
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jodem.v13i1.47468>

A Comparative Study of *Ghãtu* Performance and *Balan* Dance*

Raj Kumar Gurung, PhD

Associate Professor of English

Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Kathmandu

gurung.rajkumar@gmail.com

Abstract

The study employs the performance theory to analyze Ghãtu performance and Balan dance. They are popular cultural activities because of the beauty of artistic presentations with historical values. This bond symbolizes the harmonious relations of human beings. The network of dance masters, dancers, and audiences plays a vital role in performance. They are bound in such a way that they cannot get separated. Because of such cultural activities, man-to-man relations become strong in village life compared to urban life. After the dance masters begin to sing, the dancers begin dancing in full accordance with the words and tunes. As a result, audiences also perform the same indirectly. The performance audience is much more worth having than the performance of the two. In the performance, all the audiences get connected unknowingly. Physically, only the dance master and dancer perform but mentally, the audiences also perform at the same rate. Performance theory calls this kinesthetic impact, and kinesthetic impact is such an impact that moves the audience. It is not only the singer singing the song and the dancer dancing, it is the audiences who are singing and dancing simultaneously. Thus, this paper focuses on Ghãtu and Balan in the context of human identities, although a few researchers have worked on this site. The dancing art of Ghãtu and Balan is very peculiar and incomparable to hundreds of other dance performances. So, the performativity of both dances surprises the audience.

Keywords: *Balan, Ghãtu* performance, performing art, vyas.

* Received on July 6, 2022

Peer Reviewed on July 29, 2022

Accepted for Publication on August 7, 2022

Culture as Performance

The study employs the performance theory for the analysis of these two cultural performances of Nepal. These folk performances have not been a matter of great interest for research in the field of literature in the modern age. There is no immediate result of cultural activities like scientific invention. Performing or observing these activities is expensive as well as dry. Modern people have been habituated to entertaining other arts like disco dance rather than observing such cultural activities. Their luxurious nature might have been a matter of hindrance to continuing the cultural dance or so. In that sense anyway, the performativity of *Ghãtu* and *Balan* in their body aesthetics unfold their identities of ethnic groups and a Khasa-Brahman community. The study focuses on the socio-cultural significance. There are remarkable differences between these two cultural activities in spite of some similarities and commonalities. At certain stages, they resemble each other, but after certain turning points, they diverge. Every cultural activity has its own characteristics and nature, which represent the whole of human history, as there are similarities among the differences in human life. This is the beauty of cultural diversities.

Every cultural activity symbolizes something relevant to the human world. *Ghãtu* symbolizes the slow nature of ethnic groups and *Balan* symbolizes the fast nature of Khasa-Brahman. So, both performances are symbolically presented. These cultural activities are performed in hilly areas of Nepal, especially in remote places. Gurungs, Magars, Tamangs, Darai, Duras and Aryals observe *Ghãtu* in the western part of Nepal and the Khasa-Brahmans perform *Balan* in the central part. The time duration of *Ghãtu* is about a week and *Balan* is one night. The expense of *Ghãtu* is very high but *Balan* does not need that much budget. It is evident that ethnic groups spend a lot of money on such unproductive fields, whereas Khasa-Brahman spends money after calculating future results that they are more farsighted than any ethnic group. Both *Ghãtu* and *Balan* require a jumbo team for the performance. When the villagers perform *Ghãtu* dance or *Balan* dance, all the villagers get involved in the accomplishment of the performances. Without their mutual understanding, performance is impossible. The most interesting thing is that there is a bond created among the dance master, dancers and audiences. The various elements are integrated in such a way that they are never separated until the end of the performance. What makes them attached

into a formula? This is a kinesthetic impact that attaches or integrates all the performers into a formula. During a *Balan* dance performance, the *vyas* begins the performance by singing a kind of religious song, and after he sings the verse of the song, the chorus follows him in such an exciting way that even a seventy-year-old man stands up and starts dancing. Similarly, the audiences of *Ghãtu* also perform internally. It has a tragic story of the royal couple's untimely demise, whereas *Balan* has a happy ending story with the victory of the protagonists. This contrast is symbolic of different modes or vicissitudes of human life. Every literary text projects this. "Under the performance studies, a kinesthetic presentation plays a vital role in any performance. Kinesthetic presentation means how performers and audiences are linked" (Gurung 20). Every performance is measured by its kinaesthetic impact, which is also known as audience feedback. Both of these dance performances are on the verge of disappearing. Many cultural activities have disappeared without being recorded. The "ritual is and has always been a dead end, it cannot grow" (quoted in Gaji para 7). Hundreds of rituals have been dead end because of modern man's less interest, ignorance, and negligence. These two have also been declining although we have that awareness of protecting such archives.

