

Tribhuvan University

Reinterpretation of Traditional Motifs in Contemporary Nepali Paintings

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By

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled *Reinterpretation of Traditional Motifs in Contemporary Nepali Paintings* submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Raju Manandhar, has been approved by the under designed members of the research committee.

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Letter of Recommendation

This thesis entitled *Reinterpretation of Traditional Motifs in Contemporary Nepali Paintings* by Raju Manandhar has been completed under my supervision. I recommend it for acceptance and examination.

Supervisor

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Abstract

Contemporary Nepali paintings reread and reinterpret the traditional art works like manuscript illuminations, *paubha*, *patachitra*, wall paintings and sculptures. The artists have reformulated and reintegrated the images, icons and symbols of these early works in the paintings of our time. The structure of *mandala* and religious subject matters are also recycled. While doing so, the contemporary Nepali artists exploit the western techniques like impressionist, expressionist, cubist, abstractionist, surrealist and abstract expressionist as tools. As the artists share native tradition as well as plural western art forms, the resultant art works appear to be open-ended. Their significances are not certain and fixed but contingent, multiple and provisional. They speak of cultural self and cultural other. The art works are interconnected not only to its tradition but also western arts. The artists appropriate both western canons and native tradition to express their feelings and emotions in response to the present socio-political context.

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Chapter : I

Nepali Art: Tradition and Contemporaneity

Contemporary Nepali painting revisits, reads anew and reintegrates the images, icons, symbols and forms of traditional Nepali painting by using western forms and techniques. The present artists have revitalized contents of Hindu and Buddhist mythologies, the subject matters of traditional art works in the present context with plural and open-ended art forms.

Contemporary Nepali artists do not imitate the early art forms but appropriate and modify them according to their need. They do not only treat the ages old subject matters by means of new form but also use traditional Nepali art forms and techniques to address the socio-political issues of our time. Likewise, they use the same early form to depict different motifs such as repetition of traditional themes and religious images, and sometimes different forms such as geometrical, vertical to explore the age old contents. The art works exploit western techniques as tools to express their feelings by reformulating early forms and contents.

The thesis uses the three terms of reference: Nepali tradition, western form and contemporary works. The elaboration of the terms of reference will help to further clarify the thesis. This research studies the Nepali paintings until mid twentieth century as the traditional Nepali painting is based on the similar pattern in these works. These works are representational, that is, they refer to the characters, images and narratives of the religious texts, and the objects and events of the external world. In other words, they reproduce the objective world. The informed viewers of these works may point out the images in the canvas and associate them with the things of the external world. And their meanings seem to be limited. Such early art works are manuscript illuminations, *paubha*, *pata*, wall painting, portraits of kings and their relatives,

landscape and still lives, and so on. Manuscript illuminations, *paubha*, *pata* and wall paintings are religious works. They are based on Hindu and Buddhist myths whereas portraits, landscapes and still lives are exclusively about people and things of immediate external world.

The early manuscripts were written on palm leaves brought from India but later they were written on paper. The Buddhist manuscript illuminations depict the life of Buddha, meditating *Bodhisattvas*, other Buddhist deities and visual narrative of moral stories. The life of Buddha includes His nativity, meditation, nirvana and so on. Likewise, the Hindu manuscript illuminations depict Hindu deities like *Vishnu* and his various avataras, Shiva-Parvati, etc. The art works also depict icons like *Shivalinga*, symbols and the images of temples. Some of the images are anthropomorphic and events are magical. Some paintings represent the religious harmony between Hinduism and Buddhism.

Paubha is painted on cloth with the principal divinity in the middle. Devotees worship and pray in front of the represented image at their house and/or temple. Since the medium is flexible, it can be carried along with oneself while traveling and stored by rolling it up. Some of the *paubhas* are in the form of *mandala*, a tightly structured form consists of geometric shapes representing the consciousness. They attempt to resolve the dualities between religious and secular ideas, and individual self and cosmic being. *Pata* (narrative scroll painting) depicts the mythological stories in visual form. The subject matters of manuscript illumination, *pata* and *paubha* are used in wall painting.

Decorative motifs along the border and use of flat colours to create images are other significant features of these religious paintings. Furthermore, there is the minimum use of light and shade, as the artists considered the divine images in perpetual light. In comparison to early religious paintings, latter ones incorporate more worldly and secular images like landscape, and

the portraits of the donors and patrons. There is gradual movement from religiosity toward secularity in the works of art.

From the beginning of Shah Dynasty, the portraits of royalties and aristocrats appeared independently because of the influence of *Moghul-Rajput* paintings. Likewise, portrait became the mainstream art form during the *Rana* rule. At the same time, landscapes, still life and paintings of animal hunting also became popular. These paintings were influenced by western media and realistic techniques. All these early paintings were referential, that is, they attempt to represent the objects and events of external world, or myths in mimetic mode. Some of these above mentioned features of traditional art are shared by contemporary Nepali painting. I will explore various forms and contents of traditional Nepali art in chapter II. The study of traditional art will certainly help to trace the integration of early icons, images and symbols in contemporary art works. More western forms and techniques in the domain of Nepali art from mid twentieth century onwards.

A number of western forms and techniques are shared by contemporary Nepali artists like that of impressionism, expressionism, cubism, Dadaism, abstractionism, surrealism, abstract expressionism, pop art, installation and performance art. The art forms created by exploiting such techniques break away from the realistic representation of the objects and events of external world rather they are the responses of the artists toward the world.

Impressionists gave emphasis to the impressions of the object felt by the artist at transitory moment whereas expressionist form represented the artist's inner feelings and emotions through distorted, unusual and altered colours and images. Cubists broke the linear

surface using geometric shapes suggesting the depth. Likewise, Dadaists revolted against all the established traditions and the cherished values of the western civilization. Abstract art disconnects itself fully from the objective world. In such art works, the form is its own significance. The gradual distancing of the work of art from its objective world reaches to its climax with the creation of the abstract art.

However, the images of the objects reappeared with surrealist art works. But the images appeared with free association as in dream and hallucination. Sharing some aspects of expressionism, abstractionism and surrealism, the abstract expressionists gave emphasis to the artistic process instead final product. On the other hand, pop art incorporated not only the images of the reality but also the commodities of the market within itself. Installation and performance arts intermingled various art forms by blurring the boundaries among various art genres like sculpture, painting, literature, music and theatre. The art forms are open-ended and plural having multiple significances. These features of western art are shared by contemporary artists. I will study contemporary western art forms in chapter III.

The contemporary artists incorporate the images, icons and symbols of traditional art forms using western art forms and techniques as tools. They borrowed art forms and modified and appropriated images.

Before analyzing and interpreting the contemporary Nepali painting, I would like to present some critic's view on the works of individual Nepali artists briefly since the criticism on contemporary painting as a whole is rarely available. Regarding the western influence in Nepali art, Lain Singh Bangdel writes in the exhibition catalogue of Amar Chitrakar's paintings:

A new movement of art was active from the sixties and seventies in Nepal. Avant garde artists who worked in the western style were trying to break away from the

conventional method, experimenting with new forms and techniques and obviously heading for art nouveau. (catalogue, 1994)

It is clear from Bangdel's lines that western techniques were already practiced by Nepali artists during the sixties of the twentieth century. The use of western techniques brought the tangible changes in the domain of Nepali art.

In traditional Nepali paintings, figures of gods and goddesses, and the subject matters of mythologies became dominant but Bangdel himself gave importance to the "secular art by painting country people in their everyday lives with quiet dignity, and his distinctive landscape-immense majestic mountains and terraced fields, simple peasant huts and country temples" (Neubauer, Foreword). About his works, Dina Bangdel further remarks:

As Nepal's leading modern artist, Lain Bangdel is a unique and individual art His works have the universal appeal that unites both his personal vision with his immense creative genius. Much of his imagery is derived from natural sources, but nature that is interpreted and rendered through the artist's own perception and imagination. His style is marked with its own distinctiveness. (13-14)

He is considered as the first modern painter having his own identity improvised through the borrowed techniques from the west.

In Bangdel's works the "colours themselves not the images, spring to the eyes of the viewers and influence the mind (Subedi, *Nepali* 124). The colours have emotional appeal and the abstraction presents "a picture that exists in the experience – an unusual kind of experience of the Nepalese viewers" (124).

The thesis portrays history of Nepali painting by showing how it gets gradually influenced by the western tradition of painting. Different artists like Lain Singh Bangdel, Uttam

Nepali come under the banner of expressionism, abstract expressionism etc. - a western movement.

The figurative works, Lain Singh Bangdel executed during 1950s, depict the influence of Picasso's blue period. In the time of hardship and suffering, Picasso painted the figurative works with dominant blue colour to show the melancholy, pain and sadness; it was before he invented Cubism during the first decade of the twentieth century. As Bangdel was in France and learning the western techniques and styles of art, he shared his blue colour from Picasso's works. As Picasso was facing hardship and difficulty, Bangdel also passed through the same situation in the foreign land. He was not established as mature artist. His financial difficulties were always there in alien land. So he expressed his loneliness and hardship as Picasso did. Dina Bangdel writes about his early works, "His early figurative works convey a sense of poignancy and sadness in their theme of social realism that betrays his own period of loneliness." (Singh, 9)

The influence of Picasso's blue period can be seen his work *Old Man and Stupa* (fig.19) executed in 1956. In the painting, an old man stands by the *stupa*. He has covered his body images as well as the background which presents gloomy atmosphere. Bangdel has taken unique angle and perspective to stress the sadness and suffering of the old man. Despite the fact that the old man is nearby the *stupa*, the size of the old man is many times bigger than the *stupa*. In realistic perspective *stupa* should be bigger and the man much smaller. Thus, the artist distorts the natural organization. By doing so, viewers' attention is drawn toward the old man across his face the feeling dejectedness and gloom runs. Perhaps the society and his family, desert him, and he is seeking shelter in religious places.

Despite the fact that *stupa* is traditional religious image, its association with human beings has changed across time. Traditional Nepali paintings represent *stupa* along with religious people, saints, monks and the images of gods and goddesses. Especially, people visit religious shrine with religious purpose. But in this picture, Bangdel presents old and weak human figure—perhaps the beggar near the *stupa*. In the present context, religious places are the last resorts of the dejected, deserted, old and beggars. Thus, the association of religious place with human beings has changed. This is the irony of our so called modern time. The artist presents the theme with the use of dominant blue colour. Dina Bangdel again says, “The pervasive blue-green tonality, symbolic of the mood expressed, reinforces the atmosphere of despair. The scheme of colours recalls Picasso’s blue period, which had lasting impact on many of his figurative paintings in oil” (15).

The painting shows the influence of western art. Not only Bangdel but also his contemporary artists and followers did. The painting also shows that Bangdel had not developed his own artistic idiom till the execution of this painting. He was just attempting to handle the western techniques.

Uttam Nepali’s art works have inter-art relationship. He presents vision and textuality in the same canvas blurring the boundary between painting and literature. Abhi Subedi writes in an exhibition catalogue:

The main thrust of his modern paintings is the spirit of inter-art. From the beginning, he has sought to bring the cumulative experience of artists who use different mediums, from words to colours in his canvas. He projects the themes that carry the sensitivity of experience, environment and peace as represented by the Buddha. His field of action is canonically defined and his paintings are

executed in oil and acrylic medium. (“Confluence”)

He has shared his emotional experience and attempted to internalize what he perceives by using different mediums that suit his purpose. He represents ideas and feelings through images and words. Furthermore, spiritual feelings also get expression in his art works. In the same catalogue, Uttam Nepali writes about his own paintings, “the main source of my inspiration is God from whom does my creative energy emanates, and religiosity is the source of my strength and hope. It is full of splendors like the mathematics of the solar system and a constant source of delight” (Confluence).

Manuj Babu Mishra’s paintings represent the pain and suffering of human beings, and they make the viewers aware about the forthcoming danger. Abhi Subedi analyzes his paintings in the following manner:

Some of the recurrent images in his paintings are the missiles, tunnels, birds, serpents and terrified heads. These images evoke fear at its rawest form. The archetypal images that evoke fear glibly find place in his paintings. But the symbols though they are supposed to represent and dramatize the universal patterns of fear and hope, love and hatred are supposed to carry the burden of contemporaneity of our time. His paintings carry the times just as his missiles carry the bellicose mood that pervades the atmosphere in his paintings are reminiscent of major events of our times. (*Nepali* 126)

He has made the assemblages of different mutually opposing forces or factors in his canvas. The religious characters and the symbols of the modern technology remain side by side which is very thought provoking. In his paintings, “Children die in the refugee camp due to famine or fall under the army guns, women are raped and murdered” (126). He presents the images in such a

way that they are fully ironic and satirical (Gyanhari Adhikari 29). The agent who is responsible for such destructive event is hidden behind.

Shashi Shah's canvases are full of galloping, frenetic horses. He is able to represent energy of the horses "without being dull" (Alexander, "Shashi" 47). Sangita Thapa describes his works in the following manner:

Sometimes the horses emerge out of the sun, their flanks protruding from the flatness of the canvas as they gallop across time, on their mission to save the world. Sometimes they are locked in battle, unnaturally devouring each other, the white *Kalki* pitted against the black horses, symbolizing the battle between good and evil Shashi Shah's paintings reveal a time of spirituality in chaos, a world turned topsy-turvy as symbolized by the scattered chess pieces. In some of the paintings, a solid and pensive man stares directly at the viewer, bewildered by the turn of events in the paintings. (*Himalayan* 6)

Shah's works represent the immense energy of the horse using surrealist form. His horses are unusual and dreamlike. They also remind us of mythical world. Shashi Shah's untitled (fig. 4) depicts the surrealist horse. The "raging horse" is the tenth incarnation of Lord *Vishnu*, the *Kalki Avatara* (Abhi Subedi, "Pedagogy and Power") The horse is not the realistic representation but the surreal one. The muscle and the structure of the body are transparent from outside the bulging muscles depict the energy of the horse as the preserver of the humanity and the destroyer of the evils. The proportion and the combination of the body parts are also unusual and altered. The mane looks like a mountain. The decorative motifs on forehead, neck and tail suggest the mythical quality of the horse. Lord Vishnu in the form of the horse is galloping to accomplish his mission of saving earth and humanity. In an exhibition catalogue Shashi Shah himself says, "In

order to protect the world from its possible doom, a situation is always created in one form or another, our world, civilization and creation must survive at any cost. This is the *Kalki Mission*.”

Generally, western technique of surrealism was exploited in the western world to represent negative aspects like fragmentation, alienation and disillusionment in the then industrial society. But Shashi Shah uses the western form to suggest the brighter aspects by rendering the Hindu myth. The contents of Hindu myths and surrealist technique have been reconciled in his works. This is an example of appropriation. The artist has used same technique to depict different subject matter and theme. He decontextualizes and recontextualizes the shared forms and techniques.

Krishna Manandhar is famous for his “abstract landscapes” that include jungle, Himalayan Mountains and rivers (Juliet Bourne 6). There is rhythm and music in his abstractions. Cool breeze, green mountains, waterfalls and music are the elements that inspire him to paint. There is also the absence of social evils, chaos, conflicts and revolutionary elements in his canvas.

Culture and heritage dominate Batsa Gopal Vaidya’s canvases. The preservation of heritage in rapidly changing urban society is one of his main concerns. Sangita Thapa analyzes his works: “A magical ambience is created with recurring motifs: mountains, thick clouds and temples, sharp triangular tantric mountain shapes appear from within the womb of the more solid mountain forms, symbolizing the hidden mystery, spirituality and power” (*Himalayan* 8). His paintings embrace the socio-cultural and religious characteristics and the repetitive themes highlight his individual stamp. His paintings have enormous presence of the symbol directed to the modern circumstances.

At a glance, his paintings are very “abstract pieces in vibrant colours, but a closer look reveals a hint of the god” (Alexander, “Nepalese” 28). Most of his paintings are based on mythological subject matters (N. Singh, *Samasamaik* 260).

The anthropomorphic forms with multiplicity of moods dominate Kiran Manandhar’s canvases made up of “Phade Kagat, a specially designed canvas of ancient Nepali rice paper” (Subedi, *Modern* 11). The female figures are recurrent in his works. His colours are bright, bold and contrastive suggesting energy and power (Malla, *Chitrakala* 72). In the exhibition catalogue of Kiran’s works, Fauziz Nasreen points out that he has been “inspired by spiritualism” and his paintings show his “remarkable understanding of human life and nature”. He has sincere commitment to convey the message of friendship and peace.

