

**Recycling of Myths in Contemporary Nepali Art**Jasmine Rajbhandari<sup>#\*</sup><sup>#</sup>Asst. Prof. (Painting) at Lalitkala Campus, Tribhuvan University.\*Corresponding Author: [byakhyaa@gmail.com](mailto:byakhyaa@gmail.com)**Citation:** Rajbhandari, J. (2025). Recycling of Myths in Contemporary Nepali Art. *Journal of Fine Arts Campus*, 6(1). 25-40. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jfac.v6i1.76085>**Abstract**

This article presents the ‘recycling of myth’ in Nepali art. Nepali artists distorted such stories, characters, and emotions in their art to create unity in communication by transforming these stories from past generations to upcoming generations. This writing explores the relationship between myth and the art of Nepali artists, using their works as examples. The artworks are analyzed using qualitative research methods. They sometimes painted those stories precisely according to what was written in the text in their style. In some paintings, they distort the myth to explain their perspective about the world, political situation, and nature. These depictions of myth symbolically teach love, respect, unity, and moral lessons to society. The artists utilizing this have unique styles and are achieving great success. Information acquired by analysis of individual artworks leads to finding the meaning of works.

**Keywords:** Recycle, Myths, Symbol, Culture, Nepali contemporary art**Introduction:**

Nepali contemporary art recycles myths, and artists use images, symbols, and characters of myths in their art compositions. These myths are rooted in archetypes, which deal with cultural ideals and give expression to human beliefs. Myths are traditional stories that deal with nature, ancestors, heroes, and heroines or supernatural beings, serving as primordial types in a primitive view of the world. Fic and Doubalova’s (2014) writes:

The relationship between myth and history was perceived differently in different epochs, and its relatively positive description is unclear. Myth, or fable, can be characterized as a witness to the mystical union of man with the universe. This connection has the form of a ritual. It is literary implemented, sung, rhythmized, and told in verse, which all uses the imaginative abilities of man and seeks universal validity. (p.340 )

Contemporary Nepali artists represent myths in a symbolic way to describe people, their emotions, and their actions consciously so that they can communicate the mythical stories to their upcoming generations, which are also transforming from generation to generation. Myths are stories that deal with fantasy and explore people's imaginations, making them think there might have been such a world in the past. These stories are popular in a particular community and always unite people with happiness. The Book of Myth describes it in this way:

Without scientific information, any myths evolved into stories passed down to generations. Myths became an inevitable part of systems in religion and integrated into rituals and ceremonies, which included music, dancing, and magic. The second function of myth is to justify an existing social system and to account for its rites and customs. This way, events such as invasions and radical social changes became incorporated into myths. All cultures have their myths. Throughout history, artists have been inspired by myths and legends, giving them visual form. Sometimes, these works of art are the only surviving records of what cultures believed and



valued. (World of Myth and Legends in Art Myth, 2003, p.2)

According to this book, myth is the part of our religion that inspired art. Myth preserves our cultural beliefs and values as content in art. Carl Jung (1992) believes that myths are the experiences of our ancestors stored in our collective unconscious. “Jung believed that myths and dreams were expressions of the collective unconscious in that they express core ideas that are part of the human species as a whole. In other words, myths express wisdom that has been encoded in all humans, perhaps utilizing evolution or through some spiritual process (Wikiversity, n.d.)”. Abrams (1987) states that “Joseph Campbell (1971) defines mythology as a collection of metaphor or an organization of symbolic images and narratives metaphorical of the possibility of human experience and fulfillment in a given culture at a given time”. Therefore, we can say that myth narrates human experience through metaphors. Karki (2022) states:

Myths are generated from archetypal actions and characters and different forms of narratives: fable and allegory, novel and drama, video and cinema come out of the basic inherent impulses and psychic energies. Myths narrate the origin of humankind and perception of the visible world, the character, attributes, and functions of the ancient gods, and stories concerning an individual, an event, or an institution. The systematic collection and study of myths is termed mythology. Mythological research into the earliest literary records of the ancient world is essential for understanding the religions and philosophies of these peoples. Equally important, the study of mythology enhances our appreciation for the art and literature of the classical and modern eras. *The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, The Bible Odyssey, Romeo and Juliet, etc., are mythical stories that express action, obedience, love, beauty, heroism, faith, giving, forgiveness, and passion.* (Karki, 2022, p.11)