Comparative studies enhance and promote cultural activities. This trend of research is popular and effective as well because it creates a feeling of competition in the public. Many students and scholars of cultural studies will understand and benefit from this study. Cultural identity is the identity of everything in the ethno-socio-cultural parameters and the humanities and social sciences. The contribution of such research work in the field of folklore literature and folk culture is worth having. It describes not only the ethnic groups of Nepal but also the whole Nepali cultural phenomenon. So, cultural identity is the national identity.

There has not been serious research work comparing *Ghãtu* and *Balan*. Comparing one cultural activity with another one can promote the existence of each other. *Ghãtu* is gradually disappearing from many villages, and so is the story of *Balan*. Gopal Aryal, the *Ghãtu* guru of Khasa-Brahman *Ghãtu*, says that it has not been performed in Majhitar of Nuwakot for five years. This is what the condition of the ethnic group *Ghãtu* performance in *Ghãtu* villages is. The young generation is not very interested in protecting these archives. Their importance is something other than this.

Young scholars do not do research work on such sites. Similarly, *Balan* is not regularly performed in every Khasa-Brahman community as it used to be. Modern society prioritizes something other money-oriented activities rather than cultural activities. This paper sheds the light on the importance and existence of *Ghãtu* or *Balan* for maintaining harmonious relations between humans. Therefore, this paper focuses on: Why do we need to conserve them? Will all the Nepalese be benefitted from these cultural activities? How do these cultural activities address the galaxy of Nepali cultures?

Most scholars of literature ignore *Ghãtu* and *Balan*. They don't find this area of study worthy. Scholars from cultural studies and folklore studies are the only ones who research them. But the number of researchers is very few in this field. As the number of students in Humanities and Social Sciences is decreasing fast. On the other hand, the geography of cultural activities is also very narrow. This paper attempted to draw the attention of the young generation scholars. There has been a lot of research in the field of science, the study shows. Therefore, scholars from the science stream or other streams should also write some articles on *Ghãtu* and *Balan*.

Performativity of *Ghãtu* and *Balan*

The *Ghãtu* and *Balan* perform at their best through kinesthetic impacts or audience feedback. Depending on the impact rate, you can determine how much of an impact the audience has. The impact rate or level is almost the same between the performer and audiences although the performers' can be considered more. The difference between these two is negligible. In the meantime, the study also employs the symbol theory, that is, semiotic presentation. Both *Ghãtu* and *Balan* are cultural activities and they are Hindu cultures but *Ghãtu* has been adopted by the Gurungs and *Hanuman dance* by the Newar. *Hanuman dance* is a part of *Balan* although it is separately performed as a major cultural activity in Baglung or anywhere in the Newar communities. They have been being performed and observed by these ethnic communities. This symbolizes that cultural activities are not just protected by biological guardians or parents, but also by social guardians. Aryan is the biological parents of both *Balan* and *Ghãtu* but some other ethnic groups have been taken care of them. The Gurung has been observing *Ghãtu* for about 500 years and Newar has been performing *Hanuman dance* for "275 years" (Chhota 108). Chhota adds that *Hanuman*

dance is the Hindu culture. It is a part of *Balan*. Ram used Hanuman, the monkey, to get his queen Sita back from Rawan. He further says, “[a]lthough *Balan Hanuman dance* is Hindu culture it has been adopted by Newar and they have made it their own folk culture” (108). Newar people seem to have conserved the cultural practices in Nepal. “It is seen that there has been a conservation of folk culture by Newar in a great deal in Nepal” (Chhota 107). Both of these cultural activities are considered to be performances of song and dance. “*Balan* song and *Ghãtu* song resonate not only in the hillside area now they also resonate in some part of Tarai belt” (Gurung 129). They have certain specific methods. And there are dance masters in both performances. The *Ghãtu* gurus guide the *Ghãtusaris* or dancing girls, and the *vyas* guides *Balan* dancers in *Balan* performance. This indicates that the teaching-learning process in human life is a non-stop process.

