

Tribhuvan University

Counterhegemonic Consciousness in the Representative Songs of Ralpa Literary
Movement

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By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Counterhegemonic Consciousness in The Representative Songs of Ralpa Literary Movement” submitted to the office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, is an entirely original work, and I have made due acknowledgements to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing the dissertation. The results presented in this dissertation have not been presented anywhere else for award of any degree or for any other reasons. No part of the content of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

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Letter of Recommendation

Mousami Guragain has completed her dissertation entitled “Counterhegemonic Consciousness in The Representative Songs of Ralpa Literary Movement” under my supervision. She carried out her research from Feb 2021 to May 2023. I hereby recommend her dissertation be submitted for the pre/final viva voice.

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Approval Letter

This research work entitled “Counterhegemonic Consciousness in The Representative Songs of Ralpha Literary Movement” submitted to the Central Department of English in Tribhuvan University by Mousami Guragain has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The research examines the counterhegemonic consciousness in the selected songs of Ralpha Literary Movement. Simultaneously, it studies the rhetoric of agency formation of the subjugated class that Ralpha songs express against the dominant class. Ralpha's aesthetics in singing people's songs seek agency against the hegemonic bloc- the Panchayat system. Using Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, counterhegemony and the role of intellectuals and also incorporating Gayatri Chakravaty Spivak's notion of representation and Louis Althusser's idea of the state ideology and apparatus as the critical framework of interpretation and analysis, the research concludes in finding that the songs of Ralpha are instrumental in actualizing counterhegemonic consciousness even though emerged within the hegemonic structures propelled by the powerful state agencies to the extent of high censorship. Then, this study makes the group activism positioned to academics to understand the resistance dynamics in Nepal's politico-cultural situation before and after 1960s. Finally, it facilitates the understanding of group activism through literary writings and opens up opportunities and possibilities of studying the impacts and dynamics of similar other micro-political resistances in various historical eras neglected in the national history.

Key words: Hegemony, subaltern, intellectuals, resistance and agency.

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Chapter One

Resistance for Autonomy and Ralpa Literary Movement

The research studies Ralpa group's representative songs focusing on the politico-cultural implications represented in their songs. Members of the Ralpa came together as a group in 1967. However, the official commencement of the group happened in the the year 1968. A solo musical performance named Blue Moon at Mahendra Police Club established them as a group. The group initially began with four active members namely Raameshwor Shrestha (Raamesh), Meghraj Nepal (Manjul), Narayan Bhakta Shrestha (Rayan) and Arun-Manoj- Rishi Shrestha (Arim). Later, other creative artists joined the group that expanded it up as a movement. Considering the music and the message of the songs along with the presentation style and implications of the movement, different writers express multiple opinions about the movement. Prakash Sayami regards the movement as a "Musical revolution" (32). Ganesh Rasik notes the group as "Having a different identity in Nepali musical sphere because of its innovative singing and unique presentation" (349). Krishnahari Baral recognizes the group movement as "A campaign against exploitation, economic inequality, and injustice" (440). Sukum Sharma classifies it as a "Literary movement" (99), and Govinda Giri "Prerana" in agreement with Sharma argues, "Ralpa, a literary movement which emerged in the 60s as a gift to Nepali literature" (94). The present research concerns on Ralpa as a literary movement since the dissertation focuses its analysis on the function of the lyrics of the selected songs. The songs emit voice against socio-economic subordination and advocate equality and justice. Therefore, focusing on the functions of the representative songs I have selected twelve songs for the analysis.

The selected songs include "Bidrohaka moharai haru- Ralpa haami", "Gaau

gaau bata utha”, “Duldai aayo Gaine daju”, Dhanubaasko murali ta”, “Maanish chut achut hunxa ma vandai vandina”, “ Jutta siuchau sarkiharu”, “Gaai ta badhyo”, “Koi ta vane jahajma harara”, “ Bhokai marne mahakavika”, “Sunako din ek udauxa re”, “Bajauna basuri o kancha!” and “Hiunle taachidiyeko cha mero dhupi salla”. The analysis focuses on the message the songs deliver through symbolic and metaphorical elements of the lyrics. Songs mentioned throughout the dissertation indicate only the lyrics. Since the group got dispersed in the early 70s and only a few songs are available recorded versions, I have selected nine songs from *Manjulka Geetharu* (Manjul’s Songs), one from *Samjhanaka Pailaharu* (The Footsteps of Remembrance) and two songs available on YouTube as the primary texts.

The research examines and analyzes the selected songs with thematic variables of resistance, class, caste marginality, and hope of emancipation through the critical perspectives developed by Antonio Gramsci especially focusing upon his notion of ‘hegemony and counterhegemony’. Gramsci postulates that there is supremacy and domination of one social group over other in a society. The domination is consented as subordinated groups spontaneously accept the world views and perspective of the dominant group because of the influence the group holds. The domination is also maintained through force using state power and apparatuses to those who do not spontaneously consent over the domination. Gramsci argues, “. . . hegemony, which the dominant group exercises throughout society” (The Formation of Intellectuals 54) and further writes hegemony is maintained as a process through two methods which comprise:

1. The ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige and consequence

confidence which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. 2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. (The Formation of Intellectuals 54)

Thus, Gramsci postulates hegemony to be the dominance sustained by spontaneous consent and coercive force both. In the words of Dominic Strinati, "Gramsci defines hegemony as a cultural and ideological means whereby the dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class" (153). For Gramsci, social order and control for the dominant class was possible through the dominant class hegemony. Ralpa movement emerged in the backdrop of implimentation of Panchayat ruling system that king Mahendra commenced overthrowing democracy in 1960. The king became sole dominant power center after he dismissed and jailed people's representatives chosen through voting rights, and dissolved the parliament system using the constitutional act 55 which authorized him to use his personal conscience in case of emergency (Constitution of Nepal 2015 v.s). Therefore, through the Panchayat system the king ruled with both coercion and consent also executed state agencies to maintain his influence. Detailed examination on how he used and manipulated his power and influence is discussed in second and third chapter.

Moreover, Nepal has remained under the elitist ruling system held by royal palaces and elitist leadership as its patronage since ancient to modern era. Khadga K.C. writes, "The character of Nepali state until 2007 was determined by Hindu cultural and social and politics and government were lagely controlled by some high caste groups" (7). The so called low caste groups including other marginals had no

reach on resources as were kept outside the power structure. Therefore, Nepali socio-politics have highly internalized hegemonies in both the elitist class and the subordinated too. This feature is reflected in various genres of literary writings including songs. Songs and singers were hired and sponsored by the rich, upper class aristocratic or the royal palace, so the songs were either religious or the eulogy of the high class who ruled with power and influence. Krishnahari Baral mentions singers like Heera Gaineni, Shambhu Prasad Dhungel, Seturam, and Melawadevi who have sung eulogizing Mathavar Sing Thapa, Chandrashumsher, and Juddhashumsher respectively in different eras (439). It is only after the establishment of Radio Nepal in 1950, no doubt, songs and different types of music got flourished as it provided a forum and access to the larger audience; however, it turned out to be an effective state apparatus. Peter Karthak argues, “The radio station was a platform of the monopoly and the mouthpiece of the power players of Nepal’s Panchayat regime of absolute monarchy” (62). The ruling bloc manipulated the only national media Radio Nepal to strengthen state generated national culture highlighting mainly on hill Brahmins, their culture and rituals calling it national culture and integrity. As Tara Lal Shrestha et al. add, “The government of Nepal tends to identify certain cultural traits as symbolic of national integrity and allegiance” (43). Radio Nepal too promoted such songs like ‘Panchai ho yo desh banaideu’ (Panchas, yes make the nation), ‘Deuralima raja vetiyo’ (King was found in *Deurali*), in the name of patriotic songs, when the power was in the hands of kingship singing the glories of ruling class labeling them as the representatives of national integrity and culture. In addition, canonical history of music and Radio Nepal having the patronage of ruling class, mostly recorded such musicians and singers who were always near to the power blocs and state agencies. The second chapter presents discussion of Panchayat system as continuation of

hegemony through consent and coercion using various state apparatuses, and Ralpa songs countering the hegemonic consciousness.

Hegemony of consent is internalized in more subtle ways through creating influence of various cultural practices and products. Considering the normative world view, the subordinated ones spontaneously agree upon the hegemonic cultural constructs. The hegemonized do not have consciousness of their class as subordinated. They lack the consciousness of their history and autonomy too. Gramsci argues:

It may be said that spontaneity is therefore characteristics of the ‘history of subaltern classes’ and indeed of their most marginal and peripheral elements; these have not achieved any consciousness of the class ‘for itself’, and consequently it never occurs to them that their history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it (Selections from the Prison Notebooks 196).

In absence of consciousness of history and identity as an autonomous class, the subaltern classes spontaneously get under the influence of hegemonic practices. The selected songs under the analysis emit consciousness of the subaltern classes. Therefore, the research argues representative songs of Ralpa movement are significant for actualizing counterhegemonic consciousness at micro-political level in the context when hegemony through consent is still more pertinent in the local as well as global context. Gramsci contends, “A social group can, and indeed must already ‘lead’ i.e be hegemonic before winning governmental power and this is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power” (Selections from the Prison Notebooks 47). Ralpa songs question the dominant class hegemony, and speak of subordinated class and valorize their identity. This can awaken consciousness in the

class to lead or be hegemonic countering the dominant class hegemony, therefore; the songs contain counterhegemonic consciousness in them. It is through consciousness awakening the dominated can act autonomously and be hegemonic in the long run for socio-political justice, equality and power. Alan Hunt argues, “Gramsci identified counterhegemony, that is, the process by which subordinate classes challenge the dominant hegemony and seek to supplant it by articulating an alternative hegemony” (312). The selected Ralpha songs can become a part of the process of counterhegemony formation since the songs substantiate subordinated class consciousness challenging the dominant class hegemony.

Even though the Ralpha songs were composed, produced, and performed during the late 60s to early 70s, they still carry the voice for consciousness awakening and agency formation. The researcher also finds it important to examine Ralpha in the role of intellectuals for “Gramsci sees hegemony as something that is produced by intellectuals” (qtd. in Strinati 158) and especially against the more internalized hegemony through consent. This research also incorporates Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s critical concept on ‘subaltern representation’. Even though Spivak argues, “Subaltern cannot speak” (308), representation is “re-presentation in art and philosophy” (275), she further says, “The intellectuals’s solution is not to abstain from representation” (285). The selected songs are the representations of the low-caste and class subaltern issues, therefore; the dissertation also incorporates Spivak’s aforementioned notions. Simultaneously, Louis Althusser’s concept of state ideologies and apparatuses substantiate the Ralpha’s songs. Because the songs voice against the then existing binaries and state agencies, they emit consciousness against the state agencies and apparatuses. The state ideologies and the apparatuses function to maintain that well by serving the dominant classes. In conceptualizing the state

apparatuses, Althusser asserts, “The state apparatus, which defines the state as a repressive force of execution and intervention ‘at the service of the dominant classes’ in the class struggle waged by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat, is well and truly the state, and this well and truly defines its basic ‘function’” (70). As Althusser argues different state apparatuses during the Panchayat ruling system worked in favour of the ruling class to maintain their dominance. The issue is discussed in detail in the second chapter. Dominic Strinati writes, “Althusser identifies certain agencies of the state whose work is ideological and which perform this task. He calls them ideological state apparatus; they function massively and predominantly by ideology, by ruling ideology, the ideology of ruling class” (139). So, Althusser does not view state and its apparatuses as passive entities, but argues as active space for the ruling blocs to spread ruling class ideas. The selected songs advocate change which is not in agreement with ruling class ideologies. How the songs are against the ruling class ideology of Panchayat system is discussed in the second chapter. Hence, using these critical lenses as framework of interpretation, the study attempts to bring Ralpa movement into academic discourse and acknowledges its contribution in enriching Nepali literature and enhancing the knowledge of socio-political history of Nepal.

The researcher claims Ralpa’s representative songs containing socio-political awakening and speaking of the marginal people for the counterhegemonic consciousness formation. The movement through the songs has contributed a lot for politico-cultural autonomy formation through consciousness awakening during the time of high censorship. However, the researcher finds it problematic that still this literary movement has not been given proper recognition in the broader scholarly spectrum; and the national history too remains silent about its influence on

dehegemonizing people from the 'consented and coercive hegemony' (The Intellectuals 54) of the ruling class. In addition, the consciousness and agency in their songs converted some intellectuals to Marxists and communist whose role look significant to break the layers of politico-cultural hegemony.

The research centers on finding the answers to the major questions like what function Ralpa songs serve through the vivid picturization of subordinated class in their selected songs? How Ralpa movement played role in awakening subaltern group consciousness against the hegemony of force and consent during the Panchayat era? What makes the Ralpa movement emerge against the power bloc in the then Nepalese socio-political context? These questions about Ralpa and their songs remain pertinent for me. In order to get the answers of the above questions, this research work examines and analyzes the representative songs written and composed by the group. Ralpa as a literary movement also produced other genres of literature, art forms and activities. However, the study only covers the representative lyrics, movement context and issues related to the topic. The examination and analysis of all sorts of Ralpa literary and non-literary activities remain beyond the delimitation of this study.

Through the examinations and analysis of primary and secondary data, the research aims to fulfill the major objective of identifying the functions of the selected Ralpa songs in bearing the subaltern consciousness with special focus to the politico-cultural context of Panchayat era of Nepal. Another objective is to examine the role of Ralpa intellectuals for bridging the gap between intellectual activism and progressive aesthetics through their songs. The research also fulfills the aim to analyze the resistance dynamics of the Ralpa Literary Movement in connection to the historical, politico-cultural situation during the era. Ralpa, in the words of Phanindra Sangam,

as a literary movement of creative artists, championed the art of “progressive songs also known as people’s songs” (11). In “The Tough Talk with Raamesh” Dilbhusan Pathak supports Sangam’s claim in defining Ralpa as “Progressive and people’s singers” (00:02:00-00:02:04). Considering the progressive spirit of the songs during the era, the researcher has selected twelve Ralpa songs with resistance and revolutionary rhetoric representing voice of resistance, caste and class subaltern, and their hope for the emancipation from perpetual subjugation. Ralpa movement took place almost six decades ago and has still remained significant in Nepali literary context. However, there has been very little recognition of this movement in the existing academia. Therefore, this study brings the group activism of literary writings and their creative pursuits through songs into the academic discourse. Furthermore, the study can be significant in opening up the new possibilities of examination through new theoretical perspectives like Cultural Studies, and Performance Studies. Moreover, the study will also be significant in making its readers understand the socio-political situation of the country and the paradigm shifts in Nepali politics.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters for the systematic study of context and data. The first chapter presents the major claim, research questions, rationale, theoretical perspective, delimitations and significance of the study of songs from Ralpa Literary Movement. The introduction of key concepts, theories and data are grounded in the same chapter.

The second chapter is the review of context and theories. The chapter is divided into four sections with different sub-topics. At first, this chapter presents the critical review of scholars and critics on the dynamics of people’s songs also known as progressive songs. The review highlights the significance of progressive songs in depicting and disseminating the counterhegemonic consciousness. It also sheds light

on why the state agencies and apparatuses resist such songs. The second section of this chapter synthesizes the various scholars and critics reviewing Ralpa Literary Movement. Review on Ralpa Movement establishes them as a group of progressive artists disseminating counterhegemonic values through the songs. The major section of this review throws light on the historical context of the emergence, nature and dynamics of Ralpa as a musical band. The critical survey also reveals the major contributions of Ralpa songs in imparting politico-cultural awareness among the subordinated against the hegemonic blocs. This section ends identifying 1960s as an era of counter-cultural movements in the western historical context too. The third section of this chapter reviews on the Panchayat system since the songs carry the voice of that era. It also provides context for the formation of counterhegemonic consciousness. In the same section, I study and analyze the partyless Panchayat system incorporating king Mahendra's ruling strategy through Gramsci's lens of hegemony of consent and coercion both along with the examination of state apparatuses and ideology. The review highlights the cultural hegemony exercised by the ruling bloc. The last section of this chapter concludes with the discussion of theoretical perspective and the methodological tools used for the data analysis.

The third chapter is an intensive analysis of the selected songs. The chapter is divided into four sub-headings according to the thematic content of the songs. The first section under the sub-heading of The Revolting Roar of Ralpa, I have analyzed four songs with the resistance consciousness. In examining its call for resistance, the songs appeal for the establishment of the counterhegemony of ruled. The songs advocate equality and justice ending all sorts of subordination. In the second sub-heading, I have analyzed and interpreted two songs that stand against casteism. The songs also present bitter experiences of the so called low castes. The songs question

the traditional status quo that awakens the counterhegemonic consciousness against the elitist hegemony. The third section Raising Class Consciousness deals with the songs representing economic divide in the society. Low class issues in the songs voice the necessity of the urgency of establishment of alternative values and inclusive system. The last section of the analysis chapter Hope of Emancipation studies songs with the imagination of economic justice and social inclusion against all sorts of traditional hierarchies. This section brings hope of better future for the dominated class. Since the Ralpa songs represent subaltern space, the chapter focuses on searching the voice and space of the voiceless. Simultaneously, the selected representative Ralpali songs thrive for awakening consciousness of the working-class for the counterhegemony formation.

