

## Chapter I: The Importance of Being Subedi and Malingiya

Abhi Subedi was interested in playwriting and performance from his school-life in the age of eighteen to twenty (from 2020-22 B.S.) also wrote radio play in 2028 B.S. With the performance of an English poetic drama *Kathmandu Odyssey* in 1996 B.S. and another experimental play *River Stage* performed in the Bagmati River. He is a well-known Nepali writer, thinker and academician. A man of polymathic mind, Subedi wrote his first poem in 2013 B.S. He has written over a dozen books on various subjects and literary genres-poetry, essays, critical discourses and plays. Dr Subedi is a retired professor from the Central Department of English. His essays and seminar papers are published in Nepal and outside. He has a long association with dramatists, theatre groups, artists and the theatres of Nepal. In his late fifties, he took to plays writing. His first play is *Dreams of Peach Blossoms*. Then, towards the end of 2060 B.S., Subedi published a collection of fine full act plays (*Panch Natak*). It includes *Agni Ko Katha (Fire in the Monastery)*, *Thamelko Yatra (A Journey into Thamel)*, *Natak Pachhi Ko Yatra*, *Yooma*, and *Rungalaki Akas (The caretaker Sky)*. Among these, *Fire in the Monastery* has become popular. It has been performed for over a country over hundred shows in Samna Natya Theatre, Gurukul and is directed by Sunil Pokhrel. It has also been performed in India, Bangladesh and Denmark and Moscow. *A Journey into Thamel* has also been performed many times in Gurukul Sama theatre. It was directed by Puskar Gurung. It is also being widely admired by audience and theatre critics.

Subedi is widely known as an experimental dramatist in English. After the performance of this third play in English *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and in Nepali entitled *Aaruko Foolko Sapana*, the pace of discussion of Subedi as a dramatist has increased among theatre critics, readers, audiences, and theatre artists. And, the

performance of *Fire in the Monastery* has led him to success. Similarly, *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* and *Fire in the Monastery* have proved him a successful user of new dramatic skill in the field of Nepali theatre. In this regard, Shiva Rijal, a theatre scholar, says that Abhi Subedi's *Agni Ko Katha* is a new species of drama. He wants to reach and affect our minds, and he uses the theatre as a vehicle of instruction. His plays diagnose and portray human beings with masterful subtlety and consummate art (14). Subedi's plays are experimental on their theme and techniques. They are different than what has been understood as a Nepali play and stage in Nepali canonical theoretical history.

Likewise, Mahendra Malingiya, a pioneer in the field of Maithali drama is one of the greatest playwrights of the Maithali. A teacher by profession, he took to plays writing in Maithali, his plays depict the cries and woes of the village people who have been suffering from social disease, i.e. dowry. He is one of the members of (Mithila Natya Kala Parishad (MINAP)). This group generally writes plays in Maithali language and such plays are embedded with Maithali culture, art, traditions and so on. He has published an anthology of one-act plays which includes *Birju, Bittu and Buwas, Ek Puriya Bish, Mero Samb Dada, Mukhariti, Ek Cheu Khandhit Dhagogo, Euta Bahula Aai Ki Thi, Gagro Futalepachi*. His plays often portray the suffering of women. It deals with the women's life filled with sorrow, poverty and crisis. The most important element of his play is the circumstances resulting out of females' pitiable condition, how they are viewed by men, by the society and their family. In this regard, Dharendra Premarshi, a Maithali literary scholar, writes in him as, "The name 'Mahendra Malingiya' has become synonymous with Maithali drama and theatre. He is considered as one of the greatest playwrights in the world of Maithali drama. He has penned down many plays that reflect Maithali culture; and has raised the burning issues inherent in the society" (173). Thus, credit goes to Malingiya for the

exploration of the century long suppressed social evils, injustice, superstition, pains of females and other minorities settled in the terai region of Nepal. Sunil Pokhrel, a theatre personnel views Malingiya is the pride of Mithila. Malingiya is one the greatest personalities in the field of Maithali drama. He has won India's most coveted Baidahi prize for this play *Oakra Aagan Barah Masa*. Not only this much, his play Juwaal Kankani won the first prize in the Fifth International Drama Festival organized in Delhi (15). Malingiya deals with the ordinary problems of life and he always digs out the social issues prevalent in Mithila with a subaltern's voice. He is very realistic and takes drama as a means to express and depict the burning issues of the contemporary society. There are several social evils and even positive sides which can be known through his drama. He has always tried to throw light on the dark sides of social evils of Mithila region. Malingiya has always raised his voice against the oppressor who is solely responsible for the events caused in the Mithila. He is the Messiah of the downtrodden people. His plays are often simple and the characters used in his plays are folk people. In his plays, social victims due to corruption are shown. How the victim has to undergo physical, mental agonies is clearly depicted in his plays. He pinpoints the conditions of the common people including their happiness, sorrow, and trauma and so on.

*Fire in the Monastery* is a three-act play and each act contains three scenes. A library of syanboche monastery at the foot of Mt. Everest was destroyed by fire in 2046 B.S. The play is based on this tragic event of burning down the center of knowledge like schools and colleges. In this context, Shailaja Tripathi writes, "Agni Ko Katha is based on a real incident. Subedi used to teach English at Tribhuvan University where a few angry students burnt down the library a few years ago. Since we can't talk about these things directly, he replaced the library with a burning monastery" (12). Play revolves around the three main protagonists who are two nuns and a monk living in a Gomba. This certain Gomba is caught by fire and

the library is entirely engulfed and demolished by the angry raging inferno converting knowledge into mere ashes. The Buddha has died long ago, along with Guru Ringpoche and whose remnants were only the words contained in the books and these two have sadly been eaten up by the flames. The play begins with monks and nuns grieving about a fire that burnt down the library of the fabled monastery burning with it the priceless books which wrote about the teachings of the Shakya Muni Buddha. Lost are the teachings of the Buddha along with the fire, so think the nuns and the monks, and it leads monk Gyan to leave the monastery in search of his true calling elsewhere.

Amrita Gurung finds the juxtaposition of personal feelings and the philosophy of Buddhism in the play. She further writes; “*Agni Ko Katha* is a thought-provoking play that subtly embraces the philosophy of Buddhism juxtaposed by personal choices that all of us make in the end. The play delves into the subject of finding answers to one’s own questions and curiosity and processes which everyone goes through” (23 ). The principal character Gyan, an ardent monk, decides to head for Kailash when Purnima, a nun resists his move. Gyan has numerous unanswered questions in his heart and he desperately seeks enlightenment. He believes in destiny while Purnima in the material world. Though unmatched in views, they share a good relation.

Gyan reaches Kailash and returns. He feels the God inside. Still he knows life is not over, his journey inside is not finished yet. But, Purnima, unable to stop Gyan, sets into the physical world. She understands her life as a gift of God and extends her hands to help sufferers. With a light in her hand, she moves closer to the audience, depicting her move into the world she has chosen. The play *Agni Ko Katha* revolves around religious Buddhist monks with their own stories to narrate. The play speaks about the issues less spoken. The moral is to live life to its fullest and help those who are in need. When the monks and nuns who are preparing for upcoming *Pooja* hear about the fire caught in the Gompa, they begin

to weep gently transforming the cheerful ambience into a place of sad commotion and tension. Regardless of the fact that most of those present in the room do not know how to read and write, it is very vividly reflected in their eyes that they all have lost something very precious. Though the play is about the incident of fire in the syamboche monastery, it reminds us of the fire in the libraries of Mahendra Sanskrit University and Tribhuvan University. It also reminds us of the knowledge of men of religion of the past and destruction of sacred places and other terrific and sorrowful events of the distant past.

The play provides a solace to the knowledgeable and meditative people. It tries to show the futility of war and conflict saying that even in victory, no one is victorious. Even in the defeat too, nobody is defeated. Referring to fire and conflict, the play is an expression of violence and fire in the human beings caused by war and conflict that appear in different forms and places in the present world. The story of fire in the monastery also tries to express not only the outer pain and suffering of fire but also the pain of passion in the mind of Bhiksus and Bhiksunis unconsciously and unknowingly.

The play seems completely new on the several grounds. What *Agni Ko Katha* teaches us is that one finds the reason of one's being if one sticks to one's place. One should try new things and when one finds the reason of one's being, one will find real happiness and success in one's life. The play begins with the poetic expression of the poet Bhikshu. "A fresh color sweeps across the maintains/down below in the jungles a song undulates/here, is the triumph of one and the defeat of another. But even in victory no one is victorious/In defeat too no one is defeated/Here a dance takes place/Here is a preparation for tomorrows done drama"(Subedi, 24).

*Fire in the Monastery* was written with memory of violent and destructive events caused by fire at library, school and centers of knowledge. The play begins with the statement of poet, Bhikshu in a restless environment caused by fire. The play ends in the

point where all are engaged in their own duties and destination with peaceful, calm mind after hearing Main Lama's sermon. Critic Keshab Prasad Upadhya says:

Play gives importance not to story or narration but to character, as well as sense and idea. This is a beautiful poetic drama filled with thoughtful feelings related to the philosophy of Lama. The use of soft, mellifluous phrases according to the feeling has made the language also beautiful in the like manner. So, the dialogue and speech is a Bhikchu are beautiful, strong and intensive they are heart-rending as well. (4)

The above remark directly connotes that the play is rich in its own craftsmanship, the stage preparation and the also rich in the issue it has raised. Its performance reminds once more the craze of Parsi theater in India decayed ago.

*Wow Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai* is an excellent play written in Maithali language. This play has been nationally and internationally staged many times. This is a very heart-rending play that has really touched people of all classes. The play begins with a deep reverence to God, singing its hymns. The protagonist of the play is the father of such a daughter who has to lose her life because of dowry system, a social cancer rampant in the society. Dowry is one of the prominent themes found in Malingiya's plays. He has marvelously interwoven the Maithali society, culture, costumes very minutely. The Madhesi society has been tackling the callous dowry system for years. The very system has caused many innocent lives, torched many houses and destroyed the calm state of the society. It has invited social fragmentation, family disintegration and serious degree of tragedy. Due to this system, women's conditions are very pitiable. With regard to evil consequence of dowry system in the Maithali society, Dr Rakesh, a Maithali scholar, says:

The dowry system is a great evil in society which has destroyed many lives and caused great loss in the society. Even in one of his plays *Paush Jadh Ki Magh Jadh*, dowry plays a major role in the destruction of the family. The father-in-law and mother-in-law throw the bride out of their house simply for not bringing a motorcycle as a dowry. (25)

In *Woh Khali Muha Dekahi Chai*, Sita is the protagonist of the play under whom the play revolves. Krishna, a helpless and loving father of Sita, gives her daughter the best education one receives. Bhanu, a brother to Sita, is of amiable manner and simple nature. Often he plays pranks about his sister's marriage. Mahajan, the vampire, is solely responsible for the destruction of Sita's family only for dowry which her father cannot pay to the groom's family. In the second scene of act four when Sita is bitten by a snake, she informs her father with eyes full of tears but her father chides her to sleep which ultimately takes away her life. Krishna, the father of Sita, becomes quite helpless and hopeless because he thinks that better death calms a person than to be trapped into the marriage which costs a lot of money for her marriage. He cannot do any thing for her marriage. He cannot do any things for his daughter and becomes the sole cause of his daughter's death. In front of such a plague, Sita's beauty, domestic skills, and all the good qualities becomes meaningless. Ultimately, her father Krishan becomes a witness of her death, a result of the very social evil.