Kusumakar Neupane makes it clear that both of these folk dramas are treated as a song and a dance (16). The performers of *Ghãtu* are mostly females. There are a few villages where males are also involved in the performance. But only the male performs the *Balan*. This indicates that females are well respected and prioritized in the ethnic groups and males in the Khasa-Brahmans. This represents the variety of parameters of Nepali societies. Both of them have pre-historical stories. The dance performance is commenced only by invoking the aura in both performances. The dancing girls in *Ghãtu* and the dancers in *Balan* have the spiritual practice of being possessed by an aura. *Ghãtu* is a very slow-motion, meditative trance dance that is classical, while the latter is an exciting, fast-paced dance performance. This indicates the local variation of culture and the cultural values of Aryan and non-Aryan. Both *Ghãtu* and *Balan* are didactic about how to maintain human relations and disciplines. It also suggests that cultural activity is not conserved only by the real guardians (Aryans).

One most interesting thing is that the performance does not move ahead until and unless the dancers are fully possessed by the auras. This symbolizes that the spiritual practices of man exist even in the scientific age. The importance cannot be overstated, as many people still have benefitted from spiritual practices. The performance methods of these cultural activities are, “to be transformed into a god or to go into a trance” (Schechner 192). The performer of Hanuman gets transformed into a god, and he enacts in such a way that he is now no more a human, he is Hanuman. Likewise, the dancing

girl in *Ghãtu* starts performing as if she is the queen Yemphawati, or all of them get transformed into goddesses or go into a trance. This is the characteristic of performance or performativity.

Despite the differences, there are some similarities or commonalities. This characterizes the universality, and the beauty of diverse cultures is always unquestionable. There are certain points of departure from where differences begin. This reflects the characteristics of the human world. All things are similar to an extent or for a while, but they vary after certain turning points or the passage of time. This characterizes the universality and the whole world. Gurung further examines these two art forms comparatively:

The difference is that *Ghãtu* is music dominant and begins on a fixed day and date, once a year even though the starting date differs from place to place, unlike this, *Balan* is enactment dominant and begins on the occasions of *Krishna Astami* which falls by the end of August, as also Ramnawami that falls by April as well as in the leisure times. *Ghãtu* is based on hearsay and myth, and *Balan* is based only on myth. Both *Ghãtu* and *Balan* are dance performances, but the former is trance dance and the latter is not. The dancers sing in *Balan* but it rarely happens in *Ghãtu*. Most *Ghãtu* dancers do not sing. While there is a new trend in Ramche, Syangja, according to which the dancers also sing but in other villages, the dancers never sing any phrases of the song (Researcher's observation). (129). Gurung has clarified that *Ghãtu* is music dominant and *Balan* is enactment dominant although both of them require music and enactment. The dancing girls suffer very much in the *Ghãtu* but the dancers do not suffer in *Balan*. Almost all the dancers in *Balan* sing while dancing but *Ghãtu* dancers dance just in slow motion. *Balan* dancers jump up and down very excitingly and actively, whereas the *Ghãtu* dancers never do this. *Ghãtu* dance lasts five days or so but *Balan* gets ended just in one night. On the other hand, *Ghãtu* is performed in the daytime as well as at night time. This variation indicates the variety of our social make of the human world.

An interesting thing is that the dancing girls are irritated by the *Ghãtu* aura in the spring season, even though she is away from her country. One of the *Ghãtusaris*, the former *Ghãtu* dancer, Sunkashi Gurung says that she used to feel itchy and uneasy when she was in India with her husband. She used to experience this unwanted *Ghãtu*

aura during the *Ghātu* performance time in Nepal. She used to feel fresh only when the performance started in Nepal. The effect of *Ghātu* aura has meta-effects on the dancers. This shows that the geography of *Ghātu* is unlimited.

