Rhetoric of some Nepali Folklores and their Changing Modes of Expressions

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Abstract

This article critically observes three cultural assets of Nepal: gaon khane katha *or folk riddles available all over Nepal, some folk songs performed by the Gandharavas of mid-western Nepal and some songs accompanied by dances performed by the Limbu community of eastern Nepal. It examines how changing logic of rhetorics, including political changes, advent of modernity and the burgeoning of digital technology have forced changes, adaptation or altogether discontinuity of some of these cultural assets in spite of governmental and public efforts for preservation and promotion. The article concludes that these components of folklore, being rooted in the society, have shown such changes or setback because the social, political or the historical values that sustain their existence have changed. This article has identified modernity, recent ideological changes, and the dawning of digital technology as reasons behind these changes. Despite their changes, folklore remains very important and should be preserved in various forms because of their connection to cultural identity and societal solidarity. For this purpose, universities in Nepal, as practiced by western universities, should integrate folklore into their curricula to protect and celebrate this cultural heritage.*

Keywords: rhetoric, folklore, Gandharvas, Limbu, *gaon khane katha*, storytelling, Nepal

Introduction

Folklore, a universally accepted component of the identity of a community, is not immune to changes (Korom, 2017). As folklores emerge out of social circumstances, they change as the circumstances and value systems of the society change. Some get discarded or relegated to stuffs of archival values while others persist, albeit with some modifications, or at least with newer interpretations. Two cases in point this article takes up are *gaon khane katha* (folk riddles) and *folk songs* in Nepal. The article examines some of such riddles and songs and demonstrates how they have been changing. It shall also list some of the formidable efforts that have been put towards the conservation of such 'threatened' cultural assets. Some basic assumptions of rhetorical theories have

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been used to analyse the communicative capacity of these assets, and they have been mapped with the new impulses of the modern times that have either challenged their existence, or have forced a revision.

Folk riddles, and folk songs and dances, considered for this article, are some of the many important components of folklore that forms a strong basis for the assertion of the identity of a community. Zou and Priscila (2023) claim that "folklore is a way to express and communicate ethnic identity apart from printed texts" (p. 3). The communities that own these assets tend to preserve them, as they want to articulate their identity through such expressions. Such communities also want to be "heard" and "believed" (Royster, 1996), and identity becomes their central issue in their exercise for self-empowerment (Hall, 1993). People value their cultural, social, rhetorical and historical artefacts as equal to the political rights inscribed in the constitution because as Hall (1993) believes, culture is the collection of "experience lived, experience interpreted, and experience defined" (p. 33). To a great extent, the folklore is an integral component of elements that give the community its identity.

Given the context, Nepali people also consider this vast treasure of folkloristic heritage one of the bases for their historical and cultural identity. But bringing forth all the folkloric traditions of such a diverse society is not possible in this article; so, we aim to introduce some of the conspicuous rhetorical patterns as evidenced in this folkloric practice by taking representative Nepali riddles and songs into consideration. We have also attempted to demonstrate how these assets are gradually changing or falling into disuse and have explored some responsible factors behind these changes. We have also enumerated some of the efforts taken by the state as well as the community to preserve them.

Rhetorical Theory of Folklore and Its Purpose

The mode of expression for any genre is a part of rhetoric, and it is directed towards persuading and appealing to a targeted audience. The purpose of persuasion, for Aristotle, is always inherent in rhetoric. In the recent years, rhetoric has assumed wider meanings. Cathcart (1991) states that "rhetoric is used…to refer to a communicator's intentional use of language, and other symbols to influence or persuade selected receivers to act, believe, or feel the way the communicator desires in problematic situations" (p. 2). Folklore is a form of rhetorical communication and has a persuasive dimension to a larger extent. Additionally, it validates culture, justifies its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them, and is a pedagogical device that reinforces morals and values and builds humour (Msimang, 1986).

