

I. Prayer Performance in Kathmandu

This research analyses the performative dimension of seven popular temples and shrines in the Kathmandu Valley. These temples and shrines are places for the locals to bestow their belief in healing their bodily disorders. Locals as well as the outsiders influenced by the local culture come here with a hope to find themselves recovered from bodily illness and malfunction. Locals go and try to communicate with the gods and complain about their disorders in tooth, ears, skin, sexual potency and other minor ailments. Since ancient time, locals have been holding the belief that when they suffer bodily ailments, it is time to go to certain healing gods and appease them to come into their body and fight the evil forces that are bothering them. An evil force is that malevolent and malign spirit that can inflict pain in any part or the whole part of the body. Flowers, fruits, incense and libations are parts of common prayers whereas there are other esoteric rituals assisted by the priests as well. To study these performances, this researcher ventured into many investigations on how people in Kathmandu believe in the power of healer gods and goddesses. It would be relevant to begin with the description of 26 September 2012, that is *Hariparvitini Ekadashi*, one of the twenty-four auspicious occasions in Nepal according to the Lunar Calendar.

It is early in the morning, a considerable number of people have gathered outside the Pashupatinath temple premises. The congregation is swelling every minute. I look at my watch that shows 5: 33 a.m. People are desperate to throng into the temple. They are busy handing over their shoes and in turn receiving a tag from two men who are shoes-in-charge in a small open cottage outside the temple. A man seemingly in his late forties is loudly calling out “Shambhu... Shambhu”. People are rushing to the main temple door. Other women are calling out “Shiva ... Shiva... Jaya Shiva”. To any new Western foreigner, this group of men and women would be a

crazy group of mentally unstable people who need further medication or a psychiatrist. In real terms, they are in perfect harmony of their mind and soul. Their tone is submissive in front of the religiously mighty lord Shiva. They cannot control but pour all their reverence in the premises, which Hindus all over the world consider as the most pious place in the world. Many Hindus from far off places think that it is worth paying a visit to the temple before their death. Such is the significance of the place.

According to a myth, today is the day when the lord Vishnu has changed his position at the earth surface in *Paatal*. Though the day is particularly important for the *Vaishnav* followers, the day being *Ekadashi* is equally dedicated in the name of lord Shiva as well. Today this researcher, a young man in his early thirties as an ethnographer is on the Southern premises called the *Unmatta Vairab*.

A group of men and women in the southern face of the temple are waiting where there is a separate shrine for the *Unmatta Vairab*. The priest opens the door of the temple at six. The *Unmatta Vairab* is one angry manifestation of the lord Shiva himself. Mary Anderson writes, “the fierce and terrifying Lord Bhairab, though known to represent the destructive power of Shiva, is more intimately concerned with day-to-day life than Shiva is, and stands independently as one of the most adored, feared and propitiated gods in Nepal” (156). She even highlights the importance of the lord in Nepalese society by adding, “A new home cannot be constructed until Bhairab is propitiated. Barren women petition him for fertility, and pregnant women are forbidden even to touch his picture or idol lest his wrath cause her to abort” (156). This mighty god is even the lord that scares away the wrongdoers.

As soon as the priest opens the door, people throng into the shrine. The fierce looking *Unmatta Vairab* is of about eight feet. His erect colossal penis of almost ten

inches with an amazing girth is the sole center of faith of the many visitors most of them who never miss to bow before this mighty image after worshipping the main *shivalingum* in the main temple- Pashupatinath. In the congregation, many of them are men and women both married and unmarried. They circumambulate the colossal image and try to touch the erect penis of the *Vairab*. It is a wonder to the researcher that a newly married couple want their offerings be made to touch the penis of the *Vairab*. The unmarried girls in the queue are giggling and seem shocked as they bow carefully near the mighty penis. This researcher tries to read their facial expression. It would be again relevant to state Anderson's version who cites *Unmateshowor* of Kumbeshwor (a wooden statue in a latticed courtyard window) in the following manner: " Its immense, erect penis is draped with flower offerings from women suffering from barrenness, frigidty and menstrual irregularity, and it is said that Unmateshowar Bhairab's efficacy is so powerful that the mere sight of him causes women to be consumed with desire" (157). The strange expression of the females in the temple makes the researcher feel they might have got goose bumps at the sight of the idol's erected penis. The devotees hardly get 5- 10 seconds to touch the *Vairab* as the queue is at push and pull to have a glance of the fierce image. The name *Unmatta* itself suggests, "intoxicated by desire". The *Vairab* is the symbol of reassurance of sexual potentiality and fertility as well. It is very important to note that there is also a Santanseshwor Mahadeva behind the main temple of Pasuphatinath, where couples ask for children and hope that god will grant their wish. The researcher yielded fruitful communication with the people's belief in the lord. The *Unmatta Vairab* is the symbolic healer of sexual impotence in Kathmandu's locals.

The local tradition of worshipping the *shivalingum* or coming to *Unmatta Vairab* for sexual potentiality in this scientific age is somewhat a mystical dimension

of Kathmandu's culture. In one aspect, it is the healing process that cannot just be a psychological one that has persisted to survive in the capital city where every year, new doctors and sexologists are setting up new clinics and counseling services.

There are many gods and goddesses in Kathmandu Valley where couples go and request the gods to grant them the desired child and their worship is often followed by vows. Even outside the Valley, there are numerous such temples. In Gorkha, there is a goddess *Manakamanadevi* literally the goddess who grants the wishes of one's heart. The goddess is also believed to grant sons to the couples. On the southern premises of the World Heritage Site, Basantapur Durbar Square, there is another popular child-granting god called Santaneshwor Mahadeva and amazingly there is another popular Santaneshwar Mahadeva in Lalitpur too. In both these temples locals come to ask for children. If these acts be taken under the Schechner's Performance theory, which, on the point to expand the vision of what performance studies is, calls it "a broad spectrum" that studies all "...activities including at the very least the performing arts, rituals, healing, sports, popular entertainments and performance in everyday life"(7). With this, he wants to establish Performance Study not only as the tools to interpret art but also as a means of understanding historical, social and cultural processes. In case of granting fertility, Mahadeva and his *lingum* always top the list. People generally worship him for strength, fertility and mercy. He is an icon who is a protagonist among men and women -both married and unmarried. There are many stories and myths about girls doing penances to attain "Mahadeva" as husband. *Shreeswasthani*, a religious text on the story of Mahadeva, states how "the daughter of the Himalayas, Parwati, made *Shivalingum* of sand in the banks of river and worshipped it to attain him as a spouse" (Parajuli 113). She was successful according to the text. A girl in Nepalese society is even blessed to getting a husband

like Mahadeva. A Nepalese month Shrawan is also dedicated to worshipping Mahadeva and the occasion is popular as *Bol Bam*. Lord Shiva is such a god in Hindu mystical dimension that he is greatly revered and tried to be propitiated in case he gets angry and performs a dance- *Natraj* that invites apocalypse and destruction. But if he is happy he grants a boon and in the modern Hindu society, people in the Kathmandu Valley still go to his temples to ask for a child. The belief in this religious dimension gives a base for the research to call certain images of Shiva as healer or sexologist.

The other unique behavioral patterns of the Kathmandu's locals and other healing gods and goddesses will be dealt in the later chapter. In the current context of urbanization, Kathmandu has turned to be a miscellany, like a textbook open to any issue and an encyclopedia sympathetic to any topic. The concept of globalization has peaked up and the hybridization of the customs, language and traditions has opened up a new alley in the inter-culture understandings. People from any part of the world dissolve here. The Kathmandu Valley functions as a solvent to accept into it any culture, fashion and trends that are imported here through people, software or educational phenomenon. Since time immemorial, Kathmandu has always been the couturier of rare and appealing culture. Some cultures have turned chronic, some have come through metamorphosis, others are mutating in modernity and still most rites and rituals are determined not to change with time, instead they change the time of Kathmandu here. One of them is belief culture, gradually attuning with this era.

As a core city of the whole nation which has been housing the ruler class and the royals since historical time, and interestingly as a capital city of Nepal since four hundred years, this space of bewildering traditionalism has been the subject of many

writers, poets and researchers of all times. The history of this place is full of myths, incredible legends and living monuments and heritages.

Gods and goddesses are everywhere in Nepal. It is however not surprising for the Hindus to consider the omnipresence of god and mythologize about 33 crore gods and their incarnations (*avatars*). The presence of gods and temples in the core city Kathmandu can be explained by the expression of Kirkpatrick when he said- “there are as many temples here as many houses and as many gods as many people in the city and as many festivals as many days in a year” (2). This adage vividly describes the importance of gods and rituals in the Valley. Some temples are more important for healing reasons than other temples. Not every day or hour can be the right time to go and visit such sites or those healing gods and goddesses. Morning is mostly favorable. The sun should be in favorable position. So needs the Moon, and be the Earth. These sites are not ordinary sites. First, they are the sites where deities reside. Second, they are the spaces of collective unconscious. In addition, they are the sites of myths and legends. They are the sites of human suffering. They are culturally and historically important. Lastly, they are hospital. They are sites of transformations. They are liminal spaces. The bodies become liminal. The deities are deities as well as doctors, they too become liminal.

With so many temples, esoteric rituals and amazing *puja*-performance, everyday acts or events also fall into the category of Performance Studies according to Schechner. Thus, gods in Kathmandu are doctors of diseases, engineers of fates and pilots of religions and customs. Gods perform the roles of protectors, destroyers and guardians. Particularly in Kathmandu, the trend of going to temples of certain gods and goddesses with some form of healing belief establishes gods as healers of certain diseases. Generally, it is very common that one finds people bowing down or at least

putting down their hands to chest with great respect as they pass by several gods and goddesses those are in the streets or by the side of the streets. However, when it comes to diseases and healing practices, the lengthy process, religious formalities, fear of committing some folly that may displease the deity- all display the unimaginable and deep reverence of the locals towards those healing gods. Locals' confidence in the power of the *puja* is the mysterious dimension of belief culture.

Several studies have explored religious arts of the Valley but rarely have they addressed the healing practices from the perspectives offered by Performance theorists. Nevertheless, it is quite definite that the religious values in South Asia are susceptible to constant change as Babbi in the "Introduction" section of the book *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* puts, "South Asian religions have been ever changing. What is new is that the nature of the religious change itself may be changing" (i). Lawrence uses the word "Religious Evolution" and emphasizes on how it has entered a new phase in South Asia, however the part of this research is to negate this idea especially in place like Kathmandu because as said earlier everything tends to dissolve in Kathmandu. The locality of Kathmandu is something, which needs many unprecedented years to change. Idols of gods and goddesses are interestingly revered in Nepal. God's images and even posters are the medium to unite people and the supreme.

Idols of gods and goddesses are revered in Nepal than nowhere in the world. God's images and even posters are the medium to unite people and the supreme. In many parts of India the trend is the same but it's a noticeable factor that most of the posters (except many Buddhist *Thankas*) of Hindu gods and goddesses in Nepal come from India. Talking about the Indian marketing of god's posters and calendar art in

relation to South Asia, Daniel writes “ the ubiquity of the gods’ posters in South Asia is indisputable but art collectors and connoisseurs as well as educated westernized Indians dismiss them as Kiestsch and question their art”(24). In Kathmandu, these posters are never seen as some inferior art or the manifestation of Kiestsch.

When Lietchy ethnographically documented middle class-culture in Kathmandu in his *Suitably Modern: Making Middle Class Culture in Kathmandu* he discusses ‘practice’, ‘process’ and ‘performance’ of middle class to produce ‘space’. He rightfully states:

I argue that the idea of cultural space is crucial to an understanding of class as cultural practice like production of class cultural space is the fundamental outcome of class-cultural practice... How do “practice”/ “process” produce “space”? It is in fact through the “performance” of middle class life that the middle class makes and claims space. (255)

When Lietchy limits his study to only middle class of Kathmandu, he might have missed the essence of the religious space of Kathmandu, although large part of the population is middle class. Yet Kathmandu’s culture is somewhat beyond the “space” produced by the middle class. It would be one hundred per cent right to say that middle class size shapes up the cultural patterns of any place but in case of Kathmandu when one talks about temples and gods, the class- hierarchy dissolves in the abyss because devotion is something “special” beyond that category. All rich and poor, landowners and beggars line up in the temples. Through a sensitive ethnographer’s eye, it is very evident that even with increasing popularity of the doctors and hospitals, science and modern medicines have fallen behind the ritual belief. Most probably, it takes centuries to outrun the belief culture. Devotees say that

the offerings and oblations of the locals in the temples and shrines are never assumed to go unanswered.

The local belief patterns those are seen and practiced inside Kathmandu Valley ironically seem to contradict with the modern and hi- tech life- styles of the city dwellers. The local people here are undoubtedly the social elements of rapidity and modernity but still they pin their faith upon the so-called “absurdities” termed by the scientifically forward Western Societies. By the term “local”, I hereby include the *Newars*, the indigenous and ancient tribe of Kathmandu as well as other sizeable part of city- dwellers, who are not *Newars* but have been under the influence of such belief patterns since their ancestors started living in this mystical land hundreds of years ago. This would be much fair and just to the research topic as well to those people of Kathmandu who are indeed locals but not *Newars*.