Kiran Manandhar’s untitled (fig.20) expresses inner feelings through abstract expressionist form. Unlike most western abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko he always returns to anthropomorphic plural form. He uses the splashing and dribbling techniques of Jackson Pollock. The flowing plural colours on the canvas suggest the spontaneous evolved without pre-plan of the artist. The artist gives final product. Manandhar merges the Pollock’s technique with another abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning. The spontaneous brush strokes resemble the Koonings’s. As Kooning presents us monstrous and challenging modern woman, in Kiran’s works also a female figure emerges out of flowing rhythmic colours and sweeping brush strokes. But the female figure is not as comfortable as in realistic representation. Kiran’s canvas demands the viewer’s imagination and exercise to derive aesthetic pleasure. About Kiran’s works, Abhi Subedi writes:

His paintings are most dynamic works ever seen in the domains of modern arts in Nepal. He makes constant experiments in styles, mediums and themes in his

painting. The strongest point about his painting is the inner dynamism, the energy that is shown by the brush strokes, visible and invisible lines primary colour forms that move round the canvas and create a universe of experience and imagination. The movement starts from the centre and the energy flows within and beyond the sphere in these open canvases as it also moves within.

(“Confluence”)

The work presents the energy of the artist with which he is working. The dynamic movement of the form echo to the rhythm of creative experience. The open-ended forms give way to the multiple significances. However, the anthropomorphic form is always apparent as the traditional Nepali paintings are always anthropomorphic. However, the presentation and significances are always different.

Despite the fact that contemporary Nepali artists share the western techniques, they represent their experience in relation to socio-cultural images, icons, and symbols in their works. The western canons of art are appropriated in Nepali context. Because of the use of western techniques, their art works depart from the traditional art forms, yet they share some of the subject matters and contents of the traditional art works. Though the some eminent art writers hold that modern Nepalese artists rely heavily on the patterns and structure of the traditional paintings, we can notice individual identity or somehow grains of originality can be seen. In this context, Abhi Subedi writes:

The westernization of the Nepali art does not mean the loss or the complete rejection of the tradition: it certainly makes a departure. But modern artists of Nepal create their own milieu and create their works in it. Their ‘modern’ is basically a western concept, but they only exploit the western education to

broaden the range of their skills in painting. So, the Nepali identity of the artist in this country should be sought in their own cultural and folk environments created by themselves in their works by making the best use of their skills, whether they be western or oriental. (“Nepali Art” 123)

I have already presented some critics’ view on the works of individual artists. Now I would like present the criticism on contemporary Nepali painting as a whole. Julia Hegewald remarks that western art media brought drastic changes in Nepali painting:

The employment of new materials, colours, techniques and themes has brought drastic change to traditional painting in Nepal on several levels. In terms of material, the artists have switched entirely to white western paper, dismissing the local rice paper, used for the Newari gouches in earlier times, as unsuitable for water colours and as non-durable. They experiment with oil colours, charcoal, pencils and pestles. (96-97)

The artists have clearly departed from the local traditional painting techniques and themes; they have succeeded in establishing a new style (100). Similarly, Manuj Babu Mishra comments on contemporary Nepali art:

The contemporary art of Nepal today is proceeding with various trends. Some artists are akin to reflect national identity in art, whereas others look interested to assimilate some prevailing trends from outside world to give out a unique creation. However, the trend of contemporary art of Nepal can be summed up with conclusion that fresh and renewed attempts have been made in art through different media to give expression to the powerful feelings of mind.
 (“Contemporary” 22)

Nepali artists exploited the western techniques of impressionism, expressionism, cubism, surrealism, abstractionism and abstract-expressionism in their works (Sama, Chitrakalako Kha-Ga). About the influence of western techniques and form in Nepali art, Abhi Subedi says:

Since the sixties Nepali paintings make tangible departure from the tradition. The traditional forms of art, the portrait making, the narrative and spiritual paintings represented a different world altogether. The modern painters, most of them trained in the Indian and Bangladeshi art colleges, fully used the techniques and media now universally recognized as occidental. (*Nepali* 124)

The influence of huge numbers of western forms, techniques and media has sometimes created confusion among artists. Ram Kumar Bhaukaji says that the present situation of artists is not in harmony due to the “lack of coordination and common approach between the traditional and modern artists” (*Nepali* 6).

This critical review depicts that the paintings of contemporary Nepali artists have been interpreted and analyzed in different ways but not their relation with the artistic tradition. This research work attempts to explore how the artists reread and reformulate the traditional image, icons and symbols in their art works. Do they imitate the early art forms or use for different purpose? The interpretation and analysis of art works in chapter IV attempts to answer this question. Before going to interpret the art works, I would like to develop the theoretical tool which will be used to analyze the works.

Art forms are always intertextual because they are always interconnected with other art works. They refer/ cite earlier art works. Artists reinterpret and reintegrate earlier art forms in their works. Marcel Duchamp’s painting, L.H.O.O.Q., for instance, is connected with Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* because Duchamp reproduced *Mona Lisa* with mustache and made fun of

the renowned art work. As the paintings, the verbal texts are also interconnected. In this context, Roland Barthes writes:

[A] text consists not of a line of words . . . but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture. . . the writer can only imitate an ever anterior, never original gesture; his sole power is to mingle writings, to counter some by others, so as never to rely on just one; if he seeks to express himself, at least he knows that the interior “thing” he claims to “translate” is itself no more than a ready-made lexicon, whose words can be explained only through other words, and this ad infinitum . . . (1132)

In the above extract, Roland Barthes emphasizes that no text is original, for it shares elements of already existing texts from various cultures as we use the words from dictionary. Barthes further says, “A text consists of multiple writings, proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation” (132).

Likewise, Harold Bloom points out those new poems are always the reinterpretations of earlier poems. The young poet always misreads the father from whom he is influenced. Since “a poem is a response to a poem”, the new poets “misinterpret the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the rewriting of the father” (247). Bloom further writes:

You cannot write, teach, think, or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done, that person’s writing, teaching, thinking, or reading. Your relation to what informs that person is tradition, fro tradition is influence that extends past one generation, a carrying –over of influence. (1186)

Artists share the contents and forms of traditional works. Sometimes, they reproduce a part of the

works and reintegrate it their work creating pastiche. According to Fredric Jameson, the “complacent play of historical allusion and stylistic pastiche” are the features of contemporary art works. And in other cases, they modify, subvert or parody the traditional works. Similarly, Umberto Eco remarks, “works are created by works, texts are created by texts” (447). In this sense, we can say contemporary art works are always linked to the tradition.

According to John Carlos Row, art works are “recycling familiar myths, often in order to recall us to the mythopoetic sources of all human experience” (186). In other words they “revitalize traditional texts” with an intertextuality (186). The artists present the “creative appropriation of tradition” (Gerard Delanty 154). Not only the traditional forms are used for different purpose but also the similar subject matters reused exploiting different forms and techniques. In one way or other, contemporary art works are interlinked with their tradition. I will use this theoretical modality to interpret the contemporary Nepali paintings.

Chapter II.

Traditional Nepali Painting: History and Significance

Contemporary Nepali paintings are interconnected to traditional art works. As the knowledge of tradition seems necessary to interpret and analyze the present works, this chapter will study the types, contents and forms of traditional Nepali paintings briefly.

Traditional Nepali paintings are found in the form of manuscript illumination, *paubha*, *patachitra* (narrative scroll) and mural. These works are religious, for they are based on Hindu and Buddhist religious texts. They are also related to myths and religio-cultural rituals. The represented characters and events in the painting are mystical and magical in the sense that they do not refer to the external reality but mythical world. The characters act unusually and strange, unbelievable and magical events take place. The non-human characters sometimes act as divinities and human beings. Despite the fact that the art works have aesthetic value now, they were created for the purpose of religio-cultural rituals. Thus, they had pragmatic value in the then religious society. The art works were worshipped and prayed as the images of deities. Meditation, enlightenment and the stories from religious texts are the subject matters of these paintings. Distinct contours, flat colours and the absence of shade are the formal features.

The earliest Nepali painting ever found is in *Prajnaparamita* manuscript dated 1015. Manuscripts are religious texts which were copied, illuminated with miniature paintings and donated to priests, monks and monasteries. Paintings are also found on the covers of manuscripts. Manuscripts were generally written on palm leaves and protected by wooden covers. However, after thirteenth century, manuscripts were written on paper. The verbal texts and visual images appear on the same page. The borders are decorated with geometric and floral design.

Both Hindu and Buddhist manuscripts are illuminated. *Prajnaparamita*, *Dharanisamgraha*, *Gandavyuha*, *Kaarandavyuha*, *Pancaraksa* and *Paramartha Namasangiti* are the illuminated Buddhist manuscripts. *Visnudharma*, *Shivadharm*, *Devimahatmya*, *Bhagvata Mahapurana* and the Ramayana are some of the illuminated manuscripts. *Prajnaparamita* manuscript dated 1054 includes the scenes from Buddha's life, and the pictures of *Bodhisattavas*, *Panchabuddhas* and goddess *Prajnaparamita*. Scenes from Buddha's life are related to Buddha's nativity, meditation under the tree, miracle of a snake, temptation and attack by devils, a monkey offering honey to Buddha, taming mad elephant, Buddha's visit to his mother after his enlightenment and *mahaparinirvana*.

In the scene of nativity, Buddha emerges from Maya Devi's hip, walks seven steps and stands on the pyramid of lotuses. Such miraculous actions of Buddha suggest the presence of divine power in him. Buddha's standing on the pyramid of lotuses after taking seven steps is symbolic of his spiritual journey. After the birth of Buddha, Hindu gods like Brahma and Indra welcome the arrival of Buddha with fish and grains. The composition represents the religious harmony in the then context in the sense that both Hindu and Buddhist gods exist in harmony.

The scene of monkey offering honey to Buddha captures essence of one of the teachings of Buddha. Because of his altruism, the monkey flies to heaven being released from the chain of death and rebirth.

The goddess *Prajnaparamita* and her six female companions are portrayed on the covers of twelfth century *Prajnaparamita* manuscript. The goddess is seated on open lotus with *dharmachakra mudra* (gesture of turning the wheel of law). She also holds rosary and a manuscript in her hands which are symbolic of her wisdom. The other images around her are vase full of water, conch, flowers and lamps. The vase full of jala (water) is "an auspicious sign

and symbolizes plenty” (Lydia Aran 230). Lamp is the symbol of wisdom whereas conch symbolizes “Buddha’s speech” (Min Bahadur Shakya 29).

On the other cover of the same twelfth century Prajnaparamita manuscript the image of Buddha is flanked by three Bodhisattavas on each side. According to Mahayana Buddhism, Bodhisattava is “an intermediary between the passive Buddha and the suffering humans” (Aran 49). Ernst and Rose Leonore Waldschmidt hold the following view on *Bodhisattavas*:

Bodhisattavas, ‘Being of Enlightenment’, who are potential Buddhas or Buddhas designate. These blessed beings have come within each of their goal, the rank of a Buddha, having traveled the way that leads through the ten stages (bhumi) of supreme virtue and perfection: they have, however, abstained from taking the final step to deliverance and extinction in order to stand by those who have remained behind on earth, their former companions in suffering, to help them in their troubles and guide to them along the right path. (29)

Thus, *Bodhisattvas* have the function of helpers. Buddha’s teachings are believed to have been transferred to common people by *Bodhisattvas*. In the manuscript illumination, Buddha in *dharmachakra mudra* with white aureole is surrounded by the *Bhodhisattavas- Vajrapani, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Visvapani and Ratnapani*.

The thirteenth century Pancaraksa manuscript is illuminated with the figure of Buddha and goddesses who are the personifications of protective charms. Devotees are consulting about their ailments and problems with the goddess Mahapratishara. When the goddess opens the verses of *Pancaraksa*, the personified figure of disease runs away. The images and events in the compositions are magical.

The twelfth century *Vessantara Jataka* manuscript depicts a narrative scene in visual

form. *Vessantara* is a kind and generous prince who gives away the white elephant to neighbouring country that was suffering from draught. White elephant is believed to bring rain. But later *Vessantara's* own country suffers because of the draught. The king banishes the prince because of the revolting public. The prince goes to forest with his wife, son and daughter. One day, a Brahmin comes and asks for *Vessantara's* son and daughter to them with him. Renouncing his love for the children, he gives his son and daughter to the Brahmin. He takes away the crying children. Later the Brahmin turns out to be god Indra who has been testing the enduring capacity of the prince. He becomes successful in the test. In the end, all of them are united and return to their palace. The narrative depicts one of the important teachings of Buddha in visual form. Helping other is a good way of life and such person is rewarded.

The illuminated Hindu manuscripts are *Visnudharma*, *Shivadharmā*, *Bhagavata Mahapurana*, *Lalitavistara*, *Niswasatantra*, *Devimahatmya* and the Ramayana. The images of Hindu deities like Shiva, *Ganesha*, *Parvati*, *Vishnu*, *Laxmi* and *Durga*, and narrative scenes representing their activities are painted in these manuscripts.

On the cover of eleventh century *Vishnudharma* manuscript, ten incarnations of Vishnu are represented in visual form. The incarnation in the form of fish, (*Matsya Avatara*) saves the human beings from the flood. *Kurma Avatara* (incarnation of Vishnu in the form of tortoise) helps gods while churning the ocean for nectar. *Varaha* (boar) Avatara rescues the drowned earth. The earth appears as goddess on *Varaha's* elbow. In the painting, the animals are represented as gods.

Narsimha Avatara appears in the form of half man and half lion and kills the demon king *Hiranyaksipu* to protect his devotee *Prahlada*. *Vaman* (dwarf) Avatara destroys the pride of king Bali. As the dwarf asks for land that his three strides can cover, the king promises to grant the

land. Since the dwarf is the incarnation of Vishnu, he covers the whole earth in his first stride and heaven in his second stride. Then he asks for the place to land his foot after taking third stride. The king asks the god to put his foot on his head. Then the god thrusts the king to hell with the force of his leg on his head.

Other incarnations like *Parasuram* avatara, Ram avatara, Krishna avatara, Buddha avatara and *Kalki* avatara are represented in human form. The inclusion of Buddha as a god in the in the avataras of Hindu god Vishnu suggests the religious harmony in the then Nepali society.

Some *Visnudharma* manuscripts depict Vishnu with his four hands holding *sankha* (conch shell), *charka* (wheel), *gada* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). Some compositions show *Vishnu* on his vehicle, *Garuda*, flying to heaven with his consort *Laxmi*. *Garuda*, the mythical bird has the attributes of both human and bird.

Thirteenth century *Shivadharma* manuscript portrays Lord *Shiva* keeping *parvati*, his consort on his lap. *Trisula*, the favorite weapon of the divinity “symbolizes the triple functions of the god in the theistic sense, namely creation, preservation destruction” (M. Shakya 31). *Parvati*'s mount, lion and *Shiva*'s mount, bull are on the respective sides of the deities. *Ganga River* is seen pouring water on the head of *Shiva*. The river appears in the human form. *Ganesha* and *Kumara*, the sons of the couple also appear with their vehicles mouse and peacock respectively. The *Kailasha* Mountain, the abode of *Shiva* and *Parvati* appears in the background.

Eleventh century *Shiva dharma* manuscript illuminations depict the image of *Shivalinga*. The image attempts to reconcile the erotic and spiritual concepts. About the symbolic significance of *Shivalinga*, Lydia Aran says:

[T]he Lingam is roughly cylindrical in shape, standing upright on it's narrow end

and rounded at the top. It usually stands on a flat rimmed disc called yoni being possibly the female symbol. There is an indentation on one side of the yoni, the purpose of which is to drain off the water poured over the Lingam as offering.

(78)

The erotic and sacred significances come together in the composition.

Fourteenth century *Devimahatmya* manuscript illuminations depict goddess *Durga* and her various forms, and the deaths of *Mahisasura* (the buffalo demon), *Sumbha*, *Nisumbha* and *Raktabija*. *Durga* on her mount, lion with many weapons in her many hands attacks *Mahisasura* and other demons and destroys them. In the episode of *Dhumralochana vadha*, she attacks the demon with her arrow from the cloud. The demon, hit at the chest by the arrow, somersaults in agony. Flowers, colourful rocks and green mountains are “serving the background of the painting,” and create typical “Nepalese landscape” (R. Gupta 23).

