

Lain Singh Bangdel. *Muna Madan*, 1959. Oil on canvas.

Intertextuality in Lain Singh Bangdel's Paintings

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Abstract

Intertextuality refers to the art of involving two or more than two artistic and literary texts as a single composition of art. Western modernist technique, particularly with the style of Pablo Picasso of paintings, Nepali architecture, and socio-cultural literature based on Nepali subject matter are the key intertextuality in Bangdel's paintings, which makes his works more influential in Nepali contemporary art. The main purpose of this paper is to explore the notion of intertextuality in Bangdel's work. This study is qualitative in nature, where ideas of intertextuality have been revealed and some paintings created by Bangdel are analyzed and discussed on the basis of various primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: text, intertexts, intertextuality, Lain Singh Bangdel

Introduction

Intertextuality is one of the pillars of creativity in Lain Singh Bangdel's paintings. The visual element of the paintings created with the idea of intertextuality is more progressive, expressive, experimental, and individualistic; this type of intertextual approach has impacted on a contemporary Nepali art during the 6th decade of the 20th-century to even today. His method of intertextuality helps to explore diverse forms, techniques, ideas, and concepts.

The main purpose of choosing intertextuality in Bangdel's paintings

is to fill the gap of intertextuality in his paintings because there is a huge gap in studies of this particular topic. Many writers and critics argue that the art of connecting or combining multiple texts is called intertextuality. For instance, an artist borrows multiple literary texts, paintings, sculptures, and a particular technique to create a new work of art. Any type of creation created by humans can be called text; it can be a painting, a sculpture, a poem, a novel, a song, a dance, a film, and so on. The combination of multiple texts is called intertexts, and the act of working on the idea of multiple texts is referred as intertextuality. This paper is going to look at the combination and representation of different types of

texts in Bangdel's paintings and the type of intertextuality they have.

Background

Before highlighting the concept of intertextuality, it would be more cohesive to introduce the background of Bangdel and his major works and achievements briefly. Born in Darjeeling in 1919, he was highly interested in art and literature since his childhood. He went to study art at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Calcutta and graduated with distinction in 1945. He lived there until 1951. He enrolled at the French National Art School in Paris in 1951. He lived in London and Paris until 1961. *Muluk Bahira, Maitighar, Laṅgadāko Sāthi, 2500 Years of Nepalese Art, Early Sculptures of Nepal, Stolen Images of Nepal, and Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley* are some of the most notable books written by Bangdel. He received numerous awards, including "Honorary Knight Commander of the Victorian Order by Queen Elizabeth II" (1987), "Commendatore" from the Italian Government for his contribution to the field of arts" (1985), and "National Order of Arts and Letters' from the Republic of France" (1985).

Lain Singh Bangdel was invited by King Mahendra to Nepal from Europe in 1961 and served as Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, heading the faculty of Fine Arts (Bangdel 2017). He introduced western modernism in the field of Nepali visual arts. Thus, he is well known as the father of modern art in Nepal. His paintings in modern

form — cityscapes, landscapes, and figurative works — are some of the most notable. His figurative works are deeply influenced by the works of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque because, during his stay in Paris, he was introduced to their works (Sijapati 2020). He was the foremost painter, writer, novelist, academician, and art historian.

Methodology

This study employs the mixed-method. Intertextuality has been chosen as a major tool to interpret the paintings of Bangdel. The photos of the art works have been used as primary sources to evaluate, analyze, interpret, and find out the intertextuality in his paintings. The ideas of the works have been interpreted using both the positivist and constructivist methods as part of the ontological study. Secondary sources like online books and journal articles are used to get further information regarding the problem.

Intertextuality

From the ancient to contemporary arts, there are different methods of constructing the works of art. Intertextuality refers the method of combining two different texts in a single composition. Text can be cultural, social, creative, or literacy, which can be seen in the form of painting, sculpture, poetry, architecture, performance, dance, and so on. Intertextuality became one of the most powerful dynamic methods of visual arts in modernism and post-modernism in the East and the

West. If we are aware of intertextuality, there are many possible ways of expressing creativity in the field of visual arts. The text can be combined, redefined, reconstructed, reinterpreted, deconstructed and so on. Initially, the idea of intertextuality becomes more visible in literary theory. The most notable theorists who critique and apply intertextuality are Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, and Roland Barthes. However, the term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 (Alfaro 1996).