The audiences get moved as soon as they watch any one of *Ghātu* or *Balan*. What moves them so fast that there is no direct contact between the performer and the audience? The impact passes through the air to the audiences from the performers. To conduct the electric current, copper wire or metallic wire is needed, but the impact of dance performance does not require any of these things. The kinesthetic impact has the power of transforming from the performers to audiences that they pass through sight, sound, and wording. After all, the performance is all enactments performed by the characters but it becomes so lively all because of kinesthetic impacts. They forget that they are enacting or experiencing the story of the dance performance. The dancing girls in *Ghātu* do not think that it is their enactment or acting, it turns into the real ground. There is a kinesthesia that connects performers and audiences. This is what performing art is and the performing art immediately brings the performers into the real ground, and this is what the characteristic of performativity is. The impact on dancers in *Balan* is almost the same. The dancer starts performing his action so lively that the audiences cannot distinguish whether it is an enactment or real. Or the weeping of *Ghātu* performance is not like the filmy weeping that is caused by applying the onion. No onion is needed for the weeping of the dancing girls. For instance, the eye-opening session takes place at the end of the performance. They cry so loudly when their eyes do not get opened although the dance masters go on singing the verses of the song repeatedly for about two hours or more. Their eyes remain closed for two days or so. This scene looks so pathetic and sensitive that the dancing girls go on splashing the water on their eyes continuously but they cannot open it. Then some of them get nervous, too, and they cry loudly. And this moves the audiences. The trinity of dance masters, dancers, and the audience gets integrated into the performance. Those are the characteristics of performance or the impact of kinesthesia.

The research was conducted on how kinesthetic impact works and how to protect such archives for the next generation. Such ancient art forms have been ignored subjects by the young generation. Senior scholars and educational institutions need to make youngsters aware through their writings. Those people who observe *Ghātu* and

Balan have a belief system. The result is not calculative but it maintains the harmonious relations between them. This is the most significant thing we have to acknowledge through these performing arts. Every art form is giving some kind of lesson but these two are peculiar for their presentations. Both of them need spiritual invoking of *Ghātu* aura and *Hanuman* aura to get initiated. Until and unless the auras possess the dancers the dance performance is not conducted by force. The invocation of the aural state is unusual as the dancer starts dancing immediately after the music starts. In the *Ghātu* the music starts first, but the dancing starts only after about an hour or more. Music and dance do not go together in the early stages, but after some time of the play of music and verse of the song, the dance master sing and then the dance commences. The religious and cultural belief system is not directly related to empirical evidence. But every cultural activity helps maintain discipline in society. Because of the trend of violating the disciplines or rules, man-to-man relation has been questionable or deteriorated now. Without mutual understanding and discipline, a single person cannot observe or perform such cultural activities. It is impossible to hire manpower from other villages. For this, the villagers must be in good relation. A sense of relation and geography is bound up with culture, and culture is the result of teamwork. *Ghātu* is indigenous performance as, “[t]he templates and practices of indigenous performance, long neglected, marginalized or exoticized, can contribute to an evolving global consciousness” (Ricco 141). *Ghātu* performance has been long neglected and marginalized but its contribution reflects the evolving global consciousness. The king has to beg means the level of a man is from beggar to the king. This is global consciousness. The protagonist, king Pashramu wages the war and dies at a young age. War by the king or rulers is a worldly characteristic. *Balan* can be put into the bucket of non-indigenous performance but it also contributes to the global consciousness as there is a storyline of war between Ram and Rawan, like in *Ghātu*. Because of the warring nature of man, human relation has been worsening. So, *Ghātu* and *Balan* help maintain human relations.

Human relations have not been good in the modern world. Both of these cultural activities play pivotal roles in shaping and guiding society because “[w]ithout creating peace and harmony in culture, identity, and diversity, there cannot be least possibility of humanization in the world” (Yadav 141). And without humanization almost nothing is possible. For the continuation of humanization and human civilization, cultural

practices as such are a must. To observe the *Ghãtu*, there should be about two to three dozen man-powers. The number of dancing girls is from one to twelve or more. The number of dance masters is about ten or twelve. And every dancing girl needs one helper. Other young and energetic people are needed to make the dramatic props such as the bow and gun for hunting enactment. They are made up of wood and other materials that are to be collected. Moreover, Yadav argues, “[p]eople of one culture do not appreciate and speak in favour of other cultures because they are not acquainted with the culture of other people. In this regard, we need to promote both our own and other cultures for the betterment of inter-cultural relations” (142). Similarly, *Ghãtu* and *Balan* are to be promoted for the betterment of inter-cultural relations. The inter-cultural relations and inter-caste relations play a vital role to maintain human relations. Both *Ghãtu* dancers and *Balan* dancers signify that we should have good relations. The cooperative feelings which we find in these performances are exemplifying and worth having. This helps make the humanitarian ground strong. *Ghãtu* and *Balan* speak the voice of common people and how they live in harmony as it was an ancient model of humanity. Similarly, Thomas Ricco says that “[t]he theatre of the Alaskan Eskimo speaks the voice of the earth as it offers an ancient model of how humanity and an earth once lived in harmony” (Ricco 31). *Ghãtu* and *Balan* are theatrical performances and they reflect rural life. The simplicity of rural life, in which there is humanitarian ground, is stronger than urban life. Urban life is individualistic but rural life is social. The cultural activities unite the villagers as it is the product of teamwork, and it is easily managed in the villages. The harmony of human relations in the villages is unquestionable. So, *Ghãtu* and *Balan* resonate and reverberate in the villages.

