

## MARRIAGE RATEULI IN ACHHAM: A SITE OF PERFORMITIVITY AND GENDER DYNAMISM

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### Abstract

*Marriage rateuli in Achham is remarkable for its typical performance of deuda dance and songs of mixed emotions among women in the night time of marriage day at bridegroom's home. Among its four stages of performing deuda dance, the stage of deuda khel and real rateuli embody the real and traditional convention of rateuli performance with a humorous performance of a typical female character called dyangsyas than the stages, dio mano and balokhelaune. But today, the traditional convention of performing marriage rateuli has been dynamic and modified with an easy inclusion of male and female performers due to the influence of other culture, technology, commercialization and visualization of deuda dance and song and growing women education. This article attempts to present a comparative study of marriage rateuli in Achham from the contour of its performativity and its gender dynamism with their brief analytical information.*

**Key Words:** *marriage rateuli, Achham, women, performance, deuda khel, dyangsyas, gender dynamism*

### Background

Essentially cultural performance has been viewed from two perspectives as an ideological entity encompassing values, norms and traditions and as a combination of ideological and materials elements consisting their cultural typicality (Kunwar, 20015: 3). In the real sense, culture becomes remarkably identifiable site through the performance of its intangible elements which are values, beliefs, traditions, customs and modes. In the globally and technically contracted world, the traditional mode of cultural performances has been influenced with the issue of gender dynamic.

Achham represents a hub of Far western region for varieties of Deuda performance. Marriage Rateuli in Achham is an occasion for women to perform Deuda Khel (dance) with Deuda songs especially in the marriage night when the bridegroom and his marriage processors go to bring bride. But today it has become a site of performativity and gender dynamism. It represents both

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traditional convention of performance with Deuda dance and song among women and dynamic or modified performance with Deuda and non-deuda dance and song among females, males, women, men, girls and boys. In the very night of a marriage, the women, girls and small children enjoy the spacious and recreational Rateuli with the performance of Deuda Khel.

The originality and traditional convention of Rateuli begins with Dio Mano and ends with the good wish expressing performance of Balo Khelaune. The stages of Deuda Khel and real Rateuli which comprise the emotive and glamorous Deuda Khel in the leadership of a humorous female character called Dayangsya are the real and performative attraction of marriage Rateuli in Achham. The role of the humorous character, Dayangsya is to evoke and satire the prevailing patriarchy where the Rateuli women live. But today, the traditional mode of performing marriage Rateuli in this district has been modifying due to the influence of the non-deuda dance, songs and the participation of men and women. The commercializing and visualizing strategy of Deuda Khel and songs have also encouraged and popularized the issue of gender dynamism in the performance of marriage Rateuli. In this sense, the traditional performance of marriage Rateuli is in the liminal phase.

This article is an attempt to compare marriage Rateuli of Achham district in its original or traditional mode of performance and its recent and dynamic mode covering six different sections with their brief informative discussion.

### **Methodology**

This article is based on field study, which was carried out in 2016. Overall, two weeks long time had taken to conducting the fieldwork. This one is the concise part of the original article. In this article, the researcher has applied both descriptive and analytical research design. Primary and secondary data and sources are considered equal importance for this research work. The secondary data have collected through the published and unpublished literature, whereas, the primary data have come into collection through the field survey. During field survey, interview, questionnaire and general observation techniques have been applied.

### **Marriage Rateuli and Performitivit**

Marriage ceremony in Achham district becomes a remarkable and identifying site for wonderful Rateuli and peculiar performance among women of different typicalityd married, unmarried, old, young and women from the family and relatives and from the neighbourhood. When the bridegroom with his marriage processors leaves towards the home of the bride for marriage ritual, the women in the family and relatives become more responsible to organize Rateuli dance in the very night. All

the women around neighbourhood are invited offering them clove and/or supari (the betelnut). It is simply known as Ratyadi ko niuto (an invitation for the Rateuli dance). The invitation to women confirms the Rateuli performativity at the home of bridegroom. In this sense, **marriage Rateuli** means Deuda Khel (dance) which is performed by women at bridegroom's home in the very night of the marriage day and **performativity** means an "utterance or performance that constitutes some acts or activities" (web).

Marriage Rauteuli in Achham district commonly consists of four stages (i) stage of dio manu (ii) stage of Deuda Khel (deuda dance) (iii) stage of real Rateuli and (iv) stage of Balo Khelaune (Interview with old women, Mrs. Manti Joshi, Sita Koli and hudke (caste of Damai) Gore Nagarji et al.). All these stages do embody their unique features of performance. These stages entail brief performative information as below.