Although doctors are not actually redundant, indeed, they are busy people with long lists of appointment time to different patients. Like the major population of the country, people here too, believe in astrology, horoscopes, festivals, celebrations, worships and unexplainable superstitions. These all can be quaint practices in the global mechanized world of science and technology.

Along with the healing gods and goddesses, the people’s vows, faith and assurance will be the other elements of the tendency of the grandiose belief perimeter which is one of the espousals of this research. When culture-sharing is the prime element of a society that functions as the binding element between two or more different classes of people, the same intercultural acts mark up the distinction between two different hierarchies of culture- one the dominant and other the dominated. In religious terms, the indigenous and core culture of Kathmandu has always been the motive of influence to the outsiders.

Roughly, every minute in the Valley, hundreds of bell ring somewhere with a desire expressed by the devotees, passers-by or by anyone. With such a tranquility of peaceful mumblings of the worshippers and the locals, with gods as silent listeners, Kathmandu's belief culture is surely an interesting place of performance.

1.1 Medical Knowledge and Its Value in Kathmandu

The growing number of hospitals, clinics, and health and research centers definitely mark up the trend of modern medication inside the Kathmandu Valley where apparently, the power of scientific knowledge and the popularity of white color and doctoral pride seem to highlight the dominance of modernity over traditional beliefs. In spite of the charm of the younger generation in the city for attaining the white color robes and "Doctors" in front of the names, temples, gods, and goddesses have always been in the centre of social and cultural behavioral pattern. The politics of scientific knowledge has very little to interfere with the ritual conducts of the people in the Kathmandu Valley. Nevertheless, "power" and "strength" are two different things especially when "strength" comes with the long sequences of "influence" that has been generated since the ancient times, those times which History fails to track down.

Foucault in his *Truth and Power* refers to the society that is influenced by political economy to contain five traits of truth. The first one he talks about is that "truth is centered upon the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it" (Adams 1114). The influence of the power of scientific institutions like hospitals and the innumerable discourses they produce every day on topics of curing and healing have only little to influence the strength of the cultural dimensions of the Kathmandu Valley. The alluring medical stream attracts thousands of Nepalese students. However, the students inclined in such scientific discourse seek the

blessings of the gods and idols for enrollment into reputed teaching hospitals like that of Teaching Hospital, TU or BP Koirala Institute of Science and Medicine, Dharan. The competition is tough and candidates wait for more than two years for enrollment and those who do not want to compete and as well have money go to China for easier enrollment. Such is the charm of medical institutions and glory of medication in the country, however; medication alone is not a healer in the Valley, they have to be supplemented with the power of healing gods scattered around the city. So when Foucault tells power is knowledge and it diffuses through the systems of authority to produce truth by highlighting power as “ of immense diffusion and consumption circulating through apparatuses of education and information” (Adams 1144) as one characteristic of truth , the research implies here that “ truth” in Kathmandu has another trait- the trait of belief not founded by politics of knowledge but by system of beliefs passed down from generation to generation.

Even the world’s unforgettable tyrant Hitler in *Mein Kampf* wrote about the History and truth as “ The judges of this Stage may tranquilly condemn us for our conduct at that time; but History, the goddess of a higher truth and a better legal code, will smile as she tears up this verdict and will acquit us all of the crime for which this verdict demands punishment”(622). The words he used- ‘History’, ‘goddess’ and ‘truth’ give a glimpse how politics of knowledge generate truth through discourse.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche seems to defy the existence of god in his *God is Dead* and writes, “God is a conjecture; but I desire that your conjectures should not reach beyond your creative will. Could you create a god? Then do not speak to me of any gods” (Locke, Gibson, and Arms 662). The movement when knowledge of Science was at peak in America, the agnostic views were also called theo-thantology. During this period, the disbelief in god might have raised

serious questions on the conduct of humanity. That is why Erich Fromm writes, “In the nineteenth century the problem is God is dead; in the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead [...] The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots” (Locke, Gibson, and Arms 735). The statement really implies that the society that completely relies on the scientific knowledge and defies god promotes inhumanity.

On the other hand, *Chandi* is a religious text in Hinduism that consists of so many amazing *suktas* (verses) to call the multi- fold appearances of the goddess *-devi* to come and protect almost every organ of the body. A line from *Chandi* goes as ‘Let the right side of the body be protected by *Ajita*, left by *Aparijita*, *sikha* by *Udhotini* and *mastak* by *umaji* (Aryal 23)’. The *Chandi* amazingly has recitations or propitiation for calling the *devi* to protect almost all part of the body appealing each different form of the *Chandi devi* to take care of each organ. This connotes to a more vague form of knowledge to precisely indicate that even smallest part of our body is nothing without the protection of the *devi*. Another of the verse goes :

Let my forehead be protected by the *devi* named *Malghari*, my eyebrows be protected by *Yashsiwani devi*, the space between the eyebrows by *Trinetra*, nostrils by *Yamaghanta*, *Shakinee* to the space between the eyes, two ears by *Dwarbassini*, cheeks by *Kalika devi*, the pinnae of the ears by *Shankiri*, teeth by *Kaumari*. Throat by *Chandika*, vice-box by *Chitraghanta*, palate by *Mahamaya*, neck by *Nilgriwa*, foodpipe by *Nalkubari*, shoulders by *Khadgini* and both arms by *Bajradharini* (My Translation) (Aryal 24-25).

The descriptions and references of each part further go from even nails to the genitals. This proves that body is a dwelling site for protective goddess in Hindu belief. Body

is a cosmic site. For a western discourse, the call for “protection of sperms by goddess *Chatreshwori*, bones, fat and flesh by *Parwati*” (27) would be a ridiculous act.

Christians too believe we are made in the image of god. Body and cosmos are thus inter- related. Disorder in body is disorder in spiritual order. “Not only the gods of realms, even the common creatures are also parts of the same creator god” (Parajuli 419). The religious Hindu text *Chandi* even states that wearing a *Durga kawach* (protective amulet/shield) would keep at bay skin diseases like ‘measles, chickenpox, rashes, scabies and even the poison of drugs like *bhanga dhaturu*, *charesh* and to the venom of snakes and poisonous creatures like scorpion”(31). The belief of people in the healing power of idols may be at times, boosted by such texts.

Swami Prapannacharya talks about the wise orients of the Vedic period as he tells:

The Aryas in the pre- ancient period era used chanting and medicine both. [...] Even they were proficient in using surgery. These intelligent people were using surgery several thousand years ago that are mentioned in Aryan’s religious texts like *Susrutip*.

They could fix a broken leg by instilling rod, if we call them savage then whom shall we call civilized? Rigvedic period in it has the healing process and medicinal research and cure for blindness, deafness, sterility and the list could continue. (My Translation 73)

In the twenty first century, the world is busy talking about global problems – green house effect, pollution consequences, probable apocalypse and the list could go on. The developed countries are under investigations on cloning, discovering medicine for AIDS, cancer and other deadly diseases. Their laboratories are busy with strange chemicals to work on for the betterment of human future but in Kathmandu strange

prayer practices those seem absurd and futile in such an extremity of modern world, are seen on temples and prayer places. The locals of Kathmandu are trying to communicate with statues and idols of gods and setting up prayers and vows to cure their bodily diseases and disorders, sometimes even after the failure of doctor's medication. These following questions are obvious:

1. What makes people believe in the healing power of certain temple-gods and goddesses?
2. Do the temple gods really heal and cure them or are locals of Kathmandu just following the trend?
3. Is the belief performance going to survive in the future?

This research analyses these questions. Mathieu Deflem, a renowned Professor of Sociology and performance studies expert argues "whenever ritual is inspired by a religious belief in supernatural beings or powers, its status is different from other, inner-worldly forms of knowledge"(1). He seems in a way to take the power of knowledge to be somewhat an inferior part of worldly activities as compared to rituals that are induced in the belief of super power. He refers Turner and adds:

I concur with Turner that, for the people involved in many ritual activities, religious beliefs have some kind of "surplus value" over and above other, secular forms of thought. It is only in the different forms of religion that references are made to the supernatural (be it a personalized god, invisible energies, or divine powers attributed to natural phenomena) and to the way things are meant to be in concordance with a reality which is, according to Clifford Geertz (1973:112), "really real," and which is independent from

worldly contingencies and man-made arrangements based on secular knowledge. (1)

It cannot be undermined that people who go to these temples are educated and these people are the same people who crowd in hospitals too. Amazingly there are more people who go to temples rather than those who go to doctors because gods heal and cure them, though sometimes superstitions cross the limit to take on tough times for some. Clifford Geertz writes, “Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And worse than that, the more deeply it goes, the less complete it is” (29). To analyze the cultural concepts of locals in Kathmandu is indeed itself cracking nuts however the belief periphery needs to be revered as performance. The prayers primarily revitalize the ritual modes and methods of the healing practices of the locals and are sometimes followed by cruel sacrifices of animals and birds within their belief perimeter. When superstitions cross the normal belief perimeter there are instances when the worshippers become victims of further injury and even death, especially when serious medical consultations and doctoral procedures are under-estimated. Apart from the abnormal killing and some sort of rudimentary superstition, other methodology of prayers is praiseworthy and this research will definitely revitalize their importance.

In the past, Science has very less appeal the local's as when Eskelund published *The Forgotten Valley* in 1959, he expressed his utmost surprise, “only 5 or 6 years ago, a bicycle would draw a crowd in Kathmandu, I have been told, this is not surprising for even in the beginning of the century, the wheel was virtually unknown in Nepal” (25). There are reasons to believe this because Nepal was secularly excluded for one hundred and four years during the Rana oligarchy and it remained aloof from all progress of science and medicine.

More people here think that certain gods can heal them better than those who prescribe medicines in their illegible handwriting. Even the hospitals for this purpose would have built the temples or shrines of gods and goddesses in their arena; at least to comfort their patients. Many hospitals do have images of gods hanging over their wall or even idols and temples in their vicinity. However, the charm to become medical doctors can be sensed by number of youngsters who compete to be enrolled in the country's leading MBBS centers. In schools and colleges, many students first opt for becoming doctors or engineers. Norman Vincent in an attempt to relate 'faith in healing' critically asserts:

Present day medicine emphasizes psychosomatic factors in healing, thus recognizing the relationship of mental states to bodily health.

Modern medical practice realizes and takes into consideration the close connection between how a man thinks and how he feels. Since religion deals with thought and feelings and basic attitudes, it is only natural that the science of faith should be important in the healing process.

(191)

The middle class family and the higher-class are often found cajoling their wards to pursue doctoral study. A sizeable percentage of the students seeking their MBBS degree even pay a lot of money to come back as doctors after spending five to six years in the states of China and India. This trend has been influential from decades ago when the children belonging to rich class went to Russia to come back to Nepal as doctors. Even in such prolonged popularity of studying modern medicines, Kathmandu remains as one of those rare places in the modern world where locals go to heal their bodily disorders to healer gods and goddesses or make vows in their temples.

The world has changed and though not in the same speed and pace, undoubtedly Nepal has changed too. Nevertheless, being a country with interesting history and astounding rituals, intriguing customs and traditions since the *Vedic* times even in the phase of modernity, subjugated knowledge are of core values in Kathmandu Valley. Gerard Toffin while giving an emphasis on the dwindling roles of *Guthis* of temples in aspect of *Newari* culture agrees about the recession in religious concern and interest but again says, “religion is not rejected but the constraints of modern life and salaried work have reduced it to a less position than it has traditionally occupied hitherto” (29). He further emphasizes:

The westernization and modernization of life styles and the development of new media like television and video even in the rural settings have altered mentalities and opened up a large part of the population to newer horizons and more materialist values , widely different from the old socio- religious order wic had been permitted to remain relatively undisturbed until very recent times.

(29)

It is true that temples that were opened for the public during the Malla period and until the end of the nineteenth century are now closed for the public for reasons, which are not clear. Many temples in the three palace squares of the Valley have now turned into public rendezvous where among others the unemployed gather, gossip and time pass. Even the lower middle class use the temple plinths to conduct business. College boys and girls after bunking periods come here to talk about love, marriage, relation and so on. Temples are crowded with teenagers in college dress after eleven when the morning colleges close. It’s very interesting to see couples and pairs

hanging around the plinths of the Jagatnarayan temple and Majudeval in the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar square palace, which are famous for erotic carvings.

Referring to the temples and performance dimension of Kathmandu Valley, Abhi Subedi quotes Mary Shepherd Slausser's point, "None (temples, shrines and minor features) can be rigorously categorized as sacred or secular, for all serve both gods and men" (23). Though in modern times and climes, temples' functionalities have altered to some extent that he pinpoints yet the vigor of celebration and maintaining festivals remain unaltered because there is always a performance in the relationship between space and architecture of the *Nepal Mandala*, which can be put forward that it is same in case of prayer practices and worshipping rituals.