McClelland (2000) simplifies folklore as a communicative behaviour. In his definition, it transcends the idea of being something that belongs to an individual or group:

> [It] does not 'belong' to an individual or group . . . and in the modern context, therefore, transcends issues of intellectual property; and [that] . . . it is transmitted spontaneously, from one individual (or group of individuals) to another under certain conditions, frequently without regard for remuneration or return benefit. As it is transmitted, it often undergoes modification, according to the inclination of the re-transmitter. (p. 184)

Usually, folklore reminds us of orality, and some professional historians equate it with rumour, hearsay, untruth, and distortion (Limbu, n.d., para 10). However, in its extended definition, it is not limited to orality. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) notes that "folklore as a discipline has tended to conceive every day in largely aesthetic terms" (p. 308), pointing to Ben-Amos' definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (1971, p. 13) and the American Folklife Centre's characterization as "community life and values, artfully expressed in myriad forms and interactions" (Hufford, 1991, p. 1). Oring (1998) puts it succinctly by saying that folklore "is about people—individuals and communities—and their aesthetic expression" (p. 335). A reliance on aesthetics emphasizes tangibility as a measurement of what constitutes folklore than the terms communication, and transmission might allow. Furthermore, it leaves room for prejudice— what one person may find beautiful or important conversely may seem ugly or frivolous to another (p. 6).

Brunvand (1978) states that folklore comprises the unrecorded traditions of people and includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style of communication from person to person. He adds that folklore is a traditional, unofficial, and non-institutional part of any culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understanding, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs traditionally transmitted by word of mouth or typical examples. The study shows that we do not learn folktales at an institutional level; instead, we informally in our homes, communities, and societies.

Moreover, Sims and Stephens (2005) assert that folklore is present in many kinds of informal communication, whether verbal (oral and written texts), customary (behaviours, rituals), or material (physical objects). These authors argue that folklore involves values, traditions, and ways of thinking and behaving, including art forms. Folktales are about people and the way they learn; they help us learn about ourselves and enable us to create meaning in the world. It includes nonverbal folklore like dance, belief, folk speech, proverbs, performances, curses, jokes, music, custom, or art, including dress or cooking (Blackburn & Ramanujan, 1985, p. 26-27).

Keeping this broader definition in mind, we are mindful that all folk riddles and folk songs, like many other components of folklore, carry the values and traditions of a culturally resourceful community and Nepal is not an exception. With its rich cultural heritage, Nepal also abounds in folklore, including tales and several musical and poetic expressions. Some of the subsequent paragraphs discuss some representative folk riddles and songs, accompanied by dances, performed by various communities of Nepal as a part of their ethnic cultural identity.

Some Folk Arts of Nepal and their Changing Modes of Expression

Gaon Khane Katha: The Riddle Stories

The *gaon khane katha*[3] are unique to the folk tradition of Nepal. Though they are called *katha*, meaning a story literally, they are not stories proper, but riddles. Folklorist Parajuli (1976) says that the *gaon khane katha*, unlike its etymological meaning, does not possess a narrative but only contains a "subtle, flimsy hint at it" (p. 159). The speaker tells the riddle and asks the listener to decode it. If the latter fails to decode it, he or she is required to virtually offer a *gaon*, meaning a village, to the teller. The teller, in supposition, retains all the good things in the town and returns all the bad things to the listener. Though the practice of telling riddles is not limited to Nepal alone, the practice of offering a *gaon* is unique to Nepal, and has a special place in the Nepali society. Folklorist KC (2015) makes the following observation:

> The tradition of telling riddles is not specific to the Nepali society alone; various societies all around the globe have had the tradition of the riddle game since time immemorial. In the context of Nepal too, it has become an extremely favourite verbal game, especially among uneducated rustic folks and children. In a riddle, the riddler can win an entire village, albeit unreal, if the listeners are not able to unravel a precise, exact meaning. (p. 202)

The social and cognitive significance of *gaon khane katha* remains undebated. Folklorist Bandhu (2001) claims such stories are indicative of the wisdom of the uneducated folks. He says, "The folks may be uneducated but they are seldom unwise" (p. 320). He also explains the didactic purpose of such riddles that are in use since the ancient time: "The tradition of providing education to the people in an enigmatic way has come into existence since the Vedic period. The use of riddles is also found in the Vedic and post-

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[3] A kind of riddle in which one asks questions, another is supposed to answer them; a village is to be given imaginatively if failed to answer correctly; if answered the question correctly, the one who asks questions is supposed to give a village to the next.