The conclusive fourth chapter deals with the major findings of inquiry questions based on the spirit of title and statement of the problem and further recommendations. The dissertation ends in finding that the songs encapsulate the counterhegemonic consciousness in them. The songs valorize the subordinated and totally exclude the elitist ideas. Since the songs center on representing the everyday issues of a commonman, social injustice and problems of the local space in the folkloric tone, the songs deliver the counterhegemonic function. The imagination of alternative way of living and the call for socio-economic equality make the songs capable enough to awaken the counterhegemony. Therefore, the songs are still popular in the proper socio-political context. The rise of left politics during the 70s instrumentalized their songs because of the same function and feature in their songs. In joining the left politics the collective movement also got fragmented. Because the songs have progressive content, and speak for justice through various symbols and imageries, they have timeless literary values and universal appeal. The rise of Ralpa

Literary Movement makes everyone understand the the socio-political condition of the nation during the era when there was no freedom of speech.

Chapter Two

Ralpa's Rhetoric against Panchayat's Politics

Songs as a Site of Resistance

As songs have always boosted human emotions, feelings, culture, people and landscape across the world, humans have always incorporated music and songs in every endeavor of their life. John Street writes, “the potential of music to constitute identities and communities . . . create organisation and institutions . . . embody ideals and values” (173). Its aesthetics and rhetoric not only serve the entertainment purposes but also stands as a reliable source to understand geographical history and cultural identities. Ralpa also through the social issues present in the songs enables awareness of subverted identities and advocates alternative values against stereotypical cultural representation and practices of then society. David J. Elliott writes, “Music like culture is thoroughly mediated by concepts and expectations that are socially and historically determined” (154). As Elliott argues, songs, like any other art form, are reflection and manifestation of the group consciousness of the society where it originates. Nepal, being a multi-ethnic and culturally diversified country, own different shades of musical expressions including the progressive songs that incorporate people and landscape. Such songs present the understanding of shared values and knowledge of a particular time. Therefore, songs are integral to any society /culture and are manifestations of the eras when they are composed.

Ingemar Grandin in this connection studies Nepali progressive songs and points out, “Progressive songs tell us explicitly that the land is its people” (180). In this regard, Ralpa songs too highlight upon the issues of a commonman foregrounding the social injustice heightened by upper class elitist dominance during the Panchayat system. Through the songs, it can be easily internalized how people

were under dominance and influence of the ruling class during the era. As Grandin believes, progressive songs valorize the experiences and consciousness of oppressed people. Grandin further writes, “Progressive songs argue emphatically for the recognition of the poor and oppressed, that people with manual work and people with low social standing are worthy of love and respect” (183). On the other hand, most of the popular or folk songs either confirm the age-old hegemonic tendencies as they are fully internalized by people or bear subjective expressions of the speaker. Such songs often confirm the traditional hierarchies and are extension of dominant culture that results from socially constructed values through the elitist history. Sewa Bhattarai in agreement with Grandin writes, “Songs of progressive genre exclude love and romance and highlight the social injustice and inequality” (46). As Ralpa songs center on to represent land, and show respect to the ordinary people, advocate social justice and exclude showcasing elite values and culture including the aesthetics of romantic love, the songs have progressive voice in them.

In this context, the coercive power blocs often crush the songs that speak of and for the equality and justice of bottom ladder and do not accommodate with the elitist values. Grandin in another article defines progressive songs as, “Progressive (pragatisil) songs that is devoted to social issues, and with a more or less explicit left-oriented political message” (Creativity and Diversity 155). Therefore, singing out the marginal social issues, Ralpa songs during the Panchayat era were otherized as well as censored coercively by the state agencies considering them as bearing left- values. Devraj Humagain examines the different programs of Radio Nepal and mentions that there have been blames of biasness and interventions on the broadcasting of various programs. He points out some singers like Raamesh, Raayan, J.B. Tuhure, Jiban Sharma who sing peoples’ songs do not get space on Radio Nepal (55). Their songs

get broadcasted only when there is politically leftist/ progressive government. During the royalist ruling phase, their songs were either censored or simply not given space on the only public media, Radio Nepal. In spite of the obvious fact that the elitist ruling bloc crushes songs evoking the voice of the bottom ladder repeatedly, these songs have been created from time to time to articulate the marginal experiences and consciousness of people living in those spaces. Grandin's critical examination on Nepal's progressive songs during the Panchayat defines such songs as a devotion to motherland as well as agency to evoke the sense of consciousness, work, unity, uprising, and struggle (180). The progressive ideas and messages in the songs have enough force to arouse consciousness of the subordinated positions, which is an initial phase of agency formation of the subordinate people. Furthermore, these songs arouse hope for the marginal people with the final destination of change. Krishna Hari Baral historicizes different types of songs and classifies such progressive songs under 'political songs' (438-44) including the Ralpa songs. The rhetoric of such songs can bear the force of a political manifesto. As a result, during any political transformation or movement, progressive songs have impacted orthodoxly appropriated peoples' consciousness for the agency formation against the traditional feudalistic values.

Baral's examination also highlights the contribution of various singers and composers who have huge contribution for the consciousness formation of subaltern through their progressive songs. He writes, "Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Gopal Prasad Rimal, Siddhicharan Shrestha, Tarani Prasad Koirala, Govinda Sharma 'Bimal', Gokul Joshi, Kewalpure Kishan, Dharma Raj Thapa, Shyam Prasad Sharma contributed on awakening people against against the oppressive Rana regime and, caste discrimination and socio-economic disparities" (439). The poets/singers mentioned above are the pioneers in writing Nepali songs about commonmen and

against socio-economic disparities and exclusion. Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Munamadan*, a lyrical epic, Gopal Prasad Rimal's "ek jugma ek din" (one day in an era), Gokul Joshi's "Rokne ko ho?" (Who is there to stop?), Kewalpure Kishan's "Nepalma k sarkar aayo kisanlai goli le udayo" (What government is in Nepal who can shot down a peasant), Dharma raj Thapa's "aaja madal bajeko kina" (why madal resounds today?) are popular songs to awaken subaltern consciousness and speak against socio-economic exclusion of the marginals. The songs of Alimiya and Yuddhaprasad Mishra also impart progressive and revolutionary consciousness written prior to Panchayat system.

Raamesh, a prominent Ralpha founder in an interview on *AP Talk Time* recalls the day when king Mahendra called the group for a performance and they were not allowed to sing "their type- the revolutionary" songs and they had come back performing some folk songs (00:26:40- 00: 26:50). Raamesh memorizes they had performed four folk songs at Dance Academy wearing *daura suruwal*, managed by the officials themselves, since 'direct' Ralpha songs were not allowed or censored (Tough Talk 00:41:44-00:48:00). In this way, during the party-less Panchayat state agencies exercised absolute power to the ruled subjects. But, as Michael Foucault contends, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). As ruling class exerts power over the ruled, the suppressed class resists within the system through various revolutionary activities. Likewise, progressive songs bear the revolutionary consciousness to register the suppressed voice. Therefore, along with these songs, Ralpha songs containing subaltern voices and resistance rhetoric have also existed representing defiance against the elitist cultural hegemony, their influence and 'state ideology' (Althusser 77). Such songs challenge the power blocs and are

against the traditional hierarchies. The progressive features in Ralpa songs evoke the counterhegemonic consciousness. Therefore, considering these aspects, some scholars and critics have reviewed the movement through various perspectives. The review highlights the politico- cultural and literary implications of Ralpa. The section below contains the review of Ralpa Movement.

Revisiting Ralpa: The Aesthetic of Progressive Movement

The Ralpa Movement emerged a few years after the introduction of Panchayat system in 1960 by king Mahendra Bir Birkram Shah. Recalling this partyless Panchayat ruling period, Sukum Sharma argues, “New experimental modes of artistic expressions like ambiguous, abstract and symbolic writing were tried in context of suppression in art forms because of the ‘censorship issue’” (88-9). Because of the changed political environment and banning in the freedom of speech, literary movements adopted indirect modes of expression. “Resistance literature against tradition also became popular” (Sharma 88). Not only songs and other creative pursuits, but also the entire national environment got affected because of the regressive policies of state agencies. Therefore, Sharma posits, “. . . this phase in Nepali language and literature has historical importance” (89). Sharma records historical account of different movements of Nepali language and literature and considers Ralpa movement as a cultural movement. Sharma classifies this movement under the third phase of early modern period in Nepali language and literary movement (49) though he criticizes the movement as an anarchist revolt having no philosophical grounds inspired by Dadaism (102). On the other hand, Anna Stirr regards the group as, “Nepal’s original leftist cultural group, they began as a politically neutral artist” (Trans. Stirr). The group originated spontaneously through the association of the struggling creative artists or folk singers and not in alignment

with any party politics in the beginning. Even though the group had a decent beginning, the group's artistic pursuits and association took a shape of a movement. Sharma argues, "The artists were not only limited in singing; they were involved in the development of a literary movement, in fact, Ralpa was on the path to explore new dynamics in music and literature" (99). The group was vibrant and dynamic trying to recreate various art forms. However, the the group does not show remarkable achievement in other genres (People's Songs). There is no doubt Sharma acknowledges Ralpa movement as historically important in enriching Nepali language and literature. The writer also admits the artistic pursuits they excelled contained voices for the voiceless and had resisting discourse against the state agencies (100). However, the study seems very limited and without any theoretical perspective, the scholar simply records their contribution appreciating their artistic excellence in singing and writing.

In writing an account of the journey of Nepali music beginning from 1909 to 2009, Prakash Sayami identifies Ralpa as an important experimental musical group. In this account, he claims that in spite of the oppressive Panchayat ruling system in Nepali politics, frequent musical revolutions impacted Nepali politics (32). Sayami writes, "Continuing the rhetoric of people's songs, *Sankalpa Pariwar* through its musical productions tried to change Nepali politica. In this venture, Jeevan Sharma, Khusiram Pakhrin, *Raktim Pariwar* and their musical productions are noticeable" (35). In context of musical revolution, he adds Ralpa's rise as a protest against bourgeoisie culture inside Radio Nepal since the meager pay Grandin writes, the "artists used to receive 'was appropriated' by others they dropped the radio to line up instead with other writers, poets, painters and musicians" (Creativity and Diversity 162). As Ralpa went on performing various stage shows across the country in the

era of recording music, Sayami regards it as a first musical group too (33). Indeed, it was a first musical band of some revolutionary youths especially from the eastern part of the country.

The diverse experiences that the band members had during the era is also recorded in the memoir of a band member Manjul's *Samjhanaka Pailaharu*. The first edition was published in 1968 followed by new edition in 2008. They were experimental in various aspects including the content of their songs. As Sayami adds, "Most of the songs the group presented were songs of life and awakening songs and fewer love or romantic songs" (33). Ganesh Rasik, among them wanted to form a separate musical band, which could perform all types of songs including romantic folk songs. He, therefore, actively participated in the establishment of another band named *Lekali* in 1967 with Hiranya Bhojpure and other artists (Sayami 34). It became another very popular band later trying other popular singing genres.

The Ralpa Literary Movement commenced with a personal resistance against Radio Nepal later became an association of progressive artists as a collective movement against Panchayat regime adopting left ideology. In writing the biography of Parijat, Narendra Raj Prasai posits Ralpa's influence responsible in making "Parijat an energetic and a smart politician" (64). Parijat is regarded as one of the very influential Ralpa member. Her intellectuality and progressive thoughts fostered the group and the stage performances. The biography says she was very interested in music since the childhood. Prasai writes, "During the course of time, the first entrance she made into an organization was made into the Ralpa" (59). Later, in her guidance and fame, the Ralpa also seems to have earned a lot of popularity and the left ideology (Rasik 348) because other founder 'Ralpalies' were not so acquainted with the aims and objectives of 'Ralpa' as was Parijat (Prasai 60). Prasai further

continues, “Parijat visited different districts to provide an organizational leadership in the Ralpa. This started in 1966 and she carried on until the year 1969” (59). Parijat as a Ralpa travelled across country in musical tours. Govinda Giri ‘Prerana’ quotes Parijat’s diary recorded in Hetauda, Narayanghad, Pokara, Palpa, and Bhairahawa and also mentions the group travelled across to Darjeeling, Kalingpong and Assam with her (97). The travelling records prove that the songs were immensely popular during the time of Ralpa as a collective movement. Parijat remained an influential personality.

There has been conflicting opinions of Raamesh and Manjul about Parijat’s leadership as a group member. Raamesh says, “Ralpa was an assembly of the intellectuals bound together to dismantle the old and begin new and Parijat was the leader of the movement” (qtd. in Prasai 60). On the other hand Manjul mentions that Parijat added ‘Ralpa’ to her name for the first time in the preface of his novel *Chekudolma*, based on Parijat’s life itself, which was published after the Ralpa had already got established (trans. Stirr) its fame. However, Parijat’s influence in the group was both literary and ideological; she too remained influenced by the group. Giri ‘Prerana’ further writes, “Parijat was not the leader of Ralpa, but was at the center of it” (94) and quotes Parijat, “Parijat is not the leader of Ralpa, or Ralpa does not have any leader” (97). Hence, the spontaneous group formation occurs when the door of Radio Nepal was closed for them against their compalin of “salary encroachment by permanent employees of Radio Nepal” (Giri 95). Singing songs on alternative platforms advocating social justice and equality gave them a distinct identity. They became “people’s singers or progressive singers” (Sangam 11). Consequently, the group joined political left and started producing songs against the Panchayat regime as a collective movement.

When we see the organizational structure of the Ralpha, it looks like a very loosely structured group where the members kept coming in and going out. Even though commenced with four founders, the other active members in the group were “Manjul, Parijat, Ninu, Bimal, Norem, Raamesh, Rayan, Arim and other litterateurs and musicians were associated in it” (qtd. in Sharma 100). There were a few more artists and political leaders associated to the group. “The Ralpha members very uniquely renamed adding Ralpha surname after the group name was decided as Ralpha. Meghraj Nepal named as Manjul, Niranjana Chapagain as Ninu Ralpha, Raameshwor Shrestha as Raamesh Ralpha, Kirtiraman Chapagain as Bimal Ralpha, Niranjana Chapagain as Niran Ralpha, Pradip Nepal as Siroj Sarov Ralpha, Hari Shrestha as Norem Nigasa Ralpha, Khagendra Basnet as Simosh Ralpha, but Parijat very scarcely appeared with Ralpha surname” (Giri 97). Since various creative artists joined the group, it took the shape of a movement. Hence, Modnath Prasrit considering the movement and recalling that period says:

Ralphalis started making an impact in literature, art and music, speech, language, style, thoughts, behaviors, schools, institutions, government, marriages and families, etc. The society started attributing and comparing it with the Beatles, Hippies, a hungry generation, hooliganism and free sexual movement of youths who were engaged in that unorganized revolution. (qtd. in Prasai 60)

Prasrit’s observation marks Ralpha as a dynamic movement on the politico-cultural aspects of then society. Even though Prasrit criticizes the group as being hooliganist and unorganized, Karthak notes the group as “Heavily weighted down by the philosophy of Marxist mentors such as Parijat and Bhupi Sherchan and Konstantin Glinka, the Ralphalis were committed to politically polemical ‘protest’ songs against

the Panchayat regime, whose pundits, naturally, felt otherwise (144). The movement carried on through the productions of songs having Marxist consciousness and revolutionary, reformatory voices. Abhi Subedi in a personal conversation states, “The young men, the Ralpa boys, my age group, were the product of that time when left oriented politics had chosen singing as a favourite modus operandi. They sang in schools; progressive groups; they did not sing for the parties, but they were closely associated with the wave of communist popularity in Nepal” (Guragain). Therefore, the left ideological parties capitalized their songs for the political benefits (People’s Songs). Yet, their contribution in the making of progressive consciousness through their counterhegemonic songs remains significantly missing in the academia.