Healing power of gods and goddesses of Kathmandu and the force of unanimous belief of the public upon their own vows and oblations, the relationship of the public and the gods in temples is complex and intricate. The relationship of parent- child, which is very pertinent in the Nepalese culture and traditions on behalf of the surprising relationship between gods and devotee, leaves an astounding mark in the Kathmandu Valley because of the large number of temples and shrines that dot the places and lanes of the capital city and its outskirts. People don't always have to plan to go to temples, on the way and the lanes there are so many innumerable worshipping shrines that the with their unconscious reservoir of thoughts and social heredity happen to enter the shrines and show their deep reverence to the temple gods. Some questions are better when they are unanswered as the famous adage by a Biologist and an Activist, George Wald goes "The great questions are those an intelligent child asks, and after getting no answers stops – asking" (Leitchy 197). Science tries to answer to a problem by raising a question and list of questionnaires and doubts but the answers for religion and ritual come with belief, and the beliefs are rigid. God is the

source of energy, designer of life and he is the protector, gardener and sustainer in Hindu notion. Pavis quotes Camilleri's definition of culture as "transmitted by what has been called social heredity that is by a certain number of techniques through which each generation interiorize for the next, the communal inflexion of the psyche and the organism which culture compromises"(4). Pavis takes the definition to talk about the theatre performance of actors and dancers.

However, Camilleri's definition of culture has a broader dimension and the culture of any place takes the form of hereditary transmission to be passed from one generation to the other. In a way, Kathmandu's temples' easy accessibility can also be one of the significant factors of their popularity but the locals' temple- going- behavior can also be taken as the social heredity. The archaic value of going to temples with complaints and desires cannot be negated in the cover of modern medications.

1.2 Modernism and Subjugated Knowledge

For the outsiders, the locals of the capital city Kathmandu Valley seem to be entangled within the frame of the rudimentary beliefs and superstitions but in fact what locals are doing by keeping faith upon gods and goddesses are the basic elements of the ritual performance of this grandeur cultural space. Raised in the midst of healing temples, locals cannot negate the cultural importance of the sites. This is because taking these acts as mere superstitions would be undermining the strength of massive water underneath just by wrongly thinking "we are in the outer world", walking upon the thin sheath of ice layer.

The fifty third chapter of *In The Folly of Man: The book of Psalms King James Version of the Bible* states: "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good"

(Locke, Gibson, and Arms 646). *The Upanishads: Svetasvatar* also states glory of the supreme as, “He is the friend and refugee of all” (Locke, Gibson, and Arms 652). The religious texts are of utmost importance in the Nepalese society. At this point, it would be very pertinent to the issue to bring the issues raised by Dwight Conquergood into discussion when Conquergood cites Certeau and Scott as he pinpoints why subjugated knowledge has not been recognized or even tried to be recognized. He specifies:

Michael Foucault coined the term “subjugated knowledge” to include all the local, regional, vernacular, naïve knowledges at the bottom of the hierarchy- the lower Other of the science. These are the non serious ways of knowing that dominant culture neglects, excludes, represses or simply fails to recognize. Subjugated knowledges have been erased because they are illegible; they exist, by large, as active bodies of meaning, outside of books, eluding the forces of inscriptions that would make them legible and thereby legitimate. (370)

On one aspect of the core religious beliefs, one may only accept the trend of going to temples to heal themselves from psychological point-view. The limited knowledge of bodily mechanism and psychological theories and by floating oneself upon the rigid platform of postmodernism, the trend of going to gods and trying communicating with them may seem hilarious. It would not be wise to underestimate the flexibility of belief- culture that rests upon gods and goddesses especially in cities of Kathmandu Valley.

When Kathmandu may in one level seems a traditional archaic society because locals go and try to talk to gods about their problems, on another level a question of personifying idols may strike on the historicity and ancientness of the worshipping

cult. However, history has it that the cult of personifying god has existed in the human civilization even in the Mesopotamian society. In his *Religious Consciousness*, G.S. Ghurey writes about how in ancient Mesopotamia, a person would think himself connected to a god and think that the god is personal to him. He writes:

Mesopotamian of the third or the second millennium B.C. could not think of himself as nor could he afford to permit himself to be someone without a personal god [...]. A man's relations with his personal god were so intimate that he could be conceived as talking to his god, pleading with him, entreating him, playing on his guarantee of pity similar to the ways of a child with his parents or even cajoling him.(11)

Thus, even in such raw human civilization the concept of connecting oneself with a supreme power was pervasive and the force of the unknown was always a triggering factor for people's belief. It is quite amazing that "even during that time the person would express his hurt feelings and expect the god to comply his wishes even by writing a letter to the god"(Ghurey 11). Even in many places of Nepal, temples and their ambience are the living witnesses of written expressions of the devotees- be it on the bark of tree, wall of temples or in the form of offerings to the temples. Molloy puts "belief in god or gods arises from an adult's projection of Powerful and long lasting childhood experiences with his/her parents" (4). The concept may be true to some extent that our childhood memories with our parents who shape the Power of supreme in us has been instilled so strongly that it influences us. Molloy again refers, "Freud argues that major function of religion is to help human beings feel secure in an unsafe universe" (4). Religion is also a tool to assure people of some hope and trust on the unseen force of the supreme as in Kathmandu the basic performativity of people ooze out in religious terms.

Warga also puts Jung's Collective Unconscious as "deposit of ancestral experiences from untold millions of years ago[...] to which each century adds an infinitesimally small amount of variations" We inherit not only our physical forms but also social and cultural factors that influence us"(45). Analyzing Kathmandu's local tendency to go to the temples from Jung's point of "Collective Unconscious", the archetypes or the "primordial ages" are the religious tendencies of person's experience that have been innate in the generations and passed down from one generation to another. There is a little of arguing with this because the cult of going to temples or at least remembering god at harsh times cannot be new and innovative supplementary of the recent generation. The tradition has been revered at all times and openly handed down by the ancestors to their generations.

Although this research studies belief culture it will not be diverged towards healing practices like shamanism (*dhaami-jhankri* and witch doctors). Rather ritual methods and belief culture are studied as performances only with gods as healers. The research will weave the cultural belief patterns with the modern life styles of Kathmandu people to help understand the locality of Kathmandu's locals. It will also help to explore the belief- value of people upon gods and temples. It will also help verify the religious architecting of belief those which unite firstly people and gods and not least people and people.

In the twenty first century, when the world is focused to resolve global problems and people have started to go to space as space tourists, where medical science and the innovative technologies have done wonders, produced miracles and in turn reproduced hopes for the incurables, locals in the capital city of Nepal still seem to talk to their gods about their health and disease. This is what interested me so much. Their unshaken faith upon the guardian deities is an issue of fascination.

Not all gods in Kathmandu are healers of all diseases, each god is a specialist in certain sphere; like Kaandauta can heal the disease of ear and Haarati near Swyambhunath temple could heal smallpox(after its eradication, the belief didn't fade away, she still cures skin diseases), Sankata in New road can remove obstacles put in one's life by the planetary movements and so on. The history of this belief culture has come through a long way and it is unbeatably one of the most interesting belief performances in Kathmandu. The potentiality of such prayers and promises to the Kathmandu gods is what interests me so much. With the first ray of Sun's light, Kathmandu's core cities and lanes, are noisy of chanted or mumbled prayers, shaking bell-sounds and when people especially women with plates(*puja- thaali*) and offerings of flowers, fruits plus smoking incense sticks enter into the temples, the scenario is a living drama. Amidst these daily worship (*nitya puja*), there are so many *pujas* which are targeted for wish fulfillments. Are their wishes fulfilled? Are their prayers answered? Do the devotees rely on the strength of the power of the deities? Their belief is a performance- a dazzling performance which needs a careful and a very sensitive study.

When the locals talk to the deities or mumble *mantras* or plead to the deities in shrines and temples, the communication seems one way for the viewers however for the performer, there is hope of his/her pleadings will be answered and for that s/he may make vows. The temples seemingly have some theatrical qualities and attributes. Discussing about "Figural Theatre in Nepal Mandala", Abhi Subedi says:

The figurality of the deities in Nepal Mandala is theatrical because the basis of the composition is dialogic in nature. The viewers enter into a cosmogonic and familiar dialogue with the deities and characters they make or encounter. (74)

It is such a concrete truth that the communication between gods and man inside Nepal Mandala is like dialogues in a play which is for surely not a soliloquy because the worshipper always assumes that god is there to answer him. In this mental communication the telepathy is an essence which needs careful study to understand and interpret. When Foucault first coined the local, vernacular and naive knowledge that fall at the end of the hierarchy as *Subjugated Knowledges*, he deserves to be appreciated. Conquergood justifies some aspects of subjugated knowledge as:

Since the enlightenment project of modernity, the first way of knowing has been preeminent. Marching under the banner of science and reason it has disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies. Between objective knowledge that is consolidated in text, and local know-how that circulates on the ground within a community of memory and practice, there is no contest. It is the choice between sciences and “old wives tales” (note how the disqualified knowledge is gendered as feminine). (370)

Since the ancient time people have been going to temples to complain about their bodily disorders. In the twenty first century of highly technologized world, some category of young generation take these acts as a mere subjugated practice. Definitely times and climes have been changing in the religious sphere of Kathmandu and one may think that with growing number of hospitals and clinics, in the contest of hospital verses temples, hospitals are on top. But the belief on temples are fairly stronger than that of belief on hospitals and doctors. Many people do not want to compare scientific methods to local know-how, nevertheless local knowledge, in this case local practice have worked out whenever science has failed.

1.3 Temples and Local Psychology

Locals believe that gods eat the offerings made to them so very often they feed the idols spoiling the face of the gods. It is a custom to feed gods first, make him happy and then after appeasing him ask for good health, wisdom or other wishes. In Nepalese culture nothing can be asked from god unless something is offered as oblation, libation or other stuff like god's favorite food or cravings. Gods and goddesses do have their own favorite food or have unnatural appetite for some delicacies. As Ganesha likes *laddu*, Shiva likes *dhaturo*, *belpatta* and *bhang*, goddesses – (Durga) like the animal blood. The devotees offer the gods accordingly unless directed by priests on special *pujas*. This is also a small act of belief culture. In temples and in the streets devotees paste these offerings on the lips of idols and images. These days however the *guthis*, local caretakers of the temple and municipality discourage such unwisely acts which can spoil the idol or its beauty. They even publicize it through hoarding and notice boards but to no avail. Subedi Abhi writes that people's act of deforming the beauty of gods' idols should be seen as act of performing faiths and beliefs. His stanza goes:

Gods' mouths-

Smell of mashed banana

Rancid butter

And raw vermilion

Goddesses-

Smell of blood, incense and putrid worship

Gods don't have statues

They are stone erections

Who dissolve in devotees' longings

Like mists over mountain stream. (1999 15)



Idols of gods and goddesses worshipped with flowers, incense and goddesses' mouth fed with bananas, Basantapur- outside small Pashupati temple



Hanuman, the monkey god in Kopundole, food pasted on his mouth.



A guardian (lion) of Vihara in Patan has been fed coins.



People take *jaand* from the pipe at the mouth of *Vairab* during Indrajatara as medicine that cures/ heals diseases

Subedi has a witty perception of how locals crave for gods' blessings and wishes. His portrayal of people's faith on gods and goddesses is somehow realistic. Very few passersby do not heed any attention to the temples, street gods and goddesses as they pass by. If people are not in haste, it's always a moment of privilege to at least go and touch the idol's foot, ring a bell or mumble some prayers for success or the betterment of their family members.

Interestingly, the idols of gods especially that of Ganesh are kept in many places in order to keep away the undisciplined commuters who litter urinate or do toilets against the walls of the residents or in the street corners. There are many incidents and evidences of places where the house owners simply keep the images of gods on the outside walls when they are too much bothered by passerby who do not hesitate to pass urine or dump garbage when they are unwatched. Given that the public toilets are very few in number, the passer by relieve themselves in such places but the remedy adopted/invented by the house owners in Kathmandu is an interesting counter. All theists fear of god's wrath and disgrace, which is a psychological fear.

In all times and climes, worshipping sites in the Valley have been cuddling the belief of the devotees not sparing them any space to reappraise. With most of the traces of modernity and youngsters slowly turning away from local traditions, these culture avenues still have a majority of people developing deep faith upon healing powers of gods and goddesses.

How and where do locals go and offer prayer to the non- living symbolic entities to heal their diseases or bodily disorders (sometimes after the failure of doctor's medication) like those of ears, tooth, skin etc. are actually humble belief processes in the apparently modernized capital city of Nepal. Every morning and evening, devotees occupy these prayer places in Kathmandu and as commuters pass

by, they bow down and greet the healing gods with great respect and profound belief. It looks as if they fear of gods' rage in act of displaying disrespect or indifference to the mighty lords. The ulterior assuage believed to be brought by the prayer certainly demands some justification which at this point, the research is specifically focused to prove that gods and deities heal the diseases of the devotees. Particularly, this is what is called co- incidence and this co- incidence is something invincible, inviolable and invisibly untenable. This co- incidence is provided by the supreme, who is again invincible, inviolable and invisibly untenable but not unattainable. The supreme is attainable. The *puja*, rituals and other rigorous belief practices are media to join the locals to the supreme.