Vedic literature for the sake of rendering spiritual knowledge" (p. 320). Another folklorist Parajuli (1976) says that such riddles "provide us a glimpse of the extraordinary imaginations of the folks and show the gradual development of the human mind" (p. 160). This is to say *gaon khane kathas* are not mere games of wit; they are an entry to the various other dimensions of the folks. KC (2015) explains their larger purpose:

> On the surface, they simply sound like verbal tricks; a deeper analysis of them has revealed multi-faceted dimensions of folk life and the society. Apart from the didactic and recreational components, the riddles have powerfully projected psychological, social, geographical, linguistic, economic and cultural milieus and realities of folk like. (p. 215)

We (the authors) remember our grandmothers taking us in their laps to tell the stories of fairies that they believed they encountered while herding cattle and goats in the jungle. They used to ask some *gaon khane katha* and expect answers from us. If we failed to answer, we had to tender them a village as the rule requires, from which they imaginatively took all good things and left the bad ones for us. Some typical questions would be like:

> *Aauchha-janchha, pardkhidaina;*
> *kahilyai pani fardadaina;*
> *kasisanga tharkidaina. Ke ho?*
> [It comes and goes. Neither waits for anyone nor gets terrified with anyone. What is it?]
> *Mann chorné mayalu ti rati rati aauchhin*
> *Ujyalo huna napaudai kunni kata janchhin*
> *Ke hola yasto?*
> [The darling who comes at night to steal my heart gets lost before the day breaks. Who is she?]
> *Haat-khutta kehi chhaina jata sukai janchha*
> *Bolne much nabhaye pani gopya kura kholchha.*
> *Ke ho?*
> [No hands, no legs, yet it goes everywhere. No mouth to speak, yet it reveals the secrets. Who is it?]
> (Source: https://listnepal.com/nepali-gau-khane-katha-ukhan-tukka/)

The present generation does not understand or seriously care what a *gaon khane katha* is, what its rhetoric is, and why such stories are important etc. Our experience as teachers of literature at Tribhuvan University, over the past one and a half decade, has brought us

the realization that our students, who belong to the later generation of scholars, are getting detached from such riddles. They do not themselves know of the practice and show little or no interest in conducting research along these lines.

The *gaon khane kathas* have survived in oral tradition, especially in tales the elders of the families tell to their juniors. There are very little written resources preserving such stories, and even if they are, they are not in wide circulation, as they are not published by commercial publishers. The little that have been documented are in research journals, and only scholars turn to them. The result is that the mass is out of the reach of such written resources.

There also is another reason why the *gaon khane katha* is dying out. We remember the time when our grandparents used to tell us such stories and we gathered around them to decode the riddles and amuse ourselves. But these days, such family settings are disintegrating, as joint families are giving way to nuclear families. Moreover, children have electronic and digital means of entertainment and they no longer turn to oral entertainers. Bandhu (2015) says, "Children [today] read stories of their own and of the other countries in books" (p. 40). Consequently, stories flowing down through the oral medium are fast falling into disuse, and with it, the charm of the folk culture in its original pristineness is facing a serious threat.

Shrestha (2012) observes that joint families with grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins—all living under the same roof—were the norms in Nepal till even a decade ago. It is no longer a norm today.

Gandharava Songs from Mid-Western Nepal

Like folk riddles, folk songs and the accompanying dances are an integral part of Nepali culture. There are communities like the Gandharavas[4] or Gainés, who profess singing as their traditional occupation. They travel from village to village across Nepal's rugged Himalayan terrain, singing ballads, carrying news and preserving cultural diversity through storytelling and music. They contribute to making folk songs and folk tales popular by reaching villages and settlements and playing their *sarangi*[5] and *arbajo*[6].

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[4] A caste of Nepal known for singing folk songs

[5] A bowed stringed instrument with a skin-covered resonator mostly played in South Asia

[6] The arbajo is a type of Nepali plucked lute, long-necked and four-stringed, now described as largely extinct and superseded by the smaller, bowed Nepali sarangi. Some of the few musicians still playing the arbajo are of the Gaine caste, in Lamjung and Kaski district of mid-Nepal.

These days, they are seen using only the *sarangi*. In singing folk tales, they sing oral history incorporating historical facts (Dhakal, 2017).