And it is the village people who have been protecting the norms and values of cultural activities. But if they migrate to the city area from the village, they might forget it. This is happening in the present day as the number of villages is decreasing and the practice of cultural activities is decreasing respectively. For a prosperous and better life, man is migrating to the towns, and this helps the old culture and tradition disappear. But it does not mean that migration stops cultural activities. Many people cannot forget their folk cultures. Folk culture and folklore as such are unforgettable but they cannot continue it. “Culture is very often influenced and affected by foreign and alien contacts of all kinds. Folklores of all communities are usually handled eventually

by the oral tradition in a debased or distorted form” (Lama 163). This is what *Ghãtu* and *Balan* are like, and they are influenced and affected by foreign contacts. Despite these, there are a lot of Nepali cultural practices even in the UK and the US. We also see *Ghãtu*, *Chandi*, and *Sakela*, performing in different places of Kathmandu but only this way does not protect the traditions and cultural practices. This is not sufficient. For such cultural activities, we need a lot of open spaces which is not possible in the city area. People love their cultures but they cannot go back to their villages only for the sake of culture sake. On the other hand, they have crazy schedules and some obligations in city life that they cannot overlook.

Conclusion

The performing art of both *Ghãtu* performance and *Balan* dance is worth having in the context of cultural and social values. Research has shown that human relationship is not good today. The performativity of *Ghãtu* and *Balan* plays a key role in maintaining the harmonious relations of all humans. Both of these performances are not possible without the involvement of the majority of villagers. For protecting the cultures, the unity of villagers is a must. So, these cultural activities urge the good relation between humans. The performances are suggestive and didactic. The major concerns of the paper are maintaining human relations, healing, protecting the rituals, guaranteeing identities, discouraging gender discrimination, and promoting the archives. For this, the study has employed the performance theory and symbol theory for the analysis of these two cultural activities. The kinesthetic impact passes to the audiences through sound, sight, and wording in the air, from the performers. The relations between them should be warm to integrate them into one way. These cultural activities are not possible without the initiation of the majority of the villagers. This is also the symbol of unity and strength. Both cultural activities require about forty to fifty persons’ involvement. If there is conflict among the people living in the village, this performance cannot be observed. It suggests that village life is more social and united than city life. When the people have migrated from the villages to the cities, most of them start copying the city lifestyles and they forget their cultural practices gradually. This is all because of the poor mentality that the city is always dominant and the village is dominated. The village life is derogated by the city dwellers and the new city dwellers stop doing the activities of their villages. They are busy imitating the lifestyle

of the city people. In the beginning, the villagers do not practice the village activities, like cultural activities, later, they forget it. Then the significance of cultural activities is reluctantly twisted or stopped. The cultural identity represents all the human identities and civilizations. But before the machines and machine-guided mechanized city dwellers, such subjects are minor or secondary. The city dwellers calculate loss and profit as this is their obligation. Here lies the problem. Who will bell the cat? Who can drive city dwellers back to their villages for the sake of cultural protection? This trend of moving from village to city has been dangerous in the present day scenario. This paper attempts to find the middle path those city dwellers should observe their cultural activities managing the time where they are. This paper help in creating an interest among the urban population for folk dance for the preservation of such archives. And the main concern of the study is how to protect cultural heritage like *Ghãtu* and *Balan*. The trend of paperwork is decreasing and on YouTube, the trend has been in practice. The young generation has to surf the internet and see their archives on YouTube. Music and dance is the healer for humans. Because everyone is moved by the aesthetic beauty of music and dance, and music and dance performance, a kind of therapy, hypnotizes man in such a way that he forgets his pains. Therefore, the music and dance of *Ghãtu* and *Balan* is healer, circuit breaker, and refresher of human tensions.

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