At any situation, it would be blunder to questioning the potentiality of these prayer places but anyhow the aspect of potentiality is inseparable for interpreting any kind of such issues. The culture, traditions, values and norms that have been passed from generations do have some underlying meanings and effects unless they are cruel and impracticable. They cannot be simply declared as age-old and rusty just by clinging into the concept of modernism and advancement.

Many norms that have been established in the ancestral period and passed to the newer generation have their positions and hierarchy in a society. Especially when it comes to the aboriginality of cultural space like Kathmandu, those traditions cannot be marginalized taking them to be rudimentary and “not modern” instead they function as postulates for the innovation of newer cultural dimensions.

1.4 Strength of Idol Worship in Kathmandu

Doctors can cure diseases or may process on to an indefinite trial of medication but is it right to compare the depth of faith that a sick person puts onto an immortal supreme to a mere mortal human being who is another manifestation of a human being? Is the

respect given to the doctors and the reverence shown to the healing gods by the locals in same strength-strata? At one level, the lines and crowds in the hospitals and the hectic schedules of doctors and nurses may give a glimpse that the power of doctors and medicines are surely unmatched. Does that really mean or indicate the supremacy of Kathmandu's public belief upon doctors over the belief that is rested on the healing power of gods and goddesses?

A part-timer priest (who only comes in the morning at his will) sitting in front of the famous *Batuk Vairab* temple, near the Ashokan Stupa in Kumaripati in Lalitpur district, said: "What should I say? People come to this temple for number of reasons'. According to what he said the Generals in the Nepal Army come here and try to appease the god and ask for wish to become the Chief of Army. They organize *puja* for the same. Government officials come for promotion whereas students come for success in the exam. He added "I should not tell the names but I myself have assisted many Generals in their *puja*". *Batuk Vairab* is believed to be one of the gods who becomes pleased within short period unlike many gods and goddesses who need to be appeased through oblations and sacrifices. However, this is only one of the thousand reasons why people throng to temples. History has it that Kings held *puja* and organized *Yagyas* to become victorious in wars. Since time immemorial people in many parts of the world, have always been fascinated by the supreme power and dealt with the power with great reverence and dedication. Interestingly, the numbers of temples and gods inside Kathmandu Valley can itself add to highlight the devotion of people living here and their faith upon the unseen. This devotion is in fact beyond the capacity of history to track down the data and evidences for the same. However, with the long history of idol worship and the ritual performance, the research tends to take the aid of archaeological evidences.

The cult of worshipping idols in the Hindu rituals dates back to the Vedic Period whereas the practice of going to doctors and hospitals are just recent. The eldest hospital of the country, Bir Hospital was only built in during the prime-ministership of Bir Sumsher in the twentieth century. Before that the tradition was to take the sick to a shaman, apply local know-how or submit oneself to the faith of healer gods and goddesses. Much of the old generation locals in the Valley have not even stepped in the clinic. In this pretext, the belief cult is actually a stronger one over the doctoral methods. Taking the evidences from the Vedic exegesis- the four Vedas, *Rig, Yajura, Atherva and Sama*, one can take examples of many religious chanting, hymns and *archaas*. Ganesh Chettri and Ramchandra Rayamajhi state “Although there are multiple evidences of the word Image/idol/ *pratima* used in the *Rigveda*, the exact time when these idols started to be worshipped can’t be estimated for sure” (30).

On the other side, Max Muller, a historian who studied the Veda for 46 years says “the religion of *Vedas* knows no idols and Wilson says “the base for Vedic devotion was not idols but prayers and sacrifices”(Chettri and Rayamajhi 31). According to the writers, ‘Mc. Donald also states that there are no such examples of idols illustrated in *Rigveda* and Bloomfield also accepted the fact that the people in the Vedic period imagined a lot about the supreme forces but never made any idols or worshipped them” (31). A very popular god cited in the the *Rigveda* is the Indra- the god of heaven as worshipped today he is also the god of rain. Many hymns are dedicated to the Indra and a very famous but one controversial sentence in the *Rigveda* is “ *Mero Indra lai daswata gai ko badalama kasle kincha?*” or “Who will barter my Indra in return of 10 cows?” Cows were very valuable asset of Hindu societies and they remain as sacred and very often compared to a mother. Many researchers and experts have argued on this particular sentence from the *Veda* but to

go for the more likely it is the Indra mentioned for the exchange of 10 cows is necessarily an idol of god Indra. This simply indicates that idols were made in the Vedic era, which consequently relates to the prevailing cult of idol worship hence, can be said that idol worship was a popular belief cult even during the Vedic period. Since the *Rigvedic* time the ancient Hindu society saw idol worship.

In the eastern civilization, idol-worship can be traced as far as the Indus Valley civilization. The excavation by an Indian team in 1920 of Mohenjodaro and Harrapa (which now lies in Pakistan) about which Bangdel quotes, “a human civilization of 5000 years ago was brought to the limelight-many clay potteries along with clay idols with illegible scripts in them with strange animals engravings were found(6)” surely means that during the Sindhu Civilization in the ancient Indian subcontinent, idol worship was one part of belief ritual. It is very interesting to note the fact that at such times people didn't have weapons to shape stones or work with any metals therefore the easiest means to worship the supreme was to make idols out of clay. Even in this clay-period, (non- metallic period) idol worship was a ritual. This can simply justify how in Hindu society, since ancient period, idols and prayer practices were means to communicate with the supreme.

In ancient time, people would sit on one position in-group or individually to think about god. Later on, this developed as a meditation, which people started to be taken as the process to unite oneself with god. Experts of religion have come to an agreed point that the cave dwellers or primitive men would have developed a “fear” out of natural disasters like flood, drought, earthquake, storms or likely calamities and out of that fear the world's oldest religion Animism (nature-worship) may have begun. Later on to ease their process of union with god or the invisible, they began to sketch or form idols. Either the images and idols were imaginary or sculptured

according to the some literary sources religious books after the invention of language. Sussane K Langer as he talks about 'art' writes art as "not an intellectual pursuit, but is necessary to intellectual life; it is not religion, but grows up with religion, serves it and in large measure determines it (as Herodotus said, "Homer made the gods," and surely "the Egyptian deities grew under the chisels of sculptors in strangely solemn forms" (Locke, Gibson, and Arms 210).

The worshipping cult increased rapidly during the *Upanishad* and *Puranic* period. During these times, there were expensive and even brutal sacrifices of animals, birds and humans to attain religious reputation. One such example in the Kathmandu Valley is the temple of Naradevi, in a place called Naradevi which has a legend that kings made human sacrifices in this temple as the name of the temple *Nara* meaning humans and *devi* means goddess or goddess who takes human sacrifices. Francis B.Hamilton who had come to Nepal in the nineteenth century writes:

Once in twelve years the Raja offers a solemn sacrifice. It consist of two men, of such a rank that they wear a thread, two buffaloes, two goats, two rams, two cocks, two ducks and two fishes. The lower animals are first sacrificed in the outer part of the temple, and in the presence of the multitude their blood is drank by the masked Gots. After this, the human victims are intoxicated, and carried into the shrine, where the mask represententing Bhairavi cuts their throats, and sprinkles their blood on the idols. (33)

Hamilton does not mention the name of the temple but the surest assumption would be Naradevi. He did not see the ritual by himself but based it on his close investigation with the locals then. For the people who were poor or couldn't afford for

expensive *puja*, *yagya* or even couldn't do penance, or neither opted to take violence and animal sacrifice, "established a very different form of devotion – *Bhaktimarga* which developed the concepts of many gods and goddesses thus giving rise to idol-worship" (Chettri and Rayamajhi 33). They refer to Saint Panini who in 300 BC wrote in his *Asthadhyayi* mentioned about many idols and idol worship.

Many scholars are of the opinion that the cult of mother goddesses existed in some forms since the Paleolithic period. According to Mainali, "the female figurines of East and West Europe carved on ivory are the examples of Paleolithic female deities, which stipulate the prevalence of goddesses worship during that period"(45).

Dhanavajra cites the scripture in Lazimpat about the first historical king of Nepal Mandeva as " he who is benevolent and such a generous king that he can flow charity like water and for the sake of his mother Rajyamaati for her status and happiness has ordered to build a temple with the Tribikram (*Baaman*), who is the only one owner of the world and worshipped by all gods and sages"(3). This stone epigraph clearly states that idols were made in the times of the first historical king Mandeva.

According to Poudyal, " in the history of Nepalese idols Mandeva's Bishnubikranta of Lazimpat and Tilganga are the most ancient in terms of dates and scripts engraved in them"(11). Rana also slightly touches the cult of belief in the ancient people citing to the Harrapa and Mohenjo daro civilization as:

Numerous amulets were found among other hoards of jewels.

These amulets had designs of bird and animal motifs, with a far-fetched belief that the disease of the child could be transferred to animals. Most acceptable explanation would be that these motifs

delighted the children rather than having inherent magical design.(106)

Coming back to the idol worship and strength of the historicity of idol worship it is

better to take a reference of an Indian archaeologist R. V. Joshi who in 1939 had conducted an excavation on the pre historicity of Kathmandu but no such traces were found. However, Lain argues that Haadigaon inside Kathmandu may have been a pre-historic habitat. Lain referring to the river civilization of the Bagmati and the Bishnumati further adds “Kathmandu’s ambience has close resemblances to that of Egypt’s Nile Harrapa’s and Mohendojado’s Sindhu, Mesopotamia’s Euphrates and Tigris, China’s Huang Ho and India’s Ganges”(4). If Bangdel is correct or his assumptions are correct and indeed there were pre- historic people living in Kathmandu, then undoubtedly there was also an idol worshipping cult. Some sorts of faith or belief culture indeed would have taken its roots then. When there was idol, there was worship, when there was worship there was belief. The idols which are masterpieces that are worshipped and greatly revered in Kathmandu since the ancient time are Kaaliyadaman, Bishwarupa of Changu, Gajalakshmi of Chyasaalhati, Birupakcha of Pashupati themselves prove what worth idols were in the period and they had values and meanings in the society of Kathmandu. This, in turn can justify the worship- value.

1.5 Rituals and Disease

In many Nepalese societies, the concept of disease and bodily disorder was believed to be some consequence of evil spirit or that inflicted by fate. The basic concept was that- there is only one force to counter-part the evil spirits that is god. To make a vow to certain god would be one first thought the public would give. Or else if some evil spirits did not inflict the disorder, it would be because the god must be angry. Hence, something needed to be done to appease the god for the recovery. Therefore, people would generally go to a shaman. Shamanism is very popular in many hinterlands and villages of Nepal but in Kathmandu since ancient time.

The religious component in health and disease is one vital factor not only in the Nepalese people but in other many nationalities too. Julian Samora who claims about the pervasive nature of the religious factor in matters of health and illness in Spanish Americans writes, “being healthy is attributed to god’s beneficence and the source of illness is sought in the supernatural realm. Thus etiological factors, preventive or precautionary measures, diagnostic perceptions and therapeutic procedures are permeated with religious component”(314-323). Surprisingly, shaminism has not gained so much of the ground because the cities in the Valley are crowded by easily accessible gods and some have always been taken and revered as healing gods. In Kathmandu in many healing sites, the job of shaman is taken by the priests of the temple. The Priest of Sankata and Santaneshwor do play the role of shaman to mediate the gap between a sick and the lord. They try to propitiate god to repel the evil forces that are troubling the sick people.

The locals have developed a cult of going to the god and communicating with him directly. Khatry in his article “The Concept of Illness and the Role of Traditional Healing” writes:

Disease by traditional Nepali definition is not a microbiological phenomenon, this is external to the body system caused by some malign, malicious and malevolent power that makes an unwelcome entry into the body system and disturbs the normal balance causing host of sickness... In the cure process, the expert will try to release the captured essence of the body and put it back to function normally. (69)

Khatry describes the traditional Nepali definition of disease and he concentrates only on traditional healing systems and healers like Shamans, Black magic curer etc.to

whom he calls experts. However, in Kathmandu the real experts are the gods who have been curing people since long time back.

As rivers flowed by, more and more people came to settle in the Valley for opportunities and secured future hence bringing into here different culture, finally to mingle cultures. At present in a very fast pace more and more hospitals, nursing homes and clinics are thriving however, there is still a majority of people having deep faith upon healing powers of gods and goddesses. The worshipping performance is a unique feature of this Nepal Mandala. Subedi emphasizes:

One unique feature of the art of Nepal Mandala is that no form of art does exist here without projecting a strong form of performance. Here we are talking about the forms that exist in tangible forms. One can join dance during the festival; one can gently feel the downs of mythical half bird, half human garuda at Changunarayan temple; one can create a mood of laughter and fun oneself after liking at the monkeys shaking phalluses of gods on the struts of Bajrayogini temple... (19-20).