As a musician caste of Nepal, "like the singers of Serbia and African countries who sing the saga of the nation, narratives of epic grandeur and stories of the communities" (Subedi, 2002, p. 127), this group has an excellent contribution for the enrichment and preservation of traditional Nepali music. They also sing the songs of their experiences full of sorrow, misery, poverty, and exploration. It is believed in Nepali society that Gandharavas were musicians *par excellence* (Basu, 2016). As per their belief, their main responsibility was to please Lord Indra[7] by singing and playing music. In this respect, Basu (2016) writes, "By the time the *Puranas*[8] and the two epics were composed, the Apsaras[9], and as mentioned in *The Ancient History of Encyclopaedia*, the Gandharavas had become performing artists to the gods; the Apsaras are singers, dancers, and courtesans, while the Gandharavas are musicians. She further writes, "In the epics and the *Puranas*, the Apsaras and Gandharavas are artists who perform at the court of Indra and other gods. They also sing and dance on other happy occasions such as births and weddings of the gods or the humans particularly favoured by the gods" (para.1). But we rarely see those Gandharavas showing their performance with *sarangi* and *arbajo* telling the stories of pangs and sufferings and sharing the narratives of societies.

This glorious tradition is, however, dying out or is undergoing inter-medial transformation. Because the Gandharava youths are attending schools, they hardly side with their ancestor's traditions. The few that still perform, including Shyam Nepali and Rubin Gandharava, have become professional singers, and their performances are technologically mediated.

Dhan Naach: A Limbu Performance with Song and Dance

We also consider *dhan naach*[10] (*yalangma*), one of the most celebrated festivals of the Limbu people, to map the changes vis-à-vis changing value system of the modern times. It is one of such cultural practices performed with the singing of *Palam*. It is not just an independent dance; it is also a ritual that accompanies a wedding. Nugo (2016) writes:

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[7] King of heaven as per Hindu religion

[8] Holy inscriptions in Hindu religion

[9] Nymphs

[10] A cultural dance of Limbu people residing in the eastern part of Nepal. This not only reflects the history and the mythical aspects of the Limbus community but also tells the glorious history to the new generations.

> *Dhan naach* is a main courtship institution of Limbu communities. Those who practice *dhan naach* sing songs and dance in circle, every songs and dancing style express Limbu attitudes toward courtship between "taruni" and "tandheri" or "menchaya" and "thangben"[11] in Limbu term. No two members of the same clan of opposite sex are allowed to dance together and no two members of the same clan are allowed to have sexual relation. During the *dhan naach* they sing their songs of love affairs among the dancers, but they do not touch the even toes of another dancer. (p. 32)

Dhan naach "not only reflects the history of the communal way of life and mythical aspects of the Limbu community but also bestows the glorious history of the clan to the new generations them promoting their culture and identity with a different texture" (Baral, 2015, para. 1). The way they sing and perform a dance to the song dramatize their cultural imaginations, including origin myths, bringing the members of the community together.

Like *dhan naach*, mention may also be made of other cultural performances like the *chandi naach*[12] of the Rai people, *Laathi naach*[13]of the Tharu people, *ghatu*[14] and *sorathi naach*[15] of the Gurungs, *lakhe naach* [16]of the Newar community, *baalan naach*[17] of the Brahmin and Kshatriya people, *chyabrung naach*[18] of the Limbu people, *Tamang selo*[19]

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[11] boys and girls of marriageable ages

[12] It is a traditional dance of the Rai community in which they dance to pray to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati for success, peace, and good crops for their village. Dancers who perform this dance have to show cheerful and charming faces.

[13] *Laathi naach* is a cultural dance of the Tharu people and is also known as the Tharu stick dance. In this ritual dance, all dancers should be male or female only, as they must wake up Holy Spirit Goddess Durga.

[14] A cultural dance in which people worship and offer lamps for the Buddha begins by invoking Hindu gods. It brings many cultures and languages together across the mountains of Central Nepal.

[15] *Sorathi* is a folk dance based on historical events.

[16] Every year during fall, this dance is performed in the city areas and performed mainly by the Newari community. Dancers dress and perform as monsters wearing masks during festivals.

[17] *Balan naach* is predominantly performed by the Chhetris and Brahmins during religious ceremonies. The importance of this dance is the performance of "Lilas" (acts) of different gods and goddesses.

[18] A traditional dance of Limbu people with rhythmic beating of the *Chyabrung* and dancers execute synchronized and complicated footwork depicting graceful movements of wild animals and birds.

of the Tamangs and *deuda*[20] of the people living in the far western region of Nepal.

