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Ritual as Resistance against Divine Power in Abhi Subedi's *Bruised Evenings*

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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Buddhi Baral has completed his thesis entitled “Ritual as Resistance against Divine Power in Abhi Subedi’s *Bruised Evening*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from October 2018 to July 2022. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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LETTER OF APPROVAL

This Thesis entitled " Ritual as Resistance against Divine Power in Abhi Subedi's *Bruised Evenings*" Submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Buddhi Baral has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the drama Bruised Evenings by Abhi Subedi, a modern Nepali playwright and argues how the ritual performance becomes instrumental in the socio-cultural transformation of human society. It further explores the significance of ritual performance to facilitate the agency essential to institute progressive changes in socio-cultural dimension of society. It argues that through the contrasting portrayal of divine and human characters, the playwright reflects upon the growing conflict between classical and modern times and its perception on cultural identity, equality, individual liberation, justice and power. With human characters such as Elder and a young merchant who demonstrate against the hegemonic tendency of deities, the celebration of Newari ritual performance offers a platform for the oppressed voices to challenge the hierarchical structure of socio-cultural relations between divinity and human. In order to consolidate the argument, the research borrows insights from the theory of Performance Studies by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner and explores the ritualistic dynamism of Newari cultural performance. Likewise, it is further accompanied by Michel Foucault's concept of resistance in order to probe into the resisting power of ritual performance for social change. The paper concludes with the finding that cultural celebrations such as Newari festivities are not only aesthetic events for mere purpose of entertainment but they also contain the element of activism to bring about changes in socio-cultural landscape of human society.

Key Words: Ritual performance, Resistance, Power, Liberation, Cultural transformation

This study makes a literary investigation into a drama entitled *Bruised Evenings* authored by a modern Nepali playwright, Abhi Subedi. It aims to probe into the text in the light of ritual performance in order to argue that ritual performances are avenues for socio-cultural transformations in the society. Likewise, it further analyzes the strength of such ritual performance in facilitating the agency to the individuals or community for instituting changes in the fabric of human society. Breaking away from the conventional designation of festivities as mere aesthetic events, the researcher intends to explore the activist nature of these rituals and their influential impact for altering the socio-cultural order. Premised in the backdrop of Newari festivity of Jatras, dances and singing, the researcher examines clash between classical and modern times through a contrasting portrayal of human and divine forces. Troubled by the socio-cultural disorder as resulted by the hegemonic distribution of power relations between deity and human, the drama employs the aesthetic means of ritualistic festivals and invites a carnival atmosphere where the suppressed human beings rise to resist against the injustice, inequality, hegemonic attitude and hierarchical power relation. In order to validate the argument that the ritual performances in various cultural forms function as an instrument for resistance and regeneration of new socio-cultural interests, behaviors, thoughts, orders and practices, the researcher borrows insights from the theory of performance studies by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner followed by Michel Foucault's idea of resistance.

The research paper attempts to explore social and cultural transformation with the help of agency from the conflict between fossilized and transformative society through ritual performance in Subedi's *Bruised Evenings*. As playwright, Subedi usually includes multiple issues like female consciousness, culture, politics, religion, etc. in his literary writing. As a popular figure in the field of Nepali theatre and performance studies, Subedi gives life to his works through the depiction of social problems. It makes his works more realistic. He not

only projects social issues but anchors the necessity of progressive thoughts and actions in settling them. The text under study echoes the same spirit of his writings. In the drama *Bruised Evenings*, he amalgamates two eras: classical as well as modern. Abhi Subedi claims, “I chose to use whatever space was available to me by speaking something about the confluence of the bygone times and human feelings in the visible cultural forms. I created a persona, who trespasses several dramatic territories of Gods and human beings to speak” (Subedi 16) and talks about Newari rituals along with the perception of modern people, cultural hegemony, voices of suppressed group and so on.

The researcher, here, analyzes the role of protagonist, Elder and a young merchant, Traveller who are key figures for socio-cultural transformation. Whole project revolves around social change with cultural values, cultural hegemony, and significance of performance and also shows how a young outsider can change cultural perception as well as he becomes rescuer for the victimized people. The valorization of ritual values is also the subject to be analyzed and it is to be balanced rather than being blindfold. Dramas are written and performed for multipurpose: reading, watching, acting, etc. So, dramas have to be more realistic than other genres. The characters in drama are performing and revolting simultaneously so the ritual becomes a place for unity.

The researcher tries to show the significance of ritual performance in order to accumulate the voice and celebrate the victory over divine power for human dignity as well as the human agreement with the divine power. Social science talks about functionalism of the society as a young traveller contributes for human dignity. As we consider the happenings in our life as performance, the drama also carries social issues in a way of performance. So, socio-cultural transformation is only possible with the spirit of humanism as the protagonists, Elder and Traveller fight against cultural hegemony, divine law by situating the state law and spirit of humanism at center. The society and culture has death of

such people who has heroism and dare to challenge the established beliefs and values for welfare of society as well as socio-cultural transformation.

Society has hierarchy and people are categorized as powerful and powerless in terms of culture, caste, gender, religion, etc. even in the 21st century. The drama, *Bruised Evenings* is also a product of such society. In the play, there is conflict between divine power and human power where protagonist dares to fight against and also motivates rest of the people to fight. We have general perception of such society and are also known about the contribution of the literary products for the reformation and transformation. The play is about perpetrators and victims, inside and outside force for resistance. Going forward, the researcher attempts to prove the hypothesis that unification of the ordinary people under the agency of Elder's revolution and Young traveller's contribution for the liberation from the exploitative divine and kinship power through the means of ritual performance seems to suggest the value of rituals in social and cultural transformation of the society. The protagonist, Traveller, enters in Bhaktapur city from outside and becomes hero due to his heroic contribution of rescuing the victim of the city, ill-fated Princess and Elder heightens awareness and collective consciousness for the rest of the people in order to resist against the hegemonic and abuse of power by deities that make the human suffer for no transparent reason. The primary objective of the research is to show the potential power of ritual performance as an art that can help to transform the socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices. It is carried out by depicting the successful resistance of human-representing characters against the authoritative power of the so-called divine powers like God and Goddess or the kingdom as the symbolic representation of God and Goddess. However, the research will not depend on the theatrical performance but rather the scripted text. Thus, dialogue more than action will be the textual basis for the analysis of the text.