Intertextuality has been a most important artistic device of visual art since the 20th century. With the rise of western modernism in visual art, many artists started to deal with the idea of an intertextual approach in their works. Intertextuality is not only a method; it is also a sign. According to Umberto Eco (1986:46), "A sign is not only something that stands for something else; it is also something that can and must be interpreted." In this context, the works of the artists can be interpreted in single or the multiple ways according to the viewers' perceptions and feelings. Roland Barthes argues that the text invites readers or the viewers to rethink their connection, the text can have multiple layers of meaning- there can be multiple interpretations of the text (Barthes 1975).

Appropriation, pastiche, parody, subversion, and allusion are some of the most distinguished types of intertextualities in the visual arts, which are explained below:

Appropriation

Appropriation is the act of appropriating the original or pre-existing texts created by the previous artists. The original text can be recontextualized in a satirichumorous manner. The original text can be recontextualized in a satiric, humorous manner. It shows a special purpose for the original text. In Nepali contemporary arts, ManujBabu Mishra's *Mona Lisa* (Fig. 1)," Sunil Sigdel's *Metamorphosis of Silence* (Fig. 2) and Shreejan Rajbhandari's *Hello, Mona Lisa!* (Fig. 3) represent the idea of appropriation. Manuj Babu Mishra's *Mona Lisa* uses Nepali traditional jewelry, and Nepali bridal attire. Sunil Sigdel uses the *Mona Lisa* and the White Tara pattern from the *paubhā* painting (traditional Newar art), and Shreejan Rajbhandari uses multiple *Mona Lisa* and Newar woman spinning a yarn (Darshandhari, 2023: 83–89).

Pastiche

Pastiche is one of the critical devices of intertextuality. Pastiche is the text that imitates the visual elements of the original or pre-existing text. The work can be created by imitating multiple texts, styles, eras, or movements. However, a pastiche may have no any purpose in terms of the style or form with the pre-existing text. The works of Lain Singh Bangdel mostly belong to Pastiche. French literary critic Marcel Proust coined the term pastiche in 1919 (Porter 1974).



Fig. 1: Manuj Babu Mishra. *Mona Lisa and Manuj Babu*, 2006. Oil on Canvas.



Fig. 2: Sunil Sigdel. *Metamorphosis of Silence*. 2018, Acrylics on Canvas.



Fig. 3: Shreejan Rajbhandari. *Hello, Mona Lisa!*, 2006. Oil on Canvas.

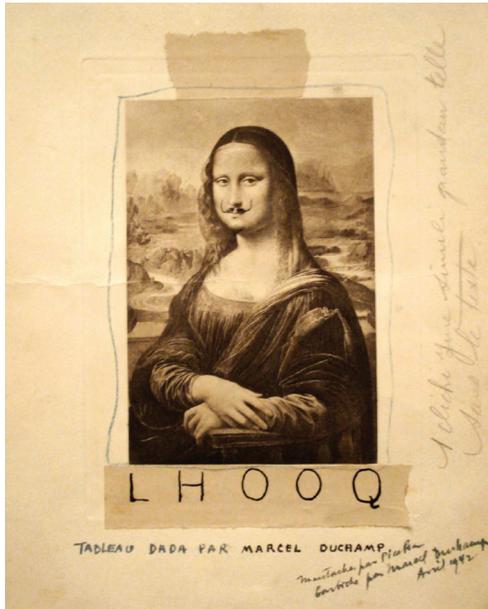


Fig. 4: Marcel Duchamp. *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919. Mixed-media.

Parody

Parody is similar to appropriation. However, parody represents the original text and exaggerates it in a more funny and satirical way. Marcel Duchamp's "L.H.O.O.Q." (Fig. 4) shows the relationship between two texts: "The Mona Lisa" painting by Leonardo and a postcard. Duchamp drew a beard and moustache and titled it L.H.O.O.Q. which means "she has a hot ass." It seems so satirical. Similarly, Nepali contemporary artist Laxman Bajra Lama's *Mona Lisa is a Lie!* is the true example of parody (Fig. 5). Lama presents Mona Lisa with a long nose like a thorn with an apple on it (as a symbol of Apple Inc.) to create a satire of dominant paintings, figures, companies,



Fig. 5: Laxman Bajra Lama. *Mona Lisa is a Lie!*, 2021. Acrylics on Canvas.

society, etc. The painting's satire is that any kind of dominant is not important to constructing a good harmony, balance, and connection in society.

Subversion

Subversion is also similar to appropriation. However, in subversion, the visual elements of the original text can be presented in a minimal or substantial way. Deviation is the key element of subversion; it deviates from the original text (regular order) or pre-existing text in a subtle or direct way. For example, Sunil Sigdel's *Metamorphosis of Silence* is a deviation from Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and Nepali traditional art. Sigdel does not follow a particular rule of conventional painting

or any tradition. However, he borrows the texts from different sources to create a sense of intertextuality in his works (Fig. 2).