These performances are in one way or the other affected by modernization. The young generation of Nepal wears modern fashionable dresses instead of retaining their cultural attires. Most of them do not sing their original folk songs; instead enjoy Hindi and English songs. They have changed their food habits. They have, to a larger extent, forgotten their folkloric tradition. These traditional practices are the conventional ways of living, which they often do not prefer. Instead, they choose to enjoy the modern ways of living. Young people are losing interest in the ritual part of these dances, songs, performances, rituals, and it is becoming more and more commercialized. The young generation seems unaware of the fact that these all as components constitute the identity. If this generation does not carry such traditions, Nepalese society lose the precious assets that the ancestors gifted.

Current Status of *Gaon Khane Katha*, Folk Songs and Dances

With the change of the political atmosphere of Nepal with it becoming a secular republic, the control of power by one or two communities of people is facing vehement oppositions. Minority groups and unrepresented communities are claiming their share in the power dynamics. A concurrent cultural movement today is the movement of identity. Communities are asserting their unique and rich identities through cultural revivals, including research, publication, increased performances, promotion and archiving. The impetus for such changes has been provided by the coming of *The Constitution of Nepal* (2015) that declared Nepal a secular, democratic republic. It also declares Nepal a country of diversity in ethnic, linguistics, religious, cultural, and geographical terms. "The Preamble" of the same states that protecting and promoting social and cultural solidarity, tolerance and harmony, and acknowledged that 'unity in diversity' is one of the primary objectives of the *Constitution*. It also recognizes the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multicultural and diverse regional characteristics of the country, and aims at building an egalitarian society founded on the proportional inclusive and participatory principles in order to ensure economic equality, prosperity and social justice by eliminating discrimination based on class, caste, region, language, religion and gender and all forms of caste-based untouchability (p. 6). This is viable, because Nepal,

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[19] It is a genre of Nepali folk song performed accompanied by the instruments *damphu*, *tungna* and *madal*.

[20] *Deuda naach* is mostly popular in Far West Nepal. Dancers perform the dance in a circle by touching the shoulders of others. They will step their legs back and forth according to the song sung by the dancers themselves.

as a nation, is defined by diversity along all these lines and without upholding the same, the proportional development of all of its constituent communities cannot be imagined.

One irony in this state of affairs, however, is that cultural assets are fast changing their forms, or are dying out in spite of increased attention and consciousness for their preservation and promotion. What has been observed is that unless and until a folk element has a performer or committed inheritor, it cannot survive. Gradual change in the format, interpretation and meaning of folklore is a global phenomenon, but there are instances when the change is so drastic that the components are not only questioned but are also eventually discarded. Those considered politically incorrect, abusive or superstitious do not get inherited. Those that encourage communal disharmony are also left behind. Such changes have also been seen in Nepal. There also are cases when these assets are forgotten or left unattended as the taste of the new generation shifts in response to modernity and the youngsters are no longer interested in preserving their cultural heritage. As a result, they get extinct, or are modified to the extent that their newer versions appear starkly different from their original versions. Various scholars, who specialize in the study of folklore, have acknowledged this change, transmutation or increasing apathy of the contemporary generation towards the folklorist heritage. Bandhu (2015) laments considering how the tradition is facing a threat:

> Various performances are dying out as there are carriers of these performances. The new generation is reluctant to learn such traditional practices. The schools mainly teach the songs and dances which are heavily influenced by the Indian films. There is very little fieldwork and research done in order to promote the traditional performances. Some of the dances of Kathmandu like Carya and other mythological dances may disappear if they are not preserved and promoted. The traditional style of telling the folktales and riddles are also disappearing. (p. 40)

The question, therefore, naturally props up: How is such a rich tradition changing along with time? What are the factors responsible for bringing about such changes?

Factors Affecting Folkloric Tradition

With the march in time, the folkloric history of Nepal too has witnessed a great deal of transformation. Though it is not exactly the same as what Haas (2015) argues in her essay on the effects of colonialism on Native American culture, Nepali folkloric tradition is affected by various factors, most conspicuous of them being the fallout effects of modernization and historico-political changes, including urbanization, migration, disintegration of joint families into nuclear families and the advent of the Internet and the

digital communication modes. In fact, these factors have snapped the connection between the past the present sustained by memory, as the inheritors of the past social memories are fast moving away from collective lives and are opting for highly individualized lives. Moreover, the folk patters of these cultural artefacts are facing unprecedented penetration from foreign cultures, especially through the digital and other audio-visual means, and the patterns are getting either hybridized, or abandoned altogether. The threat, therefore, is quite obvious.