Nepali artists use such stories, characters, and emotions in their art to communicate with their community. They described the world of fiction with inherent impulses and psychic energies and narrated folklore and popular culture of the particular time. They explain the wonder of Nepali religion and culture in many imaginative forms, which are inexplicable. These mythical images have multiple meanings and try to solve the fundamental mysteries of life, death, the universe, seasonal changes, agricultural cycles, and the power that controls our world. Mythical paintings reveal the mystery. An artist's representation provides a concrete mental picture of a myth or mythological character. Chitrakar (2012) writes about Nepali contemporary art:

In the mid-20th Century, Nepal got freedom from autocratic Rana rulers. So due to this newly achieved freedom of open society and also as a direct resultant effect of the liberal grants by the Government of India to study different genres of Fine Arts in India, the arrival of fresh young Fine Art graduates from various institutions of higher learning in big Indian cities bombarded the modern unconventional thoughts and forms. (p.96)

Nepali artist like Chandra Man Singh Maskey, Tejbahadur Chitrakar, Ananda Muni Shakya, Manikman Chitrakar, Amar Chitrakar, karna Man Singh, Govinda Narayan Jyapoo, Lain Singh Wangdel, Pramila Giri, Thakur Prasad Mainali, Uttam Nepali, Ramananda Joshi, Manoj Babu Mishra, Bijay Thapa, Shashi Shah, , Shashi Kala Tiwari, Batsa Gopal Vaidhya, Indra Pradhan, Shankar Raj Singh Suwal, Govinda Dongol, Seema Sharma Shah, Uma Shankar Shah, Birendra Pratap Singh, Madan Chitrakar, Laya Mainali, Kiran Manandhar, Ragini Upadhyaya, Hari Prasad Sharma, Jyoti Duwadi recycles myths in their painting.

Sharma(2014) found a tentative borderline of contemporaneousness from post – 1950s



(Sharma, 2014, p5). He again assumes that “they break away from the religious tradition, for they do not completely present the gods and goddesses and their activities. However, it does not mean that they do not use religious subjects. They do so in a selective manner and in different ways. At the same time, they are attached to their native cultural roots” (Sharma, 2014, p3).

Sharma claims that Nepali artworks reinterpret gods and goddesses, unlike religious art. Likewise, the artists revise and reincorporate two-dimensional colors, distinct contours, and decorative patterns, the techniques of early Nepali painting in contemporary forms. Similarly, they subvert established icons, images, and symbols of early art forms. The literature review depicts Nepali contemporary arts, viewed and studied from different perspectives. However, this recycled form of art myths has not been explored well. This study attempts to fill this gap by tracing the Nepali artists who regularly explore the myth in their artworks in a particular style.

### **Research Methodology**

The research area of this paper is “Contemporary Nepali Art” which has been explored, emphasizing that Nepali contemporary paintings reinterpret the myth and make viewers feel connected to their tradition, religion, and ancestors. Books and articles are the secondary sources that have been used to create a background for the study. Works of art are primary sources that have been analyzed and interpreted. This research is based on the qualitative method as the interpretation of artworks can be plural and multiple.

### **Interpretation of art exploring myth**

Nepali contemporary art continuously improving and developing, but, they are so attached to their culture that they cannot forget their artistic heritage. They develop under religion with religious content. We cannot forget the contribution of traditional artists who continuously practice art forms which are originated in our land. Singh (1978) mentions some paintings like *Ramrajyabhisekh*, *Krishna-charitra*, *Gajendra mokchya*, *Radha krishna* painted by Krishna Bahadur Chitrakar; *Ghatotkach badh*, *Dussasan ko ragat le Dropadi nuhauna lageki*, *Dropadi Swayamber* paintings painted by Bhim Narayan Chitrakar; *Bhagwan Buddha ko lumbini yatra*, *Ajaatsatru le sastra samarpan*, *Buddhatwa praptipachi Kapilbastu ma Bhichyatan paintings painted by* Aanandamuni shakya; *Jarasan badh*, *kichak badh* paintings painted by Manik Man Chitrakar; *Ramdurbar* painting painted by Manik Man and Bhakhatman Chitrakar (Singh, 1978, pp50-60). These traditional painters use chiaroscuro, modeling, perspective, and realistic composition in traditional mythical stories. They deal with the events and characters of mythical stories like Ramayan, Mahabharat and Jataka stories of Buddha. They recycle the myths in realistic way in their work. In Saroj Bajracharya’s view, contemporary Nepali painting shares “all the values that our tradition had to offer us with a blend of fresh ideas” made available by “cultural globalization” (“Nearness” qtd. in Sharma, 2014).