Although the disciplines such as theatrical art and drama performance studies have had a tremendous recognition and implication in western world scoring a long history of its tradition, Eastern countries like Nepal began to recognize and practice them in recent decades. Yet, street drama has remained a strong tradition. In a country where people cannot read, street dramas were adopted as the only means of reaching the audience through street performances. Such street dramas couldn't become more dynamic as popular forms of western theatre such as Forum theatre which are socially-engaged. Such street dramas, given their local occurrence, failed to attract the academic attention. Hence, they were less discussed in the intellectual and academic community. However, street drama as a conventional and typical Nepali theatre played a vital role in socio-political revolution of Nepalese society in the past as a famous Nepali theatre artist and director Yubaraj Ghimire asserts, "[i]n the early years of twentieth century, theatre came out of closed room. So it was named street theatre. But street theatre, in modern theatre, was initiated with the objective of political transformation" (88). Modern Nepali theatre dates back to the time when the songs, dances and musical performances were accessible cultural forms for the resistance against the oppressive regime. In her research project on "Dramas of Development: Theatre for Development or the Development for Theatre?", Monica Mottin studied the historical evolution of Nepali theatre. Attributing the advent of Modern Nepali theatre to the political parties that in the past had widely used cultural programs based on the songs, dances and drama in particular during elections, Monica discovers the inception of modern Nepali theatre as:

The beginning of modern Nepali theatre is linked to the streets, in particular to the theatre movement that sprang in the 1980s, during the Panchayat rule, with strong anti-establishment and pro-democracy identity. It was a theatre with a fervent commitment and a political mission, in which theatre artists took serious personal

risks publicly defying the repressive system. When no other form of public contestation was accepted by the Panchayat regime, the disguise triggered off by theatrical performance managed to create temporary spaces of resistance and contestation. (7)

In the light of Monica's study of history behind the birth and growth of modern Nepali theatre, it suffices to conclude that modern Nepali theatre emanates from the traditional acts of street dramas unlike academically-instituted western theatre forms. Despite its conventional structure, Monica's discovery adheres to the fact that the street dramas as typical Nepali theatres contributed to social progress through the instrument of resistance and contestation. Still, the exponential growth of Nepali theatre continued in decades to come.

Surprisingly, theatre and performance art have started fascinating wide range of audience towards them in recent times. The street dramas drew academic attention recently and grew more dynamic in terms of its presentation and popularity. It is proven by the rise of increasing number of theatres, theatre artists, and dramas being written to address the typical socio-cultural issues of Nepali society. Identifying the growing trend of academic interest in Nepali history of drama and theatre, Vinaya Ghimire observes:

With the emergence of various theatre groups, theatre in Nepal has turned a new leaf. Theatre has now succeeded in striking deeper roots in the life of community. It has acquired a distinct, vibrant and exciting personality. These theatre groups not only perform plays, organize workshops and national and international theatre festivals, but also publish dramas and books on theatre history. (Kathmandu Post)

In these lines, Ghimire sheds a significant light on the exciting growth in the popularity of theatre and drama performance in recent history of Nepali society. The outreaching evolution of Nepali theatre into the international forum speaks volumes of how evolving the theatre consciousness appears among Nepalese. It is partly due to the growing knowledge on the

significance of theatre art and drama performance in effecting the progressive direction of the society.

Recently, new realization that the theatre and performance art are capable of advancing development has dominated the field of theatre studies. Identifying the growth in the interest towards theatre and performance in the context of Nepali theatre and performance studies, Bhim Lal Aryal in his research article argues, “The functionality of the theatre is no longer in doubt, as many people have come to realize the potency of the theatre in development. It has the power to influence thought and opinion, and can serve as a popular and effective means of political propagation, economic empowerment and cultural diffusion” (v). On this account of Aryal’s observation, the practice of theatre is not only aesthetic art but it can equally stand capable of contributing social progress and development by hosting the possibilities of political propagation, economic empowerment and other cultural consciousness.

In line with Aryal’s observation, the founder of famous theatre known as Forum theatre, Augusto Boal also points out the possibility of theatre and performance in socio-economic and cultural development by facilitating a space for the suppressed voices to ring loud. Boal foregrounds that theatre and performance essentially empower the awareness and consciousness among the marginalized as well as downtrodden lives and encourage for the resistance and new order: “He believed that theatre could be a rehearsal for life that oppressed people could use theatre as a place to explore strategies for resistance where other socially engaged theatre presents the problems of the oppressed and offers ways to break free” (qtd. in MS Nepal Final Report, 5-6). Boal’s perception of theatre rewards theatre and drama as a place for a kind of socio-political activism that aesthetically anchors for the progressive movement in various aspects of society. As explained earlier, the role of street dramas in the Nepali history of 1980s for the resistance against oppressive system like