There were confusion and suspicion in the uniqueness of the name Ralpa as etymologically the word does not mean anything. Baburam Adhikari contends, “In the beginning, Ralpa was misunderstood as Revolutionary Active Left Friend of Asia because the group had affiliations to leftist philosophy. But, it was meaningless” (qtd. in Sharma 33). In fact, the group was named Ralpa for its different organic identity that resonates the passion and spirit of a musical band. Hari Shrestha (then Norem Ralpa) memorizes the occasion when Manjul played guitar and a friend asked the name of esoteric music Manjul instantly replied the music was Ralpa, a meaningless word. Later, the group agreed on naming Ralpa to the group as it produced strange alluring vibrations (Trans. Stirr). The genesis of the group formation was as revolutionary and innovative as the songs collection. On the other hand, Sukum Sharma criticizes the group name, “Calling Ralpa and Ralpa generation thereafter was meaningless and only the copy of western style” (99). Since the songs address the everyday life struggles of a commonman, people identified themselves with the band as Ralpa generation. Bhattarai regarding Ralpa writes, “Creating revolutionary

songs like “Gaau gaau bata utha” (Wake up from each village), “Garibako chameli boldine koi chaina” (There is no one to speak for poor, Chameli) Rapha went across the kingdom to establish ‘Progressive genre’. She further compares the songs with the ‘protest songs’ emerged during the era across the world” (46). Hence, the movement got established with creative, innovative zeal of creative artists which later grew to become a progressive movement and protest songs against the Panchayat regime as their songs contained revolutionary counterhegemonic consciousness against the status quo established and sustained by the hegemonic bloc.

Similarly, Ganesh Rasik, another Ralpa for a short period, in his memoir recalls Ralpa through its two prominent group members namely Manjul and Raamesh. In the book, entitled *Chappakai Man ma Basekaharu* (Those Living Deep inside the Heart) Rasik presents his personal and professional relationship with various artists including Raamesh and Manjul. He also writes about the socio-political environment of the era when king Mahendra introduced the party-less Panchayat ruling system. In that political background, the group Ralpa emerged with their rebellious songs that can awaken consciousness of the ruled subjects. So, Rasik recalls, “. . . emotional, euphoric, rebellious audience and listeners of the songs of two Ralpalis” (327). For Rasik, their friendship was an exemplary one. Rasik mentions their songs as the “. . . organic expression of struggle, hardships and pessimism of the youths who have travelled from remote parts of the country while youths of Kathmandu were under the influence of Hippies” (328). Since their songs refused to be in tune with the existing socio-cultural and political structures, they were even blamed as spoilers of youths and society. Rasik too worked as a Ralpa for some years. Therefore, expresses his deep appreciation in imparting the consciousness among the ignorant in writing and performing counterhegemonic songs.

Rasik examines their contribution in this memoir, expressing sadness over the lost friendship and professional ties in between the two influential Ralphalis that made the group dispersed very soon (355). The narrative very clearly depicts the historical situation of the time when Rasik himself was struggling to be established as a well-known artist. Even though Rasik explains himself of his low position as a Ralpha member, and his personal ego as the reasons for departing the group (349-50), in fact, Rasik himself was the early artist to defect the group. Manjul says he [Rasik] could not maintain the disciplinary code of Ralpha (not singing romantic love songs and consuming alcohol), Rasik left the group and Manjul joined as a singer after being a poet, lyricist, writer and announcer in the group (People's Songs). So, Rasik was an important member as a singer before he left Ralpha; however, he ended up singing in support of Panchayat glorifying monarchy. Songs like "Nepaliko mutuma khoja tyaha singo Nepal huncha tyaha raja rani huncha" (Search in the heart you will find king and queen residing there) and "Panchayat nai mero haat ko aaula vaidinale, raja rani mero duita aakh vaidinale" (Panchayat is my fingers and the two eyes my king and queen). Which means Rasik himself got culturally hegemonized and got associated with *Lekali* band on which Karthak notes, "Lekali's only 'rivals', at the start, was a group called Ralpha" (144). Ralpha songs had already established its brand as people's songs. Since Lekali group remained apolitical, inoffensive, middle-of-the-road music, which soon became the mainstream (Karthak 145). However, Rasik in his memoir provides the knowledge about how Ralphali songs and performances were against the power blocs although falls short of studying their contribution through the theoretical lenses and as a scholarly discussion.

Ingemar Grandin in his article, "Creativity and Diversity: A Musical Assessment of Panchayat Nepal" analyzes different dimensions of Nepali songs in

Panchayat era. He studies socio-political, cultural backgrounds responsible in making a diversified nation during its building process. The article reflects songs as the theme of the era. Even though Grandin believes, “One should not start out thinking that the Panchayat state was a master puppeteer who could choreograph all the dances and call all the tunes (149), he posits that Panchayat state agencies had played very much influential roles in continuing traditional hegemony in different sectors of the nation including music. He contends: “There were different kinds of Panchayat- state – interventions in the cultural economy of music . . . rhetorical and material” (148) interventions which directly or indirectly affected the bases of music making. Both kinds of interventions could target music directly as well as have musical consequences. Ralpa too originated against the state interventions that promoted the state imagined homogeneous national culture. Most of the artists and singers who were close to the state apparatuses as Louis Althusser distinguishes “repressive and ideological” (75) became popular artists in the market. Grandin further writes, “Radio Nepal as an apparatus not only used for the dissemination of state imagined Nationalism and discourses, but also gave opportunities to great artists like Amber Gurung, Gopal Yonjan, Nati Kazi, Shiva Shankar, Kumar Basnet, Tara Devi, Aruna Lama and Narayan Gopal (Creativity and Diversity 150). The singers became mainstream popular artists during the era and made contribution in flourishing Nepali songs/music industry. Ralpa stands out as it did not assimilate the state policies and ideologies. Moreover, the group presented stage programs in the remote areas openly against feudalistic common sense and bourgeois ideologies. The lyrical compositions speak of the local, marginalized issues expressing the lived experiences that can actualize self- will formation of the subjects.

Establishment of Radio Nepal followed by Inderni Records in 1962 opened

immense possibilities for different types of songs to flourish. Therefore, Syami regards the phase after recording facilities as the golden period in Nepali music (17). The popular romantic modern songs during the period were of singers like Fateeman, Bachhu Kailash, Shiva Shanker, Narayan Gopal, Gopal Yonjan, Amber Gurung, Nati Kazi, Premdhoj Pradhan, Tara Devi, and Aruna Lama, and became the mainstream songs. Songs like “A Kancha Thattai ma yo baisa”, “Tara matra hoina timilai”, “yati chokho yati mitho”, “Yaha ful nakhilecha”, “Timro jasto mutu mero pani”, “Ghumtima naau hai” mostly on romantic themes. Gopal Yonjan and Narayan Gopal’s combination made remarkable contribution in enriching Nepali music where Narayan Gopal became “voice emperor” of the kingdom whereas Sayami calls an “icon” (18) and rasik calls “celebrity” (331) to Premdhoj Pradhan in terms of popularity. Ralpa’s songs grew as an alternative kind of songs unlike the mainstream romantic modern songs played on the popular forums of the era. Bhattarai quotes Rayan who says, “At that time, the romantic love songs were very popular and songs on difficulties of low class did not count. So, singing for awakening consciousness of the subjugated became a clear objective to them for social transformation” (46). Since the traditional status quo was problematic for Ralpa, their songs emitted prospect of socio-economic equality and justice. Consequently, as Rayan Ralpa says, “Gradually they became well-known as progressive artists, politically out of tune with Panchayat establishment (qtd. in Creativity and Diversity 162). Despite the atmosphere of censorship and administrative oppression, Ralpahlis continued their movement creating songs outreaching to the subaltern people across the country. Karthak notes on Ralpahlis including Arim, Manjul, Raamesh and Rayan as the key musical members who began their musical tours in the years around 1970 influencing new constellations. Karthak writes, “Manjul and friends toured from village to village,

singing to and of the rural folk, tailed all the while by informants from the Central Intelligence Department (144). Grandin in agreement with Karthak posits Ralpa songs as an alternative cultural voice of the era that was out of the tune with state apparatuses and ideologies. Therefore, the group was under the surveillance and suspicion from the state agencies including CID.

The group constantly voiced the songs of low-class and other marginalized communities against Panchayat administration and ideologies in spite of the repression and threats from the state. The group performed at local stages searching alternative platforms using some local instruments like *madal* in combination with guitar, which was not so common those days (People's Songs). In the researcher's observation, also, Grandin postulates that the Panchayat cultural monolithic nationalism policy of 'unity in diversity' was in fact a failure even though Panchayat system seem to work on promoting "abstract – nationalism" through the artists like Amber Gurung and Gopal Yonjan (Subedi 29). There were several other forms of artistic expressions or multiple voices prevalent during the era that were demanding separate form of representation and Ralpa was one among them. Ralpa, according to Grandin represented peoples' songs, which were progressive in content and not in alignment with the state policies (Creativity and Diversity 163). Hence, Ralpa's songs of dissent were proscribed, and censored by the administration (Karthak 144). In Grandin's intensive study of Panchayat era musical scenario too, Gramscian perspective is missing even though Ralpa was a significant group promoting bottom up policies and dehegemonizing people's consciousness during the era.

Ramesh Bikal summarizes the journey of two Ralpalis Manjul and Raamesh as a live picturization of then hill people (Footsteps of Remembrance 364). The two Ralpalis had journeyed across the country on foot to listen and sing the voice and

tunes of locals. In their journey, the subjugated people loved and admired them whereas the state apparatuses were suspicious of the tour and under the close monitoring entailing cancellation of some of the stage shows. In addition to it, Bikal in *Samjhanaka Pailaharu* points out some of the misconceptions and the rumors spread by the hegemonic bloc. Bikal further writes, “Ralpha means an undisciplined hippie group who are there to spoil the youths and kids” (368). Therefore, this sort of oppressive ruling mentality was exhibited by the hegemonic upper class. Raamesh confirms it saying, “They were blamed of provoking innocent hard-working peasants, the so called low-castes, and bringing family fraction while singing protest and reformatory songs” (qtd. in Sangam 11). In fact, these artists were trying to impart knowledge and consciousness on the bottom level of society that was under consented hegemony which was no in favour of the elitist ruling class. The group also presented other types of song. In a personal conversation with the researcher, Raamesh adds, “They used to sing poetic, contemporary lively, western, progressive, and folk songs which would sometimes save them from administrative oppression (Guragain). However, power blocs used all methods to stop the group ranging from spreading rumors to using local administration against Ralpha. Manjul elicits in his memoir *Samjhanaka Pailaharu*, “It was clearly understood that the curfew order of administration was to stop our show” (130). Appreciating Manjul Bikal adds, “The book records journey of those travellers who lighted direction and path of people singing about and learning from people themselves” (364). The writer admires the way two Ralphalis communicate with locals and become familiar with their everyday struggle. Therefore, their songs are sincere expression of people’s struggle. In rendering peoples’ songs, the Ralphalis too had to go through ups and down moments of experiences from the ruling class and ruled people. Hence, Bikal’s

acknowledgement of Ralphali songs remains limited only as general appreciation as voice of suppressed people.

Hari Shrestha (Norem Ralpa) in a newspaper article remembers Ralpa as an influential musical group. According to Shrestha, “A different kind of social movement that made waves in Nepali literature and music up until its conclusion, it still lives in memory” (Trans. Stirr). Their songs were social phenomena and imparting consciousness and agency among the lower strata of the social ladder. Indeed, as Niran says Ralphali songs get revived, translated time and again either it be in a Nepali feature film named *Balidan* (Sacrifice) or in a recent young generation rapper Balen Shah’s rap version. Even after such a long gap of dissolution of the group, their songs remain in the popular music chart. In the aforementioned article, the writer shares his memorable meeting with Manjul, and discusses about the formation and development of the group. Shrestha (Norem Ralpa) agrees on the intensive study of this group and says, “Overall research, analysis, and presentation about Ralpa is necessary” (Trans. Stirr). This emphasis on the study of Ralpa also suggests a huge necessity of the intensive study of this group and their activities. In this article, the writer also mentions various philosophers influencing the group and their leftist inclination. Dilbhusan Pathak in an interview with Raamesh mentions the similar fact and says, “People used to applaud hearing their voices and many CPN-UML leaders became Marxists after listening Ralphali songs” (00:2.00-00:2.25). Their songs were so influential in rousing revolutionary consciousness. Later, the group got dispersed because the members joined multiple strands of leftist ideology (Rasik 354-55). In this way, they emerged as influential progressive artists advocating changes in the traditional conformist socio-political structures through their songs.

Netra Atom in the preface of *Manjulka Geetharu* classifies Manjul’s songs

into different categories. His songs are for the people's liberation. So, Atom categorizes them as people awakening songs, songs of struggle but optimistic about life, songs of suppressed, songs considering people as powerful and inspiring, songs imagining new world, songs searching the class system and lifestyle, songs worshipping and acknowledging brave martyrs, patriotic songs advocating new structures, songs inspiring youths to come back from foreign land, songs of women struggle, songs showing concern for children, awakening folk songs, songs on intimacy with various objects and songs on places and fantasy about lifestyle. Atom's analysis covers most of the significant Ralphi songs. His assessment to the songs and its classification too is without any theoretical lens. He agrees the songs to be very effective in the consciousness awakening to the marginalized communities and inspiring for the agency formation.

Ralphi as a collective movement dispersed in the peak of the movement, primarily, because of the political and personal differences. "Norem Nigasa went to Pokhara to continue his job, Pradip Nepal got involved in active politics, Manjul and Raamesh went towards eastern Nepal singing awakening songs and remained absent in Kathmandu for a long time, Bimal left the group" (Giri "Prerana" 156). The left political parties appropriated their songs since the rise of left party politics associated the group members into separate strands of the communist parties. Mainly, the same reason dispersed this collective movement. "In order to disseminate the conception of social change through the cultural waves brought by the progressive songs, the political parties disseminated their ideologies and messages to the public instrumentalizing the [Ralphi] songs" (People's Songs). Because the songs bear rhetoric of social equality and justice, the rise of left party politics underground with the similar ideology made the Ralphi members join the communist parties. Rasik

writes, “Ralpa got associated with underground communist parties during the early seventies. The party had internal conflicts, groupism, and national/ international polarization. . . . Hence, the assimilation of Ralpa’s active group members into two separate communist party ideologies fragmented the movement into two groups” (354). Even though as a collective movement Ralpa got divided, the members continued the movement through two different identities. Rasik further writes, “Eventually, Manjul, Raamesh and Arim continued the musical journey as *Sankalpa* family and Rayan through *Bedana* band started literary productions according to the associated party principles” (355). The political faction came to the surface and the group got divided. In agreement with Rasik Bhattarai argues, “People’s or protest songs like Ralpas have consciousness and agency to become ladder to get ruling positions” (46). Hence, Ralpa songs have been instrumentalized and appropriated by the party politics time and again for the songs contain counterhegemonic consciousness that appeals mass.

Not only in Nepal, progressive-songs also regarded as the protest songs have touched peoples’ mind across the globe; they have emitted rebellion and protest in various global communities during the 60s. Andrew Sanders defines “The decade was often hailed, though not universally welcomed, as the era of the ‘New Morality’” (611). The general overview of western culture and society reveal that several songs and musical bands have spoken against the dominant cultural hegemonies as the counter cultural practices. John Street argues, “Songs are part of a long tradition of dissent and struggle” (550). Furthermore, 1960s is the remarkable era of such counter-cultural practices including music and songs in western world too. In this era, several counter- cultural activists including artists revolted against the established social and political discriminations that created hegemonized subjects. Rayan in an interview

with Asmita Manandhar memorizes, “The Beatles was also formed around the same time we named our group Ralpa. We also had four members in the group—Raamesh, Manjul, Arim and I”. Internationally, African- Americans, environmentalists, gay and lesbians, women were raising voices to establish inclusive society questioning the conformist binaries. These different minorities also chose aesthetic forms including music and songs to subvert the dominance of elitist hegemony that created binary normativity.

These songs present resistance consciousness to dismantle the hierarchies and speak against the hegemonies confirmed by the ruling elitists. Several artists and activists were inspired and demanding love, peace, equality against the censorship and inequality. Various artists and musical bands like Beatles, Bob Dylan, Beat Generation, Allan Ginsberg, Hippie culture tried to create a new world order criticizing the established world order and different socio- political evils. Rajkumar Baniya writes, “They [Ralphas] were influenced by Beatles like four major band members. They used to carry guitars. The uncut hair, style, appearance and fashion reflect the influence of John Lennon, and Bob Dylan whereas some used to call them hippie too” (Bania). Their aesthetics and counter- rhetoric have been instrumental in voicing the issues of class, gender, caste and racial inequalities also in breaking the elitist common sense and values, and in promoting imagination of emancipation.