Fifteenth century the *Ramayana* manuscript portrays the figures of Rama, the hero of the epic, his brother *Laxman*, wife *Sita*, devotees and monkey friends like Hanuman and *Sugriva*. The nimbus and aureole of Rama signify his divine status. There are “delineated trees”, birds and stylized “decorative motif of a purely imaginary form” in the painting (Pal. *The Arts* 61).

Early Nepali manuscript illuminations were influenced by Ajanta cave paintings, eastern Indian manuscript illuminations. Because of the cross-flow of artists, pilgrims and merchants, Indian influences came to Nepal. Despite the Indian influences, there are differences between Indian and Nepali manuscript illuminations. In eastern Indian manuscript illuminations, the tonality of colours is brighter but in Nepali manuscript illuminations, it is softer. Pratapaditya Pal points out differences between the two schools of painting:

Because the pigments are prepared with different ingredients in the two areas, the colours differ considerably both in the intensity of their brightness as well as in their texture. The reds in the Eastern Indian manuscripts tend to be brighter and more like vermilion, while in the Nepali Manuscripts the reds are deeper and possess crimson tinge. Similarly, the yellow has a stronger tonality in the Eastern Indian manuscripts as compared to the softer hue preferred by the Nepali artists. (*The Arts* 42)

The lines in Nepali manuscript illuminations are rhythmic and colours are delicate and friendly where as in the eastern Indian manuscript illuminations, the lines are thicker and harsh, and colours are overused (Lain Singh Bangdel, *Prachin Nepali* 23).

Nepali manuscript illuminations painted after seventeenth century were influenced by Mughal-Rajput styles. Mughal artists employed the art of Islamic “calligraphy” in line drawing, and the lines “acquired thereby more uniformity and regularity” (E. B. Havell *Indian Sculpture and Painting* 212-13). Paintings were “often embellished with admirably designed floral patterns” (216). The figures were portrayed nearly always in profile. On the other hand, Rajput paintings are two-dimensional, simple and musical, and generally deal about love. According to Ananda Coomaraswamy, “Rajput painting is essentially an aristocratic folk art, appealing to all classes alike, static, lyrical, and inconceivable apart from the life it reflects” (qtd. in Heinrich Zimmer 386). The subject matters of paintings are mainly the love of Krishna and Radha and Rama and Sita. Such features of Mughal-Rajut paintings appear in later manuscript illuminations in the portraits of the donor of manuscripts as depicted toward the bottom of some compositions. However, facial feature and body of the figures, and the landscape in the background always remained Nepali.

Paubha, another type of religious painting is painted on the cloth and worshipped as the image of gods and goddesses. The religious people hang them on the walls of temples, monasteries and sacred place at their homes. *Paubhas* have rectangular shape. Pratapaditya Pal writes about the process of creating *paubha*:

All *paubhas* are painted on coarse cotton which is primed with conch shell to provide a smooth surface. The outline is carefully drawn either in red or black and filled in with colours. The pigments are derived both from minerals, vegetable extracts, and the principal bindings material is gum, resin readily soluble in water.

(*The Arts* 65)

The principal deity is created at the centre of the *paubha*, and subsidiary deities are around the central figure. In the nineteenth century *paubha*, *Shakyamuni* Buddha, the Buddha is at the centre, and other images of the Buddha in various postures and gestures and devotees are around the central figure.

The figures and colours in *Paubha* are in tightly structured order, and there is the lack of shade in the composition. About the formal features of *Paubha*, Pratapaditya Pal says:

Colours in such paintings were invariably determined by religious needs and the picture surface is always suffused with uniformly luminous hues. It was unnecessary for the artist to experiment with light and shade since the divine world is regarded as perpetually effulgent. The composition is determined by inexorable laws of symmetry and visual order, for a divine image cannot exist in chaos and disharmony. (*The Arts* 65)

The artists do not use shades in the *paubha* because the divine image is considered full of light.

Various kinds of *mandalas* are found in most of the *paubha* paintings. Such *paubhas* are used as the *Yantra* (instrument) to meditate for uniting individual self to the cosmic being.

Mandala is a well-ordered geometric structure, which is used as a visual support for meditation.

The principal divinity resides in the middle within circles. The circles are surrounded by squares with four gates in four directions. The structure and the images lead the individual self toward the centre. Kramrisch writes about the structure of *mandala*:

Mandalas are visual supports of concentration and mediation, ritual aids on the way toward the center of the cosmos and self. Cosmos and self coincide in the image of the central and main divinity of the *mandala*. This divinity resides in principle, in an eight-petaled lotus filling a circle, within a square, enclosed by further concentric circles. The square is divided by diagonals into four triangles whose colours white, yellow, red, and blue-represent the four directions. Entry and exit into the magically fortified square are marked in the middle of each side by a symbolic gate structure stations on the way are marked by small images of subsidiary divinities in their appointed places, in the eight directions of space within the square. As a rule, the aim of the surrounding circle teems with scenes. (44).

In the middle of *Visnu Mandala* by Tejarama dated 1420, *Vishnu* with *Laxmi* is seated in *yogasana*, and the central divinities are surrounded by other figures of *Visnu* and *Laxmi*. On the left hand side of the central deities, the kneeling *Garuda* (*Vishnu*'s vehicle) is in *Namaskara Mudra*. *Garuda* shares some human features. It is in decorated with clothes and ornaments. At

the top of the *mandala*, there are the images of the moon and the sun in two corners.

In the fifteenth century *Chandramandala*, the central deity is moon-god who is riding chariot drawn by seven ganders. Female figures are shooting arrows from both corners of the chariot which symbolizes the light spread by moon. These central figures are surrounded by eight Planets. These eight planets and central moon-god altogether make *navagraha* (nine planets). The eight planets are surrounded by twenty four stars seated on the lotus petals. The stars (*nakshatras*) are personified as female deities. The composition is anthropomorphic, magical. Some other *mandalas* are *Suryamandala*, *Cakrasamvara Mandala*, *Hevajra Mandala*, etc.

The seventeenth century *Nritesvara paubha* shows the sexual union of Shiva and his *Shakti*. *Shiva* is embarrassing his *Shakti* with his two arms. The rhythmic of dance is suggested by their moving legs. The images in the painting are the “*tantric* manifestations of Shiva and *Parvati*” (Subedi “Nepali Art” 120). According to *tantrism*, individual self can be one with cosmic being, and achieve enlightenment though the union between male and female. *Tantrism* is the modification of the Hindu philosophy based *Vedanta* without rejecting the “fundamental beliefs” (Aran 53). According to *Vedanta*, there is no duality between individual soul and the cosmic soul. Everything is filled with divine spirit creating the unity between individual soul and the cosmic soul. *Tantric* philosophy accepts this philosophy of *Vedanta* but differs in the method to achieve enlightenment.

According to *Vedanta*, to achieve enlightenment, the individual discard the pleasure perceived by sense organs. For the initiator, sense organs are obstacles on the way toward *moksha*. Although *Tantric* philosophy accepts the *vedantic* belief that enlightenment is achieved

only through the union of the self with the cosmic being, it rejects the *Vedantic* methods. *Tantra* believes that exploiting the worldly pleasure perceived by sense organs and channeling them properly, enlightenment can also be achieved. Among the various pleasures of this world, “sex as a powerful motivating factor, which, like other passions and desires can be used rather than suppressed” (Aran 53-54). In sexual intercourse, for short moment, male and female experience absolute bliss by being themselves one entity. This experience assists the beginner to glimpse the vision of the enlightenment. Lydia Aran further writes:

The *tantrikas* seem to accept the assumption that sexual energy is identical with the creative energy source of the universe They believe that by arousing the libido they thus mobilize otherwise dormant energies, which they can then use, through sexual act, combine with ritual and yoga, to increase their intuitive powers, culminating in their sexual partner, thus associating themselves to her power (60).

In the *Tantric* meditation, “the act of sexual union is the symbol of the mobilization of the creative energy” from where the individual initiates his practice of assimilating oneself with the cosmic consciousness (56). Lain Singh Bangdel says that the “whole world, from Brahma to the worm is held together by the union of male and female” (Bangdel, “Nepalese painting” 30).

The *Paubha* of *Nritesvara* exploits Tantric philosophy. Shiva is in union with *Shakti* along with rhythmic. There are various cohesive images to emphasize the central theme of the union. The head of Shiva is in the shape of *Shivalinga*. At the top of the Shrine, erect phallus is depicted. The lotus and the *Vajra* in the hands of the deities symbolize the union of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. The appearance of *Vajra*, the symbol used in Buddhism, in the hand of Shiva suggests the

religious harmony. Along the top, various forms of Shiva are seated with their *Shaktis*. The *paubha* of *Nritesvara* attempts to resolve the dualities of sacred, profane, and individual self and cosmic being.

Fifteenth century Buddhist *Paubha, Samvara and Vajravarahi in Union*, also attempts to resolve the dualities of sacred and profane. Buddhist god *Samvara* is in union with his *Prajna, Vavarahi* at the centre of the composition. His two hands hold *Vajra* and *Ghanta* (bell). *Vajra* is the symbol of “*Upaya*” or “male principle” and *Ghanta*, “*Prajna*” or “female principle” (Aran 221). Both of these symbols signify the union of *Samvara* and *Vajravarai*. Around the couple various figures like trees, *stupa*, bones, corpses, flower, temples, parasols, banners, flags, etc, and the different activities of children, monks, saints, gods, goddesses, dancers, musicians, devotees, animals etc. Symbolically include the whole world. Other *Paubhas* portraying the union of gods and goddesses are *Mahasamvara* and *Amoghapasa Lokesvara*.

Paubha paintings depict also the images of temples, *stupas* and shrines. Fifteenth century *Laksacaitya Paubha* represents *laksa* (one hundred thousand) *stupas*. This *Paubha* is related to the ritual of *Laksacaitya* in which one hundred thousand *stupas* are donated. Various small *stupas* create an interesting visual pattern.

Paubha is geometrically structured form with principal divinity in the middle. And there are subsidiary deities and images in the periphery. Pratapaditya Pal

points out:

The principal divinity in a *paubha* could not really be removed from the centre without sacrificing his or her primacy. All subsidiary figures and narratives served

to glorify the central image and their disposition had to reflect accepted principles of geometric orderliness. Even when mountains and trees are added, they are integrated into the pictorial field in a symmetrical and harmonious fashion and are never allowed to overwhelm the importance of the figures, whether human or divine. (*The Arts* 88).

In *Paubha* painting “ritualistic” or “magical” themes are depicted through “rounded and sweeping” lines, and “colour has almost a modeling effect” (*Ray Arts of Nepal* 47-49). The figures in “outlined elongated face, large petal-shaped eyes and general costumes” in paubha paintings “show the impact of Rajasthani-Mughal-Pahadi paintings” from seventeenth century (*Ray, Arts of Nepal* 51).

Tibetan *Thankas* are similar to Nepali *Paubhas* in terms of themes, techniques and medium. Nevertheless, there are some differences. Nepali *Paubhas* have simple design, “smooth gradation of colour tones”, rhythmic flow of lines, aspects of “life and nature” and “poetic charm” (Lain Singh Bangdel “Painting” 117-18). Tibetan *Thankas* have “no modeling of colour” and appear “strictly two-dimensional” (*Ray Arts of Nepal* 51). Nepali artists shared contextualized Tibetan influences in their works. Regarding the use of external influences, Pratapaditya Pal says:

Although the Nepali artists did not imitate the exact forms of the hills and rock formations seen in contemporary thankas, the basic idea of a mountainous landscape was borrowed from Tibetan paintings which had developed a distinct style of its own by the seventeenth century. (*The Arts* 154)

Likewise, he further states:

Among other features adopted were dragons and forms of clouds, flying scarves, heavier garments, and floral patterns, such as the peony-like lotus on thrones, a penchant for bright and gaudy colours, of which the Tibetans were particularly fond. However, as always, apart from the idea of using elements of landscape, the Nepali artists generally borrowed particular motifs which they combined with features taken from cotemporary Rajput pictures to create a stylistic synthesis of their own. (*The Arts* 154)

Despite the fact that *paubha* paintings were influenced by Tibetan *thankas* and Mughal-Rajput paintings, the artists contextualized them in Nepali setting.

Another type of traditional Nepali painting is *patachitra* which narrates the stories from religious texts and mythologies. It depicts narrative pictures on a large horizontal band and sometimes pictures are separated in several segments. In these paintings artists find more scope to express the creative experience than in *paubha*. *Patachitras* are as religious as *paubha* and manuscript illuminations. Stella Kramrisch says:

By merely looking at a *pata* the faithful might achieve whatever he desired, be it illumination or health, wealth and son a remission of his shortcomings, or an amelioration of his karma. Certain rites might be observed in preparing the cloth- or they could be omitted. All that was needed was faith and concentration on the evocative mantra, the magic formula uttered in front of the competently painted image. (46)

Many common people also can understand the subject matter of the *Pata* because of its simple design. The eighteenth century *Krishna Lila Pata* represents various scenes from

the Mahabharata. The composition shows Krishna subduing the serpent king *Kalinaga* who does not recognize the divine power of Krishna.

Sringabheri Avadana Pata dated ca.1775-1800, depicts the story of a hunter king and his wife. She is religious and devoted wife, so, she asks the king not to kill the animals. But he does not listen to her. After his death, because of his sin, he is born in the form of buffalo. But she is born in a religious family. She knows that the buffalo is her husband, so she always remains near him. One day wild animals kill him. She collects the bones of the buffalo and throws them into the river. She brings water in the horns and cleans the spot where the buffalo was dead. Then she constructs a *stupa*, and worships there. After a few days, the horn changes into gold, her husband in the form of young man comes out and they are united. This visual narrative deals about sin, rebirth and the importance of *stupa*.

The artists capture the landscape in the background of *patas* using mountain range, clouds, flowers and green trees. Pratapaditya Pal says:

[T]he background of these paintings is densely packed with florid ornamental devices which draw their designs or patterns largely from vegetative forms. The motifs are employed with astounding variation and compromise of both naturalistic and stylized floral elements, curving and convoluting with slender and intertwined tendrils, swirling rhizomes verging on arabesques and exuberant cloud or flame patterns. (*The Arts* 89)

The narrative aspect is dominant in the compositions although there is the presence of landscape.

In early Nepali *Pata* figures appear in round and modelled form whereas in the *Pata* of

the mid-eighteenth century onward figures seem to be two-dimensional. Amita Ray shows the difference:

In early Nepalese banner-painting one can still see the round modeled line controlling the round mass modeled in colour. But soon broad expanse and tight and solid outline begin to show less substance. They tend to be brittle and modeling desiccated; increasingly the figures are shown in flat profile or frontality, and sharp lines and acute angles tend to characterize them. (*Arts of Nepal* 51)

In later date *patas*, figures seem flat due to the lack of modeling effect. The human figures look more like common people in narrative scrolls than in manuscript illuminations and *Paubhas*. *Patras* also depict the portraits of the donors and frequently incorporate landscapes as a background.

Another type of religious painting is wall painting. The subject matters and stylistic features of wall paintings are like that of manuscript illuminations, *paubhas* and *patas*. There are paintings on the walls of the palace of Bhupatindra Malla in Bhaktapur. The scenes related to *Sati Devi* are depicted in these paintings. On the walls of Taleju temple at Bhaktapur, the battle between *Bhairavi* and demons *Sumbha* and *Nisumbha* has been depicted. As in *Patras* human figures have been depicted in profile and paintings seem two-dimensional. Some wall paintings incorporate Buddhist *stupas* and Hindu temples in the same work suggesting religious harmony. Painting walls is a living culture of Nepal. Walls are still decorated with various religious figures “at the time the building of a house is completed or when a marriage is celebrated in the house” (A.W. Macdonald and Anne Vergati Stahl 143).

