

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

**Rituals, Performance and Modernity: A Study of Temple Prayer
Practices of the Kathmandu Valley**

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By

Abhijeet Thapa

Roll no: 31

TU Regd no: 6-2-204-323-2000

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Nepal

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TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

The thesis entitled, “Rituals, Performance and Modernity: A Study of Temple Prayer Practices of the Kathmandu Valley”, submitted to the Central Department of English, MPhil Programme, by Abhijeet Thapa has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

MPhil Co-ordinator

Head
Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Abstract

A community bearing its own cultural heritage and practices has its ways of dealing with the bodily disorders and ailments. Even in the current context of globalization and modernity, local values, norms and rituals retain their religious values in several communities of the Kathmandu Valley. Gods in the temples of the Kathmandu Valley are also taken as doctors though they do not speak and prescribe. Locals believe that idols in the temples and shrines are mute but not deaf. They listen to our pain and problems. They are inside us, and also outside in temple. Therefore, going to them is also reaching to our own inner parts and elements of our body. This belief is performed through offerings of libations, incense, fruits and other victuals. Such humble prayer practices and similar performances held in the temples are supposed to heal diseases of several orders.

With sincere ethnography, the research unleashes some local prayer practices of healing the bodily disorders in the Kathmandu Valley. The research also analyses the roles and significance of such practices in the modern capital city of the nation. Locals go and offer prayers to the non-living symbolic entity to heal their diseases or bodily disorders (sometimes after the failure of doctor's medication) like those of ears, tooth, skin, sterility and the list continues. Such humble methods of seeking comeback from illness, in real ground, seem very exotic in the twenty first century. Surprisingly, Kathmandu as the chief city with most of the traces of modernity in Nepal has still a majority of people developing deep faith upon healing powers of gods and goddesses. The researcher has himself participated in one of the esoteric healing rituals for the authenticity of the research. During the fieldwork, several photos and interviews were taken to give a wide exposure to this unique belief culture. Temples in the Kathmandu Valley are not only homes to the gods but are also

the sites of locals' performance. From the perspectives of performance theories, these healing practices embody the day-to-day life patterns of the locals of the Kathmandu Valley. This research concludes that Science limits its periphery to the laboratory tests. Doctoral medications are important to rule out diseases and to relieve the patients, but beyond that, science too has no access. One cannot live in a completely Science governed life. Mystery in our life and in this universe is universal. Healing gods and our faith and performances associated with them can be taken as our efforts to live in this mysterious world.

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