Panchayat regime consolidates Boal's faith upon the theatre as a vehicle for the oppressed groups to achieve freedom, justice, equality, liberation and power. Subedi's *Bruised Evenings* echoes the resisting and revolting strength of theatre and drama performance, "This play echoes the social and political transformations that this nation is going through at the present times" (Rijal 12), which is to be analyzed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Subedi's *Bruised Evenings* has been widely appreciated by the critics and reviewers from the theatrical perspective as well as its progressive overtone. Abhi Subedi, himself is a critic of different genres of Nepali literature. He carries out different issues of society, politics, religion, art, environment, female, marginalized group, etc. in his creative and academic writing. So is the case in the drama *Bruised Evenings*. It is a product of his experience of classical cultural values and the perception of modern people. He catches the midst way to please the reader and audience. In our society, we can see many people are suppressed in one way or another. He picks up the contemporary issues with the amalgamation of classical and modern values of culture. Abhi Subedi, in his book *Nepali Theatre as I See It*, opines, "The Nepali performance culture . . . embodies what Nepali Theatre addresses the quotidian problems and creates space where people can present the power of the human beings by valorizing the body and histrionics of the performer" (10). The drama *Bruised Evenings* is the drama of rituals and performance of Newari culture through which the power of human being unites and the morality is supplied. He shows the value of ritual performance for the unity and awareness. The discourse is created through such ritual practices where people gather and unite for change.

In drama, human and Gods are arguing differently and the conflict is deliberately created. The cultural hegemony by the powerful king of Bhaktapur and the indirect force of divinity make the people unaware of their power and there seems the scarcity of agent or hero for social and cultural justice. The ritual performance becomes the means of unified mass in

order to resist the divine power. For the encounters of human and Gods, the ritual performance has created a successful agreement in order to convince Godly power. He further states, “. . . the world of God and world of human beings have a relationship that creates the rituals” (11). He valorizes rituals as characters in the play maintain aesthetic values even to revolt against the cultural hegemony. Drama is based on the Newari society of Bhaktapur city and the ritual values of the society. As social science puts the human being and society at center, playwright creates social issues which are unwanted load for human and want to resist and transform. It means they want their dignity or we can say identity. Taking Subedi’s claim here as, “In fact, dramatic performances originated from the community festivals where people watched plays dramatizing their cosmic and human dimensions of relationships. The festivals consolidates the unity of the people which is necessary for giving continuity to the life of community . . . the very soul of drama is the life of the community” (28). We can say that the subject matter of drama is society, culture and human beings.

Shiva Rijal, a prominent writer and figure in Nepali art and theatre, talks about the aesthetic and socio-cultural value of performance and also puts his view that the performer groups are taken as use and throw materials. Rijal says, “But families of the artists responsible for conducting such performances have often remained incognito” (146). He advocates for preservation and promotion of cultural performances especially Newari because it makes the people united and preserve their identity. But, at the same time, he is demanding for transformation because the time does not remain constant and it demands some changes. Further he states, “The important thing is to trace down the cultural site where specific art form is going through the process of transformation because of the involvement of the individual artist” (149). He talks about cultural transformation which is the key subject to give shape to society. The people who have power: Gods, kings, saints, etc. do the action

over them according to their will. It clearly shows cultural hegemony. The common man has to follow even if that is not good and do not come under their interest. In particular relation to *Bruised Evenings*, Rijal reviews the drama not only from its artistic mastery, as he discussed above, but also from the perspective of socio-cultural aesthetic. In his review on *Bruised Evenings*, he points out:

Similarly, this play also projects the poor subaltern characters who suffer in the power games between the kings and the divine forces as heroes or important protagonists, who realize that they too are able to bring transformations in their societies and thus help their fellow sufferers to redeem themselves from their older selves. This play echoes the social and political transformation that this nation is going through at the present times. (12)

In the light of Rijal's review, the playwright bears a humanistic approach to deliver justice, freedom, equality and cultural liberation by giving space for representation of the subaltern voices. Central characters like Elder and young merchant are heroes or change makers in Rijal's observation. In addition to his discovery, the researcher further contends that these heroes bring socio-cultural transformation through agency facilitated by the ritual performance.

Furthermore, Mahesh Paudyal as a critic, who is also an energetic contributor of Nepali literature, makes his observation on the drama *Bruised Evenings* as a political and cultural work where many social issues are intertwined. In drama, there is a character, Elder, who plays his role in the society as an agent and changes the people's state of mind and makes them ready to revolt against conservative and divine power. He compares Elder with the blind Tiresias of Greek mythology and drama and states his view as, "Only, unlike Tiresias, Elder is a common man, alienated from the rest of the society. He resembles in many ways the modern political analyst, in his ability to predict political upheavals and

dooms soon to befall the nation” (Kathmandu Post). He looks at the role of Elder as an agency who can predict the upcoming circumstances and put steps for welfare of human society and be ready for revolt. Another character, Traveller is a key figure of victory of human being who enters in the city with book and sword. Through these materials he uses his knowledge and physical power gained by book and sword. He becomes hero in the play because he is able to transform the cultural mind set of powerful and even of powerless people.

Resonating with Paudyal’s depiction of Elder and young merchant as heroes, Joseph Campbell, an American professor, explores the significance of hero in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. For the glorification of hero he opines as, “The world period of the hero in *human* from begins only when villages and cities have expanded over the land. Many monsters remaining from primeval times still lurk in the outlying regions, and through malice or desperation these set themselves against the human community. They have to be cleared away” (312). In drama, the role of hero in society is as social transformer who changes the traditional beliefs and values and shapes the mindset of people as modern people. Here, in this drama, Elder and Traveller play as the role of hero and transform the socio-cultural position of Newari community of Bhaktapur.