Allusion

Allusion comes from the Latin word 'Alludere' which means 'to play with' or 'to refer to'. Allusion is similar to parody and pastiche. However, in allusion, sometimes the visual elements of the original text are presented in an indirect way. And sometime it is a direct way of referencing a pre-existing text. For instance, Lain Singh Bangdel's *MunaMadan* (Fig. 7) is an allusion to the long poem "*Muna Madan*" written by Laxmi Prasad Devkota, which discusses the importance of intimacy and love. Similarly, Joseph Kosuth's *18 Titles and Hours* is an allusion to James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism in visual art is more unethical than pure creativity. In plagiarism, artists directly copy the pre-existing texts without any credit, royalty, or other ethical process. Jeff Koon's *String of Puppies* is one of the true examples of plagiarism. Koon copies from Art Rogers's *Puppies* a postcard to create his "String of Puppies." However, Koon does not give any credit to Art Rogers.

Bangdel's Intertextuality

Bangdel's intertextuality is more connected with the methods of pastiche and allusion. Bangdel reinterprets

pre-existing text in the form of a painting and gives full credit to the previous author. For instance, if he borrows a text from *Muna Madan* to create his painting and titles it *MunaMadan*.

Analysis of the Paintings

Muna Madan is one of the finest examples of intertextuality in Bangdel's work. Bangdel recontextualizes by connecting a *Muna Madan* and a visual technique painting created by Pablo Picasso. Bangdel has used narrative poetry as subject matter and painting as visual language. Painting depicts the importance of love, harmony, and peace. This particular moment represents Madan's thoughts and experience of sadness after Tibet's stay. Madan recalls his beautiful past memories with his mother and wife. Although Madan has enough money now, he has lost his wife and mother due to his travels in Tibet to earn money (Fig. 7).

It depicts the narrative of *MunaMadan*. *Muna Madan* is an episodic love poem – a narrative poem written by Laxmi Prasad Devkota. Some parts of the poem are mentioned below:

Purses of gold are like the dirt on your hands, what can be done with wealth?

Better to eat only nettles and greens with happiness in your heart
(Devkota1996:2).

According to Yam Prasad Sharma, this painting represents the lower-class Nepali people. Sharma further explains, as below:

The artist takes the subject matter from Laxmi Prasad Devkota's poem "*Muna Madan*". The artist presents the tragic condition of a lower-class family. Madan, the newly married young man, goes to Tibet to earn money. His old mother dies. Muna his wife, also faces tragic death, for an enemy gives her the false message of Madan's death. Madan returns to home with money but now he has lost his wife and mother. This is the plight of the poor family. Bangdel presents the overwhelming emotions of Muna and Madan before their separation. To express the inner emotions, the

artist alters the images and colors. The predominance of blue suggests melancholy. The painting presents the socioeconomic condition of Nepal in early 20th-century, but the composition is equally relevant even today. The youth of our time are going to western and Arabian countries in the hope of prosperous life but facing catastrophe (Sharma 2021:31).

In terms of the visual element, the painting depicts a couple—figures of a male and female facing downward and hugging each other. The sky and a hill are shown in the background of the painting,

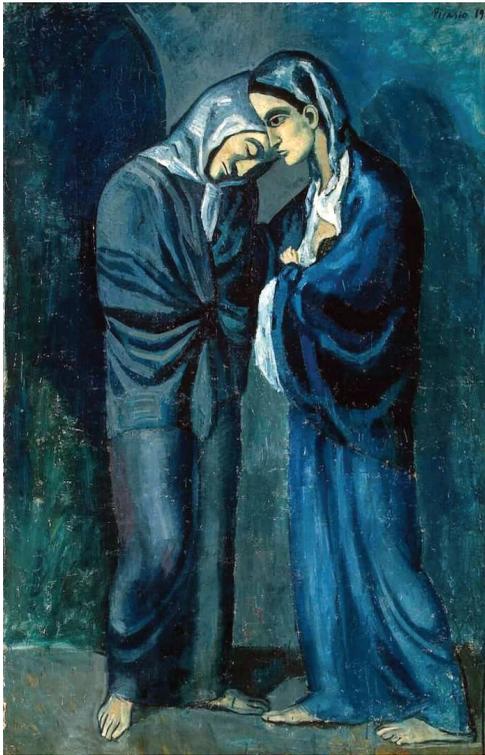


Fig. 6: Pablo Picasso. *The Two Sisters*, 1902. Oil on Wood.