Today also the artist like Gopal Kala Premi, Udaya Charan Shrestha, Asha Dangol, Erina Tamrakar, Sarita Dongol, Bhairaja Maharjan, Manish lal Shrestha, Rajan Panta, Prithvi Shrestha, Saroj Bajracharya, Sunil Sigdel, Umesh Shah, Krishna Gopal Shrestha, Jasmine Rajbhandari, Sundar lama, Mukesh Shrestha, Samundra Man Singh Shrestha, Sujan Dangol, Anil Subba, Anil and many more are practicing myth in their experimental work. Some artists explore the mythological story while some take only elements of it which give the smell of their mythical land. Such interconnection of mythical elements in contemporary issues gives multiple meanings. When Nepali viewers visualize the reflection of a lived experience of stories from their folklore in the art form they feel connected to it. This connection finally makes an art form successful in reaching its ultimate goal, the aesthetic pleasure of the viewers.

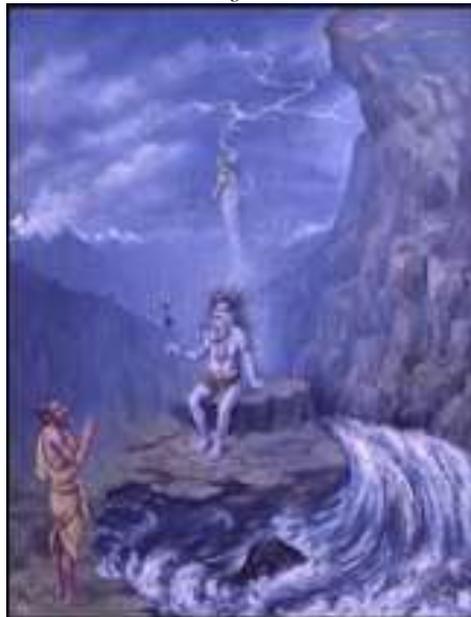


**Figure 1**  
*Realization*



*Note.* By Manik Man Chitrakar, 1940-1950, Painting, Mineral Pigment on Canvas, 36 x 29 cm, located at the Museum of Nepali Art in Kathmandu. Manik Man Chitrakar in painting *Realization* (fig.1) recreated the story of Buddha. In this painting, the old mythical story of Buddha's life is depicted realistically. Buddha is in a meditative position under a tree. He is sitting in the Bhumisparsha Mudra which signifies enlightenment attained by Siddhartha Gautama under the Bodhi tree. According to iconography, the Buddha invoked the Earth Goddess to witness his victory over Mara by touching the Earth. According to our ancient Buddhist text, Mara was a king who tried to seduce Prince Siddhartha through beautiful women to stop him from achieving enlightenment. The artist shows four women wearing Indian-style sarees and jewelry. Two of them playing musical instruments and another two were dancing. The landscapes look dreamy where chiaroscuro was used. We can see the beautiful linear style of the artist in this painting. This reinterpretation and intertextuality of mythical painting gives aesthetic pleasure.

**Figure 2**  
*Ganga Avataram*



*Note.* By Chandra Man Singh Maskey, 1956, watercolour on Canvas, 24 x 30 cm, located at the Kathmandu

**Figure 3***Devotion of Gutama*

*Note. By Chandra Man Singh Maskey, 1956, oil on Canvas, 24 x 30 cm, located at the Kathmandu*

Chandra Man Singh Maskey introduced Western realistic techniques in the religious mythical stories of Nepal. He painted stories about Shivapurana, Vhagbatagita, Krishna Lila, life of Siddhartha Gautam, etc. In one of his paintings *Ganga Avataran* (fig.2), he depicted the old mythical story about the river Ganga. Here Vhagirath is requesting lord Shiva to land the Ganga River in his hair while bringing Ganga to the earth from heaven as Ganga has enormous force which the earth cannot tolerate. Here, Ganga, the river has an anthropomorphic feature, as a female figurine and is flying in the sky in namaskar mudra; which looks magical and mystical. Shiva is painted in blue colour as instructed in Shilpa Sastra. The whole painting has the majority of blue colour as it represents water and gives the feeling of coolness, king Vhagirath looks like a Rishi who has just finished his long successful meditation to bring Ganga ( a source of water) to earth. Shiva is painted in the center of the canvas so that the viewer's eyes go directly towards the conversation between lord and king. Ganga is painted in a small size as the supporting subject and did not disturb the main character. Roop Vheda is successfully used in the character of the painting. The power of Ganga is shown through the thunder and the force of the river as explained in the mythical story of Ganga Avataran. In another painting *Devotion of Gutama* (Fig.3), Maskey's imagination of Buddha while doing meditation, is shown in a painful manner where he did not follow the traditional rules that God should be always painted young but he translates the mythical scene in a realistic style. The background female figure painted in green mono colour represents mother nature like in the mythical story protecting Siddhartha, she is also personified; the background landscape and animals who are surrounding Siddhartha look happy and painted realistically. The whole composition is painted in the harmony of green colour. Hence Maskey also interpreted and recycled myth in painting.