Both of them are known for using traditional dramatic forms. Both of them use art in the very powerful and creative manner. Abhi Subedi uses symbols and suggestiveness in his plays that brings light to the current and interminable chaos in the country. Shailaja Tripathi opines that the plays *Agni ko katha* is rich in abundant use of symbols. He elaborates that depicting a burning monastery, the play indirectly talks of insurgency and civil war that has plagued the country (11). What Abhi Subedi wants to

say that the purpose of depicting a monastery being burnt down is to show how teachers and educational institutions are being targeted in the country. Innocent teachers are being gunned down because they are the ones who have a great deal of influence on commoners.

Govinda Raj Bhattarai's symbolic interpretation has also enriched the play. He further depicts that *Agni Ko Katha*, the word 'agni' itself is a symbol of anger, destruction, non-civilization and so on. Agni is only a symbol. Like agni, the conflicting thoughts had plagued the country. The nation had been fragmented due to the ongoing civil war which not only claimed heavy loss of lives but also destroyed spiritual beliefs of the people and the nation. (18) The play was composed at this very moment which reflects the tragic historical events. Fire does not burn itself. It is lit only with the help of men. In the play too, the raging students who burnt the library are real villains in the society. (20).

Though all these subtleties the burning down of the symbolic library is not the end of knowledge, says dramatist Subedi through the principal Lama and goes on to elucidate that knowledge ends if the light of lone within us is extinguished. The mishap is looked at as a beginning of a new life in the play which seems to reflect in a way the playwright's exemptions toward the deliberate arson at TV, which changed the course of his career as a professor at the Department of English.

On the other hand, Malingiya is very famous for incorporating folk elements in his play. He uses the folk proverbs which is common in everyday speech. They represent the pure *Maithali* culture. Furthermore, the pure pastoral *Mithila* dialect adds a great flavor to the drama. In this regard, Raman is of the opinion that Mahendra Malingiya has written about the tragedy and suffering of common people. He has raised the burning issues which were once neglected by the so-called civilized society. He has written about the females' trauma, exploitation done to the farmers and working-class people (31).



Thus, Malingiya is a major influence in restoring modern folk theatre by reviving, evolving and popularizing native myths. His plays portray men's miseries but celebrate his inherent goodness. Though his characters are depressed by the surroundings, they joyfully transcend them and cultivate a natural exuberance. Hence, by portraying lives so realistically with fine sensitivity, Malingiya not only helped revive Maithali drama but contributed to the literary heritage of all those who write in Maithali language. Malingiya's three laws that are made for the sake of women are to bear, struggle and die. He says "Let you women of the whole world awake! You fight for the cause of your existence (Introduction1)." Govinda Raj Bhattarai finds the colors of life in his plays. He further says, "The main theme of his plays is conflict between the mind and the body, religion and law, love and duty" (3). Thus, his plays are stage-worthy. His plays are simple and do not require necessary arrangements. The characters chosen for his plays are folk village people. Both Subedi and Malingiya raise the contemporary issues in their plays. They have more things in common. Through the use of symbols and folk characters, both writers explore the question of existence for women. Gender discrimination, dowry, poverty are some of the common issues raised by both the writers. Regarding the issues used in the plays by the dramatist Abhi Subedi, Amrita Gurung says:

Gender discrimination is an issue that is touched upon in the play. This issue is not only all encompassing in normal people's lives but also elsewhere, including the Gompas where monks and nuns live. In a nutshell, the play makes its clear that emotions and desires of nuns are very similar to that of ordinary people. (23)

On the other hand, Malingiya, a doyen of Maithali literature, raises the issues of women strongly in his play *Woh Khali Mukh Dekahi Chai* and *Pous Jadh Ki Magh Jadh*.

Malingiya explores the issues of women and society. In the play, he portrays the suffering of farmers who have to struggle hard to produce crops and have to remain hungry for six

months. These working class people are exploited everywhere in the hands of elite wealthy people. Thus, both the writers raise the issues of women, folk people in a poignant manner.

While talking about the Nepali plays and theatre, it is relevant to outlook briefly the Nepali theatre and the ritual performances. In Nepal oral and folk theatre has also a long history. Due to the political turmoil the folk rhythms of performance have been affected. Theatre history is a very native experience. Theatre groups, scholars and should lead the both native /indigenous culture and the theatre performance side by side. Nepali has vast diverse and interesting subjects due to the diversities in our identities. Nepali theatre is a mirror of Nepai history and Nepai politics, culture. From the beginning of the modern Nepal, theatre was introduced as a patronage of King and Royal entertainment. Abhi Subedi marks Prithvi Narayan Shah and his decendents continue to become a party in the awe aspiring performances of power in the Newar rituals. They venerate the living virgin goddess *Kumari* and take signals from at the time of Indrajatra each year of their safe rue in the country (15). Therefore, we can guess that Nepali Theatrical tradition have both the folk as well as the classical foundation; so have also originated in the oral tradition. The early phase of the Nepali theatre was the combination of Indo cassia and Indigenous forms. The range of Consumerism extended to Nepal in the earl decades of 20th century. Keshar Man Tuladhar, Master Ratnadas were some of the prominent figure for the Parsi Theatre in Nepal. Royal Nepal Academy was establishes in 9<sup>th</sup> Ashad 2010 B.S. The chair of the chancellor of Academy was taken by the king himself. He delivered a speech on the anniversary of on the anniversary of the academy in 2016 BS, which inspired many theatre artists to develop and promote the Nepali theater and performances. King also funded for the two major awards named Tribhuvan Puraskar and Indra Laxmi Puraskar of Rs.1, 00,000 and 50,000 respectively.

The emergence of Bal Krishna Sama is an important event in Nepali Theatre. With Sama Nepali theatre took a different turn. He brought the masses and proscenium theatre. Subedi writes on Sama as, "Sama brought revolution in the custom design and setting as he used simpler and national colors and textures for that"(126). Sama hardly ever wrote anything in dramaturgy except here and there about the theatre art in his memories. After Sama, Bhimnidhi Tiwari made an important contribution in the field of Nepali play the theatre. Tiwari wrote many plays like *Shanshila Shusila, Adarsha Jiwa, Putali, Siddhartha Gautam, Matoko Maya* etc. Almost all of the plays were performed in the theatre. Written in simple and ordinary language, Tiwari's plays left an indelible impact of Nepali people and audience. The contribution of Laxmi Prasad Develota is equally important in the development of Nepali theatre. He has written the play like *Rajpoot Ramani, Krishnasthami* etc. Gopa Prasa Rimal brought a new direction in Nepali realistic plays such as *Masan, Yo Prem, and Maya* etc. Psychological dissection and pungent satire towards social evils are the main characteristics in the plays of Govinda Bhadur Mala Gothale. The plays like *Bhusko Ago, Dos Kasaiko Chhaina* are rich for this. The same trend is seen in the plays of Vijaya Bahadur Mala as well. His various plays were performed in different college, school, universities and cultural centers. In this series we cannot forget the name of Man Bahadur Mukhiya, Ashesh Malla, Gopal Prasad Parajuli and Abhi Subedi are some major distinguished and unforgettable figures in Nepali history of theatre and performances

## **Chapter II: A survey and Analysis of Indic-theatre practices**

### **2.1 Classical Sanskrit /Natyasastrian Theatre**

The history of Indian theatre, which started with the cave dwellers gained a rather realistic contour in the second century B.C., was with the introduction of the Sanskrit theatre. Realistically, Sanskrit theatre has been recognized as the very first representation of Indian fervor. Theatre as Bharata Muni says was “the imitation of men and their doings (Loka-Vriti)”. Natyasastra seems to be the first attempt to develop the technique or rather art of drama in a systematic manner. Sanskrit theatre remained to be a popular form of expression till the seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century, Sanskrit theatre slowly evolved as one of the eminent art form and was then popularly known as the 'Indian Classical Dance Drama'. The simple tale gives information concerning the way the theatre event was regarded in the Classical Sanskrit time. Theatre at that time was set apart from the daily life; composed out of materials which are considered sacred. Theatre required special knowledge and the skill of performance of ritual events which was to be performed according to a prescribed order and served as a sacrifice in the honour of the Gods.

Talking about the Sanskrit theatre and drama, Furley P. Richamond says, "Survey of the classical Sanskrit plays and dramaturgical texts leads us to believe that the theatre was then conventional" (33). It called upon the actors and spectators alike to understand a complex code of gestures, movement patterns and vocal expressions. Sanskrit theatre was also multidimensional. Dance and music contributed to the overall effect. This was a theatre of imagination. Costumes and make-up were stylized and symbolic. It was not the imitation of their daily life or of a particular historical period. In the staging of the plays, scenery was used sparingly special buildings

served as performance hall. In short, it can be inferred that classical Sanskrit theatre served a religious function as well as being entertaining and educational.

In the Sanskrit plays, most characters are types: the just, powerful, handsome, benevolent hero and his equivalent, the beautiful and virtuous heroine; the witty, proverbially hungry clown-companion, trusted and loyal ministers; charming and witty servants; and so on. Characters portrayal in Sanskrit drama is not based on realism but on the presentation of universal characteristic, emphasizing typical. This sets Sanskrit theatre, apart from most of Western theatre, in which characters are prized for their individuality of spirit and uniqueness of personality, such as Hamlet, Macbeth and Oedipus.