Subedi talks about performance in every art of Nepal Mandala but misses the real performance of the gods. This is where my project will take transition to glorify the healing gods of the Valley. For Victor Turner rituals are part of “social drama” that allow a culture to maintain a balance between what he calls structure and “anti-structure”. When talking about liminality and *communitas* he writes:

A mystical character is assigned to the sentiment of human kindness in most types of liminality and in most cultures this stage of transition is brought closely in touch with beliefs in the protective and punitive powers of divine or preterhuman beings or powers. (96)

He illustrates an example from the rite of passage performed by the Ndembu tribe of Zambia. When belief becomes the protective power of the *communitas* then the social culture takes a divergent way from the scientific arena, this is how the belief culture and indigenous practices of medication have spread its roots rapidly in the Kathmandu Valley.

II. Sites of Performance

With bewilderingly tracked history of idol worship, it would be very wrong to underestimate the strength of belief culture on gods and simply give way to the modern medication practices. The Central Bureau of Statistics “has recorded 4,408 people per sq. km in Kathmandu itself and 47, 67, 196 houses and buildings all over Nepal indicating the soaring number of houses in Kathmandu too”(Sharma 138-139). With this statistics, the famous adage of Colonel Kirkpatrick “Kathmandu has as many temples as many houses” (2) may go wrong but digging down beneath the superficial level, the faith of the locals upon the shrines and temples have not dwindled to a dramatic change. The huge congregation of the locals in many temples are the living witness to this grandeur cultural practice. Presten defines temple as ‘the supreme locus for puja’ and further mentions “as a home to the deity, the temple becomes a major focus for awakening the spiritual life in the community”(48). To perform special *puja* many people congregate in the main temple or take turn help of the concerned priests. For instance, one can find *Sankata* in Patan, but the main *Sankata* goddess is in New Road. There are many temples of Pashupatinath inside the Valley. Although at one level going to mute idols instead of going to hospitals may seemingly be epistemic violence, an act of anti- modernity and act of underestimating the learned doctors and surgeons, faith is beyond the act of answering. On the other level, Science alone is not a complete knowledge and it alone cannot boast of its achievement. It is too an acquired form of epistemology. In a modern city like Kathmandu it is good to have doctors and hospitals yet to the grandeur cultural integrity of the place it is not a hundred percent solution. Body is mysterious and it is

a cosmos that can hardly be conquered by Science. There are many healing sites in the city. Out of many healing gods and goddesses the area of the research are as follows:

1. Kaandeutathan, Kopundole, Lalitpur
2. Baangemudha, Asan
3. Jalavinayak, Kathmandu
4. Haarati, Syambhu Kathmandu
5. Surya Vinayak, Bhaktapur
6. Santaneshwor Mahadeva, Kathmandu
7. Sankata, New Road

The youngsters inclined to western method of medication may take it to be hilarious but the truth is that people have been healed by going to these temples. Ritual healing in form of idol worshipping is not a homogenous practice. Sometimes people go there directly and try communicating with the god and only if they think it necessary do they hire a priest to mediate between the patient and the healing god through some forms of rituals. Healing is in a way psychological. It is earning spiritual confidence. It is indeed garnering new strength. The temple is the stage. There are various actors. The priest may be in the role of an emcee and in one level, the idol is an actor behind the scene. The devotee may be an active actor or even sometimes an audience when the priest is meditating. Gerard writes, about temple- keeper's responsibility as to "maintain particular shrines to honour gods, receive gifts on their behalf, and often lead or assist in their worship [...]. Their primary responsibilities is the immediate welfare o their clients in their life" (114). Sometimes, religious texts are needed and the *puja* may go on even in a tantric manner, which normally depends on types of healing *puja* that is being performed.

Usually these forms of belief culture in the modern era are limited only to simple pains, aches or non-fatal disorders (except for exceptions). The healing power of deities is definitely grounded on doubts but one can find many people who say “I went to doctors had medicines and pain killers but without result. Then one of my friends advised me to come to this god and see, now I am ok”. The photos captured during the research would definitely open up a new cultural- lens to look at the locals of Kathmandu. Several questions ignite throughout: Is traditional method of medication or belief culture always nuisance or non-functional? Doesn't it have at least a space for scientific interpretation? Do superstitions always have adverse effect in the progress of a community? These are some of the questions that seriously need rigorous excavation. If we go back to the Mesopotamian Civilization, we can normally assume that gods' space were venerated by people through prayers in return of some benefits or longevity. In *When Rituals go Wrong* Ute Husken writes:

The religious attitude of the ancient Mesopotamians was characterized by the premise of *do ut des*. Man venerated the gods by prayers, ritual and sacrifice, and in return expected a long and successful life. The pious man, however, often had to suffer the experience that less god-fearing people had much more success in life and found themselves in a much better position without bothering to behave properly towards the gods. (43)

Any form of harmful superstitions should be ruled out but harmless cultural practices that are being handed out from generation to generations leave people spiritually happy and healthy by supporting to strengthen their hopes and attitudes. People in Kathmandu also go to the living goddess- *Kumari* who is a small girl manifested in the Newari cult as Goddess Taleju. She is also one of the most important healing

goddesses worshipped in the Valley. The tradition is so ancient that there is no clear history about its antiquity. In Berry's and Rashmila Shakya's (who was herself a *Kumari*) From *Goddess to Mortal* the writers logically clarify about this as:

The institution of Royal Kumari is a very old one in the Kathmandu Valley. No one knows really how old it is. Some say it goes back to the 13th century, but this was nearly two hundred years before the arrival of the goddess Taleju herself [...] Jaya prakash Malla who ruled Kathmandu from 1734 to 1768 AD, but sometimes it is Trailokya Malla who ruled the entire Valley from Bhaktapur, near the eastern edge of the Valley, between 1559 and 1615 AD. Since Jayaprakash Malla was the last Malla king to rule Kathmandu before the Shah conquest and there were also Royal Kumaris in the other two kingdoms of Patan and Bhaktapur, it is more likely to have been his ancestor. (25)

The Kathmandu locals' prayer methods and prayer -places may pick up trails of humor with seriousness or arouse interest with skepticisms to the onlookers; however as far as I know, this issue can be one of the interesting and significant approaches to justify the "locality" of Kathmandu's locals in the midst of glocal and translocal resources.

Nevertheless, it can be said that temples in Kathmandu were architectural show-offs for medieval kings, artifices to morally guide the public, compete with their rivals and more importantly to posit themselves as incarnates of gods. Later on Nepal adopted policy of exclusion so remained aloof from the western world or modernization until the throw of Rana oligarchy and the restoration of Shah Dynasty in 1951. During the secularly excluded period, people's habit of worshipping nature

increased dramatically also surging up the locals' superstitions and as there were no hospitals, traditional approaches of healing might have come into existence. As per the consequence, people started going to particular places to offer prayer for certain illness or disorders developing thereby deep faith on the power of gods. Alternatively, sometimes it may have come up as asking forgiveness to certain gods for mischief, which they thought, resulted to physical illness. One such example I would like to put up here is from the novel *Seto Bagh* by Diamond Shumsher, who is regarded as successful novelist in picturing real contemporary Nepalese society of Rana period in his most of the novels. One excerpt of *Seto Bagh* when the princess is sick goes as:

His Majesty expressed his thought of using the medicines of the doctor from British Embassy. Her Majesty did not agree with this. She exclaimed- 'in such illness there is no necessity of medicines. The god is not happy, we have to please him'. There was neither hospital nor doctor in Nepal.... Since many days Shamans and witch-doctors had been unsuccessful so the king's belief no longer rested on them. Her majesty had strong view that by taking medicines of the British doctor, they would invite ill- fate so she did not believe but instead hated him.

(My Translation 46)

The novel depicts reality that Kings and queens in the twentieth century Nepal and earlier period believed in the healing power of gods and goddesses, though sometimes they thought of western medication practice as the King Surendra Shah thought of. At present in a very fast pace more and more hospitals, nursing homes and clinics are thriving however, there is still a majority of people having deep faith upon healing powers of gods and goddesses. All these time and space give a cosmic quality.

In Kathmandu, these gods were and are options for:

1. ENT Doctor
2. Dentist
3. Dermatologist
4. Backache specialists
5. Speech Therapist
6. Sexologist
7. Consultant- Psychiatric

2.1 Kaandauta Thaan (= Ear God)

In Lalitpur district, a small town called Kopundole has a god of ears. The god is called *Kaandauta* and the place is called *Kaandauta Thaan*. *Kaan* is a Nepali word for ear so he is the god of ears. This god is said to eliminate pain and disorders related to ears. The place is located on the right side of a crossroad about 150m towards Pulchowk from the main Bagmati bridge that separates Kathmandu district from Lalitpur. The prayer place or the *Thaan* is a unique cultural site and very rarely visited by non-locals. Two big metallic ears are hung on a pole, and the massive ears are the symbolic entities of the shrine. At present an old man with a hunchback has been seen there who usually does the cleaning of the *Thaan*. My effort to talk to him regarding this god was not as fruitful as he has difficulty in uttering his feelings.

There are no walls on the shrine and unlike many important temples of Kathmandu, it is very plain and gives a wrong impression that it is not an important place of worship. In the middle of a small raised surface, there is a hole between two ear shaped stone structures where devotees offer flowers, coins and incense sticks. Eggs both raw and boiled are offered to the god. The site has neither any guardian deities nor structure like a temple. Devotees normally do *vaakal* (vow) when they have ear problems. The history of this prayer place is not so clear but a local woman

who the researcher met while she was circumambulating this shrine said that the ear of Sati had dropped here when the desperate Shiva during the *Satya Yuga* carried her corpse and wandered like a mad man. *Shreeswasthani Brata Katha* states about how “wherever Satidevi’s organ decomposed, a *peeth* , a pious place, originated itself [...] The first part to decompose was the anus which dropped in Nepal and a *peeth* Gueshwori originated”(97-98). This incident might have provoked the people since the ancient age to come here and worship. The open *thaan* depicts the antiquity of the temple and depicts the features of the medieval past. The twelfth chapter of the *Shreeswasthani Brata Katha* states that “the left ear decomposed in a place called Gokarna” (101). Gokarna is in another part of Kathmandu and the relevance of this place to bridge with the ancient place called Gokarna is itself a matter of further research. Anderson states “each of the sacred sites, in India, Nepal, Asham and Kashmir where the fifty two section of the Satidevi’s rotting corpse fell have become holy places called *Pithas*” (192). But when the research is so much centered upon belief practice, it is surprisingly existing in the ultra modern society of Kathmandu where there are numerous ENT clinics and doctors. This shrine is an option for ENT doctor!



A woman worshipping in Kaandutatha



The main prayer place: Two ear shaped stones and a hole in the middle with offerings

2.1.1A Descriptive Study to Keep a Record of Kaandeutathaana: During the extensive research, I found no any special mode of propitiating the ear-god, but definitely, the god is important and devotees offer eggs, coins, flowers and other common edibles. They circumambulate the small *puja than* and some even make vows to offer some common oblations and visit the god if their ear-complexities are removed. The shrine is mostly visited in the early morning. Some people nearby whom the researcher inquired about, said that the shrine used to be in the main road later in the road renovation time it was dislocated from its original place and established in the present spot. Surprisingly there is no main priest for the shrine which indicates that the shrine has been now transformed into a place where only

people with ear problems visit it while many others just bow down to the god from outside as they get past through.

2.2 Bangemudha (= Toothache god)

It is the piece of an ancient wooden stub resembling a shape of the molar, which is embedded with coins held by nails. Because of this wooden piece the place, itself is named Bangemudha meaning “non- straight wood”. When and how this tradition started, the history is unclear but it is much assumable that the history dates back to more than 200 years ago. Joe Bindloss, Frent Holden and others in *Nepal* under the heading “Quirky Kathmandu” just touches to write incompletely as “if you get a toothache during your trip, be sure to visit the old town’s toothache god-‘wood with coins’ in the south from Thamel to Durbar Square walk- a raggedly old stump of wood covered with hundreds of nails and coins”(130). The belief is that if a patient fixes a coin with a nail on the surface of the wood, the god experiences/ feels the toothache and helps him/her get rid of the ache. Some sort of innocent faith may help to eliminate pain in the children.

The site also does not have any structured temple so it is also an open god. People passing by this toothache god at least touch the wooden piece and bow down to this great healing god! The wooden piece may not have a long history as the coins engraved in them are all new coins. Where and how did the wooden stub come from is an issue that the researcher could not dig into as the shopkeepers and local businesspersons do not know about the facts. Should he be called a dentist god? At present, with so many coins nailed upon the wood, it is very difficult for a patient of toothache to find space to fix a coin.



The old wooden piece in the shape of a molar.



So many coins! So many people's faith!

2.3. Jala Vinayak (=Backache god)

There are four protective elephant gods or Ganesh in all the four directions of Kathmandu Valley. Among them, the one in the southern Valley, Chobhar, the god is called Jala Vinayak. On the back of the temple one can see a big stone which is part of the same stone that forms the main worshipping shrine of the temple. One local said-“if you are troubled by a persistent backache and no painkiller relieves you, then you may try erecting yourself on the stone” (of course your faith should be pure). This has no clear justification but according to what a local man said it may be that when people in the medieval period came through this way with loads of trading-commodities in their backs, this temple might have become the resting point. Someone with backache (because of load) may have felt relieved when he lay on the stone on his back.





A woman happy to lean on the healing- stone.