#### ◆ Stage of Dio Manu:

The invited women after their dinner go to the bridegroom's home with a manu (half kg.) of rice and money, see the mother of the bridegroom, offer the things into the basket containing Dio (oil-lamp) and wish for her son's beautiful bride and successful marriage. The mother or other responsible women of the family, offer laaun/puri, (small, delicious and round chapati which is cooked in mustard oil) babar, (delicious Achhami dish) and kasar (sweet and tasty flour of fried rice) to the invited women as Sagun. Sagun (tasty food kasar) initiates and energizes the women to sing Magal. "Magal (wish expressing deuda songs) sets an appropriate atmosphere for Deuda Khel (deuda dance)" (Interview with Navaraj Rimal). Hence, Dio Manu cements all the women for Rateuli performance.

#### ◆ Stage of Deuda Khel ( dance):

This is the most remarkable stage which ties up all the invited women to perform Deuda dance/ Khel with Deuda songs. They dance in a circle making a collective grip to their hands and arranging and balancing their feet which is called Paital Hannu in general. Some of them wear men's clothes. The more interesting and odd character in the dance is Dyangsyia (humorous character) who puts on quite uneven clothes of men and romanticizes the performers chasing the small boys and girls with the expression of vulgar and emotional language. The songs for the performance in this stage are not so odd and vulgar though. Such as- "bayulo baiga bayuli layuna samdhi jiu ka ghara, logne manchhe baigya janta kai ko mannu dara. Bwari hoijau laxmi jasi pailai beta choro, sukh mili jau baddi tamlaai niko hoi jau khoro." [The groom has gone to bring his bride to in-law's home. All the men have gone to marriage and no matter to be feared. May the bride be like a goddess and beget

a baby son as her first child! And, may you get happiness and be lucky!] (My interview and translation with Sita Koli). All enjoy Rateuli with the flavor of Deuda dance because as professor Joshi, “Dance” becomes “a full- fledged performance inherently accompanies Deuda making” (Joshi 3). In this stage, general Deuda songs are performed through Khel and there is the presence of women, girls, boys, children, old men and so on. The atmosphere of Deuda dance is normal and entertaining.

### **Stage of real Rateuli**

This stage is the groundbreaking stage of Rateuli performance which consists of an amalgamation of emotive cum vulgarous Deuda songs and performances with the peculiar, humorous, glamorous and caricaturing performance of male representing woman character called Dyangsyas. Dyangsyas has put on very odd, old, tattered, and laughter-cracking clothes of a male and performs accordingly. According to the actor Navraj Rimal, “The humorous performance of dyangsyas satirizes the sexiest nature and libido of men of the society in Gaijatra (humorous festival observed by Newar people in Nepal) style” (Interview with Navraj Rimal). She chases the women, girls, boys and others who teases and/or provokes her. The songs are also of humorous or glamorous typed Tero rayo mero sassi ekaudai peluli, tei jaireko kya manuli bhakundo kheluli (we will love each other in an inseparable way; we will jointly dispose all the obstacles that may come to our love), Baikan mera madhesa chhan ma ghara tharyay ki, mauka ei ho bokeya hunya jatkala haryay ki [I am thirsty of love for my husband is in Madhesh, now is the chance to bear the role of he-goat (husband/male) for I am still not being a mother] (My interview and translation with Sarada Dhungana (Timilsina) and so on. Hence, this stage accumulates such romanticizing performance of the male representing character Dyangsyas or Bungchya.

### **Stage of Balo Khelaune:**

This is the final stage of Rateuli Performance which is performed in the early morning of the marriage arriving day at bridegroom’s home. This stage invites the lucky dawn and good omen in the house of bridegroom. The cool, healthier and gentle breeze of the early morning befits for Balo Khelaune (playing with a doll and singing). Balo means a baby which is invited to be begotten from the bride through Deuda songs. The mother of the bridegroom and other women sing Magal (songs which are supposed to bring fortune or good luck in the home) during Balo Khelaune time. The initiation of Balo Khelaune starts with the dialogic song asd

Mother-in-law (Bridegroom’s mother): Tero balo bauwa kati masya?

Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): Mero balo bauwa ekai masya.

Mother-in-law (Bridegroom’s mother): Tero balo bauwa kati masya?

Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): Mero balo bauwa dui masya.  
[Mother-in-law (Bridegroom's mother): What is your pregnant period, daughter-in-law?  
Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): One month has passed, mother-in-law.  
Mother-in-law (Bridegroom's mother): What is your pregnant period, daughter-in-law?  
Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): Two months have passed, mother-in-law.]  
(My interview and translation with Gomadevi Pandey, Mandhari Saud and Deurupa Dhami).

The conversational song during Balo Khelaune ends with the question and its answer meeting the number ten (10). The "ten" signals the tenth month which is the time for begetting a baby. Within Balo Khelaune, there is another sub-stage known as **Magal** which is performed by songs of summoning good luck and romance in the bride groom's house.