The tradition of using characters types in the theatre may be understood within the framework of three traditions: the literary, the social and the theatrical. The literary tradition stems principally from the epics, such as the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, and from books of law and those dealing with social behavior. In the epics, characters such as Rama and Arjuna are idealized. According to the law books and codes of social behavior, men of certain rank and station in life were expected to behave in a particular way; to do otherwise would be improper, unthinkable. The ritual of social behavior seems to have stemmed from the separation of men into occupation groups- priest warriors, trades men, and peasants. Each group had particular duties to fulfill and particular behavior patterns were expected of men in these categories. In this sense Farley P. Richmond says: "Most of the characters are taken from epics, such as Ramayana, and Mahabharata. Indeed Rama is the god Vishnu reincarnated in the image of man. Their regard for propriety and strict codes of behavior in given situations easily marks them as idealized heroic types. Perhaps the priest had the most rigid taboos surrounding their daily existence" (35).

According to the Natyasastra, the principle objective of the plot is to show the hero struggling for and finally, attaining the object of his desire subsidiary incidents may contribute to this aim but should not divert attention from it. The realization of the goal relates to the three ends of Hindu life- duty, pleasure, and wealth.

As the plot is the body of the drama, Natyasastrian plots have also good beginning, proper middle and sound ending. All the elements of the plot were found in those plays. The Natyasastra makes clear that these elements do not necessarily coincide with single act but may well overlap in total acts. In this manner, Fairley P. Richmond says:

The junctures are: 1) opening, 2) progressive, 3) development, 4) pause or stage in which the hero celebrates the seed his desire and, 5) conclusion. The last juncture corresponds to the state of release from pleasure and pain by union of the individual soul with the divine soul. In general it's fair to say that each limb relates to some action or emotion of the hero in each of the stages of the junctures. (174)

The profusion of details regarding the plot of the 'Nataka' may seem unnecessarily confusing. Sanskrit plays of these two major types were to be created with a definite end in mind. This end was to satisfy the fulfillment of desire of a hero or chief character in the peace and by association, his counterpart, the heroine. The play was to end happily, as one of the limbs of the concluding juncture implies. We cannot find any play which raise controversies that cannot be resolved or that leave the mind disturbed. At the end, unnecessary diversions have no place in Sanskrit plays. Only those diversions which relate in some way to the principle plot are admitted.

The language of those Sanskrit plays is verses mixed with prose passages. As, Sanskrit is a telegraphic language, full of innuendo, compressed into a short passages

are a multitude of ideas and meanings which are not always possible to translate into another language. Critics have acknowledged that some of the most beautiful passages of Sanskrit literature are found in the drama, and several passages of *Sakuntala* and *The Little Clay Cart* serve as excellent examples. Languages of those plays are very philosophic, intellectual and also give multiple meanings. So, Sanskrit theatre was a great pleasure and intellectually challenging art to the ears of ancient listeners because everyone is not capable of rendering the subtle differences among the various regional languages and dialects.

Among the several modes of dramatic entertainment, three models are recognized: pure dance (*nrtta*), pantomimic dance (*nrtya*), and drama (*natya*). Pure dance, refers to movements, gestures, and facial expressions, which are abstract, which do not have a representational context and in which there is an instrumental accompaniment or abstract syllables recited by a singer, pantomimic dance, as the name implies, stresses the enactment of a story. A typical example is the dressing and make-up preparations of a beautiful woman waiting for her beloved. One of the musicians usually sings a text to accompany the dancer, who sometimes mouths the words. The *Natyasastra* seems to recognize several kinds of dramatic expression under the broad category of drama: dance drama, literary drama and music drama. According to the *Natyasastra*, the plays were presented to the general public in open country wards and soon improvised stages. The stage was temporarily built and so, evidently, its paraphernalia was very simple. There was preponderance of singing and dancing and of the comic element. The *Mahanataka* is the only available drama of this species. The general setting is given by the poet with some excellent poetry. Dialogue is improvised by the actors and actresses. It is easily understood because the subjects are taken from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* or the *Puraana*. Theatrical representation in the classical theatre was originated from the articulated body

gestures of the actors, their movements etc. Dance, music, recitation skill, played important role to enhance the audio and visual in the dramatic world.

The time-duration; it is clear from the *Natyasastra* that plays were performed in the morning, afternoon and in the first part (*prahara*) of the night and also in the fourth part (*prahara*). That which is pleasing to the ear and which speaks about religion, which is pure or mixed should be represented in the morning. That which is magnificent, full of satva qualities and sounds of musical instruments should be represented in the afternoon. That in which the *Kaisiki* style is employed and in which the erotic sentiment predominates and is full of vocal and instrumental music should be represented in the first part of the night. That which is full of important events and in which the pathetic sentiment predominates should be represented in the fourth part of the night. Plays were not allowed to be presented at midnight, mid-day and at dinnertime except the King's order.

The *Natyasastra* requires that the ideal spectator has been susceptibility and excellent judgment with ability to feel the emotions of character as depicted by actors. He should be attentive, an expert in handling the four kinds of instruments; have a knowledge of dresses, dialects, gestures and meter. He should be well-versed in the *Sastras* and art and should be religious by temperament. Thus, he should have keen intelligence, a capacity to examine and weigh the merits of the performance and participate in the pleasures and sorrows depicted on the stage. Among the most public, playwrights of ancient India were Bhasa, Sudraka and Kalidasa. India's greatest playwright is undoubtedly *Kalidasa* who is thought to have lived in the early mid-fifth century A.D. His most famous work is *Sakuntala* (*Abhijnana Sakuntala*), regarded by many as the best Sanskrit play ever composed. In *Sakuntala* the powerful prince steeped in pleasure and luxury, forgets *Sakuntala* not so much because of the apparent course of *Durvasa* as due to his inconstancy of mind and devotion to fleeting



pleasures. But, he had to purify himself through suffering and penance in the Tapovan. This is what promoted Goethe says, "I we would like to have heaven and earth in the same place, we would certainly get it in the Sakuntala of Kalidas"(25). So far, studies of Sanskrit drama have concentrated more on the texts of the plays than on aspects of their performance. Bansat Boudon intends to remedy this situation by presenting a detailed study of the performance of a short 'play within a play', found in Malavikagnimitra by Kalidasa (fifth century A.D.). The play within the play is performed before the king, who is thus allowed an undisturbed view of the actress who had earlier caught his fancy but was kept from him by his first wife, the queen. The performance is to settle a quarrel between the two drama teachers living at the court about who is the better instructor. However, in the play itself the context is broken off after the performance by only one of the two parties.

Another major playwright of Sanskrit was Bhavabuti. His *The Later History of Rama* is among the best plays of Sanskrit drama. The work adapts incidents from the epic Ramayan and develops unique and creative twists of the plot. Among the most dramatic works of classical India, the most movements and perhaps one of the most popular is *The Little Clay Cart* attributed to Sudraka. *The Little Clay Cart* is similar to Bhasa's unfinished work. It is a superb example of Prakarna. It involves Charudatta, a hapless Brahmin merchant who is generous to a fault, brave and virtuous and who is in love with Vasantases, a rich beautiful and faithful courtesan. The deep affection for each other is nearly spoiled by Samstanka, a jealous never-do-well brother-in-law of a corrupt king who is the very anti-thesis of Charudatta. He attempts to murder, Vasanta and blame the crime on Charudatta only to find his plot spoiled by fate. Despite its serious moment, the play basically centres on love and humour. Sanskrit plays mostly were intended to be actually presented on the stage. There might be some literary

dramas which were meant for reading only but the number of such dramas was very small.

According to Farley P. Richmond, among India's original contributions to world theatre is its aesthetic theory, which was developed for drama and applied to all branches of literature and performing arts.

The theory of Rasa, or sentiments, attempts to explain how a spectator perceives the performance experience. Rasa, means test and like the connoisseurs of haute cuisine, the spectators experience a performance as they are dining on a fine meal. All the functionary actors, musicians, dancers, playwrights and so forth are expected to prepare and train themselves according to the rules and conventions for the moment when they will present their lavish feast for the eyes and ears of the spectators.(452)

Thus, we can assert that the art of presenting Sanskrit plays on the stage was developed to high excellence in an ancient India and that the standard of the test o culture and Shradya people was so high that they could appreciate and realize the portrayal of sentiments, the transcendental joy for the realization of which the drama was specially enacted on the stage. Sanskrit theatre declined after the tenth century AD owing to the political and social unrest in north India, with the invasion of Mohammed of Gazzi and successive waves of people from the Middle East. "However, far from the scenes of its declining fortunes in north India, Sanskrit drama theatre had taken root in a remote reign of the subcontinent." (Richmond, 453).

The unity of 'time and place' was ignored both in theory and practice in the Sanskrit dramas. Sanskrit theatre didn't include the life of the ordinary people. In this regard, Som Benegal says "Sanskrit plays were artificial, unrealistic, sensuous lacking

in dramatic tension, a close class-preserved and so on, is, however, not to damn them” (58). It was highly sophisticated. That’s why, dramatists and theatre creators deviated from Sanskrit theatre and created a new form of theatre that is 'folk theatre'. Sanskrit drama flourished between 200 B.C. and about 700 A.D. No other theatre in the world has had long and continuous history. Parallel with it there must have been performances in the language of the common people, though we have no evidence of the exact nature of these performances. By 1000 A.D., Sanskrit theatres had long been dead, and regional languages –mother tongues, unlike Sanskrit had begun to emerge as vehicles of artistic and philosophical expression.

### **1.1 Folk Theatre**

The evolution of Kathakali from Kutiyttam through the intermediate stages of Krisnttam and Ramanttam illustrates the transition from the literary Sanskrit drama to the folk theater with its shift in emphasis to music and song that took place between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. Indian folk theatre has recently captured the interest of the contemporary playwrights and directors. The city theatre modeled on the 19<sup>th</sup> century picture frame stage has little new to offer, the classical dance dramas with their thick-textured music and gestures languages are esoteric. In this regard Balwant Gargi writes that it is the folk theatre lying scattered in rural areas of India which has exciting forms. The forms, perfected during the countries by constant adjustment to social change, have been evolved by actual battling with the needs of the audience and the actors (351). After the tenth century, the classical Sanskrit language splintered into vernaculars and folk root in the form of regional languages, the Sanskrit drama petrified for many centuries was replaced by the growing folk theatre. Old legends, puranic tales, mythological lore; philosophy and stories of Sanskrit plays were popularized by the present folk theatre. Thus, the tradition followed not from the folk to the classical, but from the classical to the folk. The folk

theatre inherits many of the classical conventions. The sulradhara (stage manager) of Sanskrit drama appears in vernacular forms such as the Ranga, the Shagavatha, and the Vgas. Folk theatre does not give a slice of life; it offers a panorama of existence. "Though it moves slowly, it cannot afford to be dull. The spectators are the participants of the performance. They cheer and laugh and weep and suddenly become silent as the moment demands. They constantly through parks of life interest to the actors who, charged with this electrifying contact, throw the spark back"(Gargi, 6). Life in India is in the street; sops, stalls, rituals, and something private are exposed to the sun and began to glare of the people. So is the folk theatre.