In the present context, when Panchayat no more exists and socio- political consciousness of the masses have awakened and changed in the direction of the songs manifestation, the political aim of this movement should have come to an end. Moreover, the leading Ralphas are no longer in any party politics. However, Abhi Subedi argues, “At the core they were singing about the Nepali sense of revolution and change. The singers wrote about the Nepali sense of space, Nepali productions

and the indigenous labour. So, they still sing in the proper context” (Guragain). So, its popularity and impact are revived time to time whenever there is any politico-cultural debate. In agreement with Subedi, Bhattarai adds, “Ralph’s songs speak for justice and equality in a broader sense, so the songs have become timeless” (47). Recently, during the general election, Kathmandu’s Mayor, Balen Shah, a rapper, too has sung the Ralphali songs “Gaau Gaaubata Utha” (Rise from each village), “Koi ta Bhane Jahajma Harara” (Some fly high in airplanes) in rap version. Nepathya Band prior to Balen has also presented the song in national as well as international forums. However, no study has been conducted to introduce the songs in the broader intellectual world and academic discourse. The review shows very meager scholarly engagement has been conducted regarding the features, functions and significance of the songs in actualizing new mode of politico-cultural situation. In addition, the songs remain fresh territory.

Hence, the present research engages in the study of songs penetrating upon subtle issues of layers of hegemony: hegemony through consent and force both. This research fills the gap through a novel Gramscian perspective in the selected texts to bring the songs into the scholarly discussion. The researcher examines how Ralphali songs defy against the state ideologies, rigid cultural hegemonies, and raise subaltern voices that can raise consciousness for the subversion of oppressive politico-cultural structures. The elitist history fails to record such issues. The songs are examined as a subaltern space where the marginalized get consciousness for the agency. The selected songs question all sorts of traditional hierarchy.

To sum up, Nepal during 1960s underwent various socio-political changes matching the western and global contexts. Critics believe that during the same era the kingdom was taking directions towards the modernity. Various infrastructural changes

as well as political turmoil continued in between the political parties advocating democracy and a new concept of partyless Panchayat system admonished by the king himself. Both sides claimed of better development practices, equality, justice and peoples' access in the policymaking. Moreover, discourses were created through various institutions by the dominant class that political parties were failure to address peoples' demand and consolidate democratic gains. Furthermore, the political parties were regarded as threats against national sovereignty and instability. King Mahendra himself became very active and ambitious to take over the power in his hands against the democracy established in 1951 ending the Rana oligarchy. In Nepal, kings as rulers were very successful in maintaining their influence in the public reckoning themselves as a symbol of national integrity and stability. In this regard, Lok Raj Baral writes, "Nepal's history and its Hindu traditions have made the role of the king in the Nepali polity an assertive one" (Nepal's Politics of Referendum 2) that made the king Mahendra use coercion and consent both to establish himself as an authoritative ruler dissolving democracy.

In conclusion, the chapter distinguishes Ralpa as a consciousness of the historical time. They were the versatile progressive artists advocating social justice and inclusion. In their songs, the intellectuals concretized the suffering of the ruled and remained influential in the consciousness awakening for the autonomy formation of the ruled subjects. The chapter also substantiates songs as an alternative medium of socio-political picturization and transformation. In the next section of the chapter, the researcher reviews the politico-historical contexts during the rise of the Ralpa.

Cultural Hegemony and the State Apparatus

Historical overview of Nepal presents that the kingdom has remained under the patronage of upper-class elitist rulers. Continuing the legacy, King Mahendra Bir

Bikram Shahdev ruled the country from 1960 to 1972. The king is noted and critically considered for modernizing Nepal, and most importantly, for introducing partyless Panchayat ruling system. The ruling system brought in 1960 lasted for three decades. Even though the king ruled only for twelve years, he was successful in establishing the traditional hegemony through power and influence and ruled the nation in accordance with the elitist common sense. Through the rhetoric of various nation-building slogans and cultural politics, he even became successful in making the public consider partyless monarchial ruling system better and superior to democracy. As Baral writes, “In 1960, when King Mahendra dissolved the freshly introduced parliamentary system and its sub-systems such as parties, no one but a few party workers shed tears, which showed that the peoples’ orientation towards democratic values was too tenuous to be taken into account” (Nepal’s Politics of Referendum 14). Hence, in the following chapter, the dissertation examines various state apparatuses and institutions the king executed to maintain the hegemony of consent and power both.

The concept of hegemony was first propounded and elaborated by an Italian scholar and critic Antonio Gramsci. He postulates the theory of hegemony to be a strategy of the ruling class to perpetuate their power as a ruling class. He writes, “. . . hegemony is the dominance and subordination in the field of relations structured by power” (Selections from Prison Notebooks, Longman 39). King Mahendra in the similar vein shifted the power in his hands through maintaining power in armed force through the constitutional act 64. It was furthermore strengthened by the traditional cultural hegemony and sustained by production of cultural art and artifacts, too. Hence, Narayan Khadka writes, “Two factors have strengthened the decisive stature of the monarchy in Nepal- the faith of people in the institution, and the sole control of

the army by the palace” (431). Which means the king who institutionalized the Panchayat system employed both force and consents to sustain the elitist hegemony and ruled the subjugated. Regarding the cultural hegemony, Gramsci states, “The theory of hegemony was meant to be a strategy of power pursued through a cultural work” (qtd. in Nadia Urbinati 370). Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony is strengthened by cultural, religious institutions and belief systems. As Hinduism has been a prominent and state promoted religion in the nation, the formal rules, social values and beliefs were guided in accordance to it. Baral further argues, “Monarchy, sustained by the Hindu value and belief system, had come to occupy a central place in Nepal” (45). People looked upon the king as an incarnation of God himself. The king, hence, instrumentalized the hegemonized compatriots in maintaining his dominance and ruled the kingdom on state generated ideology. In this context, marginal people remained excluded under the dominance of elites’ cultural hegemony without their knowledge. They were made subaltern, out of the mainstream socio-political power structure. So, under the wrap of homogeneous culturally monolithic Panchayat policy, there were several discriminated heterogeneous subaltern classes. Susan Hangen and Mahendra Lawoti point out, “The state promoted the Hindu religion, the Hindu monarchy, the *khas kura*/Nepali language, and the hill Hindu culture, such as the *daura suruwal* dress, as signifiers of the national community” (14). Since, state promoted homogenized cultural nationalism, consequently, heterogeneous marginal communities and their agency were denied of the mainstream socio-political power structure. Khadga K.C in agreement with Hangen and Lawati writes, “Their extreme exclusion could be gauged from the fact that there has not been a single Dalit cabinet minister in Nepali history until 2006” (6). Hence, the subjugated ones remained outside the power structure for a long period.

However, in the present context, the political scenario has changed and Panchayat has become a history. The kingdom is now a Democratic Republic and paradoxically still raising marginal issues. So, there have been reviews and reflections on Panchayat system. Raamesh himself, reflecting on the Panchayat system and king Mahendra, confers, “Establishment of a number of industries, road construction, folk music promotion along with Nepali currency issuance during his reign marks king Mahendra worked for the welfare of Nepal and Nepali identity” (STV 00:38:07-00:38:40). King Mahendra definitely laid foundations for the national development. On the other hand, the nationalist image also made a huge influence on public as well as it created an easy platform for the king to exercise full authoritative power. Baral further writes, “For the king, considered, as he is the symbol of national unity and source of political authority in accordance with the Hindu tradition and custom, was instrumental in replacing the western liberal democracy by a new order led by himself” (3). Even though there were promises of decentralization and social-reformation in Panchayat system, the king held all the executive power through a political coup which was against peoples’ participation. Thus, Anna Stirr in agreement with Baral contends:

Retaining the progressive rhetoric of the 1951 revolution, the Panchayat government emphasized modernization, development, and nation- building, with a basis in a unitary idea of national culture. But, this idea of unity came at the expense of difference: Panchayat nationalism emphasized the monarchy, the Hindu religion, the Nepali language, and the customs and values of high-caste Hindus from the hill areas, as the shared national culture. (5)

Stirr’s remarks depict how the king ruled the country authoritatively in his own terms ignoring the voicelessness of heterogeneous identities and culture vigorously

introducing homogenous national culture. As “Classics of Marxism have always maintained: the state is the (repressive) state apparatus” (Althusser 74). Thus, state manipulated various apparatuses to promote its imagined culture. That culture became repressive upon other marginal identities. The repression brought by the state resulted in socio-political and economic divide simultaneously increasing suppression of multiple values and identities.

Gramsci, in discussing the role of intellectuals, theorizes the concept of cultural-hegemony. According to him, it is through the cultural hegemony indoctrinated in peoples’ consciousness dominant class construct the normative worldview that is unknowingly accepted by the subordinated class and get ruled through consent. Gramsci puts forward, dominant class through their power, position and influence subjugate the subaltern mass without their knowledge not using any coercive force (The Formation of Intellectuals 54). In order to maintain the influence, many nationalist songs were written and played through the national media, the Radio Nepal. Krishnahari Baral argues, “Many patriotic songs recorded during the Panchayat system were the eulogy of the system or the head of the system. Since Panchas also used songs to endorse the system. Songs like Laxman Lohani’s “panchai ho yo desh banaideu” and Vishwobandhu Thapa’s “Nepal gaurav hamro yo ramro pancahiko sarkar” were written” (439-40). Through the dissemination of such songs good image and influence of the system was created in the populace to maintain the hegemony of the ruler and the ruling class. Furthermore, king Mahendra established himself as the most patriotic nationalist and an ‘art lover king’ (Sayami 35-36) to maintain the cultural hegemony.

However, Gramsci theorizes that in order to subvert the ruling class hegemony, working class intellectuals should create the hegemony that can be

counterhegemonic for the victory over bourgeois capitalistic hegemony. Gramsci argues, “An independent class of intellectuals does not exist, but rather every social group has its own intellectuals” (qtd.in Bates 353) which means dominant class employs the elitist intellectuals to create and disseminate their norms and cultural values through various institutions. These ideas and values serve the interests of ruling class enabling them to sustain their ideologies. Gramsci believed that dominant class hegemony should be challenged through the production and maintenance of alternative values, beliefs and practices that serve the subordinated class’ interest. Perry Anderson in agreement with Gramsci argues, “The working class can be hegemonic culturally before becoming the ruling class politically within a capitalist social formation” (qtd. in Im 126). Hence, production of such worldviews where working class becomes culturally hegemonic is very crucial for the construction of new political order, which would be favorable for the subordinated classes. But, the production of counterhegemony involves a long, slow, meticulous process as elitist hegemony remains deeply embedded and serve in formation and function of values and belief system. Still, it can be formed through writing. The lyrical forms of expression like Ralpa can also be instrumental in actualizing counterhegemony. Abhi Subedi writes, “There was no opportunity of revolt in king Mahendra’s Panchayat system, however, there was uprising of some young good litterateurs criticizing social characteristics of the era” (Shakti, Srasta ra Subaltern xviii). Which implies artists through the reformative and revolutionary voice can intervene in this regard. So, despite the rigidity of dominant class hegemony, cultural products like songs have potential to overturn it. In addition, progressive songs like Ralpa are easily comprehensible, memorable and easy for repetition because of its folkloric rhythm (Bhattarai 46) and can aesthetically capture and articulate the subaltern voices.

Therefore, the songs represent the history of masses who were suffering from socio-economic and political oppression. As Gyan Prakash adds, “Subaltern studies plunged into this historiographical contest over the representation of culture and politics of people” (1477), Ralphali songs also speak for and represent the subaltern groups and their culture.

King Mahendra took cultural leadership in the civil society through influence as a preserver of various national cultures. The king employed various artists, intellectuals, press and educational institutions to establish himself as a rigid nationalist. For the dissemination of such ideas Radio became an effective apparatus. Pratuyush Onta and Devraj humagain both note that “the majority of the radio programs in early years of Mahendra’s reign were devoted to denouncing the earlier multi party democracy and explaining the benefits of the one party (Royalist) Panchayat government” (qtd. in Laura Kunreuther 62). The government appropriated the intellectuals for the promotion of state ideology. Regarding the role of intellectuals, Thomas R. Bates argues, “The intellectuals succeed in creating hegemony to the extent that they extend the world view of the rulers to the ruled, and there by secure the “free” consent of the masses to the law and order of the land” (353). The king, even composed various patriotic songs himself as well as hired singers across the country to promote Panchayat utopia through Radio Nepal, a state owned broadcasting media to secure free consent. Grandin argues, “The Panchayat state needed music and musical talents to make something actually to come out of its cultural apparatus” (Creativity and Diversity 164) that also established the king as a liberal, democratic, nationalist leader. In this context, Ralpa songs voices the oppressed advocating the center space for them in their songs also registering their issues and identity.

Moreover, the king executed special directions to the state-owned media *Gorkhapatra* and Radio Nepal to stop broadcasting the news not in alignment with state ideology and only in Panchayat's favor. He officially implemented censorship, the rigid media policy. Lok Raj Baral writes, "The Press Act drastically restricted freedom of expression, particularly through its Article 30. A large number of newspapers were banned or their editors arrested for their non-conformist views" (62). That stopped the growth of private press and limited the access to information. It was after years in 1993, *The Kantipur Daily* became the first private newspaper release. Sukum Sharma notes, "Banning and putting black mark on published books during that phase needs special research" (89). These facts suffice how the Panchayat apparatuses very subtly maneuvered the media to establish the hegemony of consent through 'civil and political society' (Bates 353) both.

Furthermore, spontaneous consent was gained through different development slogans accompanied by an array of patriotic songs. One of the most popular Panchayat-era slogans, "One language, one religion, one form of dress, one country" (ek bhasa, ek dharma, ek bhes, ek desh) reflect the state efforts to create cultural uniformity" (Hangen and Lawoti 14). Hence, Nepali speaking, hill brahministic Aryan culture, values, and language became the most dominant. He wrote various patriotic songs under the penname M.B.B. Shah as well as appointed some writers to sing in favor of monarchy. Like "Gaau Farka Aviyan" (Back to Village Mission), "Unity in Diversity" along with the songs like "Ma mare pani mero desh bachirakhos" (May the nation live long even though I die), "Garchin pukar aama" (Motherland appeals) created immense influence on people and became a part of political strategy of the king. The political strategy was dispersed using state apparatus Radio Nepal. Pratush Onta writes, "After king Mahendra's take over in 1960, Radio Nepal became

one of the most important medium to disseminate the political motif that Panchayat system was better than the ruling system through peoples' representative" (qtd. in Humagain 40). In addition to it, several writers were appointed to record the bravery, stability and integrity of royal rulers and the knowledge was disseminated through school textbook courses.

These textbooks excluded the identities and contribution of marginal people. Hangen and Lawoti remark, "State- published school textbooks, written primarily by "high" caste Hindus, delivered nationalist ideology to children" (15). The textbook series *Mahendramala* record such historiography. The song like "Baneko cha pahara le yo chati mero" (My bosom is made up of rocky hill) takes the public towards imagining the nation as a homogenous sovereign hill state with monolithic cultural values and songs like "hatne haina dati ladne Nepali ko bani hunxa" (Nepali charges better with force than runs away) eulogize monarchy. Such songs were printed in the school textbooks and broadcasted using Radio Nepal that was under the royal patronage functioning as cultural apparatus to spread the "state ideology" (Althusser 77). These strategies of the ruling bloc strengthened hegemony of consent. Grandin argues, "Radio Nepal and the cultural apparatus were a sub-system in this cultural economy, not its governor" (Creativity and Diversity 385). Panchayat system implied Radio Nepal to collect folk songs (*lok geet sankalan*) and hired some artists to serve the purpose. Dharma Raj Thapa, Kumar Basnet played curatorial role at Radio Nepal to collect, perform and arrange the folk songs confirming the unitary national culture basically highlighting on the central- western hill sound (Stirr 34). Stirr further adds, "these folk songs, collected and revised for radio broadcast, provided a musical reference point for ideas of national unity, grounded in the rural central- western hills" (36). The songs other than in Nepali language were domesticated even though "in

1964, one half – hour per week was set aside for the broadcast of *bhasa-bhasi git* The name of the program was *Fulbari: Flower Garden*” (36). Eventough the folk song collection promoted national music, it was a narrow vision promotion only limited to the elitist imagination of national culture. Hence, in practice, there was neither equality nor justice but only clear divisions of class, caste and gender binaries which were very stagnantly present and preserved in the society through state apparatuses.

Not only Radio Nepal, The Royal Nepal Academy (established in 1957), Ratna Recording Corporations (established in 1967), Sanskritik Sansthan/ National Theatre (established in 1972), Royal Nepal Film Corporation (established in 1973) were the cultural apparatuses to disseminate the ruling class ideologies. Grandin notes, “Most of all this come to be coordinated—and kept under government supervision—under the Rastriya Sanchar Sewa Yojana (the National communication Service Plan) of 2028 vs” (149). Hence, all most all the cultural apparatuses were were working to disseminate the elite class ideology for the continuation of cultural hegemony. In this way, the dominants were getting access to higher avenues through the diffusion of their culture and values on socio-economic aspects whereas the ruled were pushed to the subaltern category. Hence, the status quo was maintained.