Manuscript illuminations, miniature paintings, paubhas, patas and murals are religious paintings. They depict the characters and events of Hindu and Buddhist mythologies. These paintings are worshipped and prayed as images and icons of gods and goddesses. Amita Ray comments on these religious paintings:

Without considering religion and philosophy as a foundation, no genuine evaluation can be made of the basic character of Nepali Art. The symbols of art here voice the same truth as philosophy and myth. Like that of India, Nepal has always aimed at achieving a synthesis of the dualities of life. The worldliness and spirituality are complementary not antagonistic in Nepali thought. In the same way, perhaps life and art, the religious and secular, even Buddhism and Brahmanism are not separate entities. (“Plastic Art” 10-11)

Early Nepali paintings were the integral parts of the religio-cultural life of the time. They were created to worship and pray rather than for aesthetic pleasure.

Nepali contemporary art history has been directly linked with the history of Chitrakars, a name of caste and the dwellers of Kathmandu valley. Since the division of castes according to their occupation and talent, Chitrakars have still been engaged in the creative field of art. The Chitrakars executed paintings about the socio-cultural life of the Newars of the valley. Abhi Subedi makes a comment on Chitrakar in the field of art and their creation in his article “Nepalese Art: An Overview”. He talks about the subject matters they have been representing in their painting that is religious and secular both. He writes, ‘Their motifs represent both secular and religious domains and their structure is narrative in nature’ (7).

Traditional Nepali painting is anthropomorphic, for, man becomes the “pivot” in the

foreground, and other images always remain in the periphery (Ray, “Plastic Art” 13). The deities are “created in the image of man” having both “benign and malevolent” nature “just as each human being is capable of both kindness and anger” (Pal, *Nepal* 12). The “youthful figures” of gods, goddesses always present the “vibrant sap of life” suggesting seductive beauty of human body (Ray, “Plastic Art” 14). The union of *Samvara* and *Vajravarahi*, and Shiva and *Parvati* depict the passionate embrace even though they symbolize spiritual values.

Types, subject matters and stylistic features of traditional Nepali painting are studied briefly. Chapter IV will trace the revival and reformulation of these elements in various forms while analyzing and interpreting the contemporary Nepali paintings. To reinterpret and recycle the traditional images and symbols, the artists have exploited western techniques as tools. I will briefly introduce some western techniques and forms that influenced the Nepali artists in chapter III.

Chapter III.

Western Art Techniques

The western art forms like impressionist, post-impressionist, fauvist, expressionist, cubist, abstractionist, surrealist, abstract expressionist, minimal art, pop art, conceptual art, installation art and performance art are used as tool in contemporary Nepali painting. These art forms of late nineteenth century and twentieth century are non-referential, plural and open-ended. As a result, they have multiple significances. Exploiting these techniques, Nepali artists have reformulated and reinterpreted their own tradition. This chapter will discuss the techniques of these art forms briefly.

The breaking away from realistic representation began in 1870s with impressionist movement. Impressionist painting does not reproduce the objects or images of reality as they are but captures the impression of them as perceived by the artist. Impressionist artist represents the "impression of thing on the canvas hastily which he perceives from the object at particular transitory moment" (John Canady 182). The artist attempts to capture the impression hurriedly neglecting fine outline, employing the play of light and shade. The artists "shatter the surface of their canvas into thousands of fragmented tints" and painting becomes "a rough texture of dots and dabs of paint" (183-185). The artists explore the "vibration of light" and practice "broken colours" discarding the soft colours (Jean Leymarie 13). About the painting process of impressionist, Rita Gilbert says:

The Impressionist attempted to paint what the eye actually sees, rather than what the brain interprets from visual cues. For example if you look at a house in the distance and you know intellectually that the house is painted a uniform colour of yellow, you might "see" all one shade of yellow, because your brain tells you that

is correct. In purely visual terms, however, your eyes register many vibrations of yellow, depending on how light strike the house and the shadows it creates. This is what the Impressionists were after- the true visual impression, not the version that is filtered through the knowing brain. (459)

The dazzling juxtapositions of pure colours merge when seen a certain distance from the canvas. The artists capture the image of the object as it appears to the artist at the particular moment.

The impressionists prefer to capture the impressions of the objects in the open air. In open air, one does not "usually perceive such even gradation from dark to light" because of the "harsh contrast in the sunlight" (Gombrich 406). The term 'impressionism' was given by the critics in 1874 viewing the exhibition of paintings including Claude Monet's painting *Impression: Sunrise*.

Realist artists gave emphasis on clear outline and detailed form. The realist painter takes his stand on intellectual ground and orders his sensations with respect to what he already knows. On the other hand, the ideal of impressionism lies within the concrete limits of visual sensation. As the universal principle of their style, light was the element of reality chosen expressly to reveal no more of reality than the shifting flux of appearances. Leymarie says that Impressionism creates "free forms of subjectivity, giving back at the same time both a livelier and a more lifelike interpretation of the world than a realist's objective image of it" (28). The use of contrastive colors and the play of light and shade give the picture its freshness.

Some of the renowned impressionists are Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissaro and Barthe Morisot. Monet painted seascapes and landscapes with sunrise and sunset, using small and distinct brushstrokes. He creates the images of sunlight, rippling water and mist.

August Renoir presents monumental human figures in the foreground and landscape in the background. Edgar Degas presents the unusual angle of sight and the 'peephole' view of a scene. In his painting, Camille Pissarro depicted working class people in the foreground of his landscapes. Barthe Morisot painted human figures in garden. For impressionists, an object can give different impressions depending on perspective, light and time.

Post-Impressionist artists, Vincent van Gogh, Georges Seurat, Paul Gauguin and Paul Cezanne broke away from impressionism and developed their own styles in the mid-eighties. Seurat created paintings using visual patterns of tiny dots of various colours on his canvas. If we view the painting from the particular distance, the dots mix in the eye creating a complete picture.

Vincent van Gogh used colour to "convey emotion more than to represent object" (Windy Beckett 308). His colours suggest anguish and melancholy. Sometimes he presents colour for its own sake. Paul Gauguin depicted primitive images in his paintings. He "began the movement known as primitivism- the term used to describe the west's fascination with non- western culture as well as pre-Renaissance art" (Matthew et. al. 528). He expressed the primitive themes through the use of "strong outline" and "flattened forms" (Gilbert 462).

Paul Cezanne painted landscape, still-life and portraits. His paintings have "solidity and geometric order" (Gilbert 462). Edvard Munch expressed "profound personal disturbances that made his streets echo with fear, filled landscape with death and turned woman into vampire" (Lynton 817). His paintings suggest the cruelty and restlessness of modern world.

In 1905, fauvism gave emphasis on expression through the use of harsh, fantastic and "antinaturalistic" colours on the canvas (Ray Faulkner et. al 432). The French word 'fauve' means wild beast. The colours of these paintings are arbitrary and disharmonious as the wild animal.

Fauvists expressed through colours rather than the images. Some fauvists are Henri Matisse, Andre Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck and Roualt. They were inspired by the colour scheme of van Gogh's paintings. Matisse's paintings are complex to understand. About his paintings, Herbert Read says:

To get the complete view of the scene, your vision must shift about from point to point. When it has so to speak, roamed over the whole field, then by an act of synthesis the mind retains the scene as a whole. Unconsciously, as a general rule, we focus on a central point, or prominent light, and the rest of the scene arranges itself rather vaguely round this. (73)

Matisse used arbitrary colours which are not found in the objects of the world. The images are coloured from his imagination.

In 1907, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, using geometric shapes, created cubist paintings. The artists break the linear form of the objects into geometrical forms. Then they loosely join and reconstruct these shapes suggesting an image. About cubism, Rita Gilbert writes:

Cubism is an art of facets, like the facets in a diamond; forms are flattened into planes, broken apart, and reassembled to make a striking visual (but abstract) reality. We see the same form from different angles simultaneously; top, bottom, side, and frontal views may be combined into one image. Figure and ground are treated in the same way and have equal weight in the composition, blending together into a coherent whole. (469)

Some works of Picasso show the influence of African masks and tribal art. The geometrical shapes in cubism also depict machine and mechanical age without plasticity and

organicity. Colour is often a discord, the form agitated and relentless. The fragmented images in cubist works suggest the fragmented reality. Cubists also experimented on collage technique.

Along with cubism, expressionist movement was also taking place during early twentieth century. Expressionism is the "free distortion of form and colour through which a painter gives visual form to inner sensation or emotion" (Canady 420). The artists violently distorted the images in the process of revealing inner responses to external reality. The distorted images suggest violence and brutality of the modern world. The expressionists' paintings are dynamic and bewildering. They expressed their inner sensation and abnormal state of mind through tortured and horrifying images. Bernard S. Myers writes:

Unconventionality of subject matter and frightening quality of formal and coloristic distortions, intense mysticism and sense of impending doom represents against the brutality of earthly existence and may be seen as an effort both to escape and to protest it. The vivid swirls of brilliant terrifying colours together with the tortured symbols constitute a background for morbid picture of humanity. (330)

The shocking colours and distorted images revolt against mechanization. Emil Nolde, Kathe Kollwitz, Max Beckmann and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner are some of the expressionist artists. Beckmann depicts the feeling of grimness and cynicism. He made his images distorted and shocking with his inner feeling. The artist expresses inner emotions using distorted colors.

Emil Nolde painted primitive themes using sensual colours and simple rhythms. The themes of isolation and "loneliness" in urban life are shown in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's "haunting" images (Gilbert 470). Expressionists shared bold and violent brush strokes from van Gogh, and distorted and horrifying images from Edvard Munch.

Abstract painting, in the second decade of the twentieth century, disconnected itself from the objects and events of the world. The forms and colours become ends in themselves. The artistic form does not inform us about our world. (F. David Martin et. al 75). Different viewers may approach the painting in different manner. Abstract form does not represent the objects, events and the places of the world. So, one need not think about past and future to associate the images. Martin et. al write abstract painting:

Abstract painters liberate us from the habits of referring sense to specific objects and events. They make it easy for us to focus on the sense themselves even though we are not artists ourselves. Then the radiant and vivid values of the sensuous are enjoyed for their own sake, satisfying a primal fundamental need. Abstractions can help fulfill this need if we dare, despite our habits of practice and Puritan heritage, to behold and treasure the images of the sensuous. Then instead of our controlling the sense, transforming them into data or signs, the sense control us, transforming us into participators. Moreover, because references to specific objects and events are eliminated, there is a peculiar abstraction from the future and the past. (76)

Sense are the qualities of images, colours or lines that cause sensations stimulating our sense organs. In abstract painting sensation is not caused by the objects and events but by the abstract images and colours. It fully breaks away from the classical concept of artistic imitation. The contemplation of a non-objective picture offers a complete rest to the mind and earthly troubles.

Kandinsky is a renowned abstract painter. In his compositions, there has been the lyricism of music. About Kandinsky's paintings, Windy Beckett says: "It was the liberated colour, the formal independence, so entranced him. It makes us experience one, with its

confusion, courage, excitement, furious motion, colour bounces, and smudge smears demand prolonged contemplation” (355). In the beginning, abstract art works may confuse the viewers, for they cannot link the colors and images with the objects of the world.

During 1920s, Surrealist artists again painted figurative image but in different order with different significance. Surrealist paintings were created arranging seemingly unrelated images as in dream and fantasy. Surrealists violated standard morality and artistic conventions revolting against any restraint on free creativity. They were inspired by Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis that human personality is determined by unconscious mind, and conscious mind plays a minor role in it. In Roland Barthes' words, surrealists created their art "by urging the hand to write as fast as possible what the head was unaware of", which was known as "automatic writing" ("The Death of the Author" 1131). About the characteristics of surrealism, and the influence of Freud's psychoanalysis, Herbert Read says:

I doubt if 'Surrealisme' would ever existed in its present form but for Professor Freud. He is the real founder of the school, for just as Freud finds a key to the perplexities of life in the material of dreams, so the 'Surrealiste' finds his best inspiration in the same region. It is not that he merely makes a pictorial representation of dream images; his aim is rather to employ any means which will give him access to the repressed contents of the unconscious . . . Surrealisme is an art without limits of any kind. Its underlying idea is the recovery, by means of what Breton calls 'a vertiginous descent into ourselves', of the whole force of the mental personality. It believes that there are hidden springs in the unconscious, and that these can be tapped if we give our imagination free rein- if we allow thought to be automatic. (*Art Now* 120)

As there is free association of images and symbols in the painting, the effect is disturbing and nightmarish. The painting appeals to the unconscious mind more easily than to the conscious mind. Some renowned surrealist artists are Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Joan Miro, Paul Klee, Rene Magritte and Frida Kahlo.

During the late 1940s, abstract expressionism gave more emphasis to the process of painting than to the final product. Spontaneous gestures determine paintings rather than pre-planned structure. They shared some techniques from earlier paintings and exploited them in distinct manner. Since abstract expressionism is a "response to the horrors made so familiar by the war: the destruction of cities and of individuals, the barbarity of concentration camps and of mass annihilation by means of atomic explosion", and the artists "found expression in paintings that spoke of violence and wounds", this new movement takes these aspects from expressionism (Lynton 895). The strong influence in abstract expressionism is the surrealist technique of automatic painting. They handled colours vehemently. Some abstract expressionists are Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning.

On the process of painting, Pollock placed his canvas on the floor and moved around, and at times through it "spotting, dribbling, puddling pigments" employing his "gestural technique to paint as directly as he could" (Sandler 102). Instead of applying the colours with the brush, he painted pouring and spattering them. He did not consider paint as a passive element to be used at will, but storehouse of energy for the artist to release. He interacted with his artwork and he himself was absorbed in the process of painting. The process of his painting became a kind of private ritual made visible. Pollock himself says about the process of his painting:

When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about

making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own, I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well. (qtd. in Lynton 895)

He brought out the unconscious on his canvas exploiting psychic automatism. Pollock's huge canvases overwhelm the viewer with his dynamic, interweaving and criss-crossed lines, colours and images.

Another abstract expressionist, Mark Rothko used large field of pure colours in the shape of rectangles. He created many rectangles with soft-edged colour within the larger colour rectangle. The boundaries of inner rectangles are blurred which give the inner rectangles floating effect. His works have dim lighting and atmosphere of contemplation.

Willem de Kooning painted figural images but they are not reproductions of the objects of the reality. He used large canvas, and splashed and spattered the paint with spontaneous gestures. On the process of painting, he interacts and struggles with his monster like female figures. The woman figure reveals itself as a compilation of "fragmented anatomy" (Lynton 986). He did not create these women with forethought and intention but they evolved in the process of painting.

During 1960s, pop art drew its subject matter from everyday life of common people, mass-produced culture and advertising. It exploited the images from comics and newspapers. Coke bottles, soup cans, cream pies, hamburgers, supermarket, hoarding board and the photographs of celebrities are familiar images. Pop artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Marisol gave new meanings using familiar objects.

Conceptual art emphasizes that the viewers can understand a work of art directly from the

artist's mind with the use of less material in the work. Conceptual art attempts to "bring the audience into direct contact with the creative concepts of the artist" (Martin et. al 435).

Conceptual art is not a finished product but it invites the audience to finish the work mentally through creative engagement. Conceptual artists did not give importance to the physical form but their process of creation is photographed. Some conceptual artists are Sol Lewitt, Anthony Christo, Carl Andre, Joseph Kosuth and David Bainbridge. Conceptual art stresses on the concept and the process of creation.

Installation art blurred the boundaries among various art genres by using the techniques of painting, sculpture, music and theatre. It creates inter-art relationship. It also incorporates familiar objects of everyday life and even human being. The artist installs the art work into a planned environment and the installed objects become a part of the environment to fulfill the artist's expression. Keith Haring and Jennifer Bartlett are installation artists. Installation art generally uses "space as an element, designed to be entered into and a part of the process of experience" (Roobina Karode 216).

Performance art also exploits the techniques of other art forms like painting, sculpture, theatre, music, film and photography. But the performance of the artist is more important than other elements. Recitation of the poems, dialogue, dance and the creation of music can be the parts of artist's performance. Sometimes several people participate in interaction and performance. Thus, performance art has interpersonal relationship. Performance artist Laurie Anderson's works mix various art genres like music, painting, film, and rock and roll. Nevertheless, performing artist is central to the art work.