**Figure 4***Dipankar tathagata ko yatra chitra*

*Note. By Ananda Muni Shakya, mineral colour in cloth, 47cmX33cm, photo Courtesy –Hem Ratna Shakya*

The mythical and religious lord Dipankar Tathagata's journey is narrated in the painting *Dipankar tathagata ko yatra chitra* (fig.4) by the artist Ananda Muni Shakya in a realistic way. In this mythological story, Dipankar Tathagata was invited by the king of Kathmandu for the feast so the scheme of his way before visiting the king is depicted here. Hindu divinities like Mahadev, Visnu, Bramha, Saraswati, and other Gods and Goddesses are represented in human form showing that they are cleaning the road for him. It seems like Jatras influenced him so he shows the same celebrating mood in the painting. The presence of both Hindu and Buddhist Gods in the same painting shows religious harmony. We can find hierarchical proportion also as lord Dipankar Tathagata was painted in a bigger size than other divinities, in mineral colours. He shows modeling, and chiaroscuro and shifts the magical divine world to the real world. The painting form follows Western realism. Hindu and Buddhist deities are welcoming the lord, Dipankar Tathagata. The mythological story is depicted as if it is happening to our world and makes us feel that the lord belongs to the natural world.

**Figure 5***Wedding rituals of prince Siddhartha (1956)*

*Note. By Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, 1996, Painting, watercolor on Canvas, 44 x33cm*

Tej Bahadur always painted genre paintings, hunting-related paintings of Rana rulers, portraits landscapes, and much more realistic paintings. He uses the Buddhist mythological story of the *Wedding rituals of Prince Siddhartha* (fig.5) as another painting in which he imagines the wedding scenario of Siddhartha Gautam's marriage with Yashodhara. Here he recreated the



mythological story and put the fiction by converting the Yashodhara to a Newari girl. One woman in a white dress is making hair of the Yashodhara. The artist belongs to the Newar community so he adorned the painting by decorating the foreground with Newari religious utensils. The interior of the room also looks like an old Newari room. The lived experience of the artist is delivered here as the time and space of Buddha and Yasodhara were different from the artist's perception. Belong to the Newar community artist plotted the characters as if they were of his time. He is highly successful in dealing with mythical subjects in realistic art form.

### Figure 6

*Images of Bhairav I*



*Note.* By Pramila Giri, 1988, Sculpture mask in brass mounted on canvas with oil painting, 37x36x31cm (sculpture), 150x150cm (painting)

Giri painted huge canvases in abstract colour and attached the form of sculpture to them. According to the artist, she is recycling the mythical form of Bhairava in abstract form and does not repeat the mythical images but only captures the essence of Bhairava. The ovoid shining form with a void in the center is the symbolic representation of the Bhairava mask in a three-dimensional metal form cast in metal and mounted on an oil painting. The snake-like form is also attached to it. We rarely find an artist who combines both painting and sculpture in the same work in Nepal. The complementary colour yellow and ultramarine applied on the surface of the painting reflected on shiny metal makes the sculpture colourful. The black hole shows the depth of knowledge and power of lord.

Giri is a versatile artist who depicted the power of god in abstract form. She does not represent the power of the lord directly but expresses the essence of the myth only.

### Figure 7

*War and God*



*Note.* By Manoj Babu Mishra, Painting, oil on Canvas, located at the Kathmandu

The painting *War and God* (fig 7) painted by Manoj Babu Mishra is divided into three parts. In the left part, he shows a woman in blue colour holding a man-headed snake with her hand, this hybrid figure wrapped Shiva Linga and, in the background, there is two bird headed human figures who are angrily shouting and creating noise. In the middle part, there is a cat-headed human figure holding a rocket and wearing an army dress, it symbolizes war. In the right part, he