In fact, there were the subaltern classes who had no access to the socio-political and economic benefits of the society. Moreover, traditional feudalistic common sense had fractured their agency. In addition, Baral adds, “Pancha extremists were aggressive in creating a climate of fear implying that the victory of multi- party means an open invitation to chaos and anarchy” (Nepal’s Politics of Referendum 185). In fact, the victory and establishment of democracy is meant to be the involvement of public participation in the policy making. The public remained outside of it because of fear of chaos and anarchy. Consequently, the hegemonized common

Nepalese internalized and naturalized their subordination. People's feudalistic common sense was heightened by prevailing feudalistic socio-political structure too. In spite of the political change, the age-old fundamentalist consciousness very poignantly continued, in fact, in both classes: dominant as well as the subordinated ones. It was infused through different organizations. Anu Sakxena writes, "In Gramsci's views the hegemony of bourgeois lay in its dominance of civil society, which included all the organizations which diffused the ideology of the ruling class" (66). Through the diffusion of ruling class ideologies, the elitist domination continued creating hegemonized subjects.

In order to take the cultural leadership to sustain the cultural hegemony, King Mahendra first took the political leadership. He gripped the state power in his hands through a political coup with power and consent both. John Whelpton mentions, "The royal takeover was achieved without initial opposition" (99). The takeover was successful because of the king's popular representation as a nationalist and reformative ruler. Lok Raj Baral writes:

The constitution also provided for a wide range of powers to the king. Its article 55 came in particularly handy to him when he dissolved the parliamentary system in December 1960 on the specious plea that the country was facing an emergency as a result of the ineptitude of the government as well also of the popularly elected representatives in every sphere. (26)

Even though the political parties were banned, party members supported the move. Some party-politicians also assimilated to the elitist leadership. So, Whelpton adds, "There were no protests on the streets of Kathmandu and many of the educated elite swung behind Mahendra, including fifty-five of the congress party's own seventy-four MPs" (99). In addition, promulgation of 1959 constitution through a nominated

advisory assembly set the background for the royal takeover. Although the constitution was drafted to institutionalize democratic practices, it was a strategic move of the king in securing the apex power for himself.

In this politico-cultural scenario too, some intellectuals came up to write against the power bloc. Gramsci postulates, “all men are intellectuals, but not all men have the function of intellectuals” (The Formation of Intellectuals 51). Some intellectuals like Ralpa members collected voice against the homogeneous cultural state imagination of the king. The creative artists and writers were thriving to break the biasness and domination created by it. In order to break the traditional hierarchy built on the manipulated common sense of the ruling class, it is necessary to construct counterhegemony first. The intellectuals, like The Ralpalis, through various counter cultural activities like composing their type of songs can raise consciousness among the working class that can form alternative values against the elitist common sense. Then, the non- agents can be united to speak through conciouness against the pervasive, so- called, normal culture for social equality and justice. However, the king became successful in persuading the educated elites as well as the ruled subjects that the democracy was a failure and unstable because of the corrupt party leaders. He even blamed party leaders as “failure to maintain law and order, being anti-national, corrupt and unaccountable” (Shikhar 00:00:06-00:01:38). Party leaders were jailed and people’s politics went underground. Even though the king sanitized himself by putting the blame on party politicians for national instability and threat on national sovereignty; in fact, the king himself had cautiously centralized the ruling power, as he was not a ceremonial monarch, during those years. Nevertheless, as Gramsci theorizes, the powerful rulers through their influence make people accept their ideas and opinions. “Gramsci believed that people are not ruled by force alone but by ideas”

(Sakxena 66). Similarly, Nepali elites and public easily were influenced in his words and promissory notes for national reformation. Moreover, the hegemonized class could not understand the political façade of the era.

It was a façade because the king was able to establish Panchayat system mostly through his inherited status well versed in the slogans of social reformations and the cultural hegemony. The king was successful in establishing himself as a symbol of promising leader even leader of the party leaders by holding the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary power in his hands to execute only on the national interests. According to Gramsci, “hegemony and dictatorship are mutually dependent phenomena and in both cases, the lack of spontaneous consent in civil society obliged the state to resort to force” (Bates 354). It was through political force, the king established party-less Panchayat overthrowing multi-party democracy. The democracy and people’s politics were only on the baby steps when the democratic government was taken over with array of blames itself suggest the king’s intentions and coercion.

In fact, some of the reformatory acts were already designed during the elected government time under B.P. Koirala’s leadership. As noted by Whelpton, “Ironically, Mahendra began by following the Congress blueprint: *birta* and *rajyauta* abolition had been legislated for in 1959-60 but were actually implemented after the royal takeover. The 1964 land reform Act was also similar in some ways to B.P.’s own proposals” (104). Land reform policy secured justice, but only on papers. His ruling ambition and desire for active dictatorial leadership reverberate in the fact that he secured his position in the army through an Army Act article 64 in 1959 constitution before the oath taking ceremony of newly elected B.P.’s government. King Mahendra did not leave any state agencies and institution to employ his interest. Thus, the

takeover would seemingly look like a demand of the prevailing context.

In conclusion, this section highlights the socio-political context of Ralpa's emergence during the Panchayat era. Even though king Mahendra in the present context is regarded as a nationalist monarch and accredited for promoting Nepali art, culture and modernizing the kingdom, the king ruled the subjects with consent and coercion through cultural apparatuses maintaining traditional status quo. The legacy continued for thirty years. There have been several amendments as negotiations in the constitution during thirty years of Panchayat period to sustain the royal power. However, the amendments could not fully address the marginal issues and issues of socio-political inclusion. After thirty years, democracy was re-established in 1992 during king Birendra's reign through people's movement as the rise of party politics continued underground. In the researcher's opinion, the socio-economic outcomes of party-politics in the contemporary Nepali politics is a matter of a separate important discussion and analysis, which needs to be rigorously conducted in the present academia.

Counterhegemonic Role of Ralpa Movement

This section discusses the various methodological strategies and theoretical perspective the researcher ventures for the examination and analysis of the data. With these methodological parameters, the researcher penetrates to find the answers to the inquiry questions to fulfill the objectives of the project.

The qualitative study carries intensive analysis of the selected primary texts using Antonio Gramsci's theoretical notion of hegemony, counterhegemony along with the concept of role of intellectuals. The critical insights have been gathered from the close reading and analysis of the secondary data viz. books, reviews, research journals, research articles and other library sources written about the era and songs.

To gather in-depth analysis of the dynamics of resistance and subaltern issues, the researcher also has conducted semi-structured interviews with some selected Ralphas. Notably, the researcher has translated and transliterated selected primary texts and secondary data in Nepali language into English for the analysis.

The framework of interpretation in the study incorporates critical insights of hegemony and the role of intellectuals with an aim to form counterhegemonic consciousness that dehegemonize subordinate class. Since the study focuses on examining the songs as a sight of consciousness awakening and resistance, the researcher collects, analyzes and synthesizes essential insights on resistance theorists/writers as well. In addition, the selected songs represent marginal voices; the researcher reviews insights from Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak. As Ralphas were constantly in struggle with the state ideologies and apparatuses, therefore the researcher uses Louis Althusser's notions of state ideologies and apparatuses as well. The analysis focuses on the poetic aesthetics of the songs and meaning making, analysis unfolds the contexts, imageries, symbols and other literary devices used throughout the songs.

In order to break the traditional hierarchy built on the manipulated common sense of the ruling class, it is necessary to construct counterhegemony first. Through various counter cultural activities like composing songs can raise consciousness and can be catalytic in self-will formation among the subordinated masses to dismantle the elitist common sense. The researcher finds it important to understand what kind of bourgeois or feudalistic hegemony was prevalent during the era of Ralpa formation so that the group became apparent to build up the counter hegemony to awaken the consciousness of the subordinated ones. In order to understand the hegemony of ruling class, the researcher examines some political documents including constitution

of 1959 and Civil Code Act (*Muluki Ain*) along with king Mahendra's Panchayat Proclamation speech. These documents throw light on the political and ideological leadership of the king to establish hegemony in the kingdom. How the hegemony of force and consent were indoctrinated to the subordinated class by the ruling class is a matter of inquiry that justifies the necessity of counterhegemony to structure social-equality, justice and inclusiveness. New social order was not possible through appropriated political rebellion and movements unless the subaltern subjects would get consciousness awakening and autonomy.

Ralpa as an artistic movement set in after the fall of democracy and the rise of autocratic party-less Panchayat system structured by king Mahendra in 1961. Ralpa's aesthetic endeavors were primarily focused on the establishment of working class hegemony where the subordinated class can challenge and sustain ruling class hegemony. Establishment of working class hegemony can be a slow process where agency less marginal people should arise from the layers of consciousness to understand the normative class view of the elites as an artificial social construct. Gramsci theorizes that ruling-class common sense becomes the accepted cultural norm, valid dominant ideology that justifies the social, political, and economic status quo as natural, inevitable, perpetual and beneficial to every social class. Therefore, for the formation of working class ideology, working class intellectuals must work through civil society. In the civil society, working class intellectuals can perform through various institutions like media, religion, schools, university, etc. Such organic intellectuals, according to Gramsci, can create counterhegemony that changes mass consciousness through the production of working class intellectuals. In context of Ralpa, the various artists and writers belong to lower economic status working in various service sectors victimized by the political society and state mechanisms. The

movement was in fact commenced to challenge the overt totalitarian political power exercised by the government-controlled media. Thus, their personal resistance also went in alignment with the formation of consciousness for the struggle of subaltern class of the kingdom.

Developing Gramsci's thesis, Louis Althusser conceptualized the notion of 'State-apparatuses' to elucidate the various institutions and structures that make-up the state and help to maintain its power and control over the society. He argued that the state is not simply a neutral instrument of social organization, but rather a complex set of mechanisms and institutions that functions to reproduce the existing social order and to maintain the dominance of the ruling class. Althusser postulates two types of state apparatuses: The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The RSA includes institutions such as the police, military, and judiciary, which use force and coercion to maintain social order. The ISA includes institutions such as family, religion, education, and the media, which use ideology and persuasion to shape the belief and values of individuals. Althusser believes that these state apparatuses work together to shape and control the behavior of individuals and to insure that the existing social relations are reproduced and maintained. He argues that the state is not simply a passive recipient of power, but an active producer of power relations that serve the interests of the ruling class.

Althusser postulates that both the RSA and ISA were necessary for the reproduction of capitalistic societies that create binaries. Overall, Althusser's concept of ISA and RSA provide a framework for understanding the ways in which the power is maintained and reproduced in capitalist societies. The researcher finds incorporating Althusser's concepts in understanding the Ralpa's struggle remarkable because aesthetics and implications of the songs counter the traditional binaries

maintained by the bourgeois capitalistic values. Furthermore, all state apparatuses during the 60s were under the elitist control. Ralphi songs were denied to on air and discouraged because of the rigid media censorship policy concocted by king Mahendra himself. As the king used the media to disseminate and popularize ruling class ideologies. King Mahendra did not leave any strategy behind for the continuation of ideological conditioning of Panchayat hegemony using all state apparatuses including media of course. The paper explores and studies the media censorship policy and army act implemented in 1961 to understand the coercion of state apparatuses.

Along with the power dynamics of various state apparatuses and ruling class hegemony, the researcher aims to understand the subaltern issues of the era. Thus, the selected primary texts are analyzed through the lens of subaltern concepts as well if they represent the hardships of marginal subaltern. Gramsci himself coined the word subaltern to denote low position army recruits. An Indian scholar, philosopher and critic Gayatri Chakravaty Spivak further brought the concept to scholarly discourse. The scholar contends that subalterns are the voiceless people who are socially, politically and culturally outside the mainstream power structure. Their agency is fractured by the rigid cultural hegemony existing in the society. Spivak argues that the subaltern is always already silenced because their experiences and perspectives are overpowered by dominant discourses and narratives that seek to represent them. Ralphi songs too attempt to speak the voice of marginalized by the virtue of caste, class, and sometimes occupations too. How far the songs resonate to the core of their sufferings to be heard by the ruling class is also a pertinent matter of inquiry. Especially in Nepali socio-political context while there has not been significant transformations and subalterns still waiting to be heard in the nation.

Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" challenges scholars and activists to consider the ways in which their own positions of privilege and power may influence their efforts to represent and empower marginalized groups. Ralphas, in their attempts to capsize and articulate the social injustice prevailed during the era, travelled across the remote parts of the nation to collect their real voices. Thereupon, the researcher finds the possibility of new forms of representation of the subaltern in Ralpa songs. On the other hand, Spivak comments on the notion of "speaking for" the subaltern, arguing that this can be just as problematic as silencing. She suggests that attempts to represent the subaltern must be approached within dominant structures of power. Ralpa songs too struggled to represent the issues of subaltern while there was extremely authoritarian Panchayat government system and absolutely no freedom of speech. However, the voices raised in the songs are the ethos of the subjugated ones who were otherwise voiceless.

Hence, using the aforementioned theoretical perspectives and methodological tools also incorporating some essential critics, the study examines the Ralpa formation historiography and the selected representative songs. The dissertation at first examines the Panchayat hegemony through the critical examination of king Mahendra's speech along with the constitution promulgated in 1959 and 61. To perpetuate the upper class feudalistic hegemony of consent, how the king used his power and influence through literary writings and other state apparatuses are examined and discussed too. How the hegemony of both power and consent were unknowingly fracturing the agency of the ruled subjects and making the positions of ruling class strong. To throw light on this, the researcher finds Ralpa songs as agency to construct the counterhegemonic consciousness of the ruled.

In another chapter, I have analysed and interpreted the selected songs

representing affirmation to resistance, class, caste marginalization, and the hope of emancipation from the hegemonic hurdles. Therefore, the analysis section is divided into understanding the progressive rhetoric of Ralpa at first then the researcher delves into understanding Panchayat hegemony along with the consciousness present in the songs and their position for countering the hegemony and agency formation.

Chapter Three

Ralpa Movement and Agency Formation

In this chapter, the researcher analyses and interprets the selected representative Ralpa songs that evoke counterhegemonic consciousness against the Panchayat hegemony. The hegemony also entailed from the traditional feudalistic ethos. Since Ralpa songs represent subaltern space, the chapter focuses on searching the voice and space of the voiceless. The songs repertoire represents the resistance against rigidity of the traditional binaries constructed in caste and class that push subordinated to the subaltern class. As subalterns remain lowest in the ladder of socio-political stratification, the class becomes most hegemonized and voiceless. Even though Spivak doubts and questions, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”(285), songs addressing marginal issues can become a powerful and effective medium to represent the lived experiences of the hegemonized class for self-will formation. The state apparatuses during the Panchayat assimilated to the ruling bloc. On the backdrop of the then socio-political contexts, the songs highlight subordinated issues which remain pertinent till the date.

Understanding and examining aesthetics of Ralpa songs as subaltern space becomes important. The songs are not in agreement with the elitist hegemony and substantiate the history of subordinate. Subaltern studies took shape in 1970s with the aim to provide the subordinated people their own history and voice. Gyan Prakash writes, “The term “subaltern”, drawn from Antonio Gramsci’s writings, refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/ dominated relationship in history” (1477). The subaltern classes are denied access to hegemonic power structures, and suffer from exploitation of ruling class. Subaltern studies encourage writing historiography

of the people ignored by the bourgeois as well as the colonialists for autonomous self-formation. Because subaltern studies focuses on “accusing colonialist, nationalist, and Marxist interpretations of robbing the common people of their agency, it [subaltern studies] announced a new approach to restore history to the subordinated” (Prakash 1477). Similarly, the representative songs challenge the claim of socio-economic and political inclusion and justice of Panchayat system. In order to reverse the lived history of the subordinated, the selected Ralpha songs voice against Panchayat rhetoric of capitalistic modernity and inclusion that, in reality, sharpened social and political inequalities and conflicts.

Regarding the songs production and presentation, Raamesh Shrestha reveals, “The band used to perform as a group. However, for writing songs the credit was given to Manjul” (qtd. in Bania). Therefore, most of the songs under the analysis are taken from Manjul’s collection *Manjulka Geetharu* and *Samjhanaka Pailaharu* and two more songs are taken from youtube. The songs emit force enough to structure the working-class hegemony. Beginning with their title song, the section discusses selected songs under the thematic sub-headings of resistance rhetoric, class, caste marginality and the hope of emancipation necessary for awakening agency.

