामा विकसित बस्ती (फाँट) हरूको स्वरूप हेर्दा ह्यारिस र उलम्यानको बहुकेन्द्रीय सिद्धान्तको विशेषतासँग मेल खाने देखिन्छ। फाँटहरूमा खास गरेर ट्याडला फाँटमा बनेको पहिलो दुई बाहिरियाहरूको घर पनि त्रिविसँग जोडिएका कर्मचारीको थियो। अथवा विश्वविद्यालयसँग जोडिएका शिक्षक कर्मचारीहरू नै अहिलेको ट्याडला फाँटका मुख्य बासिन्दा भएबाट पनि यो सिद्धान्तको मान्यतासँग मिल्दो देखिन्छ। बस्तीको परम्परागत स्वरूप र संरचनामा परिवर्तन ल्याउन सडक सुविधा, सहरी भू-उपयोगको ढाँचा वा अन्य ठूला संरचनाहरू कुनै न कुनै दृष्टिले जिम्मेवार देखिन्छ। कीर्तिपुरको परम्परागत बस्तीको स्वरूपमा व्यापक परिवर्तन देखिएको छ। यसमा आधुनिक संरचना तथा मानवीय आवतजावत र बसाइँसराइ यो परिवर्तनका लागि जिम्मेवार कारणहरू हुन्।

कीर्तिपुरमा 'ग्रिनउड भिल्लाज' नामक निजी क्षेत्रको अग्रसरतामा निर्मित आवासीय क्षेत्र पनि रहेको छ। यो नेपाली समाजमा भित्रिएको बिल्कुलै नयाँ र व्यापकता लिँदै गरेको बस्तीको नमुना हो। यस्ता बस्तीको फाइदा र बेफाइदा केलाउने समय त भइसकेको छैन तर परम्परागत बस्तीको नजिकै यस्ता बस्ती बसाल्ने योजना र त्यसको रणनीतिक पक्षका बारेमा स्थानीय रूपमा माथि पनि प्रश्नहरू उठेका छन्। यससँगै कीर्तिपुरमा 'लुमन्ती'

१४ खण्डित मोडेल (Sector Model): सन् १९३९ मा भूमि अर्थशास्त्री होमर होयट्को बर्जेसको सिद्धान्तको संशोधित रूपमा प्रस्तुत गरेको मान्यता हो। यस मोडेलका अनुसार सहरले शुद्धलाब्ध रूपमा सेक्टरहरूको विकास गरेको हुन्छ न कि वृत्तमा। जसले गर्दा निश्चित क्षेत्रहरू फरक खाले क्रियाकलापका लागि एकदम आकर्षक हुन्छन्।

१५ बहुकेन्द्रीय सिद्धान्त (Multiple Nuclei Model): यो मोडेलको विकास सन् १९४५ मा सी. डी. ह्यासि र ई. एल. उलम्यान नामका भूगोलविद्हरूले गरेका थिए। यो मोडेलअनुसार सहरमा व्यवसायहरू एकै ठाउँमा मात्र केन्द्रित हुँदैनन्। सहरका विभिन्न स्थान भिन्न-भिन्न स्वरूपमा विकास भएका हुन्छन्।



नामक संस्थाको अग्रसरतामा सुकुम्बासीहरूलाई व्यवस्थित आवास उपलब्ध गराउने प्रयास स्वरूप चालीस घरपरिवार बस्न हुने एउटा संयुक्त आवासको निर्माण भएको छ। यो किन, कसरी, कहिले निर्माण भयो भन्ने प्रश्नभन्दा पनि यो अध्ययनमा नयाँ र नौलो बस्तीको प्रारूपलाई समेट्ने मात्र प्रयास भएको छ। कीर्तिपुर धेरै प्रकारको मान्छे र बस्तीको नमुनाहरू मिश्रित बस्तीको रूपमा विकसित भइरहेको छ।