The Magal songs are "romantic in feature and are presumed to invite good omen to the marriage house" (Interview with Tek Bahadur Shahi) because of its special romantic rhythmic instruction given to the marriage processors by the mother of the bridegroom and her co-singer. As noted during interview with the midwife and an old woman of Patalkot, Achham, Mrs. Manti Joshi, these songs are sung/performed as Magal: Aao aao janti singari. Pathari aao, balaka janti jao. Aama khuwaunni dudh bhat, bajao panchya baja. Sara sara jantya pailo. Byaulo pathari dolima chadhao. Agi laga hudkya patar pachhi laga janti. Bicha lao doli. Jao jao baba bayuli ghara. Bayuli layao panchai baja thoki, layo mera ghara. Padhyaraka pati mani sita ki dui baini, paniko kalas dinni, pela dahi chamal sita lagai dinni. Jao jao baba bayuli ghara. [Come all the persons being the member of the marriage procession and go to bring a bride for the bridegroom. The mother of the bridegroom will feed delicious food to us and her milk to the bridegroom; play the Panche Baja. Move ahead the marriage processors. Decorate/make up the bridegroom and mount him into Doli. Lead the musician (hudkya) and dancing girl (patar) and follow them you all marriage processors. Keep the Doli (means of carrying bride and bridegroom) in the centre. Go and keep on going, you all "dear", to the bride's home. Come with the bride playing panchai baja (Nepali national music). Bring her to my home. Two sisters of Sita will offer you a mug full of water at the tap yard and Sita will offer key (tika) with the mélange of curd, rice and yellow colour on your (marriage processor's) forehead. Go and keep on going, you all "dear", to the bride's home.] (My interview and translation with Mrs. Joshi).

Marriage Rateuli in this district is, thus, performed with a mixture of emotions among Raeutili women playing and chanting varieties of Deuda dance and songs.

#### 4. Gender Dynamism in Rateuli Performance

Gender dynamism are the terms which constitute “**gender**”the fact of being male or female: issues of class, race and gender and **dynamism**”energy and enthusiasm to make new things happen or to make things succeed” (Oxford Dictionary, 2005) in a particular situation. To interpret the etymological meaning of the terms in a more substantive way, gender dynamism refers to the dynamic or changeable relationship and interactions between and among girls, boys, women and men and formed by socio- cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Gender dynamism can “reinforce or challenge exiting norms and values” (Web). To concretize the aforesaid references, gender dynamism in Rateuli performance refers the modification or change in relationship between and among girls, boys, women and men in Rateuli performance by challenging the existing norms and values of the patriarchal society. In a very plain sense, gender dynamism in Rateuli performance means changing or modifying its traditional convention with an equal and fair participation of both male and female performers.

Today, this sort of ritual of Rateuli dance during marriage ceremony in Achham district has been modifying with the influence of modern cultural era and the participation of both male and female in the performance is rapidly growing. Cathrine Bell says, “The notion of ritual is constructed in the image of the concerns of a particular era and ongoing time”(Bell, 2009: 12). Similarly, the convention of “Magal and Balo khelaune” which is done at the dawn of the next day is rather done or about to remix with different cultural effect. Its typicality and originality is being modified. This shows the step of “anti-ritualism and hybridization” (Ron Eyreman, 2006: 52) of a particular culture and ritual. Nowadays, we see hybridity in the participation of Rateuli dance. It is equally performed among male and female. Deuda, Dohari, Pop and other songs are also played to perform. “The humorous role of Dyangsyas is being modified and new sort of item dances with quite modern clothes are performed especially by young performers of both sexes and genders” (Interview with Bishnu Joshi).

Hence, the ritualization of Rateuli dance, there, is also influenced with other culture. “There is fluctuating relationship between efficacy and entertainment among gender dynamism over time” (Schner, 2003: 215). The cultural convention of performing marriage rateuli among women with Deuda Khel, Balo khelaune, Magal and so on in their proper stages are becoming contingent. The system of Rateuli dance at night time has been affecting due to the practice of one day marriage. “Today, globalization and gender dynamism go side by side.” (Victor, 2008: 15) And for commercial purpose, the visualization of Deuda dance of Rateuli by even the members of different culture has made the dance dynamic. The Dance is getting its more recreational charm with modern, pop, Lok Dohari and Hindi songs as well.

The rigidity in Rateuli is slowly converting into flexibility giving more room to entertainment and gender dynamism. The entertaining fluctuation of Rateuli is in a liminal phase in Achham because the traditional Rateuli dance and the modern Rateuli dance are at the liminal stage. There is high fluctuation between them. Therefore, the old convention of performing marriage Rateui has become dynamic due to the ongoing involvement of both sexes.