has painted lord Ganesha raising Trishula in one hand as if he is trying to fight with the cat-headed figure and in the back of him, Lord Shiva wrapped with a snake is painted in blue colour. That snake is also angrily trying to bite the central figure. Finally, at the end of the painting, the skull is placed inside the ShivaLinga-like transparent form. The viewer's gaze goes to the middle part as the figure is in standing position. The majority of its middle part is painted in yellow colour in the background, against complementary colour blue and purple applied in the both right and left parts of the painting. The whole painting expresses the chaos created by the war in this world and the only reason behind it is the animal nature of human beings. Only god can destroy it to bring peace to this world. The artist is reinterpreting and calling mythical Hindu divinities to fight against the war and bring peace to the earth. Mythical divinities and characters are used as metaphors for the positive and negative power of the world fighting with forceful expression.

### Figure 8

#### *The Kalki Avatar*



*Note. By Shashi Shah, 1993, Painting, Mineral Pigment on Canvas, 45 x 34 cm, located at the Museum of Nepali Art in Kathmandu*

According to Shashi Shah, he uses horses as the representation of the mythological avatar of the Hindu Lord Vishnu as the Kalki Avatar. If there is brutality, crisis in humanity, and danger in the world, Lord Vishnu will take the tenth incarnation of Kalki, that is the lord on a white horse and will destroy the evil powers and will protect the civilization and our world. He recycles the myth with the contemporary situation of war and destruction. So, to bring peace, Kalki must emerge to protect our civilization. He creates suspense by adding mysterious and expressive human characters with many hands. Here, he seems to have been influenced by mandala paintings central composition in which the main deities are placed in the center of the mandala in big size. He composes the main character with many hands in the red-colored mandala. As in our religious art, our Gods and Goddesses are shown with many arms which shows that they can perform many tasks and are very powerful. So the artist also shows his main white personified figure with many hands. As in the mandala picture, the subsidiary deities and power are kept at the four doors, similarly in this picture, horses are shown coming from the four doors of the mandala. His forms have textural feeling creating vibration. The artist has created a perspective that penetrates the surface of the canvas, which is created by the different layers of the surface, and the different sizes of horses, which are gradually becoming bigger to smaller, have led to such a feeling. He recycles the story and shows the power of God by using the dynamic horses as metaphors.

**Figure 9***Kali*

*Note. By Batsa Gopal Baidhya, 1980, oil on Canvas. located at the Kathmandu*

Batsa Gopal Baidhya painted Goddess Kali in his painting in which he expressed the divine power and the mythological story of Kali. He is suggesting the mythical story of Kali killing demon-king Mahishasura. In this story when Mahishasura threatened the war against the Gods, they created Kali who savagely killed all the demons. This war is the symbol of victory of truth over cruelty in our Hindu mythology. In this painting with a more black background, three eyes are shown on the upper side and the middle eye shows the infinite power of the goddess. He added a bell, a vase, and a downward-facing triangle which symbolizes female Shakti or prakriti. Here he symbolically painted all the motifs. All the ayudh of Kali are painted clockwise. They are symbolic representations of the power of the deity. Mahisasur is represented as a bullhead on the right side of the painting. On the bottom of the canvas, mountains are patterned in white colour, then green hills, an orange color symbolizes land and a blue color symbolizes water. At the same time, this picture seems to show the geographical situation of Nepal, and at the same time, it also seems to indicate the way Hindu religion gives the colors representing five elements in nature such as air, fire, water, earth, and sky. The symbols used in this way give abstract meaning to the viewers. The blank and gap created by the artist left viewers to identify multiple meanings. As the victory of truth over evil is depicted in the Hindu myth, an artist is also reinterpreting it in geometrical form in his style.

**Figure 10***Panchali*

*Note. By Shashikala tiwari, 1990, Painting, oil on Canvas. located at the Kathmandu*

This painting *Panchali* (fig.10) of Shashikala Tiwari depicts the mythical story of Dropadi bastra haran from Mahabharata. It was an unfortunate event in the story in which Kauravas disrobed Dropadi, wife of five princes Pandavas of Hastinapur, and Lord Krishna saved her by divinely providing her with an endless supply of saree (common clothing of Hindu women). The elders and even his husband could not stop it from happening as they lost her in gambling and