The researcher has seen similar stone, a bit smaller in the Indreshwor temple of Panauti. The stone was said to be Ahilya, ‘wife of saint Gautam who went under the curse of the husband’ (Lakoju 43) for not being able to differentiate the disguised Indra in the form of the saint Gautam, and became the victim of the former’s lust. The stone is also a part of the main temple, however there is no such belief of relieving oneself of backache there. It may be because the stone is quite smaller.

In Nepalese culture, it is not new that people have worshipped stones in *deurali*, *chautari* or any place out of their faith, fear of god or trust in the particular stone image for driving evil spirits away. Even in remote places people have been worshipping medium and big sized stones which had scriptures in them of some kings or royals, misinterpreting them as messages of god or idols. Therefore, it is not very unusual in Nepalese Hindu society to worship any unusual stone as gods. However, a

particular stone that has been taken as a healing god for backache since historical time still retains its importance in the twenty first century that depicts its medicinal value in the Kathmandu Valley.

2.4 Haarati temple (=Skin Goddess/ Goddess of Boon)

She is one of the most popular healing goddesses in Kathmandu Valley. In Newari, she is referred to as *Ajima* with the meaning Aji as *bajyee* or great grandma and ma as loving. Therefore, Ajima is someone who takes care of her juniors and loves all. Even in India certain goddess like Shitala was worshipped to cure children of smallpox. After the eradication of smallpox in Nepal Harati, turned someone in the traditional *Newari* community who was thought capable of curing healing any type of disease. Many staunch devotees often take vows of worshipping all the four gods and goddesses in association with Haarati when they come here first.

1. Haarati
2. Aakashvairav / Bhairav of Gyaneshwor (optional)
3. Tundaldevi of Hadigaon
4. *Mopata* or Bhatbhateni

A particular clan of Buddhacharya priests living in the periphery of the Shwaymbhunath take turn in worshipping the goddess one after other in a rotation basis each for a week. There are so many priests that one priest gets the opportunity only after six month. During the time of research the present priest of Buddhacharya clan told that people come to the temple for fulfilling their wish. For instance, I heard of a local man came to the temple with an incense packet, touched the goddess with the packet as he was going to set up a new business. Most probably, he will lighten the same incense each morning at his shop concretely believing for the success of his investment. Locals come to the temple with complain of hand pain, headache, *Deuta*

laagne (a disorder that locals believe because a god is unhappy) and every sort of minor and major bodily disorders. Locals also come here before leaving for a foreign country or after the failure of business. Sometimes the sufferers do not come themselves instead their guardians come for them. There are so many people coming everyday that there is a local club where they register their names in advance. A former priest Ashok Buddhacharya told that in earlier times people came as early as 4 am in the morning and there was a trend of placing clay pitcher (urn) to take queue in worshipping the deity, such was the popularity. After continuous disputes among the locals for taking turns a club was established to facilitate the devotees. Except chicken and pork, everything can be offered to her and the *puja* is done according to the Bajrayani cult.

Haarati(Ajima) also occasionally called Sitala is inside two tiered temple on the north western side of Syambhunath stupa. A legend says that formerly a demon Haarati turned herself to Buddhist and started doing something good for the betterment of the society. Michael Hutt writes:

She protects against epidemic diseases, and particularly against smallpox, which killed thousands in the Valley during several medieval epidemics. She is also worshipped for a wide variety of worldly ends[....] The goddess receives a constant stream of supplicants seeking protection for their children against infectious diseases, success in an examination, help in a law case etc. After the death of his favorite queen during smallpox epidemic at the end of the 18th century, king Rana Bahadur Shah had the goddess's image dragged from the shrine at Syambhu, desecrated with human excrement, and destroyed. (176)

Rana Bahadur often called one of the ill-tempered kings of Nepal, had poured his anger to the Haarati for not being able to cure his wife. Such was the intimate belief of the Kings and the people in that period but until today people still congregate here in a belief that skin disease can be cured. People also offer prayer to Haarati to cure smallpox of their children. This goddess is popular in some parts of India where Hindus have influences. James Presten who had researched about the goddesses in India during the period of 80's writes:

The goddess is also manifested as a disease deity when she appears as Sitala, goddess of smallpox, or Mangala, Goddess of fever. It is believed that these deities can both cause the illness and cure it. Complex rituals are performed to cool Sitala's wrath. Some devotees become possessed by her. Possession and trance are part of an elaborate ritual complex designed to control the spread of smallpox, which has taken so many thousands of lives in the subcontinent. (12-13)

In India too, the goddess Sitala was a popular deity to rid out smallpox and other minor ailments related to the skin. The temple of Harati in Kathmandu may be one of several manifestations of the goddess in a shared culture of Nepal and India. Even after the eradication of small pox the popularity of the god both in Nepal and India may be because of the locals' belief upon her power of healing bodily ailments.



People worshipping in Haarati temple

2.5 Surya Vinayak (= God of speech)

This is the place in the Valley where the ray of the Sun first falls before the rays enter into and illuminate the Valley. An apocryphal describes a king who wanted to build up a temple on this place so that the whole Valley gleams with positive energy. The temple of elephant goddess –Ganesh was built and the whole hill was named Surya Vinayak paying respect to Sun god -*Surya*. Surya Vinayak is another of the four protective Ganeshe in Bhaktapur district. His temple is on the top of a small hill about 500 ft. from the surface. Children who do not say a word besides crying or smiling but have reached the communicative age are brought here generally on Tuesdays or Saturdays.



A huge congregation in Surya Vinayak on Saturday



People worship the Ganesh temple before they get to Parvati temple.

The Ganesh/Surya Vinayak is worshipped first, and the children with speech disorders are taken to another temple just on its top which in fact is the temple of *Parvati* (Mother of Ganesh). The child is then locked in the temple alone for some time, the parents stay outside. For most of the cases, the child utters his/her first word probably out of fear of being alone. There are reportedly many cases of success. Hence the mother of Surya Vinayak has been regarded as the goddess of Speech *vak-mata* since the early medieval period. Nearby, a km away towards the north is another such place with the temple of Ganesh called Kamal Vinayak, which is also a prayer place where people come up with similar purpose.



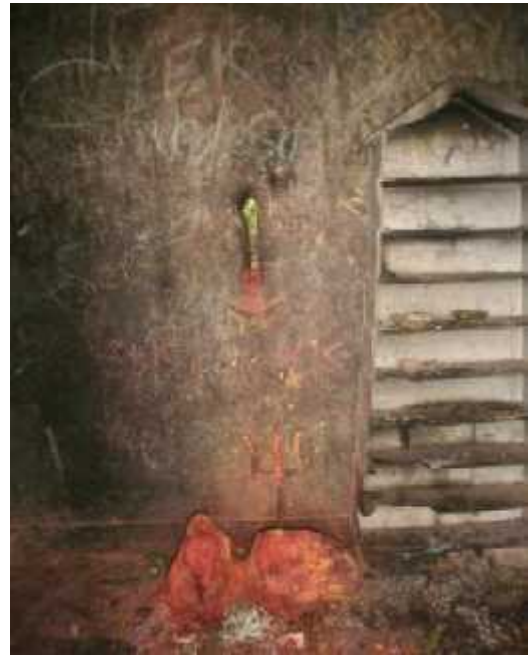
Surya Vinayak, Bhaktapur



Parvati temple – the speech god, Bhaktapur.



Kamal Vinayak , Bhaktapur



The shrine of Parvaati with whom the children are locked for some time.



A relative trying to please the child who is crying at being locked up in the temple

Sample Surveys

The researcher made a survey of number of people coming to the shrine, many of them stepping here half-heartedly just for ritual purpose. The researcher requested them for the information necessary for the research. The details are below:

Investigation 1.

Father's name: Rojan Shrestha ¹

Mother's name: Anupama Shrestha

Son (patient): Rejan Shrestha Age: 15 months.

Problem: He does not speak a single clear word/ only babbles or talks gibberish.

History: The father (Rojan Shrestha) was also brought to the same place by his father and mother, he does not, by the way remember the event, but confidently says that he believes in the power of the Speech God and his son would be able to speak clearly like him today.

Worship and Ritual

Firstly, the parents bought some offerings which are very sensitively chosen and encased in *tapari*(leaf plate). First they went to Ganesh temple, offered some *laddus* and wished their motive to come here be fulfilled. Later they came to the Speech god, prayed devotedly. The child was locked for some time under the assistance of the templecare-taker who generally wishes some money for his presence during the puja. He gave out a shriek and started crying during which he tried to speak out some words. The parents hoped that he would start talking soon.

¹. Interview taken with the couples on March 16 2012, Friday at 11: 30 am.



Rojan Shrestha, his wife and the son posing for the photo after the worship

Special ritual formality to be followed: They do not eat meat, egg or fish as advised by the caretaker of the temple asfter the worship. This may be taken as a small sacrifice to let the god know that they believe in the healing process.



Traditional sweet, *laddu* to please Ganesha



Offering for the speech- god



Mother-god or speech god, where parents come with their children.

Investigation -2

Father's name: Sugam Shrestha²

Daughter (patient): Grihalaxmi 1 ½ years old

Problem of the small girl: She says everything except *aama* (= mother), for which the mother is quite anxious.

They did not come up here with the purpose of just locking up the child with goddess *Parvati* but just attended the temple to comfort themselves as naïve believers.

²Interview taken with the couples on March 16 2012, Friday at 11: 30 am. A local caretaker called Deepesh Suwal was assisting the couple. He was not hired but he expected some money from the couple for his priestly help

They had come here from Narayanthan to attend a picnic and wanted to take chance of the unique ritual. The lush green hill also provides a retreat for refreshment and family- get together. This family is only one out of many families who attend the temple but believe in the outcome only half- heartedly. The touch of modernity, hospital and facilities have started to change people's perspectives which is both good and bad. This also proves that how science and modernity come to intersect although by true nature they intercept each other's arrival into their arena.



The parents along with the caretaker and the child do a brief *puja* before the actual part of locking the child with the goddess.



The mother sees her child from an opening as her child is locked with the goddess.

2.6 Santaneshwor Mahadeva (= Child Granting God)

Two categories of people go to some specified temples in the Valley to ask the god for offspring. They are:

- i) Couple who are capable of producing child but want either son or daughter specifically (most of the time son).
- ii) Couple who are impotent or somehow not able to reproduce but have the desire of parenting children.

Besides the Santaneshwor of Kathmandu near Hanuman Durbar Square, there is also another Santaneshwor Mahadev on a hilltop in Lalitpur that is also one of those temples of Mahadeva, which is gaining fame these days. The place is locally called Thaiba. According to many locals and present priest Ganga Gautam³, ninety-five percent of the prayers go answered as the parents who had come there for children and worshipped again come there after the success to thank him. The present priest Ganga

³Interview taken with the priest in Thaiba, Lalitpur on 12 Sep 2012, Sunday
Gautam said that the Santaneshwor Mahadeva which is mentioned in the Eighth Chapter (*Adhyaya*) of the famous exegesis “Swasthani” may be the same temple on this hill- top. A local woman the researcher met in the tea shop right at the foothill glorified the temple and said that locals have unshaken belief in the strength of the god and his capacity to grant children.

Worshipping Method

The worshippers do *Rudri-puja* or offer *Lakhbatti* as special puja-rituals. In the *puja* they offer *panchamitra* along with flowers, *belpatra* and other holy stuffs. To confirm that the god has taken the food they also offer paan (betelnuts) like that is done in any special ritual. According to the priest Ganga, during puja the shiva-idol/*lingum* should continuously be fed with *panchamitra* or *jala* (water offering). By coincidence when this researcher had gone to the temple for visit, a couple (probably of Indian origin) who hadn't had a child even after twelve years of marriage were having a serious-talk with the priest about the *puja*. For many reasons the researcher did not initiate a conversation with the couple, which could indeed have added some facts to the research. This was avoided in terms of ethical reasons. But in a tea shop this researcher talked to an old woman who said that she had herself advised a man without a child, who had wonderingly come to the temple with the problem. She said that she advised him to perform *Rudri* and after a year the man came to the temple and found her and the latter could not recognize the man. The man thanked her for the valued suggestion which indeed had worked and after the child was born, *paashni* (one of the birth-rituals when the child for the first time is fed rice/solid food) was held in the same temple premises. The old woman seemed to have no reason to lie this

researcher about the same. These types of stories are not strange either in the cities or in the village.

Mahadev's *lingum* often called *Shivalinga* is often bathed or washed in milk or water by females seeking child and taken as offering to be blessed with fertility. Males in Hindu Societies also worship this *lingum* asking for sexual stamina. An angry and lustful manifestation of Mahadeva called *Unmatta Vairabh* who is generally seen in a standing position with big and erect penis is an idol of worship for the sterile couples, especially women.

The women bow down to the penis with great reverence and sterile women often pour water over it and drink it with their cupped hands. In addition, hearsay goes that they even touch the water in their body parts and stomach to remove any evils of sterility. With all these practices, Mahadeva is surely a god who can be compared to a sexologist who is a child-granting god as the name literally goes as Santaneshwor Mahadeva. In this temple, couples may make a vow or even hire a priest for a day to accompany them for the ritual to appease the mighty god.