### त्रिवि र कीर्तिपुरवासीको सम्बन्ध

त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयको स्थापना वि.सं. २०१६ सालमा भएको थियो। विश्वविद्यालयको स्थापनाको प्रयास वा निर्णय शैक्षिक दृष्टिले सकारात्मक मान्न सकिनेछ। तर कुनै पनि परम्परागत बस्तीको आडमा यस्तो ठूलो संरचना बन्नु आफैँमा सोचनीय विषय रहेछ। कीर्तिपुरको परम्परागत बस्ती र त्यहाँका सामरिक महत्त्वका पुराना संरचनाहरू एउटा हदसम्म आफ्नै कारणले बिग्रिए होलान् वा संरक्षण हुन सकेनन् होला तर बाहिरिया प्रभावको मात्रा पनि कति हो भन्ने विषय पनि विचारणीय नै छ। आजसम्म पनि कीर्तिपुरवासीले विश्वविद्यालय विरुद्ध गरिरहेको आन्दोलन र विश्वविद्यालयप्रति अभै सन्तुलित दृष्टिकोण बन्न नसक्नु पूर्वाग्रह मात्रै होइन।

विश्वविद्यालयको स्थापनासँग स्थानीयहरूको जग्गा अधिकरणको विषयमा अहिलेसम्म पनि मुआब्जा नपाएको गुनासो र आक्रोश दुवै छ। मुआब्जा र स्थानीयलाई रोजगारीमा प्राथमिकता यी दुई विषयलाई लिएर 'कीर्तिपुर सरोकार मञ्च' नामक संस्था आन्दोलित छ। आन्दोलनको स्वरूप र त्यसको सघनताको विषयलाई लिएर आन्दोलन आलोचित बनेको थियो। तत्कालीन अवस्थामा त्रिविलाई आवश्यकताभन्दा बढी जग्गा अधिकरण गरिएको भन्ने आरोप आन्दोलनकारीको तर्फबाट लगाइने गरेको छ। मुआब्जाको छिनोफानो अभै भएको छैन त्यसैले यो विषयको हल आन्दोलनले उठाएको प्रमुख विषय हो।

त्रिविको विषयलाई लिएर अहिले मात्र नभई पहिलेदेखि नै स-साना समूहमा वा असंगठित तवरले आन्दोलन भइरहेको थियो। स्थानीयवासीहरू आन्दोलनको विषयमा पनि विभक्त देखिन्छन्। एकथरी विश्वविद्यालयले कीर्तिपुरका लागि गरेको विकास र अन्य खाले योगदानको चर्चा गरेर यो आन्दोलनप्रति आंशिक विरोध गर्छन्। तर खुलेर आन्दोलनको विरोध नै भएको चाहिँ छैन। विश्वविद्यालयको स्थापना वि.सं. २०१६ सालमा भए पनि जग्गा अधिकरणको सुरुआत वि.सं. २०१३ सालदेखि नै भएको थियो। अधिकरणको विषयलाई लिएर स्थानीयहरू पनि दुई भागमा विभाजित थिए। यसंघ (युवाहरूको समूह) र मयसंघ (बूढा वा किसानहरूको समूह) भनेर दुईओटा समूह

बनेको थियो । यसंघले मुआब्जा लिएर जग्गा दिनुपर्ने तर्क गरेका थिए भने मयसंघले सुनको ढिक्कासँग पनि जग्गा नसाट्ने भनेर जग्गा अधिकरणको विरोध गरेका थिए । यसंघमा केही पढेलेखेका युवाहरू थिए । उनीहरूको बुझाइमा सरकारले लिने भनेपछि लिएर छाड्छ । त्यसैले निश्चत मापदण्डका आधारमा मुआब्जा लिनु बेस हुन्छ भन्ने गरेका थिए ।

मुआब्जा नपाएको विषयमा विभिन्न प्रकारले आरोपित गरे पनि नपाउने किसान वा जग्गावालाहरूसँग आवश्यक जग्गाको कागजात नभएर रोकिएको थियो । मुआब्जा दिनलाई सरकारले जग्गाको कागजात माग्यो । तर सबैसँग कागजात थिएन । त्यति बेलाको जग्गाको अधिपति 'द्वारे' हुने गर्थ्यो । द्वारेको पालामा 'शेरमा तिर्ने' चलन थियो । शेरमा तिर्नेको अर्थ हुन्छ कर तिर्ने र कर तिरेका पुर्जा दिने गरिन्थ्यो । बडागुरुज्यूसँग खान्की किनेर जग्गाको उपभोग गर्ने परम्परालाई 'द्वारे' भन्ने गरिन्थ्यो । 'द्वारे' लाई कर तिरेका पुर्जा धेरैले प्राप्त नगरेको वा लिन नचाहेकाले गर्दा मुआब्जाका लागि अयोग्य ठहरिए । हुन त यो समस्यालाई सरकारी पक्षबाट इमान्दारीसाथ सम्बोधन गर्न चाहेको भए स्थानीयहरूका बीचमा 'सर्जमिन' गराएर पनि उपलब्ध गराउन सक्थे, त्यसो पनि भएको देखिएन ।