Most rural theatre forms in India supposed to begin with preliminaries and conclude with ritual. Some of these forms arose as an expression of religious zeal and have since made the transition to more secular concerns. The postclassical North Indian religious forms such as ramlila, and raslila: classically derived balletic forms, such as *Kathakali* and *Kudiyattam* (Kerda), regional folk forms, such as Yakshagana (Karnataka) and Bhavi (Gujarat); and intermediary popular forms, such as nautanki (Uttar Pradesh), tamesha (Maharashtra), and Jatra (Bengal). Indeed most of the contemporary playwrights and theatre in India were haunted by the own mythology. The writer has to follow signposts planted by the west and the paradoxical situation for the culture. A group of people who adopted the cultural amnesia as a deliberate strategy. It was later on introduces a Indian Theatre. Girish Karnad in *Three Pays* points two things out of many which changed the concept of Indian Theatre." One was the separation of the audience from the audience from the stage by the proscenium, underscoring the fact that what was being presented a spectacle free of any ritualistic associations and which therefore expected no direct participation by audience in it (4). It is interesting that while the new regional language literatures on the whole followed Sanskrit models, they did not produce written drama. He further

asserts as "theatre as it developed in the post classical period depended on improvised dialogue, with only the musical parts of the performance handed down. Its aesthetic too differed since many of these forms originated in folk ritual" (20). This theatre was for the pure entertainment and the successors were measured in terms of financial return. Until 19th century theatre had depended upon patronage of Kings, ministers or local feudal or temples. A performance became a carefully packaged commodity to be sold in the market with the highest economic benefit. By then folk theatre was a popular form of entertainment. Therefore, scholars had not thought it worthy of serious consideration. Folk theatre represented the people in their natural habitat with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. The folk theatre is impolite, rude, and vulgar. It shocks prudes. The secular forms- Tamasha, Bhavi, Nautanki, and Naqal- dominating northern and western parts of India are replete with sexual jokes. It is considered improper for women to watch these plays. In the city of Poona, many professors and intellectuals, champions of culture, refuse to see a folk play because of its vulgarity. Differentiating between the classical and folk theatre, Balwant Gargi writes:

The classical theatre is rigid, complex and sophisticated. The folk is unhewn, classical chiseled. The folk sprawls, the classical demands mathematical exactness. Folk theatre can make a whole community take part, the classical is for the chosen few. The folk has mass appeal and caters to the lowest denominator, the ordinary man; the classical is for the elite and demands previous knowledge from the spectator. (65)

Balwant Gargi says that *Lila* plays were of many types. *Harischandra* lila was about *Harischandra* who in order to keep his word of honour had to sell his wife and act as a slave in a cremation ground. *Dhruvalila* dealt with the life of the boy saint, *Dhruv*. *Prahladlila* narrated the incident in the life of the boy, prince Prahlad, who refused to

accept his father as the god and become a boy saint. Another important folk theatre is Raslila. Raslila, an operatic play, deals with Krishna's life. Raslila is enacted in the temple courtyard. It is intimate and demands reverence of the audience. It binds the audience in a bond of devotion and is an acceptable release for repressed emotion and tensions.

Folk theatre seems to uphold the traditional values; however, it had also the means of questioning the traditional values. It was also influenced by the commerce. The central theatrical device in the play is the use of a dozen singers who start conventional enough to chorus. Folk theatre was also seen in the various versions such as *Dashavatara*: a ritualistic movement turn, Jokumaraswamy which starts with a fertility rites, and Naga-Mandela; based on the oral tales narrated by woman. Thus, folk theatre uses the language of the ordinary people. It is an alive and popular theater. It is the part of the community life of the people. A number of permanent troupes are attached to the temples. Some of them have over one hundred years' tradition. The themes are taken even from mythological talks depicting valour, anger and wonder. They are characterized by a quality of energy. The costumes are simple. The female characters wear blouse and sari whereas bright-colored tunics are for males. The characters make use of speech, dances, songs and abhinaya (expressive mimings). Singing and speaking are performed by the musicians. It can be said that there are many types of performance tradition running from ritual to folk performances. They reveal us some fundamental things about theatre in South Asia. They have survived hundreds of years of colonization and are storage in the age of globalization.

To understand why urban Indian theatre is in this state today, one has to go back to the nineteenth century, when what is called Modern Indian theatre first made its appearance. The adaptation of folk drama to contemporary taste was one aspect of

the modern theater. It was nevertheless a minor quantity when compared with the multitude of plays. It is no coincidence that these cities were both creations of the British maritime trade with no pre-British Indian history. Modern theatre in India is especially for the upper middle class and the higher class people. These plays are colored by the various things such as; serious to comic, political to frivolous. These theaters share some similar characteristics to the Western theatre and yet it has features which have uniquely Indian. The subject for the new theatre became so widespread that the playwright turned their attention to "exposing the corruption within Hindu society and addressed a host of social justices. Common themes included the immolation of widows on the funeral pyres, of their husband, child marriage, and dowry system, the restrictive role of woman at home and the society and politics, and love marriage..." (Richmond, 389) Tago's contribution to promote the theater has been highly praised who won the noble prize in Literature in 1913. Erin B. Mee opines as, "the modern theatre in India began in the colonial cities set up by the British as commercial ports: Calcutta, Madras and Bombay". These cities had an urban middle-class audience with values and tastes shaped by the English-style education. They received and by the need to work with the British in administration and commerce. She further asserts:

Much of the theatre in this era copied the British drama that toured the country, and therefore took onto some extent the aesthetics, dramaturgical structures and even the architecture of western drama until the development of modern theatre in India. Most performance did not take place on a proscenium stage, nor did it depend upon ticket sales, but upon patronage. (52)

The proscenium which was adopted for much of the modern theatre separated the participants from the observers; ticket sales put an emphasis on theatre as a

commodity, making it available to a smaller and wealthier group of people. At a time when Calcutta was the intellectual and political centre of colonial presence in India 'native gentleman' named Baishnav Charan Adhya performed the role of Othello in a production at the Sans Souci theatre, the famous English playhouse in the city. In 1775, when the Calcutta Theatre or the New playhouse open under the patronage of the empire, specially of the then Governor General, Warren Hastings, and continuing for a period of about a hundred years, English theatres in Calcutta entertained a largely British audience of officers, merchants, scholars, and clerks of the East Indian Company. The repertoire of plays performed at this theatre included Hamlet, Richard III, The School for Scandal, and a Medley of Lesser known plays such as The Comedy of Beaux Stratagem and She Would and Would Not. Sushil Mukharjee begins his history of the theories of Calcutta with one of the following account:

When the English came to Calcutta they brought with them the plays of Shakespeare. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Shakespeare was a subject of study in the Hindu college. Much before that Shakespeare's plays had begun to be staged in the theatres that the local Englishman had set up in the city for their entertainment and relaxation. The names of David Garrick, the greatest 18<sup>th</sup> century Shakespearean actor and Garrick's Dury Lane Theatre were familiar in Calcutta among the readers of Shakespeare and the lovers of the theatre. (10)

The performance that remains most memorable is that of Baishnav Charan Adya as Othello with Mrs. Anderson (the daughter of Esther Leach) as Desdemona. "A Bengali youth in an English play in an English theatre catering to a [largely] English audience in the nineteenth century" is certainly a memorable event in the history of Calcutta theatres. Thus, it becomes clear how Shakespeare's plays were significant in promoting and privileging the culture of the colonizers -both among the English



expatriates as well as the elite Indians who gradually became associated with these theatres.

Bengal has a regional theatre which has gone far ahead in realizing the ideal of a true synthesis of old and new forms, without of course actually reviving the old folk theatre. –After producing several Shakespearean tragedies and other English plays and making certain odd experiments. Bengal staged the first original play a social tragedy *Kulinakulasarvasva* in March 1857 at the house of Babu Jayaram Bysack of Churruckdanga street Calcutta. Language became the deciding factor in the decline of the English plays and the development of a vigorous Bengal theatre. In 1857, the first original Bengali drama was staged in a private theatre. The Bengalis translated plays, borrowed plots and invented a repertoire of their own. Several private theatres were constructed by other landlords. Disappointed by the fact that private theatres catered only to the privileged classes, Girish Chandra Ghosh, an eminent dramatist and the originator of the Bengali theatre, expressed the idea of a public theatre in strong language for the middle class run by amateurs. To fulfill his idea he struggled hard for several years and in the beginning acted in the manner of *Yatravalas*. Finally, he succeeded in establishing a regular theatre in 1872 which is today known as 'The National Theatre of Bengal'. This theatre which was meant for general public actors were kept on salary and the audiences got entry by tickets. Girish directed the course of several kinds of plays, including *Pauranic* plays like *Harischandra*, historical plays like *Pratapa* and *Sivaji* and social tragedies. Other playwrights of Bengal were Sri Aurobindo, Rana Krishna, Swami Vivekanda and Rabindra Nath Tagore. Sombu Mitra in this regard comments on Tagore's play and further writes, "Tagore's plays are concerned with modern society, but not in the European manner" (56). The reason was he didn't use the ordinary language. The actors feel difficult to perform these words and to perform in the stage. As a result, even today it is difficult to perform

Tagore's languages. The growth of the modern theatre even in Bengal had the religious context essential and traditional to the Indian temperament and mentality. The life of 'Saint Ram Prasad' is a religious play which has been staged ground 100 times and its appeal is not yet exhausted. It is a play full of spectacular miracle and abounds in moral maxims quoted from Ram Prasad who actually was a saint in real life. From the mid-nineteenth century to around 1913, and suggests this was not due to any special regard for Shakespeare's poetry or genius but because they provided a good story with a few romantic and thrilling situations.