All the above-mentioned reviews and critical appreciations unambiguously establish the argument that Subedi’s *Bruised Evenings*, as a theatre or performance, represents the socio-cultural and political issues of everyday society. In the backdrop of Newari ritual dance Bhadrakali and Bhairab performed in the landscape of Bhaktapur town, the drama presents the dances and Jatras along with its cultural behaviours but in restored manner. The understanding of performance by Richard Schechner also identifies the everyday acts as performance such as established traditions, rituals and practices. He claims, “Everyday people perform dozens of rituals. These range from religious rituals to the rituals of everyday

life, from the rituals of life roles to the rituals of each profession, from the rituals of politics and the judicial system to the rituals of business or home life” (52). Breaking away from the conventional idea of theatre as a production art, Schechner expands the understanding into every daily activity as a kind of performance. For him performance is just a reacting of these everyday available practices. Thus, he defines performance as “The restored behavior...never for the first time, always for the second to time twice-behaved behavior” (36). The text under study presents the restored behavior of the Newari cultural and ritual practices in the cultural form of dance and Jatras.

Every ritualistic performance is a way of human expression. It expresses the lifestyle, attitude, communal values and other belief systems. Performance as such can't be isolated from its relationship with the culture. Culture and performance are intimately interconnected and interdependent. This phenomenon of interdependence is the most important ways of human expression. Conceived as a way of life, culture is regarded as the mental construction articulating the beliefs, attitudes and the values of the particular society. Therefore, culture reflects the identity of the people. It forms who they are, where they belong and what they believe in. In this regard, Clifford Greetz in his book, *The Interpretation of Culture*, defines, “Culture is the accumulated totality of such pattern is not just an ornament of human existence but the principle basis of its specificity and essential condition for it” (46). In the light of this observation, every culture has its own uniqueness and self-reflexivity.

Performance, broadly speaking, is an expressive nature of culture. It refers to the reformative action of human actions. It is a mimetic articulation of those values and beliefs as embraced as a way of living in any particular society. In Aristotelian sense, it is simply an imitation of human action and cultural behaviors. Performance hence is an artistic way of acting and transforming cultural phenomenon as Richard Schechner in his book *Performance Theory* observes, “...making arts in the procession of transforming raw experience into

palatable forms. His transformation is mimetic, a representation” (30). In Schechner’s view, imitating cultural behavior in performative art is more about the representation of that culture. So, performance has its vital role in representation of our cultural identity. Culture performance is an absolute way by which emotions, feelings, pain and experiences of people become visible. It is an act of doing something or exposing innermost repressed emotions in front of the spectators with their attractive physical movement or the vocally produced musical notes. On this note, Subedi’s *Bruised Evenings* embraces the cultural lifestyle of the Newari community in the town of Bhaktapur and resituate the ritual behavior of dance and Jatras in order to disrupt the hegemonic and hierarchical structure of socio-cultural relationship between the dominant group, as represented by divine forces Bhadrakali and Bhairab followed by aristocratic king, and subaltern oppressed groups as represented by human beings like Elder, young merchant, the princess: “Though a cultural backdrop has been used, it relates to people’s lives, how they are oppressed by those in power and have strength. It also shows if they want to, then these people can overpower the powerful and bring about a change” (146). On this account, *Bruised Evenings* embodies Schechner’s idea of restored behavior where the oppressive and hegemonic cultural behavior has been challenged and modified through the ritual of dance and Jatras.

As the drama starts, the conflicting relation between the dominant group and oppressed group is presented. Situated in the town of Bhaktapur, the ritual atmosphere of music, singing and dances emerge. The locals of Bhaktapur crowd the streets in the procession. They are decorated and embellished with traditional dresses and musical ornaments. It’s the time of cultural performance of the locals:

We can see pagoda temples of the Bhaktapur town and lanes, temple bells, masks and other items that show the rhythm of a certain life. People in a group emerge playing musical instruments and singing. That procession with people carrying bushy yak

tales, small poles and chariots crosses the stage singing and dancing to the rhythm of dhime drums, flutes, and other instruments. As the music becomes distant, two deities Bhadrakali and Bhairab come dancing in a classical style. (*Bruised Evenings* 20)

In these lines, the description presents the ritualistic decoration and cultural behavior of celebration in the Newari festivals of dance and singing. It suggests the performative activity of traditional rituals. The use of musical instruments, traditional ingredients, the procession and collective gestures reflect the quintessential of the performance as Schechner theorized above.

With this backdrop of ritual performance, the playwright employs the deity and human characters to act the rituals of dance and Jatras with the latter resisting cultural hegemony and oppressive attitude of the divine force which marks the shift from the traditional pattern of behavior. Schechner avers, “performances are made from bits of restored behavior, but every performance is different from every other. First, fixed bits of behavior can be recombined in endless variations. Second, no event can exactly copy another event” (30). Restored behavior thus includes a vast range of action. It follows repetitive action of behavior in new setting. Schechner’s implication is that we are always performing anew out of old in a continual rehearsal. It is like the building blocks out of which the behavior is replicated and thus performances gradually emerge. The clash between deity and human in the time of dance and Jatras restores the socio-cultural relationship between the two in a new mode leading to the possibility of freedom, equality, justice and liberation.

Schechner’s idea of restored behavior for anew echoes in Bhairab and Bhadrakali’s fear of losing the divine power and their growing hostility towards the common people of Bhaktapur. Both of them come out for participating in the dance. When they saw people and their creative show of Jatras, dances, free and ceremonious moments on the streets and carvings of God and Goddesses, it outraged and threatened their sense of superiority:

Bhadrakali, something is happening here, right now I see human beings always walking on the streets. I don't know if they do so because it is the time of festivals; or they have strong desires to become free... Human beings become useless once they are charged with divinity. And gods become cowards once they come close to the human beings. Kalike, such is the cycle of creation! Human beings interpret divine actions according to their conscience. That makes them strong. A man who has the strong sense of freedom doesn't accept the control of the gods. Only human beings know what it means to become free. Gods do not. (*Bruised Evenings* 23)

In this dialogue by Bhairab, the great lord of time, the hegemonic attitude of the deity is realized. Bhairab's anger is triggered by the freedom and ceremonious celebrations of human on the streets. It threatens the long-held status quo that Gods and Goddesses are above human beings and the latter should submit themselves to interests of the former. Bhairab disapproves human independence. He prefers to maintain the hierarchical relation between deity and human because it places Gods in powerful positions. He knows divine power gets breached if human acquire freedom. The oppressive and tyrannical attitude is further actualized when Bhadrakali claims, "Human beings can't be so free. They must accept the rule of Gods" (*Bruised Evenings* 23).