The western art forms we have discussed are not the realistic representations of the objects of the world but the subjective responses of the artists. Impressionists emphasize on the

impression of the things they perceived at particular moment. They painted hurriedly using fragmented lines and colours. As a result, the canvas appears to be the rough surface of brush strokes, dots and dabs. Post-impressionists shared the non-realistic style of impressionism but went beyond that creating their own styles. Some post-impressionists started to practice on geometric shapes and others turned toward oriental, medieval and classical themes and styles. Fauvism stressed on expression through the use of harsh, fantastic and bright colours. Cubists broke linear surface of the images using geometric shapes. Expressionists depicted troubled and tortured feeling through the use of distorted colours and images. Abstract painting disconnects itself from the objects and events of the world, and forms and colours do not become the means but ends in themselves. Surrealists used seemingly unrelated images as in dream. Abstract expressionists give emphasis to the process of painting than to the finished art work. Pop art celebrates the consumerism using the subject matter from the everyday life. Conceptual arts focus on the concept of art which lies beyond the work of art work. Installation and performance arts blur the boundaries among various art genres using the techniques of theatre, literature, painting, sculpture and music. These art forms are plural and open-ended. They have multiple significances. Contemporary Nepali artists used these western techniques and forms as tools to reinterpret and reintegrate the images, contents and subject matters of their traditional art forms.

Modernisms in arts fostered a period of experimentation from the late 19th to the mid-20th century particularly in the years following World War I. In the era characterized by industrialization rapid social change, advances in science modernists fall or growing alienation incompatible with the Victorian morality, optimism and convention. The modernist impulse is fuelled in various literatures by industrialization and urbanization, by the search for an authentic response in a much changed world. While on the other hand, traditional arts were only the guard

of religion and higher class people's weapons for advancing themselves and were means of suppressing the lower class people's voice. For the long time, until the end of 15th century traditional art dominated the whole human civilization. After the time of Renaissance's revolution in arts, it no longer existed in the newer customers of arts due to incapability of representing the human psyche. Gradually these arts completely replaced by the modern art at the beginning of World War I. Today human civilization has been so complex and vague that no any means of arts form can represent its characteristics.

Traditional Arts and Craft of Nepal, the very fabrics of Nepalese social life, seek to portray, in vivid detail, the age old social practices. With the process of modernization and induction of new technology, these traditional arts and crafts are facing the danger of extinction and the Royal Nepal Academy and the National Council for Science and Technology have now begun to give a special attention towards the preservation of traditional skills while trying to accommodate the new technologies in the Nepalese life in a way that it will not harm, but promote the past traditional arts and crafts of Nepal.

The Second World War ended in 1945, and five years later the political changes that took place in Nepal, brought to an end the 104 old autocratic Rana Regime. In 1950 not only was the nation's attention diverted to the political, economic and social field but there was also a revival of art, literature and culture in the favorable new democratic atmosphere.

To write it again, any discussion of contemporary Nepalese art must include a review of its history. Nepal has a rich and glorious cultural heritage from time immemorial. Scholars frequently acclaim the Kathmandu valley is the cradle of ancient civilization, as "an open museum" and anyone visiting Kathmandu, is convinced of this.

Of all, Malla kings who ruled over this valley from 1200 A.D. - 1769 A.D. within this period, the reign of king Pratap Malla is often referred as “the golden age of Nepalese arts”. There are ample examples of arts to support this fact and no doubt that the worldwide reputation Nepalese art enjoys today rests on the achievement of the past. Besides, the great King Prithivi Narayan Shah fully realized the importance of the artistic heritage, is supported by the fact that he built Kailas Durbar at Basantpur in Kathmandu after his conquest of the valley. His successors were equally keen to preserve the tradition of Nepalese art, and developed it further, as exemplified by the temples, sculptures and paintings of the early years of the Shah period. But prior to this, the Nepal was said to be glorious in its art and culture in Lichchhavi regime. Yet we do not have sufficient evidence to prove it. The prominent art scholar, Abhi Subedi, quotes in his article entitled, “Nepali Art: An Overview” about the idea of Pal, a prominent art historian in his book “Art of Nepal” (1985: 17) divides Nepali history of Art from A.D. 300 to the Shah reign into five broad period in the following. As he divides:

- 1) Lichhavi (330-879)
- 2) Transitional (879/80-1200)
- 3) Early Malla (1200- 1482)
- 4) Late Malla (1482-1769)
- 5) Shah (Since the conquest of the Kathmandu valley and the foundation of the modern Nepal by King Prithivi Narayan Shah, of the house of Gorkha and the forefather of the king of Nepal in 1769). (7)

Many experts have concluded that the real modern art in Nepal began with the Rana Prime

Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana. In 1864, Jung Bahadur Rana usurped all the administrative power in a sanguinary conspiracy. Four years after becoming prime minister, he went to England and on his way back visited France and other countries. After his return, there was a big shift in Nepali art. Jung Bahadur was so enamored of western art and life style that the influence of the west was to be seen not only in everyday life of the higher strata of society but also in Nepalese art, which brought a complete change in art and painting too. During the one century of Rana rule, a number of palatial buildings sprang up in the valley, all built in mimic of western architectural styles.

One of the Nepalese artists, Bhajuman Chitrakar, who accompanied Jung Bahadur to England, started to paint in western style and medium so other Nepalese artists followed his style to suit themselves. As a result traditional Nepalese art lapsed and fell into near oblivion.

Agreeing with this argument Abhi Subedi writes:

Legends grew around the Rana prime minister especially Jung Bahadur, about the Chitrakar artists and about their power of executing portraits. Bhajuman Chitrakar accompanied the Rana Minister to Europe in 1850, and said to have brought European influences in the use of colors and techniques. (7-8)

Most of the artists of that period were self taught and had inherited a family tradition within a particular caste. Only in 1926 was this pattern broken when Rana Prime Minister Chandra Samsher sent Chandra Man Singh Maskey for formal training in the government school of Art, Calcutta in British India, where he successfully completed a six year course. The exposure of these artists to western techniques brought the significant change on the portrait painting in the court. Since the Rana loved their own images, they got their portraits made by the

artists.

Another artist was the late Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, also from the same school in 1929. Chandra Man Maskey including Chitrakar himself was the first Nepalese artists to receive formal art training in India. In 1950, Nepal got freedom from the tyranny of the Ranas. With the end of Ranarchy, Nepal was widely exposed to international community. Nepal became open to the other countries. Artists started to go for training to India and other countries and that resulted Nepali art in the height of modernity. It becomes clear that with the fall of Rana regime in Nepal, the new epoch started in Nepali art. It created not only the question of revival and preservation of traditional art but also of the development of contemporary art. At the same time, it created a new dilemma. These trained artists could neither break completely from tradition nor could follow the western techniques fully, nor could stick to the tradition. In this period of transition' they found themselves in dilemma.

It is strange to note that when Bhajuman Chitrakar visited England in 1850, a breakaway from the traditions of the past had already started in European art, particularly in France, but this trend reached Nepal only a century later. During the first ten years following the events of 1950 Nepalese artists were busy mixing several styles of painting amongst which the concrete or representational style of the west was dominant. However, a few artists had become aware of the modern art movement in Europe. Their works were just imitation since they were self-taught artists.

At this point, Lain Singh Bangdel loomed large in the Nepali art scene. He is the first Nepalese artist to get proper and full exposure to the western school of art. After his return from Paris, some scholars hopefully remarked that “the real modern art has begun in Nepal” (Singh,

232.)

Bangdel was so genius by his childhood that he always used to do relating arts and its importance. Indicating Bangdel's Narendra Raj Prasai writes:

Bangdel copied art since his childhood while playing at home, he used to draw picture with his fingers. He used to take a keen interest in drawing and painting. He had got a post card from his father when was a small boy. The picture postcard was beautiful and that was why his father, Ranglal Rai had brought it for him. Karo, a popular artist had designed that post card. Though Bangdel did not know Koro then, he liked the post card though. He always used to begin his exercise book in school with a drawing at the beginning. He used to decorate the walls during different festivals in his village. When he was in high school, he had established himself as a good artist. Due to this, after his matriculation, he told his father that he wished to study fine arts. (296)

As said the morning indicates the day, Bangdel proved himself as a successful, outstanding and versatile figure in the field of Nepalese art as well as across the world.

Bangdel had completed his six years-course from the government college of arts and crafts in Calcutta in 1945 with the highest distinction. In 1952 he went to Paris where he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. During his sojourn in Europe, he also spent a few years in England. In France, he had the opportunity of meeting famous personalities including the Nobel Prize winner's in Francois Maurice and Albert Camus and also Andre Malraux, Jean Cocteau and painters like Braque and Picasso. They must have influenced his thoughts in arts and literature. This exposure to western art "immeasurably enriched his technical ability and multiplied

available creative options and allowed young Nepali artists access to such masters as Picasso, Braque and Van Gogh” (Neuwauer, Forward)

In 1961, Bangdel held a one-man exhibition of his works, which was the first exhibition of his works, which was the first exhibition of modern painting in Kathmandu. He was the first Nepalese artist to introduce modern art in Nepal in a real sense.

However, some self-taught Nepalese artists were experimenting with the new theme, medium and technique. Like Gehendra Man Amatya, an eminent Nepali self-taught artist claimed to be the first Nepali modern artist to exhibit his solo exhibition in Kathmandu in 1945. There many an evidence to substantiate this claim. Supporting Amatya’s claim Narendra Raj Prasai says “the first man to hold an exhibition of modern art was Gehendra Man Amatya. He had held a solo art exhibition in 1945” (299). Regarding Bangdel’s works, work resources and style, Dina Bangdel says:

His works have the universal appeal that continues both his personal vision with his immense creative genius. Much of his imagery is derived from nature that is interpreted and rendered through the artist’s own perception and imagination. His style is marked with its own perception and imagination. His style is marked with its own distinctiveness- it expresses both his familiarity with the trends of modern art and neglects his inspirations that are rooted to his native soil. (9)

Similarly, the veteran art critic Abhi Subedi asserts: “Our times speak in Bangdel’s painting. They show structuralism of the influence of western art and Nepali artist’s assimilation of western influence” (9).

To sum up, though Nepali art has long history from the ancient time and it has undergone with different changes with time and makes its own tradition and gets influence from west too. Bangdel is considered the artist who introduced western modern art in the field of Nepali art. No doubt, his influence is tremendous to the contemporary artists in Nepal.

Since the division of caste according to their occupation and the talent, the particular caste- Chitrakar, dominated Nepali art history for hundred years and this dominance slowly declined when Nepali political and economic relation widely open to other countries. Nepali artists' thirst for learning new styles, techniques and forms, pushed ahead going abroad for higher studies. The movements which said to the established movements of the west like Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, and Dadaism and so on were practiced highly. And from this revival of western art scenario, Nepali artists could not decisively avoid adopting the western tradition. Mainly the artist Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, Chandraman Singh Maskey, Gehendra Man Amatya and Lain Singh Bangdel introduced modern art in the field of Nepali soil.

In the history of Nepali Modern art Lain Singh Bangdel is highly celebrated among many modern artists for his contribution for depicting contemporary Nepali Notion. Lain Singh Bangdel, returning in 1962 from his study in Paris and London, introduced to Kathmandu the stylistic and indeed philosophical elements of modern European art. At the time when Bangdel was in Europe, he was infatuated by seeing modern masters like Monet, Picasso and Braque. The infatuation by the great masters Bangdel, followed their path by working in Impressionistic, Expressionistic and Cubist forms. Bangdel later established his career as being expressionist. Beside this, Bangdel has created huge paintings that they solely pay homage to his land and people.

No doubt, Nepali painters were heavily influenced by the western artistic style, technique as well as forms. Thus, many painters naturally get influenced from other artists in their tradition like Bangdel who has greatly been influenced from expressionism but his paintings have its own uniqueness that distinguishes Bangdel from other expressionist painters. In the similar manner, needless to say N.B. Gurung, being a very promising young Nepali artist has immense influence from the timeless work of Bangdel but he establishes his paintings in Impressionistic tradition rather than Bangdel's expressionistic tradition of painting. So, it is quite true that having get influenced from someone does not necessarily mean to follow that tradition as it is rather it is creating some uniqueness which gives a individuality of the painters and create a kind of 'ness' of an individual painter.

Chapter IV.

Tracing the Traditional Images in Contemporary Works

Contemporary Nepali paintings reintegrate the images, icons and symbols of traditional art works using different forms and techniques. Sometimes, the same subject matters and themes

are explored with different forms, and in other cases, the shared contents are subverted or modified. Contemporary Nepali artists reread, reinterpret and rehistoricize the tradition. In other words, the traditional images are reinterpreted. The figures of gods and goddesses are not presented in referential mode but they are treated with western forms like impressionist, expressionist, cubist, abstractionist, surrealist, abstract expressionist etc.. As a result, the art works appear to be plural, that is, the same art form has multiple significances. Since the contemporary art works are interconnected to the Nepali traditional arts, these art works are intertextual. The visual texts cite or refer to the earlier works. As a result, the tradition is renewed in the contemporary forms. Such art works explore socio-cultural and political issues of our time. This chapter will attempt to trace the elements of traditional art works in contemporary paintings and explore their significances by interpreting and analyzing the visual texts.

Lain Singh Bangdel's *Mother Nepal* (Fig.1) represents Nepal in anthropomorphic form. In Nepali culture, the native land is respected as mother. The presentation of non-living thing as living is one of the important aspects of Nepali tradition. In traditional Nepali paintings and sculptures, the images of rivers, ocean, earth etc. are represented in anthropomorphic forms. For instance, Ganga River in the form of goddess pours water upon lord Shiva. Likewise, the earth appears in the form of beautiful woman on *Varaha's* elbow in *Visnudharma* manuscript illumination. Bangdel shares this aspect of early Nepali art in this work. However, the artist uses expressionist form to express his inner feeling about Nepal. The shape of the figure is distorted. Woman figure, the representative Nepal seems to be sad and melancholic. She has partly hidden her face with a palm. Twisted and a bit deformed legs also suggest her suffering.

Presenting the country in such expressionist form, the artist seems to say that the country is not only the geographical land but also its people. As the people of the country are suffering,

the country itself is suffering. To depict the people's suffering from poverty and social injustice, the artist presents country itself. By representing mother Nepal sad and suffering, the artist seems to represent that not one or two people are suffering but many Nepalis.

Uttam Nepali's *Erotic Series* (Fig.2) represents the erotic images that are found in *tudal* (wooden struts in temples) using expressionist form. The composition juxtaposes celestial and mundane images. On the left hand side the image of divinity stands whereas images of a couple appear on the right. The image of divinity is depicted with three heads. In Sangeeta Thapa's words, "His erotic series inspired by the *Toonals* or wooden struts of Nepali Temples are bold interpretations of traditional art form" (Introduction). Despite the fact that the content is traditional, the form and positions of the images are modified. Generally, the image of divinity is represented at the upper part of *tudal*, and the erotic figures under it in small space in comparison to former. But Uttam Nepali puts them horizontally providing equal space. The colours of figures and background are also different, for the artist exploits unconventional and altered colours and shapes. In addition to this, the theme of sexual union is also the content of Nepali *paubhas*.

About the significance of such erotic images, Lain Singh Bangdel writes:

The embrace of male and female is the sexual symbolism of Tantric [religions].

The old concept 'symbolized the act which created the world, the eternal cycle of reproduction without which nothing would exist.' The symbol of sexual union in [art works] remained overwhelmingly popular in Nepal. The whole world, from Brahma to the worm is held together by the union of male and female. ("Nepalese Painting" 30)

As we search for the understanding of our existence, the reasoning and thinking leads to the subject of union of male and female principles. Then the curiosity arises: what makes possible

the union of male and female? We move from physical things to metaphysical question. As a result, the images lead toward the exploration underlined conditions of world and our existence, in other words, in search of cosmic being. Thus, the presentation of sacred and profane images simultaneously is justified, for both of them are the integral parts of the cosmic being.

Manuj Babu Mishra's *Birth of Brahma* (Fig.3) parodies the Hindu myth of creation using surrealist form. According to the myth, while lord Vishnu was sleeping in cosmic ocean on the bed of snake (*Sheshnaga*), a lotus sprang out of the navel of Vishnu. Sitting on that lotus, Brahma created the earth, human beings, animals, birds and other things. The god created the things with purpose, and all the things fitted in an organic whole with coherence and harmony.