Folk plays have gathered their materials from many sources, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Rajput stories, puranic and others Indians legends, Arabic and Parsian tales. Historical incidents and characters and movie and fictional materials based on contemporary life. Most of the folk plays were depend on Hindu and Arabic mythology. The theme of the plays is also taken from those sources. So, many ostensible plays offer strong doses of moral teachings that reinforce the traditional roles of women and men in Indian societies. A frequent subject is the erring husband and the faithfully forgiving wife. So the marriage bond is upheld and prostitution is condemned, not because of its effect upon the women who serve in the brothel, but because of the threat to the institution of marriage. As one might expect, the plays based on traditional Hindu heroes reinforce the moral teachings of that faith. God versus human beings and the position of the god is always in higher than human beings. If god wants something, he can get it. What every god wishes that must be achieved by him. So, like Sanskrit plays the theme of those folk plays are also displays same theme. The theme of both plays is interrelated. But the difference between those trends is that folk theatre assuming the Sanskrit plays also valorizes the formerly lesser gods. And it also created the new gods unlike the ancient Aryan gods.

After the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the language of classical Sanskrit splintered into vernaculars and took root in the forms of regional languages, the Sanskrit drama a petrified for many centuries was replaced by the growing folk theatre. There are mainly fifteen languages including the English and seven hundred dialects. So the language of the folk plays is different according to their writers and what wanted to convey message is from their own dialects. Old legends, Puranic tales, mythological lore, philosophy and stories of Sanskrit plays were popularized by folk languages.

The folk theatre inherits many of the classical conventions. The sutradhara of Sanskrit drama appears in vernacular folk forms as Ranga, the Bhagabata, the vyas or the swami. He speaks in rustic prose or dialects. To the language writers, a Hindu production of their play was the thing. Every important playwright sought the company of Hindi theatre directors, both in their respective regions and in Delhi. Hindi theatre groups in regional language dominated areas thus become well. Even if the plays were read in English, they were produced in Hindi or the language of the given culture region.

### **Parsi Theatre**

The Parsi theatre was a remarkably robust and vigorous movement that began in Bombay in the early 1850s and fanned out across South and South-East Asia by the 1880s and influenced certain sections of the Indian theatre for many years thereafter. It flourished for well over half a century in Lahore, Delhi, and Kolkatta, exerting a huge impact on the development of modern drama, regional music and cinemas. In fact, the backwash of the Parsi theatre style is still evident today in most Indian films.

The Parsi theatre was the first and perhaps the only, commercialized, mass entertainment medium in Indian theatres' long-drawn history. It spared no pains to extract the last ounce of mass appeal in its production and in many ways remarkably

anticipated the grosser box-office values of its successors, the films. In this regard, Som Benegal states:

Parsi Theatre, as it was called, for its blood and thunder high-sky melodrama, its unabashed hybridisation of western and oriental forms, its insouciant plagiarization, its bewildering concatenation of verse, song, dialogue, irrelevant comic interludes and miracles and its garish décor. (70)

As the name indicates, it was subsidized to a great extent by parsi, the Zoroastrian community of Persian origin that had migrated to western India over a century. The form was highly eclectic and of unlike parts, taking stories from the persian legendry Shahnama, the sanskrit epic, Mahabharata, the fabulous Arabic Arabian nights, Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies, and Victorian melodramas. Its style came from all of the above as well as English amateur theatricals, British touring repertories, European realist narrative structures, the singing and performing traditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian courtesans, and the visual regimes. The combination of simple plot, clearly delineated characters, strong emotional values, spectacles, and moral tone made the plays enormously popular.

The mythological genre principally implied Hindu myths and might therefore be called Puranic as well. It became a heavily complicated ideological site, marking off linguistic territorialities for example, Hindi from Urdu/ Hindustani, and partitioning the cultural apparatus of one language from another. The social drama was equally popular. It shaded into melodrama when propelled by story and more by emotional effects, but its issues were mostly elaborated with in the family-problems about equality, sexuality, education and inheritance enacted within domestic terms. It might also be seen as melodrama in a 20<sup>th</sup> century milieu, extending melodrama by

introducing pressures of modernization. In telling stories with reformist concerns such as in the words of Anand Lal, “the rehabilitation of young widows, alcohol abuse, female literacy, sectarianism. Polygamy, westernization and the ancient of determining national and regional identities” (340). In this context, Som Benegal writes:

Parsi theatre relied for most of its theatricality very closely on European or rather British model. By and large, the repertoire of this theatre advanced chiefly by the itinerant and provincial companies included fatuous farces, contrived thrillers, low-tragedies, imitation, comedy of manners and extravaganzas, plays by playwrights who have both gone into limbo. (69)

The condition of language in Bombay was more complex. The new theatre groups had been started by Parsi entrepreneurs who spoke Gujarati at home. The Parsi entrepreneur had to ensure that the fare pleased all tastes and communities and developed a style that was essentially neutral with regard to communal differences and preferences. The plays dealt with subject ranging from Middle Eastern romances to Hindu myths, and adaptations of Shakespeare, but treatment avoided all religious and ethical nuances. The existing Indian plays were not much used to them because they were unsuitable for their purpose. So, they set about pilfering themes from Indian epics and mythologies which they knew had a great hold on Indian peoples or from popular Persian romantic tragedies which appealed to the sentimental Indians or from western plays which could provide the necessary floss. Shakespeare was especially a great favourite though the bard would have been considerably astonished by the transmagrification of this work. *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julies Caesar* emerged in adaptations with locale, names and dialogues changed out of recognition to shoot the local need and understanding. The Parsi theatrical

companies did not attach much importance to the realization of sentiment and it was found that the actress sang songs in the midst of most tragic scenes. So Parsi theatres, whose sole purpose was to give the public what it wanted, however crude it might be, became purposeless as soon as the talkies were introduced in India. The commercial stage started decaying and the film and the talkie sealed its faith. Because the Parsi theatre was so candid, commercial it simply had no pretensions to art, culture, dedication to heritage and so on. Its prime consideration was to get popular plays popularly played. Regarding the downfall of the Parsi theatre, Som Benegal comments:

The decline of the Parsi theatre came with the advent of the film or rather it would be more accurate to say that with the advent of film the Parsi theatre transformed itself into the new medium of the cinema. In time, the theatre vanished the same way it had arisen- for purely pragmatic reasons, the film had become a better commercial proposition. (71)

Since the 1930s, which saw the collapse of the Parsi theatre system, revival in theatre activity has been witnessed only in those cities where the local language film industry has collapsed. In Bombay, the aggressive Hindi film industry pushed the Marathi film industry into the background in its own state, which in turn led to a revival of Marathi theatre to fill the vacuum. Realism made its appearance in the thirties, in reaction to the vacuity of the natak companies. Differentiating between the Parsi theatre and realist theatre Girish Karnad says:

In Parsi theatre, every move was controlled by budgetary considerations, where as the realistic theatre was motivated by genuine idealism. The writer,actors, and the audience were all united by a

common concern for social reform and national independence and in their optimism believed changing history possible. Often the groups consisted entirely of university teachers, their students, and white collar workers, who saw this kind of theatre as a mission rather than a profession. (45)

Parsi theatre drew historical, mythological, and modern figures in the background and a dense environment behind contextualized or provided the attendant conditions or given circumstances for their behaviour. Indian realistic drama was an improvement over its predecessor, the company *natak* play, in that it took itself seriously as art and also an instrument of social change. Yet its inability to shake off the overpowering influence of the European model was to stunt its development. Bernard Shaw was the new inspiration, along with Ibsen (as interpreted by Shaw). Thus, the realistic drama carried social themes and was guided by genuine idealism. The theatre of roots, streets theatre and English language theatre are just three of the many kinds of theatre flourishing in India today on proscenium and non-proscenium stages: in large and small cities, in front of factories, in village squares, in cultural clubs, in a wide variety of languages, aesthetics, structure and forms. K. N. Panikar, Tripuran Sharma, and Mahesh Dattani are among the most interesting and important playwrights writing in India today and their work demonstrates the wide range of styles, philosophies, and issues being dealt with in the contemporary India theatre scene.

#### **1.4 Contemporary Indian Theatre**

After India gained political independence in 1947, a number of playwrights felt the need to develop a theatre that did not follow British models, but was in some way Indian. Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, along with Habib Tanvir, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad, members of what is often referred to as the 'theatre of Roots'

movement, began to study Kathakali, Yakshagana, Chhau, and other traditional Indian performance forms to see what could be used in the creation of a modern Indian drama. After Karnad very clearly states in this regard:

The attempt “was not to find and reuse forms that had worked successfully in some other cultural context. The hope rather, was to discover whether there was a structure<sup>4</sup> of expectations—and conventions—about entertainment underlying these forms which one could learn. (63)

In this context Suresh Awasthi is of the opinion that the search for roots, the liberation from western realistic theatre, and the emergence of a new theatre from theatre artists. Aesthetically, the theatre of roots must be seen against the backdrop of the past century of western realistic theatre as practiced in India. The models and conventions of realistic theatre were borrowed, and always remained alien to Indian theatre. The inherent conflict between the two could never be resolved. A creative visionary like Rabindranath Tagore understood the nature of this conflict. He tried to resolve it in his lyric plays by synthesizing the two opposed dramatic traditions. The theatrical power of Tagore’s plays could be revealed only in the mid-fiftieth century by Somy Mitra in his productions of such plays as *Rakta-Rarabi* (Red Oleanders) and *Raja* (King of the Dark Chamber).