मुआब्जाको सन्दर्भ स्थानीयहरूका लागि प्राथमिकताको विषय हुन सक्छ । तर यो अध्ययनका लागि स्थानीयहरूले त्रिविलाई आरोपित गर्ने गरेको अर्को विषय बढी महत्वको हुन सक्छ । त्रिविको कारणले कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती उपत्यकाका अन्य बस्तीसँग जोडिन सकेन । त्रिविले कीर्तिपुरको सम्बन्ध वा जञ्जाल अन्य बस्तीसँग हुन दिएन, जसको परिणामस्वरूप कीर्तिपुरले अपेक्षित सहरीकरणको अवसर पाउन सकेन । यो आरोपमा कति यथार्थता छ वा यो भावनामा आधारित आरोप मात्रै हो भन्ने एउटा सन्दर्भ हो । तर अधिक सहरीकरणप्रतिको यो स्थानीय अभिरुचिलाई कीर्तिपुरको फाँटहरूमा अस्तव्यस्त रूपमा फैलिएको बस्तीप्रतिको वितृष्णाको अभिव्यक्ति पनि मान्न सकिन्छ । फाँटहरूमा विस्तार भएको बस्तीलाई त्रिविको सह-उत्पादन पनि मान्ने गरिएको छ । अथवा त्रिविको कारणको कीर्तिपुरको नयाँ बजार र फाँटहरूमा नयाँ बस्ती विस्तार भएको विषयमा दुविधा छैन ।

## निष्कर्ष

उपत्यकाको पुराना बस्तीहरूमध्ये कीर्तिपुर एउटा छुट्टै र महत्वपूर्ण ऐतिहासिक बस्ती हो । नेपालको आधुनिक इतिहासमा कीर्तिपुरको कीर्तिमानी राजनीतिक र सांस्कृतिक अर्थ रहेको छ । विशुद्ध नेवारी बस्ती आजको दिनमा आइपुग्दा मिश्रित बस्तीको रूपमा नयाँ र नगरीय परिचय बनाएको छ । कीर्तिपुर देशका विभिन्न कुनाबाट काठमाडौँ आई

भाग्य अजमाउन खोज्नेहरूको पनि गन्तव्य बनेको देखिन्छ । आजको कीर्तिपुरमा उच्च सरकारी ओहदाका कर्मचारी बस्ने 'ग्रिनउड भिल्लाज' देखि सुकुम्बासीहरूलाई राखिएको 'लुमन्ती बस्ती' सम्म रहेको छ । सांस्कृतिक विविधता मात्र नभई अहिलेको कीर्तिपुरमा बस्तीको नमुनाहरूका दृष्टिले पनि विविधता रहेको छ ।

इतिहासमा गुँदे, पद्मकण्ठपुर, पद्मकाष्ठगिरी र किपू भनेर सम्बोधन गरिने बस्तीको ऐतिहासिकता पाँचौँ शताब्दीसम्म जोडिएको सामग्रीहरूले पुष्टि गर्दछ । ऐतिहासिक गढपखालभित्रको बस्ती पखालबाहिर ल्याउने प्रयास र त्यससँग जोडिएका कारणहरू केही राजनीतिक र केही विकासे प्रकृतिको देखिन्छ । कीर्तिपुरमा त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालय बनाउने निर्णय र कीर्तिपुरको परम्परागत बस्तीलाई विभिन्न समयमा भिन्न-भिन्न राजनीतिक एकाइमा विभाजन गर्ने र नगरपालिका बनाउने जस्ता निर्णयहरू राजनीतिक स्वरूपका थिए । राज्यको राजनीतिक चरित्र पनि कीर्तिपुरको विकासमा प्रभाव देखिएको छ । दरबार नियन्त्रित पञ्चायती राजको समयमा कीर्तिपुरलाई उपेक्षा गरिएको र वि.सं. २०४६ को राजनीतिक परिवर्तनपश्चात् अपेक्षाकृत राज्यको स्वभावमा पनि परिवर्तन आएको भन्ने साभा मान्यता पाइन्छ ।