Bhairab's mindset of superiority and hegemonic attitude is deeply rooted in the religious discourse that conditions the chain of power putting human second to god. In a religious society like Nepalese, the supreme power is attributed to god and goddesses. They are held in high regard. The distribution of power holds the divine on the highest position followed by men in inferior order. Such religious discourse grants more authority and power in the hands of deity. The primacy of socio-cultural power is placed in the hands of deity who are to be served by the human beings. Such hierarchical play of power is instituted by the discourse as Michel Foucault argues, "Effects of truth are produced within the discourse

which is themselves are neither true nor false” (1134). In the light of Foucault’s account, the discourse of any kind creates conditions for the subaltern people to accept anything as a truth and condition them not to refute it. The long-standing religious discourse of divinity as supreme power deprive human of their independence and freedom. Bhairab’s dialogue testifies the lack of freedom and independence on the part of human because they are always subjugated to god’s supremacy.

However, the playwright equips the subaltern groups, the human beings, with the weapon of performance in the form of dances, Jatras and music to liberate them from the hegemony of the divinity. The protagonist, Elder is invented by the playwright to represent the subaltern voice and rebel against the tyranny of the deity. Theatre or performance always opens the forum for participatory approach to mediate and remediate social issues of race, gender, culture, identity, wars and ideology etc. It is a new revolutionary social aesthetic that offers two way strategies to the marginalized-strategy to question and a new strategy to relocate their identity. Theatre or performance, thus, provides a platform to the people who are devoid of a voice. Monica Mottin, in her research article *Drama for Social Change* identifies:

Theatre for Development or the Development of Theatre? Writes: drama can have a decontextualizing and transformative power. They create a different social space where anything can happen, even magic. People who don’t usually have voice can express their opinion because a willing suspension of disbelief allows for the acceptance of atypical events. Theatre can be the best tool for the representation of those voices that remain unheard in society...thus, theatre helps to create discourses and empowers those voices that are in the margin. (323)

As outlined by this theorization, theatre or performance gives voice to the oppressed and marginalized groups. It becomes the platform for the voiceless to enact resistance against any sort of hegemonic and oppressive behaviors, practices and customs.

Bruised Evenings resonates a lot with the idea of performance as a forum for inclusive and participatory dialogue. Elder is chosen to represent the subaltern voice. His leadership operates as an agency for the common people to demand freedom, independence and justice from the divine. Elder faces and challenges the deity for their arrogance and indifference towards the human sufferings: “Look, I’m very angry. I’ll settle the score here today. This is too much. We are simple people. We earn our living with the honest labour. We don’t oppress anybody. We don’t snatch away food from the stores of Gods. Then why should we be subjected to this fate? Why should we be condemned to get lost one by one?” (*Bruised Evenings* 30). The human beings, despite worshipping Gods, carving their stones and statues, prayers and devotions, are always forced to suffer. As seen in the town of Bhaktapur, the human miseries are unbearable. The Princess has suffered. Every boy that marries her dies on the night of marriage. All the boys that married to her lose lives. She is ill-fated. An injustice has been induced upon her. Divinity is to blame. The deadly snakes come out of her nostrils and kill the boy who marries her on the night of marriage. She has no power to alter it. Her father, the king holds hegemonic power. She is controlled by his desire to marry her off to preserve his royal prestige. His aristocratic attitude is realized when he forces her to marry because “One who dies for the princess and for the state becomes martyr” (*Bruised Evenings* 45). Here, the princess is deprived of her individual liberation; her desire is oppressed by the king to reinforce his aristocratic interest.

Likewise, when a man dies and is taken to the cremation, one of those who attend the procession dies. Human beings cannot survive without working. They work hard to carve the statues of gods and goddess from stone but still they are made to suffer. Human beings have

no freedom and independence. They lack the power. In such desperate socio-cultural atmosphere, he rebels against the deity for inflicting miseries and tragedies upon human beings in the following lines:

Listen, every god or goddess –

Confused or soaring high with

The arrogance and ecstasy of power!

The long tale of human suffering must end today, here!

...I am human being.

I can't be pushed around as you think.

If I cannot bring the earth and heaven in one place in

This Bhaktapur town and raise a human storm,

I Swear,

My mother never fed her breast milk to me! (*Bruised Evenings* 28-29)

As Mottin asserted earlier, the theatre or performance offers a platform for the representation of marginalized and those unheard in the society, these rebellious words from Elder reflect the oppressed voices and sufferings of the human beings against the tyranny and hegemony of the deity. Elder's declaration to organize the fellow human beings and subvert the hierarchy between earth and heaven marks the beginning of the resistance and revolution against the cultural hegemony of divinity over human life. To frame it in Foucault's concept of resistance, Elder's loud voice against the divine's abuse of power and hegemonic treatment towards human sufferings marks the resistance movement against the dominant groups in the society.

Resistance is primarily concerned with the transformations, reformations and recorrections over what has been followed as the normativity. Whenever the norms in place are questionable and discriminative, it tends to provoke for the movement of resistance for

the establishment of the new norms. Michele Foucault in his theoretical essay “The Subject and Power” elaborates the notion of resistance in relation to power. He associates the intricate relationship between the power and resistance. Any social and political norms and values that are structured in the unequal distributions of power relations suffer the rise of resistance. The dominant groups in the community are privileged with the more powers and authorities whereas the minority groups are manipulated by the systematic production of the discourse. The groups holding the authority and power build the discourse and control the powerless ones: "Discourse is controlled, limited, defined and exercised by power and draws to the way boundaries between the true and false are erected within the context" (42). In Bhadrakali's warning that, “[h]uman beings must abide by the rules I have given them”. (*Bruised Evenings* 25) stems from the discourse of divinity which heralds divine power as supreme and human are conditioned to subject themselves to the laws of divinity.