Despite the fact that Mishra has taken same subject matter, the art work questions the myth. To do so, the artist has exploited the surrealist technique. The distorted figure of *Vishnu* is lying on the floor instead of ocean. The tankers of war are aggressively approaching toward the lying *Vishnu*. The ocean seems to have been squeezed. The body of the god is disfigured. The right hand and the leg seem to have been separated from the body. The face of Vishnu turning away from the greater part of the world depicts agony and melancholy instead of mood of *yoganidra* or meditative expression. Brahma is sitting on the lotus which is sprung out of the navel of Vishnu.

The questions arise: why *Vishnu*, the creator of the universe is disfigured and in agony? Since Brahma is the creator of the earth and the things in it, did he create the tanker also? What is the purpose of tanker? Does the god create the machine to kill the innocent? The composition brings forth such questions. The body of the omnipotent god is disfigured and he is in agony. He seems to be helpless. Another question arises: Can't he control his own creations that are attacking himself? The art work questions the authority of the god by subverting the myth.

The science and technology, and contemporary wars have made fun of the literal interpretation of myth. The broken parts of the Vishnu's body suggest the brokenness and fragmentation of the established myth. The painting shares the view of most of the contemporary youths that the universe was not created by the Vishnu or Brahma. In another level, the disfigured body and the agony represent the victim of the war. About Mishra's art works, Abhi Subedi writes:

His works reflect the physical crisis in a very tangible form, but in each canvas he introduces ideas which are directly related to the catastrophe depicted in the art. The base of the dramatic relationship between modern scientifically fortified war machinery and the helpless anthropomorphic forms in the art is humanism. His subject matter is humanism-its catastrophe, thwarted hopes and bleak futurity. Overt representation rather than a subtle one is the feature of his art. Because of the need to foreground the theme, the subject of the predicament of humanity under the shadow of the war, he does not delineate the theme in a subtle manner. ("Nepali Art" 125)

The art work depicts the crisis of the faith and established values. As a result, the world is fragmented and chaotic, and the human beings are disillusioned and disfigured.

Brahma, Vishnu and lotus are the recurrent images in traditional Nepali paintings. The artist reuses these images exploiting different form with different purpose. There is ironic relationship between traditional art forms and this work. In the traditional works, the presented myth commanded the authority, expected that the art works would create the meditative atmosphere and mood among the viewers. To assist for the realization of the cosmic being like Vishnu may have been the purpose of the early work with such images. But the present work

bringing forth the same images subverts their original significance. Nevertheless, the work is interconnected to the Nepali tradition. It reinterprets the tradition with new significance in relation to the contemporary time.

Shashi Shah's *Untitled* (Fig.4) shares the image of *Kalki* avatara, the tenth incarnation of lord *Vishnu*, from *Visnudharma* manuscript illuminations and presents it with surrealist forms of horses. The galloping horses do not seem realistic but dream-like. According to a Hindu mythology, in *Kali Yuga*, the present age, when the world will be dominated by evil forces, lord *Vishnu* will take *Kalki* Avatara and save the world from destruction. About Shashi Shah's paintings, Andre Alexander writes:

All of Shah's canvases are of galloping, frenetic bright horses. That he is able to convey so much energy and to sustain it without being dull is impressive. . . .The imagery is highly symbolic: Hindu belief regards our era as the age of cheaters and liars. When the time is ripe, *Vishnu*, the Supreme Self and Creator, will deliver the world from evil and bring about a new golden age. He will arrive riding on or personified by white horses of energy. ("Shashi Shah" 47)

The movement of the horses suggests their divine power on their mission to save the world. His paintings reveal a time of spirituality in chaos. Shashi Shah himself writes about the significance of horses in the exhibition catalogue of his works:

Kalki Avatar is the protagonist of my paintings, a symbol. The declaration of Lord *Vishnu* "Whenever there is a crisis in humanity, I take on the incarnation to protect the world" is the basic element for the survival of our world and civilization. We are living and our world is living with this hope. Though the *Kalki* Avatar is the last one of all our philosophical avatars, it is the expression of

a desire/hope for peace and a vision for the continuity of the future. No matter what the crisis we face and whatever the dangers may be, the world is surviving up to now. In order to protect the world from its possible doom, a situation is always created in one form or another.

In response to the brutality and terrorism of the present time, Shashi Shah takes Hindu mythology as the source peace and harmony. Using surrealist technique, the artist plays between illusion and reality. About the surrealist features of his paintings, Kedar Bhakta Mathema says:

Here the horses are both real and unreal. Although they look real at casual glance, in close scrutiny they are outside the realm of possibility. Like other surrealists' images, Shashi's horses are both undeniable and impossible. The illusion of movement expressed in the vitality of lines and shapes of the horses and their floating manes and tails give the painting an undeniable vibrancy. (20)

Shashi Shah's work is inspired by the Hindu myth and expressed in surrealist form. It is also connected to early Nepali art forms. In this sense, the work is intertextual.

Kiran Manandhar's *Acrylic on Canvas* (Fig.5), the art work in the form of *mandala*, explores theme related to meditation and enlightenment using abstractionist technique. In the first glance, the form seems to be abstract. The colours and images in the canvas do not directly refer to the objects and events of the external world. However, the close reading of the canvas depicts the pattern of arranged triangles. There is a triangle at the centre, and it is surrounded by other triangles around it. The triangles around the central triangle are enclosed by a circle. And the circle is enclosed by a square forming other triangles. A corner of the triangles in the periphery is pointed toward the centre which suggests the movement from the periphery toward the centre. The images are organized in certain pattern so as to create the form of *mandala*.

But as in traditional *mandala*, the artist does not create the figures of gods and goddess in referential mode. In the traditional *mandalas*, the central deity is surrounded by other subsidiary deities. But here the central triangle is surrounded by other triangles. The triangle resembles to the *yoni*, and *yoni* is the source of creation. The movement of the sweeping brushstrokes toward the central triangle, to some extent, resembles the movement of the phallus toward the *yoni*. Thus, the composition represents the union of male and female principles, *prakriti* and *purusa* or the individual self and the cosmic being. About Kiran Manandhar's *mandalas*, Abhi Subedi writes:

He used the *mandalic* art that he executed on Nepali rural hand-made paper to create this effect. To him *mandala* was/is everything-solidity, surface, sky, earth, confluence of mind and universe, a consciousness symbolized by the vulva and the movement of energy to and from it. They have psychological dimension. They create an atmosphere of the mind through brushstrokes, distribution of colours not in tonal merger but in terms of the distribution of each over the entire surface, a technique used . . . in nearly all of his paintings to create linear effects of both the visible and invisible lines. ("Kiran Manandhar's Art Odyssey" ix)

The structure of *mandala*, the theme of meditation and concentration, and the union of male and female principles are the elements of early Nepali paintings like *paubhas* and *mandalas*. The present art work shares the same structure and the theme but treats them with different form. Traditional *mandalas* are almost referential whereas this *mandala* is nearly abstract. The art work is similar to the traditional painting and different from them at the same time. Thus, Kiran Manandhar reinterprets and renews the tradition of creating *mandalas*.

Shanker Raj Singh Suwal's *Peace* (Fig.6) reintegrates the figure of meditating Buddha at

the centre of the canvas and arranges other abstract images around the central figure creating the renewed *mandala*. The central figure and its surrounding is illuminated by bright light, the symbol of cosmic energy, and the images in periphery are pulled toward the centre by the magnetic energy of the central figure, the Buddha. In this sense, the composition resembles to the traditional *mandala*. But it differs from the early form, for instead of the images of gods and goddesses, there are abstract images in the periphery. The artist uses abstract images with purpose, that is, the abstract encompass all the objects of the universe since they do not refer to the particular things of the world. The artist rereads, revitalizes and rehistoricizes the early form. Since the significances of the images in the background are multiple, the art form is plural. The art work emphasizes that both living beings and the objects of the world exist because of cosmic energy, and the realization of this concept may result in the harmonious and peaceful world.

Batsa Gopal Vaidya's *Kali* (Fig.7) recycles the myth of *Devimahatmya*. The characters and events of the religious texts are also painted in *Devimahatmya* manuscript. Thus, the particular work is interconnected to the traditional art forms. But the artist presents the images and events through altered form. The artist has used surrealist form to express the figure of *Kali* and her battle with *Mahisasura*, the devil. The images are condensed and displaced. The artist does not show many hands of Kali in realistic form as in traditional painting but implies them by presenting many *yantras* (instruments) of her where there should be hands. The breasts are amplified whereas the image of buffalo demon is condensed. The head of the buffalo is the metonymic representation of the devil. Moreover, it is proportionally small. She is attacking the devil with a spear. But the head of the buffalo is proportionally bigger than the realistic green mountains and expressionist Himalaya.

The artist condenses, amplifies and distorts the images with purpose. The bigger size of

the head of demon than that of mountain and Himalaya signifies that the demon has dominated the earth. On the other hand, the bigger size of the goddess than that of mountains, Himalayas and the demon's head signifies the power of the deity.

Both creative and destructive aspects coexist in deity. The voluptuous, bulging and monumental breasts signify her creative power whereas her attack on the head of the devil represents her destructive aspect. The composition subverts the traditional representation of the deity that Kali is the goddess of death and destruction. About the cultural and mythological motifs in Vaidya's works, Sangeeta Thapa writes:

A magical ambience is created with recurring motifs: mountains, thick clouds and temples. Sharp, triangular tantric mountain shapes appear from within the womb of the more solid mountain forms, symbolizing the hidden mystery, spirituality and power of nature. (*Himalayan* 8)

Along the bottom, the artist presents the decorative pattern which has been shared from the traditional Nepali painting. However, within the decorative pattern, he creates the image of river with navy blue colour. But the river is not flowing vertically but horizontally.

The battle between Kali and *Mahisasura*, images of Kali and the demon, and the decorative pattern are the elements of the early Nepali arts that are presented exploiting western techniques like expressionists and surrealists. As a result, the age old images and events appear in renewed and revitalized form.

Radheshyam Mulmi's *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (Fig.8) depicts innumerable images of the worldly things within an alphabet "ॐ" (*om*). The combination of the things and 'om' is harmonious which is suggested by the rhythmic colours and lines that have been exploited to create the alphabet and the images. The air in the upper part of the canvas moves in the shape of

the divine alphabet. The *Shivalinga* has been surrounded by the shape of 'om'. The water in the lower part of the canvas also appears in the shape of 'om'. Even the lotus petals appear in the form of same alphabet.

The alphabet has the special significance in Hindu culture. Mythologically, the alphabet contains the whole universe which is also called '*sabda brahma*'. The artist recycles this myth, and depicts the concept visually. The alphabet encompasses the whole universe. The *Shivalinga* also has the similar significance. Mythologically, the *Shivalinga* is unfathomable. In other words, the whole universe is within it. Thus, the images of 'om' and the *Shivalinga* icon are cohesive semantically. They reinforce the same motif.

The myths related to 'om' and *Shivalinga* are the subject matters of early Nepali art works like manuscript illuminations and miniature paintings. For instance, some *Shivadharm* manuscripts depict the images of *Shivalinga*. Furthermore, the presentation of vision and textuality, or visual images and verbal text is the important aspect of manuscripts. In Mulmi's painting, the same subject matter has been depicted with surrealist touch. One image is melting into another as in dream. 'Om' melts into things and vice versa. Likewise, *Shivalinga* melts into 'om'. In the first view, it seems as if contrary images are put together. However, the close reading and the interpretation of the composition reveals that the arrangement of the images and icons is coherent.

Traditionally, the disk or rim around the *Shivalinga* is the symbol of *yon*i. Through the rim the water, which is poured on the *Shivalinga*, is drained. The elongated edge of the rim appears in the shape of the phallus from which white liquid is flowing intensively. The traditional icon has been subverted in the sense that the part of the *yon*i appears in the shape of the phallus. By presenting such image, the artist suggests that in divine world, there is no

distinction between male and female principles. The *Brahma* is beyond duality, and it is in cosmic rhythm and harmony as represented by spontaneous and flowing colours and lines. The title also signifies that Shiva is truth, and the truth is beauty. The *sadhaka*, who realizes the existence of Shiva, knows truth, and who knows truth, he/she perceives beauty. In the English poet's word, 'Truth is beauty and beauty is truth.'

Asha Dangol's *Tantric Union* (Fig.9) represents the theme of Nepali *paubhas* in different form. Some of the Nepali *paubhas* depict male and female deities in sexual union at the centre. For instance, such images are found in the *paubhas* like *Nritesvara* and the union of *Samvara* and *Vajravarai*. But Dangol's composition shows two couples in union in two sides of the canvas, and the circle representing lotus at the centre. The composition not only shares the images of the early painting but also modifies them. The positions of the images are altered. The couples in union appear in the periphery instead of centre. However, the position of circle in the shape of lotus appears in the middle as in early Nepali *mandala*. Likewise, the artist also creates a square, triangles and rectangles to create the shape of *mandala*. The central circle is surrounded first by the square and then by rectangles and triangles. The variegated abstract shapes within square and triangles enhance the surrounding.

The artist changes the positions of the images with purpose. The couples in union depict the action, and their experience is implied by the blossomed lotus at the centre. Analogically, the union of the union of male and female deities is the union of individual self and the cosmic being. Such motifs are also the contents of the Nepali *paubhas*. The minor deities in the periphery are replaced by the abstract images. Since abstract images do not refer to the particular objects and events of the myth and the external world, the may represent the images of entire world. Furthermore as in Nepali manuscript illuminations, the artist reintegrates the verbal texts

(alphabets in Ranjana script) within visual images.

The images of the copulating couples are not the objective representations of the mythical figures having many hands and the mythological instruments with them. The figures are anthropomorphic. They resemble more to the normal human beings than to the divine figures. Furthermore, the artist has made the figures suggestive using expressionist technique. The colours texture on the surface of their bodies do not resemble to the conventional representations. The whole bodies of the female figures are in deep red whereas the colours of male's bodies are in the form of mosaic.

The composition is the mixture of various forms, techniques and motifs. The abstract and figurative images are put together. The anthropomorphic forms are figurative whereas the images in the background are abstract. The structure of *mandala* is recreated using western techniques like expressionism and abstractionism.

Similarly, Govinda Lal Singh Dangol's *Untitled* (Fig.10) recreates in new form sharing some of the images and structure of traditional Nepali *mandala*. The triangle in red colour lies at the centre of the canvas, and it is enclosed by a circle. Along the border of the circle, lotus petals appear in a bit altered form. The contour of the lotus petals, to some extent, resemble to the decorative pattern of the traditional Nepali painting. As in early Nepali *mandala*, on the lower half of the circle, the rectangle and gate-like structure appear. All the images and structures like triangle, circle, lotus, rectangle and gate appear to be the integral part of the globe or the universe. The outermost round shape appears solid and three dimensional which encompasses all the images and objects of the universe. Even the sun and the moon are incorporated within it. The structure is created in such way that the viewer's attention is drawn from periphery to the centre. Thus, the *mandala*-like structure appears to be the instrument for meditation.

Nevertheless, Dongol's *mandala* differs from traditional *mandala*, for the figurative images of gods and goddesses do not appear. The central deity is also missing. In place of central deity, abstract geometrical figures are placed. The positions of sun and moon are altered in the sense that they do not appear in two corners at the top of the canvas but in vertical line. Likewise, the gates and rectangles are not around the circle but only on the lower part of the circle. Furthermore, rather than images and figures, colours provide aesthetic pleasure. Dongol's *mandala* is not referential but nearer to abstraction. The paintings discussed so far depict that contemporary Nepali paintings share the contents and forms of traditional art works. Regarding the interconnection of traditional and contemporary art works, Yam Prasad Sharma writes:

Despite the fact that Nepali artists create open-ended, plural and subjective art forms by exploiting western techniques, they recycle, reformulate and reintegrate the forms and contents of early Nepali arts. The structure of *mandala*, themes of meditation and concentration, two dimensional colours, decorative patterns and religious iconography, the features of manuscript illuminations and *paubhas*, reappear in unconventional and altered forms. ("Contemporary" 306-307)

The traditional images and icons are not imitated but modified and altered to express the artists' feeling in response to contemporary context.

Binod Pradhan's *Divine* (Fig.11) represents an individual figure who attempts to assimilate oneself with divinity through meditation. The artist uses the surrealist form to depict this theme. The surrounding is huddled with religious shrines both Hindu and Buddhist. Stupas and temples coexist in the same canvas. The background is dissolving with the meditating figure. The outlines of background and foreground have been blurred because of the rhythmic colours, lines and flowing abstract images. The closed eyes and the introspective expression of the human

figure suggest his meditative mood. The meditating figure seems as if he is pulling the entire external world within his consciousness. This is the depiction of the assimilation of the individual self and the external world.