according to the Dharma of the slave, they could not go against their new master/owner. Tiwari interconnects this story with the recent incidents of rape ruining our society. She merges nature and the human world with the mythical story of Mahabharat. She tells us not to be only silent viewers like the characters of Mahabharata if such incidents take place in our society. In this painting, she has made leaves in the lower foreground, and on the left side of the painting, the same leaves are shown converted into human faces representing Draupadi's five husbands five Pandavas. On the right side of the picture, there are eyes with the same leaves. The eyes gradually rhythmically fade to a corner across the top of the picture. In the center of the image is a large Om letter. On the left side of the painting, two hands seem to be playing a flute representing Krishna. In the center of the painting, the main character of this painting is shown as a woman trying to pull her saree down, which is Draupadi. Standing above green leaves, this female character looks like a flower. An attempt has been made to merge the letter Om lightly with the background purple. A kind of rhythmic movement is created in the painting due to the repetition of the leaves, and eyes as motives. Here, eyes also represent the male gaze. Dressing the main character in red is to attract the attention of the audience to the main character of the painting and also because it is the opposite color of green. This type of color treatment is present in most of her other paintings.

### Figure 11

*Goddess Taleju playing dice with King Jayasthiti Malla*



*Note. By Hari Prasad Sharma, Painting, oil on Canvas, located at Kathmandu*

Hari Prasad Sharma is a pioneering artist to depicts myth in his paintings. His oil paintings always create an imaginative world of our past realistically. Here in this painting *Goddess Taleju playing dice with King Jayasthiti Malla* (fig.11) he is imagining the mythological story of King Jayasthiti Malla playing pasha with Goddess Kumari. He minutely decorated the painting background with Newari architectural design. He directly expresses the mythical story of Goddess Kumari. According to the story, King Jaya Prakash Malla used to play dice with the Goddess Taleju who appeared to him as a beautiful mortal after his devotions. While they played, she advised him on affairs of state. But the queen was suspicious of her husband's activities and saw the goddess peeping from behind a curtain. It was prohibited by the Goddess never to tell anyone about their meeting. So, she immediately vanished. Once he saw her in a dream informing the king that she would never return. But he would find her if he searched, in the guise of a virgin child of the Sakya cast. So, Sharma tries to depict both characters of the story realistically but it looks like the world of imagination playing dice in the old Newari room imagined by the artist. Ornaments, Carpet, floor, windows, temple, and throne all are treated



minutely and in detail. Both character's bodies are anatomically improbable. He dealt with the medieval popular story of Nepal on the surface of his canvas.

### Figure 12

*The Myth of The Nagas and the Kathmandu Valley Watershed: An Ecological Artwork*



*Note. Jyoti Duwadi, 1993, Installation, Mixed media, installed in Kathmandu*

Jyoti Duwadi did this installation entitled *The Myth of The Nagas and the Kathmandu Valley Watershed: An Ecological Artwork* (fig.12) in 1993. "Myth of the Nagas" weaves together traditional art, indigenous stories, and rituals to communicate ideas for a greenway and nature corridor along the sacred rivers of Kathmandu Valley. He uses a Thirty-minute video, a Nag Panchami poster, an ancient text of the "Swayambhu Puran", photographs of the Bagmati river, a tree mandala, a map of the Kathmandu watershed, Drawings by Deepak Joshi for an environmental comic book, based on the "Nepala Mahatmya", Two sculptures, "Earth weaving" and "Red Earth of Nepal," were made with sand, red earth, and bamboo dokos (baskets used to carry goods ) and Buddhist Mandala: Naten Chutuk, created by lamas from the Tase Chen Shedup Ling Sakya Monastery, Boudhanath. He uses all these materials to create awareness about the protection of the environment. Like nagas (snakes) who breathe in polluted air and leave fresh air for the survival of all living beings, we should contribute to the preservation of water resources and the environment of Kathmandu. The whole installation is the synthesis of mythical stories depicted in many ways by many people to give gratitude to the nagas for giving us fresh air.