However, the theory of resistance assumes that the forms of resistance begin to take place when the power relations between the groups and individuals in the community are exploitative and hierarchical. The movement of resistance emerges to subvert those norms for the establishment of new relations. Foucault in his essay “The Subject and Power” describes the resistance as a way for formation of new power relations dismantling the older forms of normativity:

[forms of resistance are] another way to go further towards a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their positions, and find out their point of application and the methods used. (780)

In these theoretical lines, Foucault has brought together the power and resistance. He treats resistance as a force to battle the older forms of power organizations and distributions and a way to set a new form of power relations. The new restored cultural behavior as exhibited by Elder ignores the old order of hierarchy between divine and human as Schechner observes that the new behavior like Elder “the original truth or source of the behavior may not be known, or may be lost, ignored, or contradicted- even while that truth or source is being honored” (34). In case of Elder, he and his fellow beings ignores the old and hegemonic order of divinity as supreme power and rebels for the equality, freedom and cultural independence.

With his new rebellious leadership, Elder enlightens his fellow human beings and cement the collective consciousness among them to accept the challenge of the divine. He declares their agency through the form of festivals to lead the resistance movement. The festivals of dance and Jatras offer him the agency to battle against the furious Bhadrakali and Bhairab. Glorifying the inherent strength of performance in facilitating the agency for bringing an effective outcome, Deborah A. Kapchan, a prominent performance theorist, asserts, “...to perform is to carry something into effect. The notion of agency is implicit in performance” (479). On this account, Elder exercises the agency via the means of festivals and strike a deal with Bhadrakali. The deal is met between the divine force and human as represented by Bhadrakali and Elder. As per the deal, the divine force withdraws its power to kill the fellow human being and, in return, Elder and his fellows will take out mother Bhadrakali in chariot procession. Here, the means of festival performance provide human beings the chance of agency in the fight against the hegemonic force. Elder announces the human agency after he strikes a deal with mother Bhadrakali:

Brothers, listen! I’ve struck a deal with mother Bhadrakali. No one shall get lost from now on. But that is not surrender on our part. We know, we shall not physically win but by doing so we shall show the deities how strong is the will of the human beings

and how powerful they are. We shall judge the magnanimity of the gods by their actions. I've promised to Bhadrakali that we shall take out her chariot procession...Listen, oh my brothers! We shall accept the challenge of the divine beings. They can kill us but to do so will be their weakness. We shall overcome and celebrate that mood in festivals. That will be our victory procession. (*Bruised Evenings* 33-34)

The human agency amplifies after Bhadrakali consents to cease snatching human lives. Elder succeeds in enticing mother Bhadrakali for the festival moment of chariot procession. It reflects the victory of human like Elder to liberate from the tyranny of divine force and rejoice the freedom of their will. In the same vein, identifying the agency on the part of human force like Elder as a vehicle for human's liberation and freedom, Mahesh Paudyal, literary critic in modern Nepali art and literature, observes:

[d]ealing with the nascent human desire to revolt against that which challenges one's free will. This agency man, in the beginning at least, exhibits itself in weaker manifestations of resistance such as silence, indifference or non-participation. With time, however, as it acquires the support of more men and snowballs in energy, the phenomenon takes the form of a full-fledged revolt. (Kathmandu Post)

He takes Elder as an agency and another similar character, Traveller who is also a hero or agency for socio-cultural transformation. Awareness, provided by Elder leads to resistance and revelation of silence. And this revelation of silence culminates into the human independence and liberation from the hierarchical order between divine and human.

Identical to Elder's act of resistance through the agency browsed by the performance of festivals, a young traveller's entry further intensifies the current of transformation of socio-cultural scenario in the town of Bhaktapur. As transformative influence as Elder's leadership, traveller's entrance as an outsider hosted the liminal phase in the festive atmosphere of the

town. Traveller's transformative influence boosted Elder's project for equalizing the divine and human realm culminating it into a new level.

Upon his visit as a part of his business to the town of Bhaktapur, a young merchant feels strange when everyone looks anxious about the poor fate of the Princess, Mayaju. The king of the town exercises its full aristocratic power to compel the princess to marry with the boys despite the frequent tragedy. Due to the anger of the divine force at the creative and ceremonious human festivals on the streets and also the hegemonic power of the king, the princess suffers the death of her new bridegroom on the night of marriage. Elder perfectly illustrates the miserable life of a princess due to the cunning game plan of gods and the oppressive ideological tendency of the king who cling to the power at the expense of his daughter's peace:

The creatures that inhabited the body of Mayaju
Were perhaps the game plans of gods.
Or they were something else.
To play on the life of an innocent girl
And make death dance upon the young men,
To lurk in the body of the woman like shadow
And to strike the lover after the moment of love is finished
And wait for the next victim
Again hiding in the body of the same woman. (*Bruised Evenings* 40)

Here, the poetic lines give an account on the tragedy and misery as inflicted upon the innocent princess, Mayaju. Every boy that marries to her is cursed to doom. On the night of wedding, the venomous snakes, as Elder claims they are dispatched by deity to make human suffer, come out of her nostrils and poison them to death. The king designates the death of her bridegroom as a martyr dying for the state "One who dies for the princess and for the

state becomes a martyr” (*Bruised Evenings* 45) and forces the princess not to stop marrying. It exposes his ideological hegemony to stay in the power by selling the princess’ life and dignity. She is in minority. She is powerless before the dominant power of the king. She is helpless and can’t confront the dominant force. Her suffering is human suffering. Her freedom and independence has been stolen away by the hegemonic function of the divine power and the ideological interest of the king to preserve the royal power. Elder labels it as an injustice and unfair play of power by the dominant forces. The town and its locals are tormented by the repetitive deaths of the young boys.