Sometimes a *lingum* is stray and people do not worship but make it a seat! (Beside Pashupatinath- Kathmandu)

2.7 Sankata temple (=Consultant-Psychiatrist)

Sankata is in a way a consultant psychiatrist to the locals because locals crowd here with the belief to rule out their day to day obstacles caused by the planetary positions. They come here with number of day to day tensions or problems and try to relieve themselves off the tensions. The temple in New Road is the most famous god in the Valley where more than hundreds of faithful devotees throng to- especially on Monday and Saturday with intense belief of ridding obstacles and problems off their life. The goddess, as the name goes is believed to take away the obstacles (*sankat*) from the lives of straunch devotees.

Investigation 3

The researcher has himself participated in one of the worshipping patterns called *Patro Puja* – an intense type of *Puja* which takes about 35- 45 minutes and the worshippers are allocated a special time in advance by the priest. The worshippers have special motif, which can be in advance told to the priest.

2.7.1 Requisites for the *Puja*

Pre- requisite: Certain sum of money (Rs.1000/- during the time of research) has to be given in advance to the temple committee as they have to prepare various food, alcohol, etc especially for the *puja*. The *puja* is not performed on Monday and Saturday as the temple often remains crowded during those days. A day is specified for the *puja* and the devotee is called usually in the evening. The devotee himself/herself can also bring fruits, alcohol, flower etc. according to the wish.

At this point of research, it would be wise to quote from the work by Nepal's one of the finest historical anthropologists, Prayag Raj Sharma:

The popularity of Sakti cult in Nepal saw proliferation of temples dedicated to goddesses of diverse names and forms in the Hindu and the Buddhist Pantheons all over the Valley.[...]Blood and alcohol became common terms of offerings in such worship. Samebaji, consisting of meat, soyabean, beaten rice, ginger, etc, considered otherwise impure in the Vedic mode of worship, is a special ritual food the Newars have been using in the rituals. (23)

The ritual of offering such victuals to the goddesses is actually a sharp deviation from the ritual of Brahmins and Chettris who consider alcohol as impure and do not offer to the gods. However when such people come to Kathmandu the myriad of such rituals actually engulf their preconceived notions and like this researcher who did not hesitate to offer those things to the Sankata.

Ingredients prepared by the temple:

- 1.*Kaalo bhuteko vatmas/* black soyabean
- 2.*Local rakshi/* local whisky
- 3.*Local jaand/* local beer
- 4.*Chiura/murai* (beaten and puffed rice),*choyalala* (buffalo meat), *anda* (egg), *samaybaji* (local set of Newari snacks), fried fishes
- 5.*Aalu tareko/* fried potatoes,
6. Fruits like banana, mango apple, coconut

2.7.2 Puja-process: The main priest enters the small puja-room of the Sankata temple where barely a person fits. As Erving Goffman states of a theatre actor, ‘When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them’ (61). During the process, I become the audience along with some outsiders who are curiously looking at the puja ritual and

enter the liminality and he becomes a performer, he too in a liminal stage. Goffman adds, “They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it...” (61). The priest has that supremely valuable gesture and pride of being able to bridge the gap between the goddess and me. He sits in a cross- legged position (*paleti marera—kamalāsana*) and places 5 metal antique iron vessels (as the name goes *panch patro=5* vessels) and the temple attendant=(his assistance) usually a lady who has prepared the food and offerings places all the required ingredients to his convenience. The priest tells the worshipper to touch the ingredients usually with right hand before offering them to the *patro*. This means that the specially prepared ingredients are offered to Sankata by the worshipper. Three of the *patros* are bigger than the other two. First, he puts the *chiura murai* and *aalu tareko* in the first one.

On the other *patro* he puts alcohol, *jaand* and other ingredients filling all the *patro*. He may not put all the ingredients brought by the attendant but it can be seen that the *patros* have all the representation of the ingredients. The worshipper is made to light a *batti* with his own hand. To mark the beginning of the prayer he lights the incense by the flame of the same *batti* , after washing his hands which may have been dirty touching clothes floor etc. the hand washing process is just a show (may look like pretention) but it is quite necessary to pay respect to the god. It may be a bit psychological.

The priest then takes out a book having *mantra* for the *paatro puja* and recites some chanting. The worshipper should cup his hand and at times, the priest gives him flowers and gives him chance to offer them to the *patro*. During the process, there is a

triangular relationship between the *patros*, priest and the worshipper in which the latter is outside the main worshipping arena.

2.7.3 My Impression after the Puja

Even as a research- student of the twenty first century and brought up amongst all the gadgets and appliances of innovations and technology, having all sorts of experiences of going to hospitals and being cured by tablets, capsules and doses of injections, I felt a tranquil state of mind after the *puja*. Was I being graced by the goddess? Was it psychological? Was tantric form of puja putting its effect on me, though I do not have any psychological disorders. Were my desires going to be fulfilled? Norman Vincent Peale in his bestselling book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, clearly states about the prayer-power. He justifies through examples to state: “Prayer power is a manifestation of energy. Just as there exist scientific techniques for the release of atomic energy, so are there scientific procedures for the release of spiritual energy through the mechanism of prayer” (57). The wine and alcohol that the priest offered to the goddess has been a tradition in many temples inside Kathmandu Valley as a method to appease the god.

This tradition has been prevailing in the human civilization since ancient time. G.S. Ghurey in his *Religious Consciousness* puts “libations, as distinct from drinks provided for the gods with their daily meals were poured from early Sumerian times and were of water, beer or wine, or the blood of sacrificial animal” (8). He further quotes Kant who tells that “redemption is the supreme concern of all religions and that morality, that is the struggle against the principle of evil waged by a man intensely conscious of his need of redemption is the root of all religion” (257). The instinct of human beings at harsh times itself manifests in the form of redemption and seek someone to bestow the hopes and faith upon. That “someone” many times in the

place like Kathmandu is definitely gods and goddesses. There are reasons to believe on the miraculous aspects of prayer mechanism though apparently it seems to be a bit psychological.

2.8 Ritual Performance: Core Values of Reassurance

People just march into the banner of Science and underestimate the local knowledge. Appadurai when dealing with the issues on nationalism, under the heading of *The Production of Locality* writes “one of the most remarkable features of the ritual process is its highly specific way of localizing duration and extension, of giving these categories names and properties, values and meanings, symptoms and legibility”(180). The meaning and categories supplied by the Kathmandu’s locals to such prayer places and the legitimacy these places are going to gain in the generations to come is merely a symptom of Kathmandu’s locality. Kathmandu takes in its big pouch both science and tradition. Although the capital city is again gaining ground on traditional medication practices and healing power of gods and goddesses, the society here simultaneously believes in doctoral methods too.

When there are developmental works and towering infrastructures, there are obviously various counter- parts. Pollution, population growth and different sorts of chemicals from sources of developments give rise to diseases. Newer forms of diseases and ailments are introduced every year with upcoming newer threats. With so much of developmental works going on around, Kathmandu is no different place. No matter how much the literacy rate has surged or health consciousness has become a driving force in the city dwellers, still the number of sick people and the number of diseases are also increasing in parallel. This is the main fact that in the recent years Kathmandu has seen and heard of many hospitals and private health centers. This means that the demand of doctors and medicines have tightly gone up. The trend of

getting Doctoral and Nursing degrees has not subsided. Instead, they are on the dramatic rise.

The doctors have become god-like figures who are entrusted with great reverence by the public. They can identify the disease; spontaneously say about the cause of the disease and with scientifically proven calculus can even predict the death date. The sick as well as the members of the family of the sick are assured and reassured by the modern doctors and nurses. But does that mean that people in Kathmandu have started to lose faith on healing power of gods and goddesses?

The doctoral amenities too are not very far away from prayer practice. Most of the renowned hospitals, nursing homes or clinics have at least a small temple with a deity in their periphery not only for patients or their relatives but for doctors too! If not always, in such contexts of subjugated knowledge, Lietchy is right when he claims “Kathmandu’s middle-class public is local even as it draws on translocal resources to ideologically and materially construct itself” (148). At one side, the cities and the village are susceptible to changes and liberal to the modern and postmodern schools of thoughts but the locality of these cities is an emblem and beyond a surface understanding. There are almost no hospitals where there is no any idol of one or the other gods and goddesses. This associates the hospital’s administration trust upon gods healing power or at least an opportunity of psychological realm to the patients and relatives. This proves that even in the ultra-modern society of the capital city, local knowledge, local belief and local resources will continue to pose themselves proudly especially it is true when we talk about local culture.

Science + Tradition (Remix of Belief- Culture)



A temple in front of Patan Hospital



A prayer place on entrance of Alka Hospital, Lalitpur

Rivers flow by never to return again, people come to this blessed land and fade away like withered flowers, leaving no trace except for some, everything changes here into shredded bits but festivals that were celebrated several hundred years

ago still find their way through the hectic schedules of the city dwellers; mileu remains the same when puja and worships still retain themselves as one of the prime activities of the locals here. Locals in the Valley never seem to be tired to go to temples, even if they do not have time to circumnavigate a temple in the morning, the evening spares some time for them to visit the desired temples. Appadurai is correct to define rituals' features "of giving names and properties, values and meanings, symptoms and legibility to duration and extension" (180). The meaning and categories supplied by the Kathmandu's locals to such prayer places and the legitimacy these places are going to gain in the generations to come is merely a symptom of Kathmandu's locality.

Many people do not want to compare scientific methods to local know-how, nevertheless local knowledge have worked out whenever science has failed. People just march into the banner of Science and underestimate the local knowledge. Kathmandu takes in its big pouch both science and tradition. It is true that Kathmandu is a city of temples and often interpreted as "Land of Gods". Why did gods and temples become so important in Kathmandu?

Why did people tend to develop such profound and concrete belief- culture? The history has undocumented many of such issues and at present we have no option rather than to assume. In ancient times, the kings and the rich people performed *Tula Daan* as part to complete their vow. The custom was very popular inside Kathmandu Valley and the neighboring states. Nowadays it's impossible to imagine such generous vows but time to time locals offer gold, silver, diamonds or other valuables generously which can be justified by the *vandaars* (store) of various temples that often show how rich are certain temples.

*Tula Daan*³ was often offered by the royals and the kings in their presence. A special puja is done for hours or days and then followed by the main part where the donor for whom the puja is done sits on one side of a colossal Manual balance(like weighing pans used in shops) and on the other side of the balance, valuable materials like gold, silver, diamond or rice or some sorts of stuff are kept until both pans balance in equilibrium, especially done by kings in ancient time. History has tracked down records of such practices. People all over Nepal make vows to different gods and goddesses to rule out some evil or for betterment of something. Many times such vows involve animal sacrifices like cock, goat, sheep, or if the god is Ganesh, it's the offering of 108 *laddus*.

Especially in and near Kathmandu, where there are numerous popular gods like Dakshinkali, Shovabhagawati, Indrayani , Pashupatinath the number of vows are multiplied multifold. It is true that Kathmandu is a city of temples and often interpreted as “land of Gods”. Why did gods and temples become so spatial in Kathmandu? Why did people tend to develop such profound and concrete belief-culture? The history has undocumented many of such issues and at present we have no option rather than to assume.

³*Tula Daan* is a special offering of valuables to temples as per the weight of the donor. It is somehow out of practice now but was recommended in cases where an individual suffered from such diseases that were not curable.

At this point, it would be better to include the reference of a temple called Atko Narayan temple which is used to identify the sex of an unborn child. Ankit Adhikari in *The Kathmandu Post* writes:

Taken as a replica of Bhaktapur's Changunarayan temple, Atko Narayan, where lord Birinchi Keshav Narayan (an incarnation of Vishnu) is worshiped, is also believed to have a special power to identify the sex of an unborn child. The process of sex-identification goes this way. Raw mustard oil is poured on the head of a pregnant woman facing the idol of Lord Vishnu. It is said that if oil flows downward the body through left, the unborn will be a boy. (2)

Pregnancy is seen as a matter of great pride among the married woman that supposedly gives a social status to her. Her fertility is also praised and greatly revered within and outside the family. In relation to the Atko Narayan temple Ankit also adds to point out the significance of the temple in the royal class in the past. He adds, "according to Bharatlal Shrestha, chairman of Atko Narayan Preservation Committee, even pregnant women from the then royal family used to be brought here to identify the sex of unborn. This tradition is still alive among the locals" (2). When modern ultra video facilities are easily available which cost a little money but ensures the sex of the child, it is nearly incredible that the locals administer this traditional way. Pregnancy is thus a matter of great pride to the Nepalese woman that gives her a separate identity. Simon de Beauvoir writes:

In men's eyes- and for the legion of women who see through men's eyes-it is not enough to have a woman's body nor to assume the female function as mistress or mother in order to be a "true woman". In sexuality and maternity woman as a subject can claim autonomy; but

to be a “true woman” she must accept herself as the Other. (Hazard Adams 1000)

In Nepal and even in the capital city Kathmandu where this research is centered upon, Simon’s claim seem to be false because in order to be a true woman here, she need not be the “Other”, she has to be able to give birth to a child and prove her fertility. She becomes a true woman when the child she gives birth to is a son. That is why temples like Atko Narayan and Santaneshwor are scattered around the Valley.