Since the images of Hindu temple and Buddhist stupas seem to be moving toward the meditating figure, the composition suggests the religious harmony. The meditating figure finds the same essence in both religions. The images of stupa and temples, and the themes of meditation and religious harmony are also the contents of traditional paintings like manuscript illuminations, *paubhas*, *patas* and murals. The artist reformulates these contents using western forms like surrealism and abstractionism. The composition, at the same time, is connected to the Nepali tradition and the western form creating intertextual relationship.

Pradip Adhikari's *Untitled* (Fig.12) exploits the images of traditional arts but subverts their significances. The image of question mark at the center and a number of circles around, in the upper part of the canvas, make a structure of *mandala*. Toward the lower part of the *mandala* two eyes appear which resemble to the eyes on *Swayambhunath stupa*. The eyes and the structure of *mandala* are also the images of traditional Nepali art. The eyes on *Swayambhunath stupa* suggest peace and harmony, and the structure of *mandala* brings forth the themes of concentration, meditation, order and the authority of the central divinity. These are the significances of the present images in traditional Nepali art works.

However, these significances are questioned by Adhikari's composition. A flame appears by map of Nepal. The image of flame may be associated with rebellion and opposition. The images of peace, harmony and order (*mandala* and eyes) are juxtaposed with the image of rebellion (flame). The question arises: why does the artist do so? He does so with purpose. The revolutionary people of our time question and oppose the so called order and harmony. The

existing peace and order is only the discourse of the ruling elite. With this discourse, only few people dominate and exploit the majority. The artist wants this so called order to be dismantled. The revolutionary youths of contemporary Nepal no longer believe in the traditional system. They want it to be burnt and destroyed. The question mark at the centre of the *mandala* implies that the artist questions the authority of the central figure. The composition demands that the society should be restructured for the emancipation of the suppressed and oppressed people. The youths of our time no longer accept the exploitation in the name of superficial order and harmony. They reject the ideologies of those who attempt to maintain the status quo in the name of tradition. The artist uses the images of traditional arts to depict different theme. The artist decontextualizes the images and rehistoricizes them in the present context.

Buddhi Thapa's *Mother Nature 2* (Fig.13) recycles the Hindu myth related to earth using expressionist technique to some extent. Hindu myths personify the images of nature like ocean, rivers, trees, earth, moon, sun and so on. For instance, Sun and Moon appear in human forms. The Ganga River in the form of female deity pours water upon lord Shiva in manuscript illumination. The *Baraha* avatara rescues the drowned earth, and the earth appears in human form in one of the compositions of *Visnudharma* manuscript. Buddhi Thapa also presents Mother Nature in anthropomorphic form. The monumental female figure, the representative of Mother Nature appears in white clothes. Her voluptuous body implies her fertility power. The colour green is dominant symbolizing the greenery in nature. Using expressionist colour, the artist presents the female figure in green colour to some extent. Thus, she represents the nature itself. The artist does not treat the nature as non living thing but living and divine.

Since the artist establishes that nature is living and divine, the composition appeals that the nature should be treated in humanistic manner. We should not hurt the feeling of nature.

Indirectly, the artist wants us to preserve and conserve the beauty of the nature. In this sense, the art work is also a form of eco-criticism.

Karna Maskey's *Super Power* (Fig.14) attempts to represent the cosmic energy in abstract form. Some traditional Nepali paintings also deal about the same subject matter but their form is different. They represent the divine power in the figure of gods and goddess, union of male and female principles, and in the form of *mandala*, but Maskey's composition exploits the abstract form to explore the same motif. Since the abstract form does not refer to any object objectively, it can be interpreted in multiple ways. Viewers may associate the abstract images with anything according to their experience and imagination. The abstract image in this composition, to some extent, resembles to the cosmic snake, the bed of Lord Vishnu. The cosmic snake seems to absorb all the elements of the universe with its centripetal force. Despite the appearance of single image, the whole world appears within it. There are multiple spaces, shapes and other images within the single image. The composition appeals the viewers to realize the comic power beyond the material world.

Gautam Ratna Tuladhar's *Bhairab Dance* (Fig.15) depicts that the divine power is not only creative but also destructive. The creation and destruction move in the cycle. The terrible figure of *Bhairab* dances its destructive dance creating chaos and confusion. The dark colour on his body and the garland of skull make the figure deadly and violent. To emphasize the terrible aspect of the divine power, the artist has exploited the expressionist form. Not only the figure of *Bhairab* in foreground is terrible but also the background is full of chaos. The abstract images and forms are in mess. The female figure on the right hand side is paying her homage to *Bhairab*. This shows that Nepali culture not only prays and worships benevolent aspects of gods and goddesses but also their malevolent nature. As the divine figures themselves show their positive

and negative aspects like ordinary human beings, the divine power appears in anthropomorphic form. The images of *Bhairab* are recurrent in traditional Nepali paintings and sculptures. The artist takes the same image and presents in different form. Since the work is interconnected with its tradition, it is intertextual. The interpreted art works so far depict that the contemporaneity of art works is not the breaking away from the tradition but continuation in different form. Julia Hagewald has similar view:

They [Nepali artists] are working on improving and progressively developing their ancient artistic heritage into 21st century, their main criterion for judging whether their art deserves to be called "Nepali" being that it be good. Only good art, influenced by new and foreign ideas but allegedly coming out of their own tradition, as they would have it, is considered to be true modern Nepali art. (100)

Nepali artists used western forms and techniques to renew, revitalize and reinterpret their tradition.

Sujan Chitrakar's *Let's Talk about Identity of Dignified Entity* (Fig.16) depicts the identity crisis of established icon of the tradition. The artist presents three images of a cow, a form of goddess Laxmi in Hindu mythologies. The cow in the middle seems to be realistic whereas the images of the cow below and above are expressionist. The background of the broken and fragmented image of the cow at the top is black. The image of the cow including the black background is surrounded by blood imagery. Both black background and blood imagery are the symbols of destructive forces that threaten the identity of the cow. There is the blank circle pointing toward the head of the cow on which something should be written. Perhaps what the cow might have thought and would have spoken. Allowing the space for the viewer's imagination, the artist leaves the space blank.

The figure of cow below, the mirror image of the cow in the middle is painted in blood like red colour predicting the future condition of the cow. The blood is dripping from the body of the cow below. The threat is lurking over the dignified entity of the Nepali culture.

Using the figure of the cow, the image of traditional Nepali painting and Mithila folk art, the artist responds to the contemporary socio-political situation. There is hot debate on religious freedom. The artist imagines that in the setting where cow is worshipped, what will happen if the cow is fragmented and destroyed, and the blood is spilled from the body of cow? How will the people, who have faith on cow, respond? The composition also predicts the potential religious and ethnic conflict in the future. The work also suggests that while using the right of religious freedom, one should respect the religion and culture of the other. We should not hurt the sentiment of the followers of the other culture.

Shashikala Tiwari's *Untitled* (Fig.17) also takes the image of cow and provides her judgment overtly on the issue of religious freedom. The body of cow is dismembered and the blood is spilt all over the canvas. The cow is vomiting blood. The composition is surrealist. The image of cow is proportionally bigger than the map of Nepal. The blood of the cow creates the ocean of blood, and the powerful tides of the blood sweep the map of Nepal as if it is a butterfly. As a result, the position of the map is shown turning upside down. The artist seems to have the opinion that the cow, the metonymic representation of Hinduism, is the foundation of the country Nepal. Thus, if the cow is destroyed, the identity of Nepal will be questioned as the drifting map of Nepal in the tides of blood. Despite the presence of religious image like cow, the art work is overtly political. The composition makes the statement that cow should be preserved and respected.

Puran Khadka's abstract painting *Timeless Treat* (Fig.18) searches the underlined

conditions of the self and the universe. He attempts to represent invisible essence in visible abstract form. In other words, the work depicts the artist's meditation and concentration to unify oneself with the cosmic being or the soul. He attempts to present the visual shape of the essence of all beings and non-beings. Khadka searches answer to the philosophical questions related to universe, life, death and existence. Khadka himself says that "something is secret" in the various phenomena of the world ("Painter"). If an individual perceives and realizes this secret, he/she achieves "wholeness" and "Eternal Aliveness", and "our life is a toll for knowing and being this Eternal Aliveness" ("Painter"). In this work, Khadka is in the quest of this harmony and wholeness between himself and cosmic being. About his works, Khadka himself writes:

The true significance of the works presented in the exhibition is that they serve the need of the soul and our reason. They are reminders as well as supports of contemplation, since contemplation and understanding serve the needs of our soul, i.e. "To attune our own distorted modes of thought to cosmic harmony."
("Painter")

As he meditates on the process of creation, his works appeal the viewers to meditate and realize the essence. Arun Ranjit says in this regard, "His work is a resistance against the lack of spirituality of modern times and an attempt to make the viewers realize the necessity of observing the true values of human existence and it is like retracing the emotional history of mankind" ("Puran"). The themes of searching soul and individual's union with cosmic are also the subject matters of traditional Nepali paintings like manuscript illuminations and *paubhas*. But Khadka explores the same theme with different form. Thus, the work is interconnected to the tradition.

The interpretation of the art works reveals that contemporary Nepali paintings share the

subject matters and contents of traditional Nepali arts. Contemporary artists do not imitate the traditional icons, images and symbols but appropriate them. Sometimes, same contents are presented with different forms, and in other cases, similar forms are used to explore different themes. While reintegrating traditional icons and images, the artists exploit western forms and contents as tools for their expression.

Kiran Manandhar's *Untitled* (fig. 20) expresses inner feelings through abstract expressionist form. Unlike most western abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko he always returns back to anthropomorphic plural form. He uses the splashing and dribbling techniques of Jackson Pollock. The flowing plural colours on the canvas suggest the spontaneous evolved without pre-plan of the artist. The artist gives final product. Manandhar merges the Pollock's technique with another abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning. The spontaneous brush strokes resemble the Koonings's. As Kooning presents us monstrous and challenging modern woman, in Kiran's works also a female figure emerges out of flowing rhythmic colours and sweeping brush strokes. But the female figure is not as comfortable as in realistic representation. Kiran's canvas demands the viewer's imagination and exercise to derive aesthetic pleasure. About Kiran's works, Abhi Subedi writes:

His paintings are most dynamic works ever seen in the domains of modern arts in Nepal. He makes constant experiments in styles, mediums and themes in his painting. The strongest point about his painting is the inner dynamism, the energy that is shown by the brush strokes, visible and invisible lines primary colour forms that move round the canvas and create a universe of experience and imagination. The movement starts from the centre and the energy flows within and beyond the sphere in these open canvases as it also moves within.

(“Confluence”)

The work presents the energy of the artist with which he is working. The dynamic movement of the form echo to the rhythm of creative experience. The open-ended forms give way to the multiple significances. However, the anthropomorphic form is always apparent as the traditional Nepali paintings are always anthropomorphic. However, the presentation and significances are always different.

Despite the fact that contemporary Nepali artists share the western techniques, they represent their experience in relation to socio-cultural images, icons, and symbols in their works. The western canons of art are appropriated in Nepali context. Because of the use of western techniques, their art works depart from the traditional art forms, yet they share some of the subject matters and contents of the traditional art works. In this context Abhi Subedi writes:

The westernization of the Nepali art does not mean the loss or the complete rejection of the tradition: it certainly makes a departure. But modern artists of Nepal create their own milieu and create their works in it. Their ‘modern’ is basically a western concept, but they only exploit the western education to broaden the range of their skills in painting. So, the Nepali identity of the artist in this country should be sought in their own cultural and folk environments created by the themselves in their works by making the best use of their skills, whether they be western or oriental. (“Nepali Art” 123)

Ragini Upadhyay’s *Untitled* (fig. 21) is a postmodernist work that depicts the contemporary political situation of Nepal in ironic manner. The artist represents the realistic portraits of political leaders like late Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhab Kumar Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Upendra Yadav with their fixed surrealistic body. Furthermore, she brings together the

map of Nepal in black colour, green hills, images of temples and stupas, cell phone, telephone and television etc. She creates the assemblage of many things which is a feature of postmodern art. The traditional images like temple and stupa come into dialogue with modern form. Realism and surrealism are juxtaposed. Modern technology and religion coexist in the same canvas. Art is interconnected with politics and Nationalism. Such hybridity of multiple images gives the painting a postmodernist touch. In this regard, Abhi Subedi comments, “Ragini Upadhyay has skillfully created floating postmodernist intaglio images present the irony created by the joint effect of ire and sharp humour” (“Pedagogy and Power”).

It is worth exploring the ironic features of the painting. The heads of five political leaders, the representative of five political parties are attached to a single body suggesting that despite their varied external appearance, essentially they are same, that is, they are corrupt, selfish, and publicity and power hungry. The thoughtless leaders ignore their duty and the ethics of politics. The connection of a telephone handset with their hip suggest their lack of communication with common people and external world as if they did not have time to talk to them whom they are supposed to serve. The hanging cell phone around their neck suggests their self-centered communication according to their need, wish and choice for their own benefit.

The presentation of a television set above them connected to their head implies their love of media publicity despite the fact that their speech is meaningless presentation of contradictory words. The leaders even do not have the sense that what they asserted at the beginning go against it at the end of the speech. Thus, it is the question if they will lead or mislead the nation.

The candle suggests the chronic load shedding in the country. The leaders are not concerned to initiate for solving the current problems but floating after illusion of power suffering from narcissistic mania. The clock tower in the lower right hand side is the symbol of

running time escaping from their sight. This implies that the changing time does make any difference to them. They are lost in themselves.

The green leaves coming out of the television suggest the brighter side and the hope. This is also ironic in the sense that whatever good things public will find, it is from television in the speech of the leaders announcing the improvement in education, health, poverty reduction and hydro power etc. The reality is dark as the map of Nepal in black colour suggests. The floating leaders are unable to see the gloomy state of the country. They are floating above the mountains and temple towers. They overlook the nature and Nepali culture.

The presentation of the portraits of male leaders depicts that women do not have influential role in Nepali politics. In this context, Abhi Subedi writes about Ragini's works, "Ragini in the painting has captured the weak points of human nature, especially the games monopolized by men as their prerogatives, like politics, violence, backbiting and fighting for gains" ("Nepali Utopia" 128).

The artists have ambivalent attitude toward both western forms and native cultural root. They speak for the self and the other. Since the artists exploited western art techniques, their works are plural and open-ended. They do not refer to the particular objects and events of the external world objectively. Since the art forms are plural they have the potentiality of multiple interpretations. And their meanings are not fixed and certain but contingent and ever shifting. Nevertheless, in one way or other they are related to the native tradition.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Contemporary Nepali paintings share the images, symbols and icons of traditional Nepali arts. Furthermore, they also share the structure of traditional *mandala*. The artists do not

integrate these elements as they are but read anew, modify and reformulate those exploiting western forms and techniques. Some art works take the age old contents and present them in altered forms whereas others use the early images and symbols for different purpose. There is the distance between the significances of the traditional images and the renewed and revitalized images and symbols. In other words, contemporary art works, reinterpret the early works.

The paintings of our time reread the subject matters of manuscript illuminations, *paubhas*, *patas*, and murals. Manuscript illuminations represent the subject matters of Hindu and Buddhist myths. Buddhist manuscript illuminations narrate the life of Buddha in visual form. Life of Buddha includes his nativity, meditation and preaching etc. These subject matters are integrated in contemporary Nepali paintings in renewed forms. The images of various incarnations of lord Vishnu, other Hindu deities and meditating figures from Hindu manuscript illuminations are also reintegrated in contemporary art works. Likewise, the theme of religious harmony is found both in traditional and contemporary art works.

Furthermore, the structure of *mandala* is presented in different form. The union of male and female principles, and the union of individual self and cosmic being, the themes of traditional Nepali *paubha* and *mandala* are explored in contemporary works exploiting western form.