However, this time the festivals of dances and Jatras continue but with the introduction of newness in the fabric of the town’s social and cultural order. The entrance of an outsider, a young traveller brings a resisting power to regenerate the order of the Bhaktapur, which is plagued by the misery of an innocent princess. The power lays in the book and short sword that the young traveller has brought with him “A young businessman, a traveller arrives there. He is carrying a short sword and a book” (*Bruised evenings* 49). His arrival initiates a new mode of performance in the festivals of dances and singings. This time new hope of change and justice is realized at the festivals on the street. The people on the streets place faith upon the transformative power of the young traveller with his book and sword. The process of regenerating new order is sensed by the presence of the traveller. It is indicated in the conversation between shopkeeper and traveller. Traveller gets to know the sadness of the town and the misery of the princess from the shopkeeper. The regenerating of the order under the resisting influence of traveller is foreshadowed by lines in traveller’s book which reads, “...two snakes will rise to bite you, and you will kill them with this sword. A great change will come in your life after that” (*Bruised Evenings* 51). This very moment of change in the socio-cultural space of community is what Victor Turner, a prominent performance theorist and critic, theoretically terms as liminal state.

Victor Turner's theoretical contribution to the study of performance studies and its dynamic expansion remains vital. According to his disciplinary study on art and performance studies, every meaning of art doesn't remain static, rather it lies neither here or nor there but always in-between. His unique idea of in-between location of art and the meaning it delivers much often dismantles and breaks down the long-held dichotomic relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic values, which ultimately culminates the art and meaning into the liminal state. Grouping all forms of arts as the form of social drama, Victor in his seminal essay *Liminality and Communitas* relocates the centuries' long understanding of aesthetics and integrates it into the spirit of the ritualistic process of culture by borrowing Van Gennep's elaboration of '*Rites de passage*'. Turner further elaborates:

[...] The attributes of *Liminality* or of *liminal personae*- threshold people are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons eludes or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, *Liminality* is frequently linked to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (315)

These lines addressed the limitation in the conventional concept of art and aesthetics paving the path of departure into the modern and new meaning to the study of aesthetics: socio-aesthetic. The world of the socio-aesthetic or the world of the liminal-the space of in-between welcomes the harmonious ally between art-society-culture. In spite of the dialectical exchange between art and society where they influence each other by the measure of critical distance, art and its aesthetic essence, which is to impact the social fabrics of society, exists

always in liminal and ambiguous state, more like the state of death, womb, invisibility and the state of bisexuality. Known as a creative domain, art tends to become more expressive and vibrant at the state of *Liminality*, in its attachment with the society as well as its cultural elements. Being an anthropologist by academic positionality, Turner analyzes art and aesthetic in the frame of cultural practices and introduces a socioaesthetic that he himself coins as 'social drama'. Clarifying his concept of social drama, Turner further in *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play* shares:

[...] what I call 'social drama'. This has a proto-aesthetic form in its unfolding. In many field situations [...] a person or subgroup breaks a rule, deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting. Conflicts between individuals, [...] follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of character, interest, and ambition. These mount toward a crisis of the group's unity and continuity unless rapidly sealed off by redressive public action, consensually undertaken by the group's leaders, [...]. Redressive action is often ritualized and may be undertaken in the name of law or religion. [...]. If a social drama runs its full course, the outcome may be either the restoration of peace and normalcy among the participants or social recognition of irremediable breach or schism. (39)

In the lines above, Turner emphasizes the expressiveness of the art while in relation to the human society. His idea of social drama basically contends that social phenomenon resembles the very presentation and structure of art.

Turner's concept of social drama directly disorients the essentialists and their understanding on the functionality of art. From the standpoint of essentialists, the singular objective of art lies in its essence to present ideal, absolute, truth and beauty. Such old school of thinking detaches the art from its proximity with the society by limiting the aesthetic value within the intrinsic beauty of art. Unlike them, social critics relocate the aesthetic value of art

arguing that any art work loses its aesthetic essence and value when it fails to articulate the attachment with human activities, social moorings and culture. Going by what social critics have to say, art vehicles the agency in representing society and social entities while the society becomes an ideal artifact that art defines, analyzes and represents through its socio-aesthetic mode of expression. It is at this moment of confluence where social anthropologists like Turner identify a deep tie up between art, social rituals and cultural practices of every day society.

As far as the socio critics of art are concerned, they look at every aestheticism as all political and ideological forming the liminal space by the combination of art and society. In the eyes of art, society is a liminal zone which gets influenced and changed for art imitates the performance of rituals. On the other hand, for society art is a liminal location which gets influenced, transformed and changed as society undergoes several socio-political happenings at large. Taken together, both art and society, through their interrelatedness, invites *Liminality* at large. In the words of Turner *Liminality* is a space of transition marked by three phases: separation, margin and aggregation. He claims,

[...] The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individuals or group [...], from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period the characteristic of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural real that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-a-vis towards of a clearly defined and “structural” type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions. (314)

Turner's three phases of *Liminality* deeply correspond to the fact that human history, civilization and socio-cultural expressions have changed over the period of time. Change has always been prevalent in transitioning human life, society and every cultural outlook from one structure to newer forms. This very process of transition, as Turner puts observes, starts from the separation where individuals or groups fall in conflict with the established socio-cultural entities. This moment of separation is more symbolic. When it grows into second phase of margin, the relation between individuals or groups and the socio-cultural order begin to share ambiguous response to each other finally leading to the rise of new stable order. Elder's dissatisfaction and resentment towards the deity's unfair play of power to make human suffer, as discussed above, signifies Turner's first phase of separation. Likewise, an entry of young traveller, an outsider, into the town of Bhaktapur which is reeling from the misery of the princess signifies Turner's phase of separation. It is foreshadowed by traveller's sense of discomfort as he feels agonizing faces of the people on the street. In his conversation with shopkeeper, traveller says: "I too have heard some of these stories. But *Dai*, I'm a simple man. My visit to any place neither makes gods' bells ring nor inspire people to turn around and look at me. But ever since I put my first step here, I've had some uncanny feeling" (*Bruised Evenings* 49). Here, traveller's 'uncanny feeling' signifies the beginning of the separation from the state: ideological hegemony of the king and manipulative play of power by the deity.