Comparing hospitals to the healing temples, the devotees come as the patients with complaints and disorders. The pre- healing atmosphere is a bit perplexing for the devotee because they have lots of doubts and discomforts. They would have heard of success from their friends and relatives about the state of being healed or cured.

Generally, before going to worship the faith seeker would have bathed or at least cleaned up himself to attain the state of physical purity. S/he would have decided whether there is need of the temple priest or not. Depending upon the condition of severity, the faith- seeker would be assisted by parents, guardians, friends or relatives. The priestly assistance would be a bit expensive but the state of severity would decide that. Nevertheless, with the assistance of the priest there are rooms to be assured that the god has been appeased.

In most of the healing temples until there is an occasion or a festival there is no need of standing in a queue. The doctor’s prescription in the hospital herby can be compared with the *tika*, and offerings or other part of oblation or libation that he has offered to the god during the *puja*. If the *puja* is not performed for bodily ailments and done for wishes, the wishes asked to god should not be shared with others until they have been fulfilled. A faith-seeker feels positive about his performance and may

develop a profound reverence for the culture, which assures him at least for the moment.

The core values of pre-healing circumstances lies in the underlying factor that how a society takes physical deformities and incapability or some specific bodily impairments and inefficiency like that of pregnancy, deafness, skin diseases etc. Since ancestral time Santaneshwor Mahadeva has been playing a role of assurer for those women who failed to conceive. After a woman is married, the ability of bearing a child has been seriously looked upon. Infertility or sterility are still condemned bitterly and looked upon as a disgrace or curse. Judith Butler quotes Simon Beauvoir's claim that woman is 'historical situation' and her body suffers "cultural construction not only through conventions that sanction and proscribe how one acts one's body, the act or performance that one's body is, but also is the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally conceived"(191). In a way in Nepalese society, Simon's version of woman as a cultural body is accurate.

In the past, when a married couple could not bear a child or a woman could not conceive, then they would be harshly condemned in front of others on occasions or festivals by the elderly people and the talk of children would humiliate them. Today we have In -Vitro methods (Test -tube method), sperm donation trends or curing sterility and related problems of both men and women. In the past when there was no access to doctoral methods, the only option was to go to temple gods and goddesses. In such a woeful scenario, the importance of Santansewhor Mahadeva would have heightened. The condition was even worse for the woman because sterility was seen as women's problem and there were many cases in Nepalese society of divorce or remarriages.

Thus, after marriage, every woman's desire and concern was to conceive and have her bulged stomach displayed to ease up her pride and maintain the feminine prestige. This would give her enough prestige both in and out of the house and later on this prestige would even surge up if she had a baby boy. Thus, Santaneshwor Mahadeva was also a god who became popular as son granting god. In such circumstances, the best option for a woman would be to go to the mighty Mahadeva, make vows, offer flowers and food, and worship him to propitiate/appease and make him happy at last. The Mahadeva himself is the *shiva lingum*, which is the symbolic representation of the union of male and female.

Analyzing from one aspect, the temples of Mahadeva and *shivalingum* became a consoling place (a space of consolation) for the then women who were accused for their sterility. The women also came up there to the forefront for *santansukha* (child- fulfillment) and openly worshipped the god and their coming to the forefront can be taken as one of the elements of women empowerment through religion or belief. Even in today's time, Santaneshwor Mahadeva has retained such charms and popularity which clearly indicate the success of prayers made by those innumerable unknown women and men from the past or else his popularity would have faded. Thus, the psychological and medicinal value of the mighty god cannot be neglected at all.

The healing temples that were discussed earlier are still the centers upon which the innocent faith of large public rests upon. The aroma of incense, the ringing of bells on the poles and doors by the people and the ringing of the bells on the roofs by the will of the wind have been the surviving witness of the people's faith upon the idols. The hymns and chants of the temple priests, the flower and libations offered to the gods are the sources of aestheticism too.

The sublimity of the ambience in and around the temple is unexplainable and certainly beyond words. These are places whereby passers-by rests, poets can write poems and a storywriter finds real characters of their tentative stories. These are the places where researchers from all sectors, anthropology, literature, or performance studies find issues on variegated topics. Relating to the ambiances of temples around Kathmandu Valley, Abhi Subedi quotes "monkeys shaking phalluses on the struts of Bajrayogini temple" (2006: 20). Subedi certainly misses to write about the wandering dogs and the playful children (both homeless and with home) who go on collecting the bananas, apples or coconut pieces offered by the devotees to the idols. They would feel lucky if they find coins. The obstinacy of some children begging for some favor or money, the gamblers in the corners playing cards or marbles, college boys and girls dating in the plinths of temples, astrologers both fake and genuine making money by advising the devotees to appease god in one way or the other are all the sources of aestheticism and cultural philosophy.

The ambience of Kaandauta in Kopundole may not be such charming as the shrine lies on the side of busy road yet the value of the shrine to console the victims of ear-problems and to suppress their fear of being deaf should not be underestimated. The space given to the temple in the middle of the side/branch road that meets the main road even in the road extension campaign during the present prime-ministership of Baburam Bhattraï signifies its importance in the modern period. The temple is a bit claustrophobic but the function the shrine has been playing in the modern society of Kathmandu is important from psychological and medicinal point of view.

In the past, deformities were also taken as curse. Blindness, handicaps deafness and skin diseases were part of social taboo. This social inequality to the sufferers may have given way to the temples like Kaandauta and Haarati. The temple

of Sankata which is the busiest temple among the seven healing sites discussed in the research plays a role of consultant psychiatrist and by supposedly removing the effects of planetary movements on the sufferers. The toothache god- Bangemudha by which the whole area is also named Bangemudha is another such shrine of assurance for the patient suffering from severe toothache though the wooden stub has no proper encasing by walls and other amenities that are very common to other temples. In the same way the backache god and the speech god also has that proper functionalities to rid the sufferers from being depressed and condemned in the society. The speech god has been the source of great relief to those people raising up mute or stammering children.

In the same way, the belief and faith define ethnicity of a tribe or people living in particular geography. In the context to the healing practices, there is some sort of similarity in the Otjiherero speakers in Africa. The tribe too used herbal medicines, massage and specialist healers. Marrison Wallace in his *Making Tradition- Healing History and Ethnic Identity*”, writes, “this article has explored the ways in which indigenous healing has operated to build a sense of ethnicity at one level” (371). Wallace has put that the recognition of self and unity has been promoted among the tribesmen due to such indigenous healing process. The development of medicine and modern medication does not have such function in such tribes where locality is so much a concern. He writes how “the historians and anthropologists acknowledge that the coming of (western) biomedicine, the colonial state and the missions may have changed the nature of such healing but have hardly dented its popularity” (371). In the same way, Kathmandu is punctuated and venerated by so many hospitals and health centers but the popularity of temples has not been affected to the slightest. Hospitals are limited to laboratory tests and physical dissection, operations and

surgical conducts. Doctors and Nurses are also mere humans who just use their knowledge in the body of fellow beings and prescribe medicines. They can calculate the maximum number of days a cancer- patient can live up to, they can forecast the birthday of a baby and know about the sex before they are born, they can alleviate the bodily disorders and relieve the patients but even then, they are limited. They are limited in a sense that they depend upon their acquired knowledge and experience. In a place like Kathmandu, healing and curing oneself is a different phenomenon in some cases. It is surely beyond the reach of scientific discourse. Although it is not as simple as a battle between Science and Religion, the strength of people's belief are worth researching in terms of performativity.

III. Significance of Belief Culture

Idols of healing gods and goddesses are mute but not deaf. Many times the locals' prayers have been answered. The prayer practices and worshipping modes in the ritual forms so displayed by the locals of Kathmandu cannot be just termed as superstitions and rudimentary forms of subjugated knowledge. It needs a different lens to look upon these practices; the lens of ritual performativity through which subjugated knowledge is valued and the age-old beliefs are not neglected in the process of being intoxicated with modernism. Kathmandu is such a place where global changes have to first come through the local space of understanding to have their roots expanded. Not a single thing is global here without being glocal. The intangible festivals, rituals along with the tangible temples are the living witnesses of the significance and the meaning of these prayers and belief cult that the locals here haven't following since thousands of years back. The rituals have their essence and core social values and have their own form of reputation in the cultural space of Kathmandu Valley. These rituals have some worth-mentioning values from religious, cultural, psychological, philosophical and medicinal point of views. If there are any doubts that do gods and goddesses really cure or are these all forms of rituals, which will fade away, with the interference of westernization and modernism? Then the potentiality of the prayers and the oblations are misunderstood because here the result is something not what one can get after taking a tablet or a dose of medicines. The ritual belief is not a game as Levi Strauss puts:

Games are disjunctive because through the contingent events of intentions chance and talent they transpose an initial symmetry of the players into a distinction between winners and losers at end. Ritual by contrast conjoins because even though asymmetry is postulated in

advance it ends by making all the participants pass to the winning side.

(32)

Thus unlike games, which need chance talent and practice, rituals, are higher in the hierarchy because they are part of the society and there is no case of losing. Even if the prayers are unanswered, there is always a hope and hope surely is healing. The potentiality of the prayers offered to gods is actually the indefinable interplay of their belief and coincidence. Potentiality of anything is just a secondary consequence, which I have lately come to realize. Primarily there is some power of co-incidence. Therefore, gods are someone invisible, invincible and powerful who are active to create the positive co-incidence. Nobody of the devotees during the interviews and the research I met said that s/he was not satisfied with the god's grants or totally disbelieved upon the power of gods. Still as a citizen of twenty first century, it would at times be a work of absurdity to conclude that gods can heal and modern medication has lesser space in Kathmandu. This would be totally misunderstanding of the chief essence of the issue raised so far. When there are sizeable percentage of people who go to both doctors and gods, when there are considerable people who come to temples on daily basis with their bodily complaints, when there are indeed people who at least believe that their bodily disorders have been healed by gods or at least believe that if prayers and oblations and ritual process go right gods are concerned to heal them, then what can be the meaning of potentiality? Therefore, these prayer practices have cultural, psychological philosophical and medicinal value in the *Nepal Mandala*. The worst part for a devotee would be to assume that there is no god indeed, when for all his/her life s/he has been worshipping someone called god. God is also an incomparable belief. So far then, it can be analysed as:

Potentiality of God's grants = Mysterious interplay of local's belief + Co-
incidence (granted by gods).

Believing upon god is something not like how people believe on certain teams or players on their capacity or skill. There can never be the debate of who wins or who loses by going to temples or by offering oblations and libation to the deities. The belief pattern in this type of cultural space is very different and can be agreed with Levi Strauss where in his *The Savage Mind* says, "games are disjunctive because through the contingent events of intentions, chance and talent, they transpose an initial symmetry of the players into a distinction between winners and losers at end" (32). He further contrasts games and simple form of recreations to ritual saying that, "ritual by contrast, conjoins because even though asymmetry is postulated in advance it ends by making all the participants pass to the winning side" (32).

Small things make difference. The power of small thing or factor creates incomparable difference. In *Antarman ko Yatra*, Ghimire writes- "Water does not boil in 99⁰ C. but boils in 100⁰ C. The steam of boiled water runs the engine of trains: it does multiple miracles. The factor that boils water is that last 1⁰ C" (My Translation 8). Actually if we think in depth, the power of the last 1⁰ C. is mysterious, undefinable and unemployable. We cannot question its potentiality, nevertheless, we don't have the proof that the last 1⁰ C. boiled the water and again without that last 1⁰ C, Science has proven that water does not boil. Similarly, our birth is not the result of our potentiality of outnumbering millions of our brothers and sisters (semen). We became the first to swim into the mother's womb not because of our capability to swim faster than the millions of others. It is just the matter of luck or should I say co- incidence that we were in the first row. There were chances that we would simply end up in bathrooms- masturbated or ducked up in condoms or simply splashed on bed sheets.

Then what would be the question of our potentiality of taking a life-form? Even in these simple instances the role of co-incidence can't be undermined. But what is co-incidence is, in fact the grant of god or gods that we comfortably or uncomfortably take as belief- culture.

The whole world uncomfortably believed in the forecasts of an octopus in the FIFA World Cup 2010. The same world believed in the fake apocalypse of 21 December 2012. No community is free of superstitions or belief- culture. Great scientists and doctors touch the image of their god, or make a gesture of respect before an important project. Some sort of super power either in forms of healing or forecasting will keep on surviving even in a hi-tech society. Then in such juxtaposition, the question of potentiality of Kathmandu's locals' prayer is a mere jingling act into the web of odd confusions. The positive hopes and attitudes brought forth by these unique healing places and the constructive urge of every generation to instill such power- play of gods and goddesses into their psychology have to be seen as rational and advancing civic philosophy in this selfish and less spiritual age. To conclude, it is a visible truth that Kathmandu's locals will always be successful to spiritually construct the generations to come through their belief-culture; therefore, the prayers they make to the gods and goddesses have medicinal , cultural, historical psychological and performative valuesand dimensions.

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