वि.सं. २०४६ पछिको खुला आर्थिक नीति तथा केन्द्रीय सरकार, स्थानीय सरकार एवं गैरसरकारी पहलमा निर्मित आधारभूत भौतिक संरचनाका कारणले बस्ती विस्तारको रफ्तारलाई बढाएको हो । कीर्तिपुरका फाँटहरूमा बनेका अधिकांश घरहरू वि.सं. २०४५/४६ सालपछि बनेका हुन् । विश्वविद्यालय र खुला राजनीतिक वा आर्थिक नीति प्रमुख रूपमा जिम्मेवार कारण भए तापनि बसाइँसराइको प्रवृत्तिमा आएको परिवर्तन पनि खास कारण हो भन्न सकिन्छ । यसबाहेक सामूहिक बसोबासको नयाँ प्रवृत्ति र केही हदसम्म विप्रेषणको प्रभावलाई पनि बस्ती विस्तारको कारण मान्न सकिन्छ ।

कीर्तिपुरको परम्परागत बस्तीको स्वरूपमा आएको परिवर्तन र विस्तारमा मोटामोटी दुईओटा विषयहरू कारण बनेर आएको छ । पहिलो विश्वविद्यालय एवं आन्तरिक सडक जस्ता पूर्वाधारको निर्माण र दोस्रो विभिन्न समयमा राज्यले लिएको स्थानीय निकाय वा एकाइको परिवर्तनसम्बन्धी नीति प्रमुख हो । दुवै विषयलाई हेर्ने वा स्वीकार गर्ने सन्दर्भमा स्थानीय समुदाय आन्तरिक रूपमा विभाजित देखिए पनि यो बस्ती विस्तारको कारण बनेको छैन । ऐतिहासिक, सामरिक वा सांस्कृतिक महत्वको संरक्षणमा भने स्थानीय अग्रसरता पटकै देखिएन । त्यस्तो अग्रसरता व्यक्तिगत वा संस्थागत कुनै तहमा भएको छैन । साठी वर्षमा कीर्तिपुरको बस्ती विस्तारले कीर्तिपुरको जनजीवनलाई मात्र नभई सिसै भौगोलिक (भू-उपयोगको स्थिति) एवं सांस्कृतिक वातावरणलाई नै नयाँ र नगरीय बनाएको छ ।

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(नोट: यो लेख पहिलो ड्राफ्टको रूपमा तयार गरिएको छ। आवश्यक सुझाउको अपेक्षा गरिएको छ। काठमाडौं उपत्यका नगर विकास बोर्डको भवन निर्माणसम्बन्धी आचारसंहितालाई जोडेर लेख्ने काम बाँकी नै छ। लेख्ने क्रममा छुटेका वा बढी भएका विषय र सन्दर्भलाई औँल्याइदिनु होला।)



The Interactive Mapping and Archive Project was created with the aim of mapping the cultural space of the Kathmandu Valley. The main goals of the project were to digitize the art- and theatre-related materials of the Valley and to bring together people from various walks of life—including painters, theatre artists, urban planners, and architects—to open a dialogue about the cities of Kathmandu. This publication includes essays by IMAP fellows, as well as other scholars, who used materials in the digital archive to write about the cities of Kathmandu. The essays included in this volume do not propose a grand meta-narrative about the fields of art and theatre or the city spaces that they examine. What they provide are a number of windows and perspectives from which to look at these areas and examine the shifting meanings of concepts such as modernity, globalization, and urbanization. It is hoped that such perspectives will invite still newer points of view and inspire scholars to do further research on the urban landscape of Kathmandu, its architecture, theatre, art and performances.