History and Group Ideology

The folkloric identification of different communities is contingent in Nepal somehow determined by power dynamics. Before its unification by the then King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Nepal was divided into many principalities. Such community-based territories at least had their own unique histories, rhetorical practices, cultures, ideologies, ruling systems, and ways of life. After unification, the empire became a unified 'Greater Nepal' with unified rhetorics of multicultural, multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, Hindu Kingdom (*The Constitution of Nepal*, 1990). During this era, the power centres in Nepal were largely controlled by people from the so-called high-class. The Shahs were on the thrones; the Brahmans and Kshatriyas were in other key positions, including government offices, security forces and social institutions. The state priorities and division of resources were accordingly polarised. On the cultural front too, the minorities and their cultures seldom received any attention. As this continued for decades, certain cultural assets got endangered.

The power dynamics changed as Nepal was declared a secular republic as the result of People's Movement II in 2006. With this change in power dynamics, the cultures, rituals, religions, songs, dances and living styles of marginalized indigenous started receiving some added attention, but was perhaps too late. The folkloric assets discussed earlier have endured in the form of peripheral cosmetics from the mainstream culture, tradition, and lifestyles.

Those assets that have survived have assumed a changed rhetoric, as ideologies defining them have changed. Ideological shifts are significant in judging how the rhetorics are under the process of transformation. Obviously, differences among multiple ethnicities and linguistic groups, ideology and castes exist (as imagined by the constitution). The tradition is still alive but that pristine originality is shadowed; the "aura" is gradually lost (Benjamin, 2018). Along with the ideological shift, the direction of rhetorics also changes as new stories on secularism and republics are in the air.

Advent of Modernity

Nepali society is gradually embracing modernity. One of its impacts is that families are migrating towards urban spaces to avail the outcome of modernity. The elder members of the families, however, are adamant in sticking to the rural spaces. As a result, joint families are fast disintegrating, and getting divided between villages and towns. Nepal is thus changing from a conglomeration of multigenerational joint families living mostly in the villages—the living museums of folklores—into a group of cellular, nuclear families settled in urban spaces. Consequently, the oral storytelling practice, a component of folkloric tradition that thrived in joint families with elderly parents and grandparents, is negatively affected. Same is the fate of many other genres of the folklore, including ballads and other cultural songs, dances and performances.

But the democratic movement of 1990 brought about major political and economic changes; it also ruptured this social contract. As economy expanded, new jobs opened in the manufacturing and services sector, and many flocked to the cities. The decade-long conflict initiated by the Maoists roughly from 1996 to 2006 hastened this trend, and elderly family members were left behind, leaving no kids to listen to their stories.

Read Global (2015) in its blog with the title "Preserving Nepal's Oral History, Grandparents to Children" worries on the waning of this generational history of rhetorical tradition due to the influx of modern media and communication technology.

> For centuries, the history of Nepal has been transmitted from generation to generation through oral storytelling: passing on stories about culture, livelihoods, and the natural environment of the country. Yet as Nepalese society modernizes and globalizes, this practice has begun to recede: stories once told are forgotten, traditional dances blend with more modern variations, and local histories are lost. (para. 1)

This problem has become a genuine one, and it is the time to think about promoting and preserving the unique cultural identities as the then General Director of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, in a speech once said:

> The cultural diversity around us today is the outcome of thousands of years of human interaction with nature and among people with different customs, beliefs, and ways of life. Having inherited this priceless legacy, we need to ensure it is passed down to future generations. (para. 4)

With this reality, we remember our grandfathers, the men of stories. They prodigally told stories of their hardships in rural Nepal and the stories of bravery that they used to share

with us. This storytelling practice passed down the rhetoricity of the time along with the knowledge and entertainment giving meaning to community life values aesthetically, as Hufford (1991) and Oring (1998) have theorized.

As mentioned in its Constitution, Nepal, as a multicultural, multilinguistic country, is proud of its cultural, ethnic, linguistic diversity. Different ethnic groups have their own histories, cultures, values, traditions, stories, performances, which make them different from others. The rhetoricity of these varieties make them distinct; however, their original characteristics have gradually been affected.