The Revolting Roar of Ralpha

Ralpha, a literary movement of creative artists, championed the art of progressive singing. It would be very appropriate to say it was Nepal’s first musical band that was formed through a revolutionary step against an exploitation of a state apparatus. Therefore, the songs contain resistance consciousness in them. The following song taken from Manjul’s autobiographical memoir *Samjhanaka Pailaharu* introduces the group and their counterhegemonic spirit:

We Ralpha—the Bastian of resistance

We Ralpa—the island of voices

We Ralpa—our bosom border

broader than any volume

We Ralpa—waves of the ocean

We Ralpa—melodies of the era

We Ralpa—rays of the sun. (1-6)

The song asserts Ralpa as a group against outdated, orthodox beliefs and socio-economic injustice having broader visions and perspectives. The song asserts Ralpa as island of voices for the voiceless. They have big broader visions to speak for, and do not want to be within the limited boundaries set by the traditional structures. The first line of the song announces Ralpa as a group to protest against any form of subordination. Manjul remembers, the song was performed at Okhaldhunga (Footsteps of Remembrance 320). At a local setting, the song is an announcement of the group's collective spirit, which declares Ralpa means rebellion as the group can voice against all sorts of discriminations and discrepancies of the era. Anne Stefani believes, "Songs have a transforming power over the individuals who sang them and on those who heard them" (56). After hearing the resistant spirit of this song, people can awaken their resistant spirit too. As the song implies, Ralpa's musical movement exhorts the force of resistance against the prevailing injustice. Their songs speak the demands of the time. 'The island of voices' (2) also means it's the time to speak. People cannot always remain muted. The song launches Ralpa as a very distinct revolutionary group, and the repeated use of 'we' denotes they have collective force like 'the waves of ocean' (4) and are unstoppable. Stefani further argues that singers are instrumental in "bringing to the surface centuries of oppression and resistance against the oppression burst out through the voices of the singers" (65). The song

successfully establishes the group pioneering against exclusion and oppression. ‘Melodies of the era’ (5) depicts the consciousness of the time. People should not carry on the traditional old hegemonic culture and structures. Now is time for the change. Similarly, ‘the rays of sun (6)’ depict hope and a new beginning. The revolutionary character trait of Ralpa resonates through the group name Ralpa itself.

In the similar way, the above song through the various metaphors assert the group as very bold, revolutionary, innovative, conscious, forceful and united enough to bring agency to the dominated ones. Like the waves of the ocean, the group asserts its unstoppable force that keeps striking back. The repeated use of refrain ‘we Ralpa’ highlights their solidarity and makes the song forceful in its message. The song is almost like a rap song. Anastasia Denisova and Aliaksandr Herasimenka substantiate Rap as unstoppable resistant music that capacitates to “trigger a discussion on contentious issues in a censored political environment” (2) as the above song contain similar tones of resistance and mode of expression. Even though the government had strict media censorship policy, the group remained determined enough to sing the melodies of the era as intellectuals should speak for the class they belong. Ralpa continued to speak against the traditional hierarchy. The melodies carried the voice of subaltern and for that class of people, the group means hope like ‘the rays of sun’ (6). The tone of the speaker in the song is assertive and optimistic and has motivating rhetoric for awakening consciousness among the subjugated. It marks the group as a reliable medium of agency formation to establish new order catapulting the traditional hegemonic ones.

Songs not only express the aesthetics of personal feelings they speak the society too. Farzana Kazi argues, “Songs are the excellent means of displaying

resistance against the oppressor” (223). The socio-political commentary present in the song below promotes the counterhegemonic consciousness and resistance dynamics formation during the very critical juncture of time when there was media censorship. Ralpha band emerged as working class intellectuals speaking of freedom and justice openly regarded as a threat to the royal palace. For Gramsci, the only way to get rid of subordination is through the permanent victory of the working class is by establishing socialist hegemony. As “civil society is the marketplace of ideas, where intellectuals enter as “salesmen” of contending cultures” (Bates 353). Ralpha band emerges raising consciousness in the civil society for the establishment of socialist hegemony as working class intellectual.

One of the most popular songs, under the analysis, has been performed on multiple alternative platforms as well as on aired recording version. Regarded as one of the most popular revolutionary songs, the song remains most capitalized on peoples’ uprisings. It has been remixed and reverbed by various artists in multiple languages. Prakash Sayami writes, “among the most popular songs Ralpha presented were Rimal’s ‘Raato ra Chandra surya’ (Red, moon and sun), Mishra’s ‘Rakta krantiko jwalamukhima’ (In the volcano of bloodred revolution), Shyam Tamot’s Gaau Gaau bata utha’ remains in the frontline (33). Tamot’s song appeals:

Wake up from each village

Wake up from the colonies

To change the countenance of the nation

Those who can write

Wake up holding the pen

Those who can play music wake up with the musical instrument

Workers wake up holding the instruments

Those who have nothing rise holding your voice. (00:00:01-00:04:58)

The consciousness arousing rhetoric of the song raises revolutionary zeal in the listeners. Raamesh in an interview with Dilbhusan Pathak describes the song as invocation to people through persuading tone to rise up because Raamesh believes people are the live country and people themselves are responsible for making their destiny. Political leaders must act peoples' will (00: 44: 46- 00: 48: 00). If rulers do not act people's will, they must raise voice for justice. They should not remain silent. He further says, it is one of the most translated songs which they performed. "The song was translated into Tamang, Limbu, Chinese, English, Magar, Gurung dialectics" (Tough Talk 00:06:50-00:08:85). The song says people have endured a long-suffering and suppression from the ruling class, and now it is the time for the revolution. Therefore, people should arise from each part of the kingdom. The song reinforces the call for freedom and justice. That would only change the face of the nation. The speaker encourages people to have consciousness of the time also reminds people of their power. Whatever skill they own, that is their power. Since songs can resound as "the mouthpiece of resistance to the artifice of hegemonic culture, to the hypocrite officials, to the social vices and political wrongdoings" (Denisova and Herasimenka1) and make people aware of the time to change the face of the nation, the song under analysis bears similar rhetoric. In order to fight against all sorts of discrimination, there must be unity and harmony among the ruled subjects and intellectuals must lead. Grandin postulates, ". . . these progressive songs give an idea of the world view disseminated by the opposition during the Panchayat era, and of the ideals, aspirations and sentiments that may have attracted ordinary men and women—farmers, carpenters, government servants and so on—and mobilized them in the cause of political change" (176). In order to change the face of country, there must be unity

among different professionals/intellectuals and ordinary men too. Therefore, the song calls ‘writers to arise holding their pen’ (5). Unskilled workers can resist through their voice against all sorts of discrimination and inequality. The song calls for the unity of different working class professionals to make their voice powerful against all sorts of domination.

The song has a profound revolutionary tone that provokes the listeners to move in action for the change. According to Grandin, the song motivates “. . . writers tell the truth; teachers help eradicate ignorance; singers sing songs to raise consciousness; poets and artists build the bases of civilization” (177). In this song, the writer incorporates all classes of people who can equally be the agent of nation formation. The ruled people are, “. . . brave, hardworking, suffering, downtrodden, poor” (Grandin 177) and still they can form agency through solidarity. The song, therefore, gives an affirmation to all the subjugated to rise with consciousness for solidarity and agency in order to accomplish socio-political transformation for the counterhegemony formation.

Manjul and Raamesh incorporate similar rhetoric of class-consciousness and affirmation to resistance in another song. The song gives space to a marginal community *Gaine/ Gandharva* in it and wishes to hear protest songs from a *Gaine/ Gandharva*. The song unfolds:

Here comes the Gaine brother roaming around in our yard

Oh what a pity! body attired in rags

I wonder! what he might have eaten?

where he might have stayed?

I find an elder brother in his face

from where he might have been

Oh! his love is in my heart. (1-6)

Gaine refers to a community of occupational Nepali musician caste. Moisala informs, “As a group of musicians, they prefer today to be called *Gandharvas*” (15). The speaker in the lines above remembers the day when a *Gaine* had visited his/her home in a pathetic condition. The song says the *Gaine* was ‘wearing ragged clothes’ (2) and had no fixed destination to stay, so the speaker wonders where that *gaine* might have fed. Moisala adds, “Within the Hinduistic order in Nepal, “untouchables” like Gains were not allowed to own houses or lands” (15). *Gaine* community belongs to a group who are traditional singers and carry a special Nepali local musical instrument called *sarangi* (a fiddle like instrument) and wander around singing people’s joys and sorrows. “Because wandering Gains have been singing about things that they have seen and heard, passing on messages, stories, myths, news, and events, they have been called “singing newspapers”” (Moisala 16). As *Gaine* community did not belong to the top ladder in Hindu orthodoxy, they were denied access to the local households.

The song depicts economic deprivation and social exclusion of the community. In doing so, the song valorizes the identity and agency of the community. Moisala argues, “Even after the official abandonment of the caste system in 1960s, the caste hierarchies made the *Gainses/ Gandarvas* suffer from various kinds of social exclusion” (24). However, the speaker in the song addresses him as a ‘big brother’ (1) and feels his pain also gets worried ‘where the *Gaine* would eat’ (3). Grandin in his article mentions Shambhu Rai, one of the top three *saragi* players, “had not gone directly to Panchayat controlled cultural apparatus but instead had joined Raamesh and Manjul in their group *Sankalpa Pariwar* in the late 1970s to give musical programs in various places in the country” (Creativity and Diversity 167). The incident is very remarkable to show the value and high regard of *Ralpa* members to

promote local music and the community. The cultural apparatuses would only assert, “top –down imposition of a unitary national culture” (Stirr 36) that confirmed Hindu hill high caste /class values. In this context, the above song gives space to the cultural minority and their lived conditions in raw form. In the same song, the writer reveals *Gaine* as a progressive singer having resisting voice:

I wish he would come again to our village
 To sing his melodies
 To wake up those speechless
 To sing the songs of bravery
 To wake up powerless, lonely
 To wake them up, to help them be alive. (13-18)

The speaker wishes if the *Gaine* would visit again and retell the narratives around. Steven Curtis in this regard, critically reviews Weisethaunet and says, “Weisethaunet makes a good claim for the “chronotopic” weight of many *Gaine* songs which accrue emotive significance as they record the specific tales and trials of the people and places that *Gaine* musicians encounter in their wanderings. The songs’ significance is thus wholly derived from the social environment” (Curtis 396). Similarly, according to the lines, the *Gaine* songs were beautiful also having raw representation of people and events also bearing agency for the subordinated. In the similar tone Moisala argues, “In many *Gaine* songs texts, political criticism blends with social criticism of life circumstances” (16); lines in their songs tell peoples’ suffering, injustice, inequality and voiceless condition. Therefore, the *Gaine*’s songs actualize peoples’ pain and incorporate courage and determination to the muted to speak. Through the songs of *Gaine* the voices would get assertion and solidarity to live. The song valorizes the minority class, promotes the experiences of local music makers as well

as identifies agency in solidarity for resistance.

Similar resistance rhetoric camouflaged in various imageries and symbols makes Manjul's and Raamesh's composition affirmation for the revolution in another song:

Oh! Mynah fetch the melody, bring the voice
to the flute from a local bamboo shoot and *vakimla* hook
wake up all dead and in slumber
return all those gone, call all gone far away. (1-4)

The song written and composed by Manjul and Raamesh personifies a musical instrument *Murali* (Flute) made from a special kind of locally available bamboo shoot known as *dhanubaas* and *vakimla*. The speaker is requesting a Mynah bird to fetch voice and rhythm. The power in the voice and rhythm can awaken asleep ones and incite life to the dead. The song is a powerful call to wake up from the existing situation to build the autonomy. The writer metaphorically asks the acquiescent bird to raise its voice. The bird is a symbol of people whose voices have been suppressed. Therefore, *feri* (once again) people need to raise the voice to establish their rule. Only that raised voice can awaken the rulers and the dead democracy can come back. The voice can be so powerful that already dismantled democracy can be returned and re-established.

The song contains resistance consciousness in it. The speaker cannot overtly challenge assertion of revolution because of the rigid media policy. Rayan says, "A new age demands new revolution. Society and state require constant reminders, regardless of how democratic society is. So, in every era, artists should be on the frontline to push the boundaries and stand against any censorship" (Manandhar). However, in lack of freedom of expression during the era, Nepali writers had no space

to voice marginal experiences. Writers were heavily censored and kept under the strict suspicion. As a result, the collective voices remained suppressed in literature and the literature produced rendered in favor of the ruling elites. The song necessitates urgency of the agency for the muted to get access into the socio-political structures who:

can give roads to narrow lanes, wind to the breeze

can lit fire in water, submerge fire

give eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf

leg to the lame, voice to the voiceless. (5-8)

The lines are affirmations to give agency and force to the subordinated. The aesthetic voice and rhythm of the song and artists can provide force to the muted. The flute in the song symbolizes the power of art in consciousness raising, awakening a, agency building and resisting domination. Flute can also be an image of justice and harmony and “trigger a discussion on contentious issues in a censored political environment” (Denisova 2). Similarly, the fire is a symbol of aggression and rebellion. The rebellious speaker in the song announces to lit the fire in water once the persona gains autonomy. The rebellious attitude of the persona in the song summons for the people to counterblast the existing disparities and discrimination through the imageries and symbols of flute, bird, lane, wind, fire and physically challenged people

Rhetoric of Condemption against Casteism

Caste-system denotes a traditional practice that creates hierarchy among the people simply based on birth on a certain family lineage. A person spontaneously gets dominance over another person by birth. This is scientifically wrong, and the classification roots back on Hindu religion. However, in South Asian context, including Nepal, people are still fighting against this inhuman practice of

discrimination. It is the construction of Hindu philosophy itself. According to Hindu religion, every creature in this world is the creation of Lord Brahma including humans, which categorizes the people into four different levels as Brahmins, Kshetrias, Vaishyas and Sudras. This categorization assumes that the Brahmins, created by the mouth of Lord Brahma to symbolize scholar's groups, Kshetrias are the production of the arms of him who symbolize the warriors; Vaishyas created from the lap of Brahma to symbolize a mother like feeding her baby, and Shudras from the feet of Brahma to symbolize a weight bearer. This categorization gives dominant position to Brahmins and the lowest position to Shudras.

Hindu philosophy drives Nepali society too, so the dominant class assimilated its geographical and ethnic diversities. The state was ruled through the state-promoted ideological slogan like "unity in diversity". Panchayat system also ruled in the same line by imagining homogeneity as a national culture; however, in practice there was no equality and justice for the heterogeneous marginalized people based on neither caste nor the class. Hangen and Lawoti write, "During the Panchayat era (1962-90), the state solidified the idea of Nepal as a homogeneous Hindu society" (14).

Therefore, the feudalistic traditional caste hegemony was sustained despite the Panchayati affirmations of legal provisions. Caste hegemony was rigidly prevalent during the era and the society continued practicing untouchability and touchability based on caste. In the words of Whelpton, "Untouchables or Dalits, as they increasingly preferred to be called after 1990" (157) otherwise they were relegated as untouchables.

The following song composed by Manjul battles the caste hierarchy sustained by the traditional feudalistic hegemony through negation, "Neither do I say touchability nor untouchability exists / nor surrender to caste discriminating rituals"

(1-2). The song involves rhetoric against a longstanding caste issue and involves the question of a caste minority identity. The theme of the song and its power relations are critical to the governments' promise of caste equality and justice. According to Pirkko Moisala, "Radio- Nepal and the state supported film and music industry have almost completely disregarded ethnic musics" (qtd. in Grandin 187). The state apparatuses including Radio Nepal only promoted the elite class values and conformist songs. In the context, when the ruling class maintained the status quo and binaries, the speaker of the song denies of any rule that agrees with caste discrimination.

Before the political paradigm shift of 2006, the idea of state-nation formation was primarily promoted through homogeneous Hindu Nepali speakers. Uttaran Datta and Mohan Datta argue, "upper-caste Hindu society created massive socio-political and economic uncertainty in the lives of the people of lower strata of society" (4). As a Hinduized kingdom, society practiced beliefs and values based on four castes that consisted Brahmins and Kshatriyas at the high and Sudras at the bottom ladder in the hierarchy. However, the song disapproves of such practices that promote touchability and untouchability according to cast. The caste system was also forwarded by the King Prithivinarayan Shah himself when he advocated the country as 'A garden of four castes and thirty- six sub-castes'. Furthermore, Jung Bahadur Rana, the founder of autocratic Rana rule, brought *Muluki Ain* (National Code) into effect as a strict legal provision in 1984. Through it, elite rulers legalized the deified conventional Hindu caste system chronologically then afterwards. Hence, in the same song, Manjul further adds:

There exists segregation as elitist pursue
thus continues rituals of exploitation of labor

being a human, I do not drink human blood

I do not accept the rituals that discriminate human. (3-6)

The song depicts the existing discrimination based on which the dominant class sustains the discriminatory practices (3) through coercion and consent. However, for Manjul the practice equates with ‘drinking human blood’ (5) when a person exploits labor of another human based on the caste. The song displays the reality of then society when the ruling bloc was claiming of caste equality whereas minority subaltern was still victimized only because of his/her caste. King Mahendra’s promises on constitution followed by New Civil Code (*Muluki Ain*) professed caste equality that was a façade limited only on legal provisions. John Whelpton writes, “The introduction of new *Muluki Ain* in 1963 formally established the equality before the law of all Nepalese and outlawed untouchability” (156). In practice, however, there persisted a deep chasm in between the so-called upper castes and lower ones as the song suggests. Manjul Ralpa in the song rejects the idea of treating people with biasness based on caste hierarchy established and continued by the dominant class. The upper-caste simply enjoyed the benefits of the society whereas the so-called lower castes were marginalized from various advantages including the denial of access to certain jobs and cultural sites. Like they were relegated to mean jobs and were not allowed to enter certain public areas and monuments. Whelpton again notes, “Shortly after promulgation of the *Ain*, a group of untouchables were barred by police from entering Nepal’s national shrine, the temple of Pashupatinath on the Bagmati River on the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu” (157). Very lately through a people’s movement in 2006 caste, ethnic and minority issues were somehow addressed; however, the rigid traditional beliefs still remain remarkably in the kingdom.