K.N. Panikkar was exposed as a child to the way so-called folk performances forms of Kerela, and he incorporates some of the stories, music, dance, steps, rhythms, and ideas from such forms as Kathakali, Theyyare, Patayani, and Kuttiyattam into his plays and productions:

Folk contains the archetypal elementary expression of man, which is related to the soil of the land [...]. It may be difficult to understand the



rationale of a particular folk element, because the national may be complicated [...] it may be inexplicable to us, which is very interesting for me—I don't have to have a reason for everything. The absence of rationale-as far as we are concerned is interesting to me. [...] [It implies a] par rationale, where it is difficult to apply your normal reasoning to what happens or what is known in folk as Thanathu [thanathu is the extreme point of imagination]. This par rationale comes from the folk tradition. (420)

Through his works with folk forms and his experience directing Sanskrit plays, Pannikkar has developed a theory, embodied in his own writing that Indian theatre is not conflict-oriented, but transformation-oriented. For Pannikkar, theatre is storytelling. Not satisfied with play to a middle-class audience, or in some cases wanting to make a particular statement to a particular group of students, workers or politicians, some playwrights took to the street. Badal Sirkar of Bengal was one of the first practitioners of street theatre in India. In 1983, dismissing the then common notion of that street theatre is not art, he wrote:

This concept is based firstly on the mistaken notion that anything done in a “proper and decent” theatre has automatically become art, and anything outside is non-art by definition. [...] whether theatre would be art or not depends on the theatre workers, irrespective of their working in theatre halls or working in streets. And as for propaganda, every theatre, in fact every art is propaganda, as it propagates something or other. Street theatre propagates change, the so-called pure theatre propagates status quo. (360)

Like, Sircar Sabdar Hshmi was another famous practitioner of street theatre in India, was beaten to death in January 1, 1989, in the middle of one of his performances. His most famous production *Machine* deals with the exploitation of workers, and has been performed all over in India in streets, market places, in front of factories, at rallies, and for roughly 160,000 people at the Boatclub in New Delhi. He was killed while performing *Holla Bal [Attack]* for workers in Jhandapur, an industrial town east of Delhi. The play dealt with the government repression of the labor movement, and was being performed in support of CPI (M)'s local election campaign. Suresh Awasthi is of the opinion:

Theatre does not simply occur in available space. It creates its own space, and alters what is already there. A given space requires new forms and changes dimensions according to how the actors use space. In the traditional environmental theatre of the Ramlila, the entire space is animated and transformed in endless ways by the performers moving through it, and by the spectators occupying their own and the performers' space. In such a situation, the border between the two spaces is constantly blurred, and this has a magical effect on theatrical communication. (325)

According to Suresh Awasthis, stylization is the essence of theatre of roots. After breaking away from the realistic mode in its search for roots, the new theatre embraced stylization -the hallmark of Indian traditional theatre for centuries. So the theatre of roots developed its aesthetics by using informal performance spaces, providing a new perception of the performance, and evolving a whole scheme of stylization covering various aspects and elements of performance.

English-language theatre has long been associated with light entertainment, and English is dismissed by some as a foreign, colonial language. English is, however, officially recognized as a national language in India. English is the language in which they feel most comfortable speaking, thinking, and writing. Aside from the plays of Asif Currimbhoy in the sixties the most famous productions of plays by Indian writers in English were mounted by the Madras Players. Mee quotes Mahesh Dattani in *Contemporary Indian Theatre: Three Voices* that he writes in English, and takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the oppressive weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire (4). In the early eighties, while in college, Dattani joined the Bangalore Little Theatre, took workshops with them, directed two plays, and found he was very interested in acting. Mee further writes about him as "but it was not until he directed Woody Allen's *God* that Dattani decided theatre was something he would actually like to do and that he would like to do 'something less frivolous' (5). In 1987, Dattani founded his own theatre company, and began to look around for Indian plays in English, which proved more difficult than he had anticipated. The transformation of dramatic into performance text has been the primary concern of Indian performance theory. Even the rasa theory in its essence as formulated by Bharat in the *Natyasastra* has a strong performance orientation. Performance aesthetics even provides a separate word for it. Drama as text is *Drishya Karya*. Visual poetry and as performance it is *Porayaga* meaning skillfully arranged. Because of the stylized character of the production and the developed art of the actor, it is often said that directors of the theatre of roots are obsessed with form, that form dominates and suppresses the content of their plays. The Indian theatrical tradition have been concerned with form both in theory and practice but form which is integral to content, not imposed on it; form that is primarily concerned with the art of the

actor; and form which illuminates the dramatic text, transforming into a performance text of plastic, visual images. Kathakali, Kuttiyattan, and Yakshagana show this concern to form, and by implication, for the highly developed art of the actor. It is the same with theatre of roots.

In Nepal oral and folk theatre has also a long history. Due to the political turmoil the folk rhythms of performance have been affected. Theatre history is a very native experience. Theatre groups, scholars and should lead the both native /indigenous culture and the theatre performance side by side. Nepal has a vast diverse and interesting subjects due to the diversities in our identities. Nepali theatre is a mirror of Nepal history and Nepal politics, culture. From the beginning of the modern Nepal, theatre was introduced as a patronage of King and Royal entertainment. Abhi Subedi marks Prithvi Narayan Shah and his descendants continue to become a party in the awe-inspiring performances of power in the Newar rituals. They venerate the living virgin goddess *Kumari* and take signals from it at the time of Indrajatra each year of their safe rule in the country(15). Therefore, we can guess that Nepali Theatrical tradition have both the folk as well as the classical foundation; so they have also originated in the oral tradition. The early phase of the Nepali theatre was the combination of Indo classical and indigenous forms. The range of consumerism extended to Nepal in the early decades of 20th century. Keshar Man Tuladhar, Master Ratnadas were some of the prominent figures for the Parsi Theatre in Nepal.

The emergence of Bal Krishna Sama is an important event in Nepali Theatre. With Sama Nepali theatre took a different turn. He brought the masses and proletarian theatre. Subedi writes on Sama as, "Sama brought revolution in the costume design and setting as he used simpler and national colors and textures for that"(126). Sama hardly ever wrote anything in dramaturgy except here and there about the theatre art in his memories.

**Chapter III : Peace and poverty and Contemporary Nepal in *Agni Ko Katha*  
and *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai***

**I. Women as Character**

In patriarchal, the worth of women as independent human being with their own personality and identity is negated. If any women are valued for their usefulness as house wives, as wardens of the children of the family or only as some beauty objects to be possessed and taken care of.

Purnima who has questions that she would like to get answers to when the fire razed the library to the ground the pain of the charmed books gave way to other pains that were suppressed for so long. The pain was not the pain of having to live the life of a nun, but the pain of a woman experiencing her loneliness, her isolations from the belief that even lord Buddha would forsake her once she leaves the monastery. In this sense one nun says:

Just see how it is. Lord Buddha is every where, but once we live the monastery, it becomes difficult even for him to protect us. That is why the nuns can not leave. If the monks leave even the gods will forsake and protect them but if we do the same, he will not be able to protect them us. I am quite surprised. (22)

That is how Subedi explores his ideas about the emancipation. The nun is actually raising the question to the patriarchy. How patriarchy is playing with the women is seen above. In this context Purnima's replay to this still more fraught with pain. As she replies, "god looks everybody equally. But one thing what you have said is quite correct. When the monks leave the monastery everybody thinks well of them but if we leave everybody things we are immoral, we are sinners" (23). Thus the fire in the library allows these nuns to give vent to their pent up emotions that even in birth

god has become impartial to them. Those nuns are steeped questioning about impartiality of the god and think that he is wrong doing for them.

According Buddhist philosophy women are born as women because in the previous life they have committed some unacceptable Karma. And the voice of the singing nun rings through the text, even the nun is a woman. In this sense Sangita Rayamajhi says:

*Agni ko Katha* ended on the edge of possibility as the female character Purnima stepped over the threshold of the monastery to the journey towards a future that was yet to be made and named still haunted by the myth of the female body and the horrors of the present crisis. (4)

As Rayamajhi says, our society is always haunted by the male ideology and the myth of the female body. In *Agni ko Katha*, Abhi Subedi had dare to challenge the norms of Buddhism by portraying female characters. At first Purnima, a nun is in the dilemma that whether she will leave the Gumba or living in it Purnima says to Bhiksu Gyan that she will not go anywhere. But inwardly she is thinking of going outside. As she says:

You too have been thinking as I have been. I have many things on my mind. You know, even while I am praying, I dream of going there. I see myself standing in front of Kang-Rimponche. Every one said something had burn inside. I don't know what was burnt. But yet, I fed something or the other has burnt. (35)

Even if Purnima, a nun had on mind that she wanted to go to Kang-Rimponche because of the gender restriction, she wants to go there when Bhiksu Gyan was preparing to go for the answers of his questions of life, he asks her to go with him or not. But she replies that she will not go; there is the restriction on nun for going outside. Nun are compelled to live in Gumba, they are not allowed to go as

other bhiksus. In the last scene of second act, Purnima has totally internalized the norms of Buddhism and patriarchy. As she says, “I am a woman, I have friends here, and my sun rises and sets here. Gumba is my world not my prison” (37). But when Bhiksu Gyan leaves Gumba, both Bhiksuni are in quest of their questions answer; they talked about the meaning of their life.

How to get salvation or nirvana is the main topic of their discussion. They discuss about the segregation policy of society and they last come in decision that they have to leave the Gumba to find salvation. Thus, the journey of nuns to the Mansarovar, Kailash to search and prove the meaning of women’s existence and her power heralds new times for women. Rejecting the segregation and separation policy of patriarchy, those all nuns slap on the cheek of patriarchy. Why segregate in such great matters in the spiritual quest is the great question. So, Purnima, main Bhiksuni of the play develops a strength, power within her which enables how to walk out of the monastery with emission in hand. She finds salvations and begins working among the affected, wounded feels pride as being a woman because as Bhiksu Gyan to tantra. In this sense Bhiksuni Purnima says:

My work will now start to take pride in the fact that I am a woman. A women’s life is not a failure only the style of work is different where I go I am still the Bhiksuni of this Gumba[...] you also have women’s body. It has great importance understood that and understand yourself. Also understand that you are a woman, a bhiksuni. That is not a defeat.

(38)

In this way both bhiksunis get knowledge of their life and feel pride of being women. Thus, Abhi Subedi, *Playwright of Agni ko Katha* explores the female identity in the ground. In this response Sangita Rayamajhi says that when male playwrights comes up with such roles for womens. She does not understand that why no women in

Nepal has attempted to exercise her artistic freedom by casting her own image by her own hand.

In the play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, by Maithali playwright Mahendra Malingiya, a pioneer in the field of Maithali drama, deals the themes like poverty, superstition and dowry. He raises simple issues prevalent in the society. Poverty is course in *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai* and also deals the issues of superstition. The third scene of act I, at the entrance of the door a bucket and a jug is placed. A metal is also seen. It is believed that those things are kept there to save from the spirit. Second woman enters the house of a pregnant woman and washes her feet and spits into the face of the child. Such kind of superstitious beliefs are prevalent in Maithali society which is depicted in the play. Because of the superstitious beliefs and poverty, Maithali people are suffering and losing their life also superstitious belief in Maithali society is properly converged in this play.

Sita's mother: before going to talk about marriage taste yoghurt and go tasting yoghurt means good luck.

Narrator second: yes, it is also written in the book of Govinda Bhai, eating yoghurt means it invites good luck. (20)

Eating curd is good luck for them, such kind of belief is every where in the society which is consciously depicted by Malingiya, superstitious is enmeshed in the society which is the main obstacle of the revolution of the society. So we must give up such kind of belief and live good life. In the second scene of the third act, there also the conversation between the female character and second male character; they are also discussing on superstitious beliefs.