### **Analysis: Performativity and Gender Dynamism in Marriage Rateuli**

Marriage Rateuli as a ritual performance can be connected as “reutilization” which attempts to correct the implication of “universality, naturalness, and an intrinsic structure” that have accrued to the term ritual (Roy, 1999: 37). Rateuli performance at marriage ceremony in Achham district has its own naturalness and quite intrinsic and rhythmic structure in relaying the typical cultural message among all Achhami women.

The hidden pathos, emotions and confined feelings of gender discrimination among women are released through marriage Rateuli. It also let women inhale breathe of complete freedom. The long-run ritualistic roles taken by the women during Rateuli performance is not only for their cultural repetition but also for the obligatory adoption of rooted patriarchy there. Now, the “commercialization of Deuda Songs, Rateuli dance, their ongoing visualization, and the impact of western culture” as Prof. Dr. Joshi, has sensitized the women on their primitive mode of Rateuli performance of marriage ceremony in this district (Joshi, 2011: 51). So the participation of both male and female performers has keenly been increased erasing the biased and rigid stain of Rateuli culture.

The solidarity, easy acceptance, and adjustment of women in the dance show the similar “semantic framework”, place and cultural atmosphere with a similar geographical relationship. Such features evoke the purity of Rateuli dance and their unique cultural semantic framework and its revision. We can bridge it with Catherine Bell’s opinion as: “Ritual acts must be understood within a semantic framework whereby the significance of an action is depended upon its place and relationship within a context of all other ways of acting: what it echoes, what it inverts, what it alludes to, what it denies”(Bell, 2009: 220).

If we critically observe the role of the Dayngsya woman performing in the second stage of Rauteli, we may get the vivid and rooted image of male dominance and their ill and emotional behavior upon women kind there. This may be an irony to male kinds to stop such immoral and unsociable activities and to provide equality and freedom to women. As Emile Durkheim has written in her article “The Elementary Forms of Religious life”, “Religion and ritual in patriarchy are biased to women and it is religious and ritual performance through which women expose their intrinsic wills”

(Emile, 1961: 67). Similarly, James Fernandez in his “The mission of metaphor in expressive culture” opines that “Cultures are not women friendly in a male dominated society and the cultural performance of women, there, unmask such dominance” (James, 1974: 34). Both Emile Durkheim and James Fernandez try to express in feministic tone and indirectly connote not to let women feel such discriminating culture because both man and woman are the equal component of the society where they share their cultural homogeneity.

So Rateuli dance in/of marriage has been exposing the common intrinsic emotions, pathos and long-run discriminatory feelings of general women of patriarchy Achhami society. The role of Dangsy woman in male dress and the growing participation of male characters in Rateuli dance with different sort of songs foregrounds the angle of anti-patriarchy step and gender dynamism in Marriage Rateuli.

### **Conclusion**

Marriage Rateuli in Achham expresses and performs the women’s mixed emotions via typical sorts of Deuda Khel and song as with the amalgamation of its four stages: stage of Dio Mano, stage of Deuda Khel, stage of real Rateuli and stage of Balo Khelaune. But now, the old tradition of performing marriage Rateuli has been dynamic and modified with the inclusion of male and female performers due to the influence of other culture, technology, commercialization and visualization of Deuda dance and song and growing women education. Though the original performance of marriage Rateuli in Achham is in the verge of extinction, the recent and growing trend of gender dynamism in it has tried to equalize women as men issuing and challenging the long existed womanish ideology of the patriarchal society. Therefore, marriage Rateuli in Achham has become a site of performativity and gender dynamism today.

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### **Local Respondents**

- Manti Joshi, Chaurpati V.D.C., Patalkot, Achham, Local Midwife
- Sita Koli, Lungra V.D.C., Thuwa Achham, Famous Deuda, Singer and Dancer
- Sarada Dhungana (Timilsena). Janaki V.D.C., Paragipur Kailali, Local woman and experienced Rateuli performer (a migrant from Mangalsen Achha
- Goma Devi Pandey. Researcher's Mother
- Navaraj Rimal. Janaki V.D.C., Bhagatpur, Kailali, Actor, Artist and Directors and the Ex-chairperson of Khaptad Sanskritik Pariwar
- Tek Bahadur Shahi. Kalikesori Ma. Vi. Nada, Achham, Teacher
- Mandhiri Saud. Kalika V.D.C., Bajkot, Achham, Local Deuda Khel performer
- Vishnu Joshi. Payal V.D.C., Halladi, Achham, Politician (ward member)
- Gore Nagarji. Kalimati, Achham, Famous Hudke (caste of Damai)
- Deurupa Dhami. Binayak, Municipality, Dhamibada, Achham, Volunteer woman and deuda singer