Caste discrimination as a social construct has always prominently remained in

Nepal. King Mahendra's New National Code promulgated in 1963 took a step to wipe out the deeply rooted traditional cultural hegemony but without a success. No strict legal provisions were made in case of mistreatments based on caste hierarchy.

Whelpton notes, "However, even in the Kathmandu Valley Mahendra's government appeared reluctant to give full effect to the legal change" (157). In agreement with Whelpton, Aahuti argues that although Panchayati National Code announced the practice of untouchability as a punishable crime, the provision number 10 on the same Act regards the continuation of orthodox practices indiscriminately. Therefore, the Code was, in reality, to maintain the caste biasness not to uproot it (154). The semi-imperial socio-culture kept it poignantly present during the whole of the Panchayat era. Aahuti further adds, "Therefore, there were no legal punishments in such cases" (154). However, the song stands against the caste hierarchy and regards the practice as inhuman act continued through elite interest. Below the four main castes categories, Dalits, who are considered the lowest in the social hierarchy and are often referred as "untouchables".

The following song of Manjul replicates the Dalit suffering and double marginalization:

Sarkis sew shoes

but only to walk barefoot

you tailor clothes but live without robes. (1-3)

The lines depict the philosophy of caste-system as a complex system not only limited to the social discrimination but also economic deprivation. They highlight the fact that caste system has very deep connection with economy and politics, too. Caste dominance has its connection resulting in the class hierarchy. According to Pfaff-Czarnecka, "Panchayat ideology claimed the equality of all Nepalis, yet high caste

Hindu parbatiya hierarchical hegemony was fundamentally built into the system” (qtd. in Grandin 185). The two castes *Sarki* and *Darji* presented in the song are categorized as untouchables equivalent to Dalits. Here, the castes have been presented as working class, very poor, and marginalized subaltern. Moisala argues, “Even though the legislation had changed, the Hinduization of the state politics that kept ethnic groups and lower castes marginalized in relation to high- caste Hindus still continued during the Panchayat regime of king Mahendra and his son, king Birendra”(18). Manjul inaugurates the fact that *Sarki* who have no choice than to make shoes are deprived of wearing them. Their feet are bare without having the facility or capacity to wear a pair of shoes.

Since the so-called low-castes were bound to their traditional menial profession, they had survived extreme economic crisis. According to Aahuti, one of the features of caste system was perpetuation. Which means the designated labor to a particular caste must be continuing to future generations (14). The given lines present very bleak picture of the lowest of the low caste in the then society. With the succession of *Sarkis* and *Darjis* on their entitled profession, they have been made subaltern through social-exclusion and without any economic agency. Present day scenario might have changed to some extent; however, back in the 60s era, they were continuing their traditional profession and performing their roles allocated by the conventional system.

As the genesis of caste-system dates back to Hindu classification of the division of labor, the low-caste *Sudras* were responsible for the service of all other upper-castes. Aahuti contends this mode of classification resulted in the formation of class-based society (14). The rhetoric in the song matches with Aahuti’s opinion as the low-caste Dalits were relegated to very low-income manual profession like sewing

clothes and shoes at local levels, capital production for them remained a far cry; they were unable to sustain everyday lifestyle and were not free to choose another profession. Furthermore, the cultural hegemony of the caste system ostracized Dalits from literacy or any other forms of agency formation that pushed them to remain muted considering themselves as destined to be so. Therefore, in the same song Manjul urges all muted people to speak for the justice and equality as follows:

O arise against exploiters of your labor

arise and resist for the victory and to bring back your snatched world. (16- 17)

Here, *Damai* and *Sarki* represent the Dalit subaltern class. The cultural hegemony of caste-system has muted the agency-less poor subjects knowingly or unknowingly. The lines indicate Dalits could not speak for the value of their labor and hence remained economically deprived. Lines also implicate feudalism as the usurper of the labor of working class *Sudras*. Aahuti in explicating Marxist political economy argues, “Each and every capitalist society existing at present has strategically robbed the labor of a laborer” (119). Consequently, low-caste Dalits were pushed back to severe economic crisis. However, the song urges them to speak for it. The lines impart consciousness to the low caste traditional artisans that they have been exploited. They must awaken and act rebelliously to demand their rights autonomously to discontinue the subordinate position. The hegemonic bloc appropriates the value of the labor of the subordinated. The lines represent resistance rhetoric to rise against the prevailing injustice toward Dalits. Only when the oppressed speak autonomously, the establishment of subaltern hegemony is possible.

Raising Class Consciousness

Caste differences and discriminations can also lead to other kinds of differences. Because songs endow the quality “to bring attention to inequality and

other types of social and political struggle” (Adrianna Helbig 1), in this section, the researcher analyzes and interprets the songs on class issues. Ralpa, most significantly records the rhetoric of class differences prevalent during the era that created subordination among the people in the socio-economic status. High-class feudals had controlled the resources and opportunities whereas low-class suffered for the survival and livelihood. In an agrarian society, small-scale peasants belong to subordinated and voiceless. In fact, the history of human civilization is the history of class conflict. Spivak in explaining Marxist concept of peasant class calls them “dislocated and incoherent” (276) as they are dispersed and agency-less. Spivak further adds, “. . . the small peasant proprietors cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (276). Ralpa songs became popular because the songs represent the socio- economic status of the society where economically subordinated do not have access to the basic needs. The following folkloric song below reflects similar pathetic condition of low-class also advocates call for equality. One of the most popular songs of similar rhetoric is:

Chameli! Cow is kept in the shed
 but the pail contains no buttermilk
 there is no voice to speak for the poor. (1-2)

The song speaks the suffering and struggle of peasant class living under the voiceless existence. The song addresses an imaginary Chameli, a local woman. The ‘cow’ rearing takes the readers to a rural setting where livelihoods are sustained through subsistence farming and cattle rearing. A peasant works very hard taking care of his cattle but cannot feed his family properly. The lines say there is lack of even ‘butter milk’ in a peasant’s home. Ingemar Grandin in analyzing the rhetoric of progressive songs adds, “Landlords and other exploiters appropriate most of the produce” (180).

This explicates the reality of Nepali low class farmers. In this degraded level of poverty line, also there is no one to speak in favor of such peasants. His voice is a subject to be subjugated. The elite class enjoys the benefits in both: feudalism and capitalism. Despite the hard labor, the subaltern class remains dependent, inferior, and the “other”. The song explicates, “Chameli! The red rooster crowed from the housetop / but the justice for the poor vanished” (3-4).

Red rooster is the symbol of a new beginning as the song bears voice of resistance on the establishment of Panchayat system. The political changes in Panchayat were not in favor of peasants. They were fighting against injustice as the song says justice is lost for the poverty-stricken. The color red symbolizes revolution and the symbol of crowing of rooster is a declaration of it. It is high time for the revolution to subvert the system that only serves elite hegemony. This artistic creation serves the political aim of Ralphalis as progressive artists.

Panchayati rhetoric of justice satiated people where actually low class were excluded, deprived and discriminated. Land reform and foreign aid policy also could not battle the existing poverty of peasants. Whelpton adds, “The failure to grip the poverty over most of the country occurred despite extensive development aid received from 1950 onwards” (128). The color red also symbolizes revolution. The traditional agrarian system and the feudalistic mindset of the people made the change very complex. Hence, the song necessitates a revolution against injustice of the hegemonic system. Furthermore, Manjul in the lines, “Chameli! the rich possesses abundant wealth / but the poor suffers a heavy debt” (5-6), adds that rich are getting richer and the gap is ever increasing because poor are getting poorer and in debt. The lines reverberate the reality of working class. They “point to the marginalizing forces of the dominant economic logics that have resulted in the misdistributions of wealth in [then

Nepali] society, and its scarcities at the margins” (Datta and Datta 6). Instead of getting economic independence, the working class was getting poorer because the means, mode and matter of production remained with elite class. Despite Panchayat’s claims of political inclusiveness, caste system and other social inequalities persisted, “. . . the performance of the system on the economic front was abysmally slow” (Baral 8). Prakash Chandra Lohani in this regard contends, “Looking at the grim economic situation during the period under review, one political economist maintains that the people are being exploited by ‘a new class or a vested interest group in the country” (qtd. in Baral 9). Thus, the economic condition of working class was deteriorating constantly during the era.

The rhetoric of song further indicates the same fact. It reads, “Chameli! like water in *dudhkunda* lake / there must be equality to all” (7-8). The song continues with the emphasis on equality. People were frustrated to see upper class enjoying resources in abundance while the dominated ones below the poverty line. *Dudhkunda* (pool of milk) for the elites just like water whereas for the poor there was even scarcity of *mohi* (buttermilk) despite hard labor. Buttermilk is associated with a basic drink available among low class too. The song urges for the establishment of such system where there is no discrimination in the distribution of the means of production.

When equality pervades, there will be the establishment of working class hegemony ending class differences. Therefore, there must be equality like in a lake (*Dudhkunda*) there is equal distribution of water. The last line of the song presents resistance rhetoric to build such a system where equality pervades for all classes.

In the similar theme, another song juxtaposes the metaphors of stark class differences as it continues, “Some are in pleasant flight / But some are perspiring profusely-in our Nepal” (1-2). The song expresses huge economic incongruities in

between the rich and poor classes. In the song, pleasant flight, the metaphor for wealth juxtaposes with perspiration denoting the hard labor of poor class. Even though nationalist historiography claimed of equality and justice for all through the proclamations in constitution and *Muluki Ain*, the practice did not coincide with the experiences of people. Therefore, this song represents the reality of the era. The lines say elitist class got opportunity to enjoy all kinds of luxury whereas poor remained at the bottom ladder. The song continues, “some attired in shimmering fabric / but some with patched clothes-in our Nepal” (3-4). It presents economic differences in wearing clothes and lifestyle too. Shimmering fabric symbolizes richness and royalty in the clothing of elitist upper class. In contrast to it low- class were under privileged and bound to wear rags. Through the method of comparison and contrast and uses of images accordingly, the song presents two worlds apart in irreconcilable position.

The economic condition of working class and peasant class was worsening and the gap was increasing day by day. Narayan Khadka in this regard claims, “The two and half decades of experiment with the party-less Panchayat system have failed to improve the economic well-being of the society and maintain peace and harmony among various groups” (442). Even though Panchayat constitution proclaimed of socio-economic justice, the practice was opposite to its promise. The further lines, “some with abundance of wealth / but some remain evicted from house and land- in our Nepal” (5-6) reflect ironic situation of the people at the bottom living under suffocative Panchayat system. They evoke the fact of limited upper class grabbing lion’s share of resources whereas majority of low class was being pushed into the extreme poverty. The Panchayat promised of land reform policy but the marginalized were losing their land because of extreme poverty. In analyzing the socio-economical aspects of Panchayat, Khadka claims, “The political functioning of the Panchayat

system has impoverished the country” (450). The elites use their power through the state agency to get benefits and the poor class has no access to such agency. The lines in the song, “some achieve BA and MA degree / but some ceaselessly obliged to grass and firewood works- in our Nepal” (7-8) further shows the distinction between the classes. They speak of inequality and discrimination in opportunity and education. The elite class could afford higher education whereas the subordinated remained doing menial job for the sustenance. Children of subaltern class have to choose for the survival and education is not a priority.

The discrimination persisted in Nepal because of the unequal distribution of resources that resulted into various forms of inequality and deprivation. Nepal, during the Panchayat era had “The meager results of the ‘basic needs’ program was blamed by some on a failure to elaborate and then implement the very broad objectives the government had set itself” (Whelpton 128). Low class people suffered in lack of basic needs and most of the government plans and policies were getting failure. The song continues, “some are cared by family doctor / but some die without approaching the hospital” (9-10). The lines represent two classes. The upper class enjoys health facilities whereas the low class cannot get even the basic health facilities. Khadka further writes, “The ignorance of peoples’ needs and interest on the one hand, and the concentration of power for the satisfaction of Panchayat ‘clique’ on the other, have resulted in a number of problems in Nepalese economy” (450-51). The Panchayat system and its structures doted in the favor of the ruling class, and the marginalized class was denied of some basic needs including medicines.

The concluding lines of the song, “The flowing river cannot be stilled/ This system does not last long” (11-12) evoke resistance consciousness. Flowing river symbolizes the force that is also natural. It has power to break the obstacles on its

way. Similarly, if people consciously rise-up against subordination and otherization from the national structure, the oppressed class can march ahead towards equality and justice. Raamesh says, “They used to sing songs like this. ‘The flowing river cannot be stilled; this system does not last long’. The song was directed towards Panchayat. Which means your dates are numbered” (STV 00:20:29-00: 20:14). The speaker calls for the agency in the last line when he acclaims of discontinuity of such discriminatory practices.

Another song assimilates the class subaltern issues. The song goes:

Starving deaths of *sarangi* in poet laureate’s stomach
are our songs

worn clothes of *sarangi* player dying bare
are our songs. (1-4)

In the above composition, the lines represent the thematic content of most the Ralphali songs. As the band has been regarded as “peoples’ singers”, the lines also confirm the band as it. The song is dedicated to economically oppressed working class intellectuals and workers. The song was performed at Aathrai Sankranti bazar in a school. Therefore, captures the attention of local audience. The first line indicates to the great poet laureate Laxmi Prasad Devkota (Footsteps of Remembrance 217). Devkota remained economically drained in his life. The state apparatuses did not support him for his genius, but remained indifferent for bearing reformative and revolutionary consciousness in his expressions against the dominant class so much so that he lived in extreme economic crisis and died in lack of proper nutrition, medication and in debts. Regarding the dismal attitude of the nation towards artists, Michael Hutt quotes Devkota, “envies Soviet writers their government-funded Writers Unions. While these receive crores of government patronage, Nepali writers don’t

even have cowries and their cultural unions are "stepsons to cabinets." (Hutt). Despite being a great poet of Nepal, Devkota lived a basic life and ended in poverty. The nation remained silent on supporting him. Therefore, the song above raises issue of the great poet in the beginning line. The speaker of the song affirms the song belongs to his empty stomach. The third line speaks for *Gaine* community. *Gaine*, now *Gandarva*, indicates so-called low- class traditional musician of Nepal. Moisala writes, "As a group that was for long marginalized due to caste order, the *Gaines/ Gandarvas* have been subjects of social deprivation, especially social exclusion, as well as economic and cultural poverty" (24). The half- naked *Gaine* in the song is wearing ragged clothes explicate his economic position. The composers dedicate this song to economically deprived working class. The song unfolds:

walls and fence, colors and the lines drawn by orphaned artists
 are our songs
 sculptors hurled in the street, ignored and hated
 are our songs. (1-4)

The lines identify art as a subaltern space, where representation of the ruled working classes is at the core of suffering, destitution and struggle. The composers admit they want to write songs of this class of people. They want to sing songs of painters, masons, and sculptors valorizing them as the working class. They are thrown into ghettos, muted by oppression, denying the access to power structure. Simultaneously, the song expresses frustration and dissatisfaction over the socio- political evils brought by political system. They [Ralpha] wanted to deconstruct cruel, illogical, extremist, conventional traditional social system (The Footsteps of Remembrance 216). Because the root cause of economic position and social exclusion lies in the old hegemonic social system, Moisala in studying *Gaine/ Gandarva* argues, "Within the

Hindu caste hierarchy, the intertwining of social status with society and economic opportunities is obvious, if not striking” (15). The low social status simply limits opportunities resulting in low economic status, which makes them agency less in a feudalistic, bourgeois, or in a capitalistic society. Cultural hegemony is thus a key constraint in making a class-less society. Other two lines, “the voices of yet live graves once buried alive/are our songs” (14-15) dramatize the socio-economic crisis compelling the marginalized people live without any identity. The subaltern class lives without any history and identity in the ambivalence of life and death. Hence, in a country dominated by economic injustice and discrimination, a poor class lives a dead living, a paradoxical and liminal condition. The song announces to write about identity less minorities. Instead of choosing elite domain of expression, the lines record to sing in representation of history less people. The lines also exhibit Ralpa’s exuberant poetic aesthetics.