Female: if you see waterfall pot, it will good luck for you.

Second person: oh, waterfall pot or your face.

Female: (laughing) go go.



Second person: you are marrying your daughter and I'll go first?

Female: you talkative man: recite the name of God and go fast. If some one will come with empty bucket. (25)

Every where we can see superstitious belief in the play because of the poverty and illiteracy. Such beliefs are captured the society. Such beliefs are accepted by female more than male because male get opportunity to read and learn from outside. Both Subedi and Malingiya being contemporary playwrights, deal the different issues. Malingiya deals the ordinary problems of society and always digs out the social issues prevalent in Mithila with a subalterous voice. But Subedi deals with the contemporary national issues and his plays are more philosophical also.

## II. Narrative Structure

Both dramas *Agni ko Katha* and *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai* have different kind of narrative structure. In *Agni ko Katha* Bhiksu poet plays the role of narrator or chorus where as there is whole chorus in *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*. Malingiya adopts characters and plots from the folk theatre, where as Subedi reverses such kind of tradition and does not use such kind of chorus rather creates a character who worked as a role of narrator also. In this way Subedi experiments a new kind of trend in his plays but Malingiya seems to adopt the traditional concepts of trends.

In *Agni ko Katha*, Subedi, created a character poet Bhiksu who is supposed to perform the role of sutradhar. He is narrating the story and gives some background information of the play. Unlike the traditional play, which at first prays the God for the success of the drama, this play does not start with praying to the rather some information about the development of the play.

Poet Bhiksu:

This but an enactment of a play,

But here some where inside  
 Something has occurred,  
 In the mind the Gumba do not know.  
 The wind blows through  
 The sky too is the same  
 Inside some where, something has happened.  
 In the Gumba today the drama of the sky is about to unfold  
 The red burning horizon,  
 Could be of the mind or of the Gumba  
 Today, some where inside me I get a feel of a call of something. (3)

It shows that something will be happen there; the narrator is awaring every one that something bad will happen there but also convinces others that Lord Buddha will save. The red burning horizon, the sky is about to unfold are some symbols which depict the bad scene will come soon. In this way sutradhar of the play, poet Bhiksu, through him, the playwright begins his play but little be in different manner.

In act II, scene, I, Poet Bhiksu whoplays the role of chorus takes the whole scene. This is how we can say that Subedi not following the traditional norms. In this scene he is saying that departure of Bhiksu Gyan and his personality as a Bhiksu.

Bhiksu Gyan is nowhere [...]

In search of knowledge

Gautam did leave home at twelve

Midnight

In his hands he has no books

Words he has, in his mind questions abounded but answers

He had none.

Bhiksu Gyan last night went out in search of knowledge.

Greatly devoted was he. (24)

Thus in the whole scene poet Bhiksu narrates every thing about the central character Bhiksu Gyan. He is compared with Gautam Buddha who also left the house at midnight. In this way the whole scene is in part of the poet Bhiksu who is also plays the role of the chorus, narrates about the Bhiksu Gyan as in traditional manner.

In *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, the playwright Malingiya, seems to adopt the traditional way that the role of the sutradhar is same as ancient. At first we can see in this drama that the chorus praying the god and asking to give strength to them. Many gods and goddess are prayed like Durga, Gaumata etc. unlike Subedi's plays Malingiya's chorus are in many numbers who prays and narrates the story jointly.

We prey the seven sisters of goddess Durga

By joining ten fingers to the Gaumata

We surrender to you and wish that you will bless us. (1)

In this way, we can see that Malingiya is adopting the traditional rules but does not give much importance to them. They are not as strong as other ancient chorus. It is his own style of depicting the chorus because chorus plays less important role in his plays. He has given less space to the chorus. In this way Malingiya's depiction of chorus is quite ambivalence.

There are some unique characteristic for choosing the characters in the plays of Malingiya. In *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, there are only some named characters like Sita, Krishna, Bhanu but others are not given the name rather like first male, second male, female, second female etc. According to Malingiya, the name of the characters in the play is not so important. So, he does not give emphasis to the naming of the characters. In this way we can say that unlike the ancient great plays, he does not want to produce great heroes in his plays.

Like Malingiya's plays, Subedi also displays his characters as bold and is not given name to them. Bhiksu Gyan, Bhiksuni Purnima, is only named characters but others are although important, not given the name. Like malingiya, Subedi also is not conscious of the naming the characters perhaps he also has same attitude towards the characters name, as Malingiya.

Abhi Subedi, a prominent and successful literati deals with the high philosophical issues. In *Agni Ko Katha*, he takes the references from Buddhism and deconstructs the role of women in Buddhism and wants to balance between male and female. He also wants to convey the message that we can not get knowledge only through meditation rather we can get from what we desire. By compelling others we can not get knowledge rather our condition will as Bhiksu Gyan.

I still have to search for such answers, Purnima. You are going. You found the answer to your questions from this. I came back to Gumba. I have returned to that same life. But one thing is different. A Kailash is burned inside me. I always climb there. Now a day I always repeat the line of a poem. Now days, in my dream I always climb the mountains.

(77)

At last Bhiksu Gyan can not find the answers of his all questions but other characters like purnima and singer Bhikisuni get knowledge. Singing Bhiksuni finds knowledge that she will repeatedly sing a song and Purnima wants to serve those orphans who lost their families in war because she feels satisfaction in it. Thus, Subedi explores and conveys the message that self satisfaction is more important which like the Nirvana or getting knowledge. Like the western plays, his plays are high philosophical. In this context, Tulsi Bhattraai writes:

We can get nothing in Gumba. By serving peoples or monks and nuns should be scatter in outer world. The main thing is that what we can do

through our words and speech or own love we must search knowledge within. Only two things can save us that is light and love. Life is a journey. (Nepathya 11)

Unlike Subedi, Malingiya deals with the real social issues. His plays portray the miserable condition of terai people. The characters often used in his plays are folks. He is much more influenced by the realistic playwrights like Henric Ibsen and others. As in realistic dramas, the play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, centers on social problems and the problems of individual struggling against the demands of the society. Sita is a protagonist of the play and also is a victim of society because in our society female have taken as second sex. As a piece of realistic literature, this play represents life and social world as it seems to the common readers evokes the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen.

Second woman: where is the house master?

Woman: I don't know, he has gone without saying me.

Second woman: if he had gone to call Natuwa.

Woman: no, if it is then people will laugh.

Second woman: Why?

Woman: if Natuwa will dance in daughter's birthday then people will laugh aren't they? (Act first scene five)

The play full of similar scenes shows that society is restricted to perform the dance by Natuwa in daughter's birth day. So, women in the play internalize the fact if they do so people will laugh at them because Natuwa must be performed in son's birthday only. In this way we can find that Malingiya's plays often deals with the contemporary society and his plays are realistic plays. Most of the realists prefer the common place and the every day experiences what Malingiya seems to adopt. He also selected the common place of Terai and his characters are also ordinary.

Language used by Malingiya in his play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, is colloquial. It is written in Maithali dialects. Selection of language and words are simple and easily understandable. Malingiyua is very much interested in writing such language. He is in the opinion that language of every literary text must be clear, simple and communicable. If we use highly philosophical language then the message we want to deliver can not be easily achieved. In the third act scene seven, there is the communication between father and mother of Sita.

Wife: (Yakata paigh sans chhodait) Aab ki karabi?

(Shying) what will we do?

First male: hamara ki kahai chhai?

(What can I say?)

Wife: Ahankain nai Kahu tan, kakara kahiyau?

(If you don't say to me then whom do you say?)

First male: Ham kakara dekha diya. Ham tan swayam Asarmath chhai.

(I rejected them. I can do nothing for her)

Wife: tan Sita Kumari rahatai?

(Then Sita remain unmarried?)

The dialogue is in pure Maithali dialect and clear, simple and colloquial. According to Dhirendra Premharsi, Malingiya's language and his choice of words are very much assertive. He uses simple and straight language.

Unlike Malingiya, Abhi Subedi's language is elevated and very symbolic. It seems to be written to only literary persons. His language in his play is very philosophical and signified. His words are more abstract and symbolic; the literal meaning of his words are less meaningful than metaphorical meaning.

Bhiksu poet:

In the mind of Gumba

I do not know  
 The wind blows through  
 The sky too is the same  
 Inside somewhere, something has happened.  
 In the Gumba today the drama of the sky is about to unfold.  
 The red burning horizon  
 Could of the mind or of the Gumba. (24)

All these above dialogues are symbolic and not simple what we can see is that most of the words are abstract and metaphoric. “Red burning sky, strange things has happened”, all these idioms and words provide metaphorical meaning.

Thus, both writers being in the same period uses language differently. Malingiya’s language is simple, clear and colloquial where as Subedi’s language is metaphorical, abstract and philosophical. Their language and words are not the same and the dialects they use are also different from each other.

### **III. Dramatization of the Nation**

Both Subedi and Malingiya are contemporary playwrights touch the national issues. Abhi Subedi, a national scholar and professor of the English department, dramatizes the Maoist insurgency and civil war of Nepal. But Malingiya, the regional playwright, touches the burning issues of Madhes that is dowry. Dowry is so rooted in Terai that even parents leave their child if he turns to be a girl.

*Agni ko Katha*, touches the hot issue of Maoist insurgency at that time. The word ‘Agni’ itself refers to the destruction and symbolically it shows the destruction and damage of Nepal.

According to Govinda Bhattarai, ‘Agni’ is the symbol. There are many destructive ideas like ‘Agni’ due to many bad things is happening. Nation was divided when there was repeatedly attacking on the physical and metaphysical beings. So, this

creation is produced at that time which signifies that bad history of Nepal. When fire spreads then Bhiksu poet says:

Now all will transform into a dancing mood  
 First those who perform will use their instrument of sound  
 Those who will sing begin to sing  
 Those blowing horns will blow them from time to time  
 There who play cymbals fill the air with the sound of cymbal.  
 They will blow the conch and with it the smaller horns  
     soft murmuring of music will rise  
 The sky will fill  
 Some will begin to cry  
 While others silently walk. (28)

When *Agni ko Katha* was written Nepal was suffering worst political crisis in its history. The Maoist people's war was a direct threat and a death knell to the government of Nepal. They fired its salvo seeking to destroy constitutional monarchy and aiming to establish a Maoist people's democracy. So here, destruction or firing of library does not mean only to library rather it signifies the whole country which is totally in firing. Every where and every one is in terror who could not feel secure. So, here also 'Fire' works as a vampire who wears the mask of vampire can do such kind of unwilling work. Every thing due to fire is damaged. So, poet Bhiksu says seriously:

Every body's mind got burnt in the monastery fire  
 Books got burnt.  
 Feelings written great devotion got burnt  
 Memories of words put together with love got burnt  
 All finished  
 Now in the ashes are sprinkled memories of knowledge



Those pages where once the eyes of knowledge had glided. (27)

Fire does not damage itself. It is a man who creates it and the man with the vampire mask are the main villain. But those the monster that causes such thing is not being punished. The main accused one escapes silently. Whatever and wherever they are not punished rather protected. Only though sincere, innocent persons are living in threat. Buddha's philosophy is not working well now a day, the satisfaction of the innocent people's work, is swallowed by the destruction. Thus terror and delight are being described simultaneously in this work. This kind of terror and destruction is being applied only in war.