Digital Advancement

Although folklore is a "self-conscious discipline" (Blank, 2014, p. 1), the gap widens between the name of the field and what it now signifies (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 281). There are opinions that folkloric rhetorical tradition is gradually dying. This discipline has a seemingly grim future. But some critics are happy to silver linings, be it in a distant horizon. They argue that although visualized folklore may not maintain completely original taste, Internet has continued to make folklore alive. Traditional arts like painting, dance, music, and drama have always been integral to the telling and re-telling of stories in Nepal, so the community-developed theatre programs have contributed to act out the stories. Many songs have been recorded newly with a new set of instruments and they are now available on digital platforms like YouTube, X, and Facebook.

Some opinions believe that Internet culture is not an enemy to folklore. Anderson (1991), for example, argues that technology can bring the vernacular into sight, thus facilitating community culture and promoting nationalism—traditional by-products and correlates of folklore. Blank (2014) seconds this argument when he finds communication facilitated through the Internet parallel with what we do in "the real world" (p. 4). Folklorist Dundes (1980) regards technology as a friend of the folklorists but not a foe. He writes, "Technology isn't stamping out folklore; rather, it is becoming a vital factor in the transmission of folklore, and it is providing an exciting source of inspiration for the generation of new folklore" (p. 17). Some folklorists like Dorst (1990) and Dorson (1972) fear that the Internet will undermine the credibility of their work or negatively impact the content of their research. However, it should be noted that "new technologies do not necessarily displace, replace, or eliminate earlier ones. They alter the relations among them and incorporate one another—with far-reaching effects" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 310).

Internet users in Nepal are gradually increasing. According to the report, as of July 2024, 49.6 percent of the population has access to the Internet. It is an encouraging report, but because of the excessive use of television, YouTube and internet-based applications, gaming technologies have mostly replaced the stories of grandparents. Their closeness to their parents and grandparents–affinity to root in Nepali context–has been switched to Internet-based programs and websites that have negatively affected the folkloric knowledge of the society to which they belong. The newer generation does not much concern with traditional dance, belief, folk speech, proverbs, performances, curses, jokes, music, custom, or art, including dress or cooking as Blackburn and Ramanujan (1985) and Sims et al. (2005) defined as the components of the folkloric rhetorical tradition. Whatever is available online does not necessarily preserve the original form. So, the new generation is exposed to whatever has been digitally customized, altered or even manipulated to address the taste of digital audience.

Efforts for Preservation

There are two approaches to the preservation of folklores: academic and performative. The first includes research, archive development, book publications, teaching, and such other activities while the latter includes the enactment of the asset by the direct stakeholders.

The history of the institutionalization of folkloric rhetoric does not have a long history throughout the world. Though it was a part of a curriculum since the later part of the nineteenth century, it is a recent phenomenon in US academia that it began as an independent field of study with Ralph Steele Boggs' Interdisciplinary Curriculum at the University of North Carolina (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 291). William Baskin classified it under literature departments as oral literature and in anthropology department as a verbal art (Wellek & Warren, 1956, pp. 34-42). In England, the term was first used in 1846, meaning 'survivals' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 297) and institutionalized in the twentieth century.

In the case of Nepal too, as Limbu (n.d.) states, independent scholars have been studying folklore and associated issues with it in order to safeguard these valuable assets, their work has rarely been recognized by the concerned authority, nor such organized institutions have prompt and precise coordination mechanism to bring some substantial result from it. Nevertheless, Nepal had felt its need some decades ago and has been working to bring about some visible outcomes. In the 1940s, the Nepali Language Publication Committee felt a need to collect folktales and issued a notice to this effect, asking school teachers working in different districts to send folktales for collection and publication. As a result, it published various books of folktales (Bandhu, 2015). Another

book of folktales, *Nepali dantyakatha*, a collection of folktales, retold by Bodha Vikram Adhikari followed in 1938. This work was a part of school curriculum for many years following its publication. The contributions of Pushkar Samsher Rana towards the collection and archiving of proverbs and idioms is noteworthy. A book with this content was published in 1941. Satya Mohan Joshi collected folk songs in 1946, and popular singer Dharma Raj Thapa gave continuity to this effort initiated by Joshi. Thapa is also credited for establishing Lokgit Sangrahalaya, an archive of folk songs in Kathmandu.