The traveller's moment of separation gets pushed into Turner's phase of margin by Elder's encouragement where the individuals or groups develop very ambiguous state of relation with the existing socio-cultural order. It comes to the light by the idea of traveller marrying the princess. Upon knowing the misery of the princess and the hope of the people that traveller can end this cycle of deaths of the young boys who marry to her, traveller expresses his skepticism on being capable of turning it around "don't hope anything from me

or from my props. I am not a person to enter a rich woman's chamber in the evening in celebration and emerge as a stone statue the next morning. I am a simple man. My life is open like the paddy fields" (*Bruised Evenings* 54). However, Elder enlightens him and makes him conscious about the hegemonic and hierarchical atmosphere of the society. He encourages him with the words of confidence in defeating the deity and claim victory:

This small state has become the battleground of the mighty forces. Armed gods and goddesses are doing excesses here. The king of this land is arrogant; he only wants to protect his bogus pride. One princess gets married each day. The entire state is busy helping the king to fulfill his bizarre dream. An overacting state benefits ruler, not the people. But we are certain to defeat all the visible and invisible forces of men and gods. (52)

Elder's words expose his innermost objection to the system that is oppressive and hegemonic. His quest for the abolishment of the hegemonic ruling system and the establishment of the new order finds its moment of margin after the traveller finally marries the princess. This moment of margin, as Turner terms it, is launched by the festive orchestration of ritual performance on the streets:

[t]he crowd and drum players' group arrive. They are declaring to the rhythm of the drum, "listen, listen, everybody listen! A youth imbued with all the 32 virtues has come to our Bhaktapur town. The princess will be married to him today'. People rush towards traveller and marvel at him. One group of drum players come and put a garland round his neck. Then they would hold him with great respect and care...traveller is being taken away in festive manner. (*Bruised Evenings* 54-55)

Here, the performance offers the agency for the traveller on his way to breaking the chain of misery in the town of Bhaktapur. All the people perform songs and dances creating a festive moment and arrange his marriage with the princess.

The moment of transformation is achieved when traveller succeeds in killing the venomous snakes. Unlike other bridegrooms, traveller defeats the cunning game of divine forces and rescues the princess from the chain of misery “Mayaju is overwhelmed to see her only groom alive in the morning” (*Bruised Evenings* 56).

The human victory over the cultural hegemony, aristocracy and oppressive hierarchical power relations begins Turner’s third phase of aggregation. It is the moment when the rituals are continued but with restored behavior which “can be worked on, stored and recalled, played with, made into something else, transmitted and transformed” (Schechner 35). The transformative function of performance is evidenced by the festive marriage and triumphant of traveller against the divine force. The aggregated “stable state” (Turner 314) with new norms mark its new socio-cultural life in the town of Bhaktapur. As a result, new identities have been created by the ritual performance “performances mark identities” (Schechner 28). The new order in the form of new cultural identity, equality, liberation and freedom is actualized when Mayaju excitedly declares, “Now, it is the turn of the human beings to take control of their own destiny. I am happy about that! From now on gods and human beings are equal in this Bhaktapur town. Now, gods can no longer play nasty jokes hiding in the bodies of human beings” (*Bruised Evenings* 58). One of the ardent literary critics on Subedi’s works, Shiva Rijal recognizes this momentum shift in the social life of the Bhaktapur as a victory of the subaltern who realized that they are able to bring transformation and redeem themselves from the old order: “Similarly, this play also projects the poor subaltern characters who suffer in the power games between kings and the divine forces as heroes or important protagonists, who realize that they too are able to bring transformations in their societies and thus help their fellow sufferers to redeem themselves from their older selves” (12). In line with this review, *Bruised Evenings* as a theatre or performance proves the how the performance serves as a mode of resistance against the cultural hegemony,

hierarchical power relation, inequality and oppressive system for the establishment of egalitarian and equitable society as seen in the victory of the subaltern characters in the drama as represented by human. The playwright empowers the subaltern characters like Elder and traveller through the weapons of the ritual performance: dance, songs, musical instrument and Jatras.

This way, the researcher concludes with the findings that the rituals are not only aesthetic events but they embody the possibility of activism for bringing the changes or new order in various aspects of the society. As discussed earlier, the rituals of the dance, songs and Jatras created an atmosphere for the human characters to rise and resist against the hegemonic and oppressive play of power by the divine forces and the king. Elder is able to make a deal with Bhadrakali by promising to take her in a chariot procession while performing the Jatras and dances. Likewise, traveller is taken into the princess chamber by the group of people with drums, flutes, and other musical songs in a festive manner. Towards the end, Elder announces full freedom and victory of men over divine and pledge them to celebrate in the festivals in new order, the order when human and Gods are equal. Furthermore, Gods like Bhairab and Bhadrakali refuse to participate in the festivals due to the creative and productive performativity of human beings. All these textual evidences establish the argument that the ritual performances are the platform for socio-cultural transformation of the society as seen in fictional town of Bhaktapur in *Bruised Evenings*.

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