No one is constant in the play, either Bhiksu Gyan or Bhiksuni Purnima and others. They want to leave the Gumba because their heart is being fickle. Like the condition of the country where all the innocent want to go other safe place in quest of peace, there is also depiction of the same scenario.

Bhiksu Gyan: purnima, I can not stay on any longer in this Gumba

Bhiksuni Purnima: what? What are you saying? Where will you go if you can't stay here?

Bhiksu Gyan: there are places I can go. The world is open for me.

Bhiksuni Purnima: how can a Bhiksu be free by renouncing the Gumba

Bhiksu Gyan: I see Buddha beyond here. Purnima, there is nothing for me here. Now wherever I go from here. There I can see Buddha Guru Rimpoche found the mementoes every where of Buddha. In the hills and mountains caves and forest every where. (24)

In this way, Bhiksu Gyan is not constant in the Gumba. His heart is being swerving. He wants to go far from that place where he expects to find the real peace. Living in the Gumba without peace is totally impossible for him. He says that he can see every where the Buddha. Buddha here literary means the peace. Peace is every

one's desire now days. People are being tired due to the civil war and they want relief from it. So, here is also Subedi literary depicts the message of peace and aware that people can do anything for the peace as Bhiksu Gyan wills to leave the Gumba for the quest of peace. People of Nepal are also being disgusted due to the war.

Thus Subedi the playwright of *Agni ko Katha* conveys the message of peace in his play. According to Govind Raj Bhatrai, Subedi is witness of the firing of the central department of English. This play also depicts the same thing but it is the firing which is not limited in the department only rather it spreads in the whole country. This is only the symbol but it has unlimited width. In this way, Subedi's play dramatizes the national issue of civil war.

Unlike Subedi, Mahendra Malingiya, a prominent regional writer touches the issue of dowry prevalent in Terai. He is the writer of Maithali dialect and also gives clear picture of Maithali society and other societies of Madhes. According to Madhukar, the main characteristic of Malingiya's plays is to show the social life of village areas. He shows the lifestyle of the lower class of the society which indirectly pointing to the bourgeoisie of the society. He shows that every lower class people have no existence at all because they have to depend upon those so called bourgeoisie or Jamindar. He uses Marxism in his text because there always conflict between proletariat and middle class family. In the play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, there is also similar kind of conflict. But in this play he focuses on the dowry system of Terai and how those girls are being victim of such kind of cruel system. The protagonist Sita becomes victim of such system and at last she is compelled to die because her parents do not have money to cure her.

In the scene fifth act four when Sita's father Krishna goes to find a suitable bridegroom for his daughter, he approaches to Sundar Lal's home whose son is an

engineer. Sundar Lal plainly tells him that he had spent large sum of money for his son's education. So, he demands three Lakh as a dowry.

First person: you don't worry. How much you will give them they will satisfy.

Third person: It is my duty to say. Living in small house, I can manage only one or one and half lakh.

First person: Can I say some thing?

Third person: it is impossible to manage less than three Lakh.

Second person: Then we can't forward our talking.

Third person: Then I can do nothing. I am helpless.

Second person: Helpless is not taker rather dweller must be helpless.

(36)

So dowry, one of the most serious evil, is the burning issue of Mithila region. The custom of dowry, long entrenched in Mithala's male dominant society, has attained alarming proportion. There hardly a day when the crisis of dowry victim are not echoed by the media. Life struggle for survival in an era of uneven development and resultant tension also shapes the mode of orientation of people of different status. In the context of dowry Rakesh Dayal, a Maithali scholar says that the dowry system is a great evil in a society. Dowry today is being demanded and paid without any relation to the bride and her father's income and wealth. Failure to meet these demands results in ill-treatment of young wife and often driving them to commit suicide and in many instances they have been murdered. With the increase desire for quick money and the luxuries of life these demands are not confining to the rich and the middle class alone but also for the lower class.

Wife: what they demand?

Husband: fifteen tola gold, Yamaha, color TV and refrigerator.

Wife: what is the meaning of Yamaha?

Husband: Yamaha means motorbike.

Wife: And how much to spend for them?

Husband: More than three lakh. (23)

Thus the practice of dowry mainly affects the lower class people. So, the position of women in Mithila is so bad that their status less important than dowry. In this way Malingiya, depicts the evil aspect of dowry in his play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*. He clarifies that either this system of dowry and poverty kills the life of the innocent people or they become mad.

Thus both Subedi and Malingiya are the contemporary literary artists, touch the issues of Nepal. Subedi's *Agni ko Katha* deals with the incidents of civil war and Maoist insurgency of Nepal and burning problem of dowry in Mithila is seen in Malingiya's play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*.

This is how both texts are simultaneously related to each other either in their issues or in their forms. Subedi shows the libidinal stage of his character and they are in quest for peace. The language has used is very philosophical and metaphoric. Setting of the play and the characters are bold and suitable. And Malingiya's play shows the social evil of the village areas. There superstitious belief, poverty and dowry is the main theme. He deals the condition of female that he will continue to write plays till the female domination exist in the society. He sketches real picture of the society and his characters are also real. The language he uses is colloquial and simple. So, both Malingiya and subedi are a kind of diversities of drama

“Agni ko Katha” is directly seems to influence by Natyasastrian theatre in reference to character, language and theme. As in Sanskrit plays, the language of the play is in verse form. All the characters speak through this form. As poet Bhiksu says:

Bhiksu Gyan is nowhere [...]

In search of knowledge

Gautam did leave home at twelve,

Midnight.

In his hands he has no books

Words he has, in his mind questions

Abounded but answers he has none. (24)

Thus Subedi adopts Natyasastrian language style in his play. Not only in the context of language but also theme is being adopted by Subedi from Sanskrit theatre. As we can find high philosophical theme in Ramayana and Mahabharata, *Agni ko Katha* is also deals with such religious theme of Buddhism. Subedi explores the theme of love, peace through the Buddhist characters. Every characters in the play are in quest of peace, love and they are in dilemma for getting Nirvana. But Subedi seems to deconstruct traditional belief of Buddhism and gives way to his own concept in this sense his play seems to be experimental like folk theatre. Sources of those folk theatres are from many religious philosophy and those plays deal with their own way.

Unlike Subedi, Malingiya seems to adopt tradition of folk theatre. In the context of language, theme and characters, it is totally close to folk theatre. As we can see in folk theatre, the language they adopt is regional and vernacular or dialect, *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai* also in Maithali language. Characters of the play are also from day to day characters of Mithila who behave and speak through their tradition. The theme that catches the play is also influenced by folk theatre, which deals the theme of dowry, social injustices, female emancipation and superstition, all prevalent in this region. In this sense it is directly influenced by the realist and reformist playwrights. In this sense, Dharendra Premarsi says,

What Malingiya deals the issues like dowry, superstition and injustices are all prevalent this region? In this sense he seems to be more

reformist playwright. He wants to make equality in the society and does not want any kind of discrimination. (22)

So the play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, is directly influenced by the folk theatre and the trends of that theatre is catches by him, in the sense of language, theme, characters and plot. In this way Malingiya uses the Mithila language, social injustices, and the theme of emancipation, day to day lower class characters and synchronic development of the plot. And he is also a reformist playwright.

### Chapter IV: Conclusion

This research makes study on theatre through its history theories on it, dramatic text written for it and finally analyzes the performance of the plays *Agni ko Katha* and *woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*.

Studying comparatively is very much difficult task but researcher has tried his best to do so and explores something about both plays- *Agniko Katha* and *Who Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*. Being the contemporary plays, playwrights of both *Agniko Katha* and *Who Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, deal different contemporary issues of the nation. As a work of art is the reflection of the society, both contemporary playwrights reflect the most burning issues like dowry and civil war in their plays. Both playwrights' exploration of some new technique and admixture of culture and issues have brought newness in the development of the modern theatre.

Drama is a communal work of art. A community of playwright artists, director, critics and audiences are involve in the transformation of the dramatic text. Every member in the community plays equally important role in successfully bringing the text. So the playwright is the source of departure. Then the director with the help of the actors presents the text on stage for the audiences. The actors write the play again with their body language. At last, audiences and the critics provide judgment about the success or failure of the drama.

Abhi Subedi, renowned literati, in Nepali and Mahendra Malingiya, an icon of Maithali literature, display the pathetic condition of Nepal. Subedi redefines the Buddhist philosophy and conveys the message that not only through meditation rather serving disabled people and satisfying oneself we can get Nirvana where as malingiya, always deals the issues like superstition, and burning issues like dowry in Terai, also mixes those themes in his play. Malinigiya always raises his voice against oppressors who is solely responsible for the events caused in the Mithila. He is the

Messiah of the downtrodden people. He displays his characters as folk people and is like the realists writers. In the play *Woh Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai*, protagonist Sita becomes victim of dowry and poverty and sacrifices her life. But in the plays, *Agniko Katha*, all characters, bold and philosophical are in quest of peace. Women's emancipation is there where Bhiksuni Purnima is not in dilemma whereas Bhiksu Gyan is in quest. Subedi, tried to deconstruct the Buddhist values and norms and also deals the issues like civil war of Nepal as a whole.

Thus, the research also made the researcher go through the custom of Nepali theater, read dramatic text and know researchers, artists and creators of Nepali theater. This has made the researcher realize that the Nepali theater in its recent days is making the new trajectory. Not only this but also the contribution of Maithali drama in Nepali art theater is more appreciating and it paves the way to its bright future. Both plays *Agniko Katha and Who Kalhi Muha Dekhai Chai* have been performed in South Asian countries and made many shows uses the cultural semiotics. From the music to the custom, the plays or rather their performance creates a strong cultural ambience.



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