### Figure 13

*Ramayana*

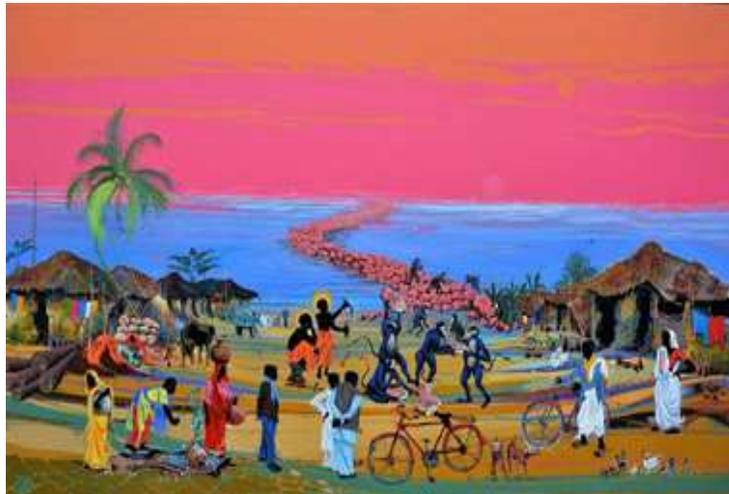


*Note. By Uma Shankar Shah, 2013, Unique print, 200x100cm, located at Kathmandu*

Uma Shankar Shah reinterpreted the story of the mythical Hindu story Ramayana in this print *Ramayana* (fig 13) in a unique way. He composes the whole story by dividing the surface into many segments. He creates rooms to define every incident of Ramayana by reusing distorted forms of Mithila folk art. Mithila folk art is the folk art famous in Janakpur, Terai region of Nepal in which all the figures are painted in profile and decorated with many geometrical



designs, animals, birds, etc., and outlined with double contour lines. The whole painting has tones of red, patterns of elephants, arrows, and geometrical patterns. From the marriage of Ram Sita, the war between Ram and Ravana, Laxman was injured and Hanuman was summoned to bring sanjivani buti to save him and he brought the whole hill of medicine in his hand, such a magical event of the story is narrated here. This painting has a harmonious composition of red and white colors. Painting, done in the style of Mithila painting, and the presence of the Janaki temple in the background seems to show that he paid tribute to his native land.

**Figure 14***Ram setu*

*Note. By Rajan Kumar Panta, 1942, Painting, Acrylic on Canvas, 3 x 5 feet, located at Kathmandu*

This painting *Ram setu* ( fig.14) depicts the episode about Ram setu (bridge made by lord Ram) of Ramayana, a Hindu mythical story. It describes the making of a bridge constructed by Nala and Nila with the help of the Vanara (monkey) army; to help Rama reach Lanka. According to *Ramacharitamanasa* Sita, the wife of Rama, prince of Ayodhya, India was Kidnapped by the demon king of Lanka (now Shrilanka). To save his wife he wants to reach Lanka. So, the bridge was made by the monkey army with the stones that stayed afloat once written Rama on them. Rajan Panta alters the myth by recreating it in his colorful surreal Terai landscape. In the foreground of the painting on the left side village women are busy filling water from the tap and busy with their daily chores and men are watching the incident. Cycle, dogs, buffalo, and hens with chicks are used in the painting to make the scene lively. Ramayana is famous in the Terai region and is deeply connected to the soil and souls living there. So, he paints the magical incident in a stage-like surreal landscape in mesmerizing tinted and bright colours. The black silhouette of Rama and Laxman in the center of the painting attracts the viewers' attention. His objects filled with bubbles create movement. Monkeys are busy making a bridge that ends on the pink horizon creating perspective in the centre of the painting. Hence the artist recycles the mythical story to show the importance of teamwork which is suggested in the episode of Ramayana.



**Figure 15**  
*Narayanhiti*



*Note. By Krishna Gopal Shrestha, 2019, Painting, oil on Canvas, 5x6ft, located Kathmandu*

Krishna Gopal Shrestha painted the famous mythical story of Narayanhiti a spout constructed in Narayanhity palace in hyper realistic manner. The painting *Narayanhiti* (fig.15) narrates that the Lichhavi king Vikramjit instructed to build the Hiti (tap in Nepal Bhasa) in the southern part of the palace courtyard but there was no sign of water from the Hit for which the king consulted Astrologers. Astrologers suggested that a sacrifice with a male candidate having thirty-two qualities of perfection should be performed. Only the king himself and his two princes were suitable candidates. So, the king decided to sacrifice himself and ordered one of his sons to sacrifice him so that a sign of water could be seen at the Hiti. The king told his son that a man would be sleeping by covering his face and body to sacrifice him without looking at his face. Immediately after this, the water started to flow from the Hity which served water to the people of Kathmandu. After the son did so, he realized he had killed his father. With regret and guilt, he consulted with priests for a way to salvation and made many temples for it. The artist shows the son crying with the head of his father. An artist's expertise can be seen in the minute detail work of the tree, tap, lord Visnu on Garuda on the upper part of the tap; and realistic portrait of both son and father and their clothes. The chiaroscuro added drama to the painting and the treatment of transparent white cloths of a lying dead body is fantastic. Hence, the story teaches the moral duty of humanism that even the king sacrificed himself to save people from drought. By reinterpretation of this mythical story, an artist is trying to show the sacrifice of self for the welfare of people. He passes this thought to the next generation of our society.