In 1967, Department of Culture, Government of Nepal, started publishing *Harmo Sanskriti*, a magazine dedicated to folk culture. It published scholarly articles on various aspects of folk expressions, including *gaon khane katha,* folk songs and dances. The magazine, however, was discontinued after some time. It is no longer in circulation at present. The foundation of the Nepali Folklore Society in 1995 was another formidable academic effort to conduct and foster the study of various aspects of folklore in Nepal. Through convening of various national and international workshops and conferences, the society has helped create discourse on Nepali folklore and intangible cultural heritage and given many scholars a platform for working out in the field of folklore. The most notable documentations materialized by the society are folklore and folk life on *Dhimal, Tharu, Gandharva, Gopali, Meche and Aathpaharia Rai*[21]. It was really a milestone initiated by the Nepali Folklore Society as it has been carrying out systematic research on folklore for the past one decade.

Nepal Academy, known earlier to 2005 as the Royal Nepal Academy, also made tremendous contributions towards the study, research, archiving and preservation of folk cultural heritages of Nepal. In the early 1970s, it launched the Karnali Folk Culture project, under the leadership of veteran scholar, late Staya Mohan Joshi. Joshi led a team of other scholars, including geographer Junga Bahadur Singh, folklorist Pradip Rimal, linguist and folklorist Dr. Chudamani Bandhu, and they visited the remote location Sinja and studied its culture and language and published in forms of books. At the same time, the Academy formed the Dhimal Project, under the leadership of Tulasi Diwasa to study Dhimal culture. Under the sponsorship of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, scholar Deva Kanta Pantha collected ballads and oral poetry from Doti, while Harihar Bhattarai and Ganesh Man Gurung collected similar cultural assets from the same areas. Purna Prakash Nepal Yatri, another veteran folklorist, collected folk arts from the Bheri Zone and published a book, *Bheri Lok Sahitya* from the Royal Nepal Academy. Bandu (2015) has made a detailed mention of a few other efforts towards the study and conservation of folk assets in Nepal. Various fieldworks were conducted by the students

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[21] These all are indigenous people of Nepal

of Nepali literature at the Department of Nepali under Tribhuvan University. The study of Nepali folk ballads from Pokhara was completed by Moti Lal Parajuli (1980). Hom Nath Sapkota (1985) worked on the folk ballads of Gulmi. Mythological folk ballads of Baitadi were studied by Atama Ram Bhatta (n.d.).

Such research works obviously open the door to understanding folk traditions, culture, tangible and intangible cultural heritages of the folk groups, and deciphering the implicit meanings in their myths, stories, proverbs, jokes, riddles, etc. This is the right time to initiate for further expediting such efforts and make plans and strategies with precise objectives for safeguarding Nepali folklore. Silverman (1983) puts, "With its strong ties to the past and its potential for manipulating the national consciousness, folklore has indeed served to promote nationalism, socialism and ethnic unity" (p. 50).

Conclusion

As Nepal is a country of diversity in terms of language, ritual, religion, ethnicity, it is normal to observe multiplicity in lifestyles, storytelling practices, performances, dress codes, celebrations, to name a few. Whatever the ethnicity, culture, geography, linguistic background is, these practices are the priceless assets of Nepali people. As folklore is affected by modernity, the Internet age, historical shift, ideological awareness, and its original format have been changed, but folkloric practices still survive in different guises. These different versions may not be as precious as their natural forms; it is our responsibility to preserve and value in any form and format; however, the warmth of their pristineness is always celebrated primarily. Only by owning all rhetorical forms one can ensure the promise declared in the preamble section of Constitution of Nepal to establish an egalitarian society by promoting social and cultural solidarity, tolerance and harmony, and unity in diversity.

Taking folklore as a priceless gift, the universities like institutions should include it in the courses because culturally rich Nepal should preserve this tradition as it is associated with their identity. European and American universities have treated folklore as a discipline, and they have institutionalized it, but in Nepal, it is withheld for years as it does not have much space in academia; a narrow space in the Nepali Department of Tribhuvan University and a few chapters in the English curriculum of graduate course which does not suffice. Therefore, creating a conducive environment for exploring, performing, and preserving the unexplored folklore, and conserving the existing one is the imperative need of the time.

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