Fig. 7: Lain Singh Bangdel. *Muna Madan*, 1959. Oil on Canvas.

which is created in very simplified form. The painting is created in the 'alla prima' technique. The composition and the distortion of figures and colors of the painting "MunaMadan" looks similar with Pablo Picasso's *The Two Sisters* (Fig. 6).

One of the most powerful intertextualities in Bangdel's *Mother and Child* is the visual aesthetic and technique of Pablo Picasso's paintings created during his blue period. In terms of visual aesthetics, the space, composition, color application, selection of figures, attire, the composition of facial features, and background of the painting *Mother and Child* (Fig. 9) is very similar to *The Soup* (Fig. 8) by Pablo Picasso. The space is empty around the figures, which are painted by a thick lighter blue color effect. However, the child is shown in white clothes in both paintings of

Picasso and Bangdel. Mother is offering the soup to a child tenderly, in the painting; mother is watching the child affectionately. Only visible parts of the body, like faces and hands, are painted in a warm color. However, the rest of the painting is dominated by cool colors. According to the color theory, orange, red, and yellow are the warm colors, while blue, green, and purple are the cool colors. Females are emphasized in both paintings; both artists have been able to show the mothers' emotions, affections, and grief in a much more effective way to the viewers. In terms of the conventional technique in both paintings, an alla prima method is used to show the richness of the painting quality. However, both artists have followed unconventional methods of painting in terms of proportion, perspective, and human anatomy; the figures are not presented in a realistic or natural form; distortions



Fig. 8: **Pablo Picasso.** *The Soup*, 1902. Oil on Canvas.



Fig. 9: **Lain Singh Bangdel.** *Mother and Child*, 1945. Oil on Canvas.



of color, proportion, perspective, and perfect human anatomy can be clearly seen in the paintings. The depiction of Nepali socio-culture is another text added in Bangdel's painting, which symbolizes the male-dominated society in Nepal, where females are responsible and closer to housework and their kids.

Bangdel's Fool Moon Night emphasizes on the Nepali village (Fig. 10). He depicts Nepali architectural elements to express the narrative of the painting. The method and technique of painting are similar to Pablo Picasso's Mediterranean Landscape (Fig. 11). Although Bangdel's painting was created one year later after Picasso's painting, the pictorial form of the painting looks similar to Mediterranean Landscape; they are



Fig. 10: Lain Singh Bangdel. *Full Moon Night*, 1952. Oil on Canvas.

Fig. 11: Pablo Picasso. *Mediterranean Landscape*, 1953. Oil on Canvas.

almost shown in a geometric pattern with semi-flat colors, where little naturalistic approach has been shown in the painting. The patterns of different forms in the paintings are created by regular and irregular lines. The use of color is created in unnaturalistic forms. However, the use of harmony, rhythm, repetition, and balance is visually appealing in both paintings. Both paintings place emphasis on architectural structures surrounded by a natural environment.

Lain Singh Bangdel's Untitled depicts the village of Nepal. Painted in a very eccentric manner, he juxtaposes houses in geometric form in a surreal way (Fig. 12). Thus, the visual elements of the painting look like a fusion of surrealism and cubism. The asymmetrical balance, juxtaposition of houses, and application of colors on the pattern look similar to House on the Hill by Pablo Picasso (Fig. 13). Thus, the idea of modernist technique with Nepali subject matter like Nepali cityscape and architecture makes Bangdel's work more intertextual.



Fig. 12: Lain Singh Bangdel. *Untitled*, 1960. Oil on Canvas.

Conclusion

Intertextuality has become one of the most fashionable trends in modern and contemporary art. The idea of intertextuality belongs to appropriation, pastiche, parody, subversion, plagiarism, allusion, etc. This study shows that Lain Singh Bangdel's intertextuality is associated with allusion and pastiche. He connects text and other text to create his painting in a very subtle way. His text refers to the inspiration of Western modernism, and the other refers to Nepali literature and architecture. His process

of painting is very authentic because he has given full credit to the pre-existing text through the title. The inspiration for him mostly comes from Pablo Picasso's method of painting. Distortion of figures and color, and the 'alla prima' technique are some of the key features in Bangdel's paintings, just like in the paintings of Picasso. Bangdel's *Muna Madan*, *Full Moon Night*, and *Mother and Child* are some of the greatest examples of intertextuality.



Fig. 13: Pablo Picasso. *House on the Hill*, 1902. Oil on Canvas.

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