**Figure 16***Joy with Machindranath*

Note. By Jasmine Rajbhandari, 2014, Painting, oil on Canvas, 3 x 5 feet, located at Kathmandu

Jasmine Rajbhandari illustrated the mythical god of rain Seto Machindranath in her painting *Joy with Machindranath* (fig.16). Deity Seto Machindranath is surrounded by six distorted female characters. They have wings and float in the foreground of the canvas like a garland. As if they are welcoming the divine and adorning them with his ornament; as every year in the month of Chaitra, the people of Kathmandu welcome the god during his chariot festival. The illuminating white face of the deity is immersed in the contrasting black background and the white scarf floats and merges with the red rhythmic petals of the flower painted right in front of the god. The throne, crown and nagas on the top of the divine are painted in golden colour. The female figurines' colour follows the alternate repeating pattern of blue, green, and yellow.

According to the myth, Lord Seto Machindranath appeared in a pond near present-day Ranipokhari, during the reign of Yaksha Malla. Yamaraj came to visit Swayambhunath, the holy place. But the king, with help from his tantric priest, captured the god of death and demanded that he make him immortal in return for his freedom. Yamaraj told the king that he couldn't give anyone that power. The king didn't let him go. Yamaraj summoned Lord Seto Machindranath to free him from the king. The Lord, white in colour, emerged from the water and told the king that neither Yamaraj nor he could grant him immortality. The Lord also told him to build a temple to live a long life. Eventually, he set Yamaraj free. He also told the king to organize a ratha yatra every year for three days starting from Chaitra Sukla Ashtami so that he could go to the houses of those people who cannot move, because of disability or stay longer in their houses and bless them. Ever since then, the procession has taken place every year from the same place where the Lord presented himself to King Yaksha Malla. The Deity is bathed and repainted every year as a ritual that symbolizes the changes occurring throughout one's life. As life is full of struggle so without having any jealousy we have to unite to solve the disorders of our life. The paintings suggest the thought of unification through recycling the mythical deity and the story in her narration.

**Figure 17***JAA...MA:Gubaju 1*

*Note. Prithvi Shrestha, 2017, Painting, Acrylic on Canvas, 36 x 48 cm, located at Kathmandu*

In this painting *JAA...MA:Gubaju 1* (fig.20) Prithvi Shrestha painted the Newari Priest called Gubaju in this painting. There is a famous mythical story about this priest in Newari culture. In Newari language, 'Jaama' means powerful person and Gubaju means Newari Priest. His real name is Manju Bajra. According to history, Jaama Gubaju was a very powerful magician and knew tantric power. So, he was called Jaama Gubaju. It is said that he could disguise himself as a bird and fly. So the artist painted a bird and a hybrid form of a human and bird on the sky in the background. He could do many unbelievable activities. He has contributed to society and tried to eliminate cast discrimination. Till now, it is believed that he is inside the well of Musubaha. And his descendants are still living there. So the artist depicted the big figure sitting in the center of the canvas. The figure occupying the whole canvas is painted in green colour filled with uncountable bubbles. These bubbles create movement in the blue flat background. As myth states the power of the priest, the artist also painted two figures of half bird and half human flying in the sky. The painting looks mysterious as the figure is closing his eyes and reciting some mantras with a bell and Vajra in both hands. The artist is successful in depicting the mystery of myth in his style.

The Nepali contemporary artist regularly explores myth in their painting. As every civilization or society has its mythical stories and artists are an integral part of society, Nepali artists reinterpreted such mythical stories and characters in their own style continually.

### **Conclusion**

Nepali contemporary art recycles mythical stories of Nepal. The recycling of fantastical elements in the content of their paintings became broadly practiced. Even young contemporary artists use chiaroscuro, modeling, perspective, and distortion in Nepali mythical stories. These myths are sacred tales that explain the world and man's experience. Hence, these mythological stories inspire Nepali artists to explore their subjects. Nepali artists use traditional imagery, fuse them with various activities of modern society, and connect modern society with conventional stories in magical art forms. By reusing mythological metaphors, they try to understand the ancient time. Sometimes, they paint those stories as written in text in their style, and in some paintings, they distort the myth to explain their perspective about the world, political situation, nature, and feminism. These depictions of myth symbolically teach love, respect, unity, and moral lessons to society. Reinterpreting such stories in their style repeatedly added new depth to their art and inspired another generation of our culture in a new way.



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