Hope of Emancipation

As the researcher argues, Ralpa songs represent the socio-economic issues; however, the songs have optimistic tones. The Ralpalis do not show any disappointment or pessimism in the songs. In a personal interview with the researcher Manjul says, “Parijat was a nihilist before getting the influence of Ralpa songs. She adopted optimism in philosophy and in her writing after she came in contact with Ralpa” (Guragain). The hope affirms that the change will come and new spaces of new culture will be established. Nadia Urbinati states, “Hegemony denotes the transformation from within, both of the subject and of its environment” (370). Collapse of the old ideological structures brings hope of emancipatory future that gives agency to the marginalized and hegemonized. Regarding the agency of resistance songs, Marek Payerhim argues, “By being created by a host of disparate

authors and then shared in collective experiences, protest songs help engender a sense of common identity, indicate agreement as to the existence and nature of injustice, and provide a symbolic resource pool for activists” (8). Thus, Ralpa songs too motivate the listeners for the revolution on the prospects of establishment of new socio-political order. Even though the themes center on the deprived, marginalized communities, the hope of new beginning continues in the songs. Similar hope resonates in the following song:

Golden days will rise
 the nation will shine
 colorful sky will prevail
 water shall exhilarate. (00:00-42-00:01:06)

Above lines comprised of lyrical craft of Laxmi Prasad Devkota and Raamesh’s singing, intervene the socio-political issues. Sayami writes, “the musical composition and presentation of Devkota's song ‘Sunako din’ and Siddhicharan's ‘Mero pyaro Okhaldhunga’, became very popular” (33). Being a nature poet, Devkota’s aesthetics arouse hope for the country using various natural imageries. The poet imagines of a new beginning, justice, equality and freedom in the kingdom through the vivid imageries. The imageries of rising of ‘the clear golden morning’, without any ‘dark clouds’, but enhanced with ‘colorful clouds’ reflect the contemporary mass consciousness “heading towards more rational and politically matured state” (Phuyal 33) in Nepal. The hope and imagination of freedom in the lines implies people were excluded from the joyful moments at that time. However, the song calls for people to be optimistic. The images mark joy and prediction of a good beginning, beauty and harmony. However, the hope persists. Ralpa, through the powerful musical composition in the poem, reiterates the theme of socio-political domination existing in

the society while Devkota was alive during the Rana oligarchy. Raamesh Shrestha shares with Dilbhusan Pathak visiting Parijat where poetic creation got ranked above the song lyrics. So, he challenged some poets met there and started composing and presenting songs like “mero pyaro Okhaldhunga” (My beloved Okhaldhunga) including the poem under analysis by Devkota. (00:18:04- 00:19: 03). Shrestha blames the ruling class media apparatus for disregarding such non-canonical songs and not broadcasting issues based songs. As ruling class sell ruling ideologies “a set of ideas which served or embodied the interest of particular social classes” (Saksena 65) to mask the exploitation, state apparatuses block other ideologies. The poem-based song makes excluded class motivated for the new departure in the structures.

birds will arise chirping

all temples shall ring the bell

sweet fragrant air will blow

heart and flower both will bloom. (00:01:23-00:01:41)

Devkota in the lines valorizes the expected glory and blissfulness. Everything in the nature dances with full expression of joy when there is freedom. Ringing bells and blooming hearts hint at unbounded enthusiasm at the dawn of new order and structure. Every mute thing gets voice. In companionship to the socio-political prosperity goes parallel with the exuberance of nature. Thus, the expression of nature in its majestic form replicates the prosperity of the society, of the people. Because of the censorship in expression, Nepali poets and writers were subjected to write within the boundaries allocated by the hegemonic state strategies. Tulsi Acharya writes:

The Nepal academy was established in 1957 to develop and promote Nepali

literature. However, the establishment of Panchayat system and its one

language policy deterred the development of literature in many languages that

lasted from 1960 to 1990, which means the opportunity to bring the voices of the marginalized from different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds remained a distant shore.

Therefore, in denial of conforming to the ruling class ideologies, working class intellectuals along with the peripheral communities remained oppressed. In this context, the lines impart consciousness of time and agency to imagine such a state where there would be total freedom. Humanity would dance like the nature dances. The eco consciousness in the poem goes side by side with the socio-political consciousness and creates a utopian state of total freedom. As Devkota's poems remarkably criticize over the erroneous practices of so-called elitist values prevalent in the society, in absence of that social malice, humanity celebrates in parallel with the nature. Devkota takes the readers to imagine the state of emancipation from every kind of domination.

Another song assimilates similar rhetoric of hope. The writer expresses emancipatory future of the ruled through various natural images in the following song:

Oh Kanchha! Play the flute
 let the slopes get raised
 get lifted up
 let the wind blow, fog disappear
 let the sun shine
 snow in the mountains and trees melt
 let there be light in snow covered hut
 Kacha! Let the flute be played
 let the sky be deep and blue

Himalayas be crystal clear
 mountains get dense, pastures get green
 hills be pleasant
 Kanchha! Play the flute. (1-13)

Presented in a folkloric rhythm, the song presents the hope and end of all sorts of disparities in a society. It imagines of a situation when people have transcended their hegemonic situation. Anne Stefani argues, “Singing was a transformative act that took on a cathartic dimension in the sense that it allowed the singers to transcend a specific situation, and in the process to transcend their own condition of oppressed people” (62). The song above depicts an end of oppression where people have transcended the previous condition. It opens with a request to an imaginary person, kancha. Kancha epitomizes a commonman. The implied rhetoric through various natural imageries depicts beauty and harmony in the situation of a commonman. Kancha, gains the agency through his flute.

Although the song literally talks about natural harmony, its deep concerns are about the socio-political harmony when there will be end socio-political evils and equality prevails. The instrument flute is associated with agency, peace and harmony remains locally available, affordable to all is also associated with commonmen. The song imagines of a utopian state wrapped in various metaphoric expression where the conformist values and belief systems have disappeared and pleasantness and harmony continues to rule. The song exemplifies the fact that new alternative world with egalitarian values is possible. Marek Payerlin affirms, “By daring to break whips, chains, and bars, the society will bring down the ‘walls’ and the entire world order” (30). The disappearance of fog denotes end of all differences and false hegemonic practices. Sun shining denotes the new beginning of socio- economic equality and

inclusiveness. Similarly, the imagery of frozen environment connotes to the rigidity of traditional feudalistic values. The song says, the rigid feudalistic orthodox practices of status quo will melt at structural level and the peasant class will get justice as the song says there will be 'light in a peasant's hut'. Dense mountains, green pastures and pleasant hills depict economic progress, abundance of resources and the establishment of social justice and harmony. So, the song provides consciousness, agency and direction to the listeners to work for the change, for the better future in newly established order.

Similar optimistic rhetoric communicates in another song. In the song various natural imageries are personified to present the socio-political scenario of the contemporary era. The song moves forward through the depiction of regression to the hope of emancipation.

snow exfoliates my pine
 ice has bounded the free floating river
 mist has covered the lake
 chilling cold both have chased warmth and light from here
 slopes are sore from landslides
 bare ranches shivering with cold
 forest fog wandering wailing and weeping
 do not cry my forest fog, pines, rivers
 to release your bondage, to set you free
 flood of light is coming back from across the horizon
 A river of rays is flowing to you. (1-13)

The song contains two binary themes cohesively put together. The first eight lines in the song talks about the rigid antagonistic forces working to maintain the suppression

and bondage. Rest of the lines put hope for the oppressed through the images of force of emancipation. Various natural imageries forward the themes of the song. The images of snow, ice, fog, cold represent the rigidity of traditional ruling class hegemony. According to the song, those oppressive strategies of the totalitarian rule have ripped off freedom and justice. People have been living under the marginalized condition within the boundaries set by the system. Payerlin writes, “Yet without alternatives, the “legitimacy frame” used by the regime and heavily promoted by its official propaganda would have been dominant and tended to keep people from acting against the government” (31). During the Panchayat system, people were bound to the allocated status quo policies within the framework of hegemonic structures. State apparatuses further strengthened the ruling class ideology creating the bondage to alternative ideologies. Acting against the structures and state machineries was regarded as anti- national and were subject to punishment. However, “the prolaterian must seize state power in order to destroy the existing bourgeois state apparatuses” (Althusser 740). The song, on the first two stanzas, depicts how dominant class ideology and status quo limits the freedom and justice of the subordinated. The exfoliated pines, bounded rivers through snow remind of the oppressed living conditions of subordinated class and the artistic expressions appropriated within the Panchayat censorship policy.

Images of bare slopes and ranches explicate scarcity, poverty and destitution. Consequently, low socio-economic position making peoples life hard and painful. The personification of sore landscape, shivering, weeping, wailing nature and land denote the everyday struggle and suffering of common people. However, the song does not end in displaying the pain and hardships. Its last stanza highlights on the transformation of the situation. Songs, “address conditions of marginalization;

communicate their commitment and actions towards raising consciousness; and promote humanistic values. In doing so, it puts forth the voice as anchor to emancipatory imaginings in bringing about transformation” (Datta and Datta 3). The expressions like ‘do not cry, ‘to set you free,’ ‘from bondage’, ‘flood of light’ emanate optimism and emancipatory imaginings on the listeners including the addressee of the song. The flood of light is consciousness awakening among the marginalized. That awakening becomes a medium of agency formation against the prevalent hegemonies. Similarly, river of rays expresses hopeful situation for the subordinated people.

In conclusion, the selected Ralphali songs under different thematic sub-headings speak the subordinated voice against the prevalent hegemoniand status quo of the then time. The songs became instrumental in imparting the awakening and enabling the voiceless to speak against the continuation of conservative feudalistic status-quo. Even though Panchayat system claimed of socio-political equality and public participation in policymaking, the reality was people remained under the homogenization and suppression heightened by censorship and banning policies of state agencies. Against these strict policies Ralpa’s emergence as an intellectual and artistic movement speaking against orthodox practices and in raising the voice of the marginal communities has become historically significant. Hence, the texts speak counterhegemonic consciousness of people and the time during the Panchayat hegemony.

Chapter Four

Actualizing Ralpa Movement in the Contemporary Context

The research concludes in finding that the Ralpa songs function the awakening of counterhegemonic consciousness because the songs encapsulate themes against conformist structures and status quo. The power blocs use state mechanisms and cultural influence both to sustain the hegemony. So, the hegemonized should also create aesthetic and cultural space to be heard and seen as an autonomous class. Then only socio-economic justice becomes possible. The progressive rhetoric of the representative Ralpa songs also brings the understanding of the then socio-political and economic representations of the subjugated class and the dominant too. The songs have depicted the bitter lived experiences of the subaltern groups, and have successfully captured the deprivation of the subjugated classes especially during the Panchayat ruling system. The dominated class remained exploited, oppressed and discriminated even though Panchayat Raj affirmed of the socio-political justice. Despite the constitutional and legal affirmations of the state agencies, the feudalistic common sense and structures continued. The ruled subjects got pushed further to periphery confirming the bourgeois status quo. Promulgation of new constitution in 1962 and revised national code (*Naya Muluki Ain*) legally declared the end of caste discrimination, untouchability and other socio-cultural discrepancies. However, the absence of provisions for punishment in case of practice of discrimination and untouchability suggests the perseverance of cultural hegemony of the elite class. Similarly, any organized effort to preserve and promote indigenous language, and culture was labeled as bearing anti-national spirit because of the homogenizing national policy. The rigid orthodox practices and structures continued and fractured the agency of the marginalized castes and class. The songs encapsulate the

experiences of outlawed systems. Furthermore, the songs present discontent with the confirmation to status quo convention and question the socio-cultural hierarchy. The undertaking of discrimination, domination, humiliation and exclusion reveal the rigidity of dominant class hegemony.

The marginal issues at the core of the songs prove Ralpa as performing intellectuals' role rising up voices for the underprivileged and otherized. Moreover, the recurring use of local musical terms and instrument like *Gaine*, *Sarangi*, *Madal*, *Murali* and the depiction of rural settings and everyday struggle themes make the songs capture subaltern voices with local aesthetics vividly. Folkloric tones incorporated with colloquial words, also, absence of love, romance and the lack of appreciation of elitist practices in the songs make the songs call for the urgency of establishment of subjugated class hegemony countering the elitist one. Rejection of dominant culture and acceptance of language of empowerment, sorrow, struggle, resistance and hope speak for the subaltern to arouse consciousness against the more internalized cultural hegemony.

Ralpa's association to voice the subaltern experiences and against the socio-political exclusion in the then politico-cultural context of Nepal, challenging the power blocs with long history and tradition was a rebellious task. On the one hand, Panchayat ruling system withheld by a powerful monarch, and on the other hand, hegemonized citizens fully under the cultural influence even regarded kings as godly incarnation. Moreover, the strict censorship policy had constricted freedom of speech and art forms within the boundary line created by the state. However, the collision of the music they created challenged the age-old common sense handed down by the elitist class through history, culture and power. The reformative and revolutionary consciousness in the songs directs the society towards adopting progressive values

that omit all sorts of traditional binaries. The group activism culminated during the late sixties to early seventies through various artistic endeavors. The phenomenal impact and popularity the group created has prolonged till the date. Ralpa's inspiring impetus was against the grand-narratives of king Mahendra and the Panchayat system. Their songs reject the official nationalism and struggle to create new spaces of opposition and alternative future beyond the authoritative ruling system.

King Mahendra, on the other hand, was successful in establishing party-less Panchayat ruling system throwing the multi-party democracy. Even though the researcher comments on the king and his system, the researcher finds king Mahendra as a dynamic personality. He wanted to rule the kingdom ambitiously as an absolute monarch. To fulfill the purpose he created immense influence among the people. He established himself as an ardent nationalist. Through the cultural- products, like romantic and patriotic songs, the king established himself as peoples' personality. The system was introduced calling experimental. The system definitely introduced the foundations of modernism. Laws, infrastructures were developed imagining inclusive socio-economic growth. However, the king pursued the goals sustaining traditional values and maintaining the previously existing binaries. The homogenization policy executed the feudalistic and bourgeois hegemony and served only the ruling class interest. The researcher opines Panchayat utopia created such an influence that the system was easily accepted by muted subalterns crushed under feudalistic bourgeois hegemony. In the absence of consciousness awakening and autonomy formation, peoples' empowerment and socio-political transformation remained hard and the king easily overthrew democratic parliamentary ruling system holding all authorities on himself imposed the party-less Panchayat. The ruling elites discounted the heterogeneous identities and their contributions in the nation building. Rise of Ralpa

in Nepali socio-political scenario gets justified in this context.

Studying songs as a medium to embark on counterhegemony for consciousness building, self-formation and resistance dynamics in Nepali academia is a quite recent venture. Nepal as an affluent cultural capital too has a long history and tradition of diversified conglomeration of musical productions. Such aesthetic expressions have not only captivated human heart but also played remarkable roles in touching the layers of human consciousness. The musical prolongation has considerable number of progressive songs appealing the socio-cultural transformation through its aesthetic resonance. Even during the early phases of musical developments, entertaining and religious, musical compositions carrying various social messages were very common. Still, the songs containing reformative messages could not emerge as a force for the reconstruction and transmutation of peoples' consciousness or remained under the cover of the elitist hegemony amidst the illiterate and ignorant populace. Emergence of Ralpa as an avant-garde musical band carried public voice in such a way that the group became successful in registering themselves as a voice of the era. Their musical tours across the nation staged at the front yard and backyard of the locals addressing their everyday life struggles touched the emotions as well as consciousness and made a remarkable call for the urgency of socio-political transformation. As the songs record subordinated mass consciousness, that can radiate subaltern for the autonomous formation as agency formation to catapult the hegemonic semi-imperialistic ruling block. However, how far the agency songs created during the era carried the liberating consciousness for the voiceless? Why has the intellectual solidarity as an agency to structure alternative hegemony got fractured within a short period of time? What made the members get assimilated to the grand-narratives after they joined the party politics? Hence, the research opens up new

dimensions and possibilities of analyzing such resistances and movements in the making of a nation.

Besides, present research delimits its study area within the sphere of selected songs of Ralpha. Further delimitation consists of the selection of the songs based on and suited to the subaltern dynamics. Many songs deliberately left behind remain as fresh territory to be researched. This study does not claim that findings are exactly similar or dissimilar in other social, cultural and political trajectories of Nepal represented in other art forms. Within its delimitation as well, the study does not cover the area of gender, philosophical, and other cultural issues pertinent in the songs. Other songs published and available in both printed and electronic forms will help prospective researchers working on different dimensions of Ralpha movement. Moreover, comparative study with progressive songs of other singers belonging to same and different epochs in different variables will reinforce to the significant findings of subaltern issues. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies of Ralpha songs and other musical and literary movements pertaining to socio-political, cultural, economic, and philosophical dimensions of Nepal and beyond are yet the doors to be opened for further research endeavors.

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