Sometimes, the shared contents of early works are expressed with different form. In other cases, the subject matters are modified, altered and even subverted. The contemporary art works are similar and different at the same time from traditional works. In one way or other, contemporary works are interconnected to the tradition. In this sense, contemporary art works are inter-textual. In other words, the contemporary artists modify and appropriate the texts of the traditional works. Thus, contemporaneity of Nepali paintings is not totally breaking away from

the tradition but continuation and elaboration of tradition in renewed and revitalized form.

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Fig. 21.

The figurative works, Lain Singh Bangdel executed during 1950s, depict the influence of Picasso's blue period. In the time of hardship and suffering Picasso painted the figurative works with dominant blue colour to show the melancholy, pain and sadness; it was before he invented Cubism during the first decade of the twentieth century. As Bangdel was in France and learning the western techniques and styles of art, he shared his blue colour from Picasso's works. As Picasso was facing hardship and difficulty, Bangdel also passed through the same situation in the foreign land. He was not established as mature artist. His financial difficulties were always there in alien land. So he expressed his loneliness and hardship as Picasso did. Dina Bangdel writes about his early works, "His early figurative works convey a sense of poignancy and sadness in their theme of social realism that betrays his own periods of loneliness." (9).

The influence of Picasso's blue period can be seen his work *Old Man and Stupa* (fig.) executed in 1956. In the painting, an old man stands by the stupa. He has covered his body images as well as the background which presents gloomy atmosphere. Bangdel has taken unique angle and perspective to stress the sadness and suffering of the old man. Despite the fact that the old man is nearby the stupa, the size of the old man is many times bigger than the stupa. In realistic perspective stupa should be bigger and the man much smaller. Thus the artist distorts the natural organization. By doing so, viewers' attention is drawn toward the old man across his face the feeling dejectedness and gloom runs. Perhaps the society and his family, desert him, and he is seeking shelter in religious places.

Despite the fact that stupa is traditional religious image, its association with human beings has changed with time. Traditional Nepali paintings represent stupa along with religious people, saints, monks and the images of gods and goddesses. Specially, people visit religious

shrine with religious purpose. But in this picture, Bangdel presents old and weak human figure—perhaps the beggar near the stupa. In the present context, religious places are the last resorts of the dejected, deserted, old and beggars. Thus the association of religious place with human beings has changed. This is the irony of our so called modern time. The artist presents the theme with the use of dominant blue colour. Dina Bangdel again says, “The pervasive blue-green tonality, symbolic of the mood expressed, reinforces the atmosphere of despair. The scheme of colours recalls Picasso’s Blue period, which had lasting impact on many of his figurative paintings in oil” (15).

The painting shows the influence of western art. Not only Bangdel but also other many Bangdel did. The painting also shows that Bangdel had not developed his own artistic idiom till the execution of this painting. He was just attempting to handle the western techniques.

Shashi Shah’s untitled (fig. 20) depicts the surrealist horse. The “raging horse” is the tenth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the Kalki Avatara (Abhi Subedi, “Pedagogy and Power”). The horse is not the realistic representation but the surreal one. The muscle and the structure of the body are transparent from outside the bulging muscles depict the energy of the horse as the preserver of the humanity and the destroyer of the evils. The proportion and the combination of the body parts are also unusual and altered. The mane looks like a mountain. The decorative motifs on forehead, neck and tail suggest the mythical quality of the horse. Lord Vishnu in the form of the horse is galloping to accomplish his mission of saving earth and humanity. In an exhibition catalogue Shashi Shah himself says, “In order to protect the world from its possible doom, a situation is always created in one form or another, our world, civilization and creation must survive at any cost. This is the Kalki Mission.”

Generally western technique of surrealism was exploited in the western world to

represent negative aspects like fragmentation, alienation and disillusionment in the then industrial society. But Shashi Shah uses the western form to suggest the brighter aspects by rendering the Hindu myth. The contents of Hindu myths and surrealist technique have been reconciled in his works. This is an example of appropriation. The artist has used same technique to depict different subject matter and theme. He decontextualizes and recontextualizes the shared forms and techniques.

Ragini Upadhyay's untitled (fig. 21) is a postmodernist work that depicts the contemporary political situation of Nepal in ironic manner. The artist represents the realistic portraits of political leaders like late Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhab Kuma Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Upendra Yadav with their fixed surrealistic body. Furthermore, she brings together the map of Nepal in black colour, green hills, images of temples and stupas, cell phone and telephone, television etc. She creates the assemblage of many things which is a feature of postmodern art. The traditional images like temple and stupa come into dialogue with modern form. Realism and surrealism are juxtaposed. Modern technology and religion coexist in the same canvas. Art is interconnected with politics and Nationalism. Such hybridity of multiple images gives the painting a postmodernist touch. Abhi Subedi comments on this painting, "Ragini Upadhyay has skillfully created floating postmodernist intaglio images present the irony created by the joint effect of ire and sharp humour" ("Pedagogy and Power").

It is worth exploring the ironic features of the painting. The heads of five political leaders, the representative of five political parties are attached to a single body suggesting that despite their varied external appearance, essentially they are same, that is, they are corrupt, selfish, and publicity and power hungry. The thoughtless leaders ignore their duty and the ethics of politics. The connection of a telephone handset with their hip suggest their lack of

communication with common people and external world as if they did not have time to talk to them whom they are supposed to serve. The hanging cell phone around their neck suggests their self-centered communication according to their need, wish and choice for their own benefit.

The presentation of a television set above them connected to their head implies their love of media publicity despite the fact that their speech is meaningless presentation of contradictory words. The leaders even do not have the sense that what they asserted at the beginning go against it at the end of the speech. Thus, it is the question if they will lead or mislead the nation.

The candle suggests the chronic load shedding in the country. The leaders are not concerned to initiate for solving the current problems but floating after illusion of power suffering from narcissistic mania. The clock tower in the lower right hand side is the symbol of running time escaping from their sight. This implies that the changing time does make any difference to them. They are lost in themselves.

The green leaves coming out of the television suggest the brighter side and the hope. This is also ironic in the sense that whatever good things public will find, it is from television in the speech of the leaders announcing the improvement in education, health, poverty reduction, hydro power etc. The reality is dark as the map of Nepal in black colour suggests. The floating leaders are unable to see the gloomy state of the country. They are floating above the mountains and temple towers. They overlook the nature and Nepali culture.

The presentation of the portraits of male leaders depicts that women do not have influential role in Nepali politics. In this context, Abhi Subedi writes about Ragini's works, "Ragini in the painting has captured the weak points of human nature, especially the games monopolized by men as their prerogatives, like politics, violence, backbiting and fighting for gains" ("Nepali Utopia" 128).

Kiran Manandhar's untitled (fig.) expresses inner feelings through abstract expressionist form. Unlike most western abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko he always returns to anthropomorphic plural form. He uses the splashing and dribbling techniques of Jackson Pollock. The flowing plural colours on the canvas suggest the spontaneous evolved without pre-plan of the artist. The artist gives final product. Manandhar merges the Pollock's technique with another abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning. The spontaneous brush strokes resemble the Koonings's. As Kooning presents us monstrous and challenging modern woman, in Kiran's works also a female figure emerges out of flowing rhythmic colours and sweeping brush strokes. But the female figure is not as comfortable as in realistic representation. Kiran's canvas demands the viewer's imagination and exercise to derive aesthetic pleasure. About Kiran's works Abhi Subedi writes:

His paintings are most dynamic works ever seen in the domains of modern arts in Nepal. He makes constant experiments in styles, mediums and themes in his painting. The strongest point about his painting is the inner dynamism, the energy that is shown by the brush strokes, visible and invisible lines primary colour forms that move round the canvas and create a universe of experience and imagination. The movement starts from the centre and the energy flows within and beyond the sphere in these open canvases as it also moves within. With the combination of the charming, striking colours, lines and anthropomorphic forms he has executed these powerful painting on Nepali paper canvas prominently with acrylic medium. The energy that he creates not only gives joy and energy to the viewers but also poses challenges to those who want to see a definite answer to the questions that these works tend to give rise to. ("Confluence")

The work presents the energy of the artist with which he is working. The dynamic movement of the form echo to the rhythm of creative experience. The open-ended forms give way to the multiple significances. However, the anthropomorphic form is always apparent as the traditional Nepali paintings are always anthropomorphic. However, the presentation and significances are always different.

Despite the fact that contemporary Nepali artists share the western techniques, they represent their experience in relation to socio-cultural images, icons, and symbols in their works. The western canons of art are appropriated in Nepali context. Because of the use of western techniques, their art works depart from the traditional art forms, yet they share some of the subject matters and contents of the traditional art works. In this context Abhi Subedi writes:

The westernization of the Nepali art does not mean the loss or the complete rejection of the tradition: it certainly makes a departure. But modern artists of Nepal create their own milieu and create their works in it. Their 'modern' is basically a western concept, but they only exploit the western education to broaden the range of their skills in painting. So, the Nepali identity of the artist in this country should be sought in their own cultural and folk environments created by themselves in their works by making the best use of their skills, whether they be western or oriental. ("Nepali Art" 123)

The artists have ambivalent attitude toward both western forms and native cultural root. They speak for the self and the other. Since the artists exploited western art techniques, their works are plural and open-ended. They do not refer to the particular objects and events of the external world objectively. Since the art forms are plural they have the potentiality of multiple interpretations. And their meanings are not fixed and certain but contingent and ever shifting. Nevertheless, in one way or other they are related to the native tradition.

III. Nepali Art Tradition Nepali Art History

Nepali contemporary art history has been directly linked with the history of Chitrakars, a name of caste and the dwellers of Kathmandu valley. Since the division of castes according to their occupation and talent, Chitrakars have still been engaged in the creative field of art. The Chitrakars executed paintings about the socio-cultural life of the Newars of the valley. A noted Nepalese art scholar, Abhi Subedi makes a comment on Chitrakar in the field of art and their creation in his article “Nepalese Art: An Overview”. He talks about the subject matters they have been representing in their painting that is religious and secular both. He writes ‘their motifs represent both secular and religious domains and their structure is narrative in nature’ (7).

The Second World War ended in 1945, and five years later the political changes that took place in Nepal, brought to an end the 104old autocratic Rana Regime. In 1950 not only was the nation’s attention diverted to the political, economic and social field but there was also a revival of art, literature and culture in the favorable new democratic atmosphere.

To write it again, any discussion of contemporary Nepalese art must include a review of its history. Nepal has a rich and glorious cultural heritage from time immemorial. Scholars frequently acclaim the Kathmandu valley is the cradle of ancient civilization, as “an open museum” and anyone visiting Kathmandu, is convinced of this.

Of all, Malla kings who ruled over this valley from 1200 A.D. - 1769 A.D. within this period, the reign of king Pratap Malla is often referred as “the golden age of Nepalese arts”. There are ample examples of arts to support this fact and no doubt that the worldwide reputation Nepalese art enjoys today rests on the achievement of the past. Besides, the great King Prithivi Narayan Shah fully realized the importance of the artistic heritage, is supported by the fact that he built Kailas Durbar at Basantpur in Kathmandu after his conquest of the valley. His successors were equally keen to preserve the tradition of Nepalese art, and developed it further, as exemplified by the temples, sculptures and paintings of the early years of the Shah period. But prior to this, the Nepal was said to be glorious in its art and culture in Lichchhavi regime. Yet we do not have sufficient evidence to prove it. The prominent art scholar, Abhi Subedi, quotes in his article entitled, “Nepali Art: An Overview” about the idea of Pal, a prominent art historian in his book “Art of Nepal” (1985: 17) divides Nepali history of Art from A.D. 300 to the Shah reign into five broad period in the following. As he divides:

- 6) Lichhavi (330-879)
- 7) Transitional (879/80-1200)
- 8) Early Malla (1200- 1482)
- 9) Late Malla (1482-1769)

10) Shah (Since the conquest of the Kathmandu valley and the foundation of the modern Nepal by King Prithivi Narayan Shah, of the house of Gorkha and the forefather of the king of Nepal in 1769). (7)

Many experts have concluded that the real modern art in Nepal began with the Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana. In 1864, Jung Bahadur Rana usurped all the administrative power in a sanguinary conspiracy. Four years after becoming prime minister, he went to England and on his way back visited France and other countries. After his return, there was a big shift in Nepali art. Jung Bahadur was so enamored of western art and life style that the influence of the west was to be seen not only in everyday life of the higher strata of society but also in Nepalese art, which brought a complete change in art and painting too. During the one century of Rana rule, a number of palatial buildings sprang up in the valley, all built in mimic of western architectural styles.

One of the Nepalese artists, Bhajuman Chitrakar, who accompanied Jung Bahadur to England, started to paint in western style and medium so other Nepalese artists followed his style to suit themselves. As a result traditional Nepalese art lapsed and fell into near oblivion. Agreeing with this argument Abhi Subedi writes:

Legends grew around the Rana prime minister especially Jung Bahadur, about the Chitrakar artists and about their power of executing portraits. Bhajuman Chitrakar accompanied the Rana Minister to Europe in 1850, and said to have brought European influences in the use of colors and techniques. (7-8)

Most of the artists of that period were self taught and had inherited a family tradition within a particular caste. Only in 1926 was this pattern broken when Rana Prime Minister Chandra Samsher sent Chandra Man Singh Maskey for formal training in the government school of Art, Calcutta in British India, where he successfully completed a six year course. The exposure of these artists to western techniques brought the significant change on the portrait painting in the court. Since the Rana loved their own images, they got their portraits made by the artists.

Another artist was the late Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, also from the same school in 1929. Chandra Man Maskey including Chitrakar himself was the first Nepalese artists to receive formal art training in India. In 1950, Nepal got freedom from the tyranny of the Ranas. With the end of Ranarchy, the doors of Nepal were thrown wide open to the outside world. Nepal became open to the other countries. Artists started to go for training to India and other countries and that resulted Nepali art in the height of modernity. It becomes clear that with the fall of Rana regime in Nepal, the new epoch started in Nepali art. It created not only the question of revival and preservation of traditional art but also of the development of contemporary art. At the same time, it created a new dilemma. These trained artists could neither break completely from tradition nor could follow the western techniques fully, nor could stick to the tradition. In this period of transition' they found themselves in dilemma.

Bangdel and Modern Art in Nepal

It is strange to note that when Bhajuman Chitrakar visited England in 1850, a breakaway from the traditions of the past had already started in European art, particularly in France, but this trend

reached Nepal only a century later. During the first ten years following the events of 1950 Nepalese artists were busy mixing several styles of painting amongst which the concrete or representational style of the west was dominant. However, a few artists had become aware of the modern art movement in Europe. Their works were just imitation since they were self-taught artists.

At this point, Lain Singh Bangdel appeared in the Nepali art scene. He is the first Nepalese artist to get proper and full exposure to the western school of art. After his return from Paris, some scholars hopefully remarked that “the real modern art has begun in Nepal” (Singh, 232.)

Bangdel was so genius by his childhood that he always used to do relating arts and its importance. Indicating Bangdel’s Narendra Raj Prasai writes:

Bangdel copied art since his childhood while playing at home, he used to draw picture with his fingers. He used to take a keen interest in drawing and painting. He had got a post card from his father when was a small boy. The picture postcard was beautiful and that was why his father, Ranglal Rai had brought it for him. Karo, a popular artist had designed that post card. Though Bangdel did not know Koro then, he liked the post card though. He always used to begin his exercise book in school with a drawing at the beginning. He used to decorate the walls during different festivals in his village. When he was in high school, he had established himself as a good artist. Due to this, after his matriculation, he told his father that he wished to study fine arts. (296)

As said the morning indicates the day, Bangdel proved himself as a successful, outstanding and versatile figure in the field of Nepalese art as well as across the world.

Bangdel had completed his six years course from the government college of arts and craft’s in Calcutta in 1945 with the highest distinction. In 1952 he went to Paris where he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. During his sojourn in Europe, he also spent a few years in England. In France, he had the opportunity of meeting famous personalities including the Nobel Prize winner’s in Francois Maurice and Albert Camus and also Andre Malraux, Jean Cocteau and painters like Braque and Picasso. They must have influenced his thoughts in arts and literature. This exposure to western art “immeasurably enriched his technical ability and multiplied available creative options and allowed young Nepali artists access to such masters as Picasso, Braque and Van Gogh”(Neuwauer, Forward)

In 1961, Bangdel held a one-man exhibition of his works, which was the first exhibition of his works, which was the first exhibition of modern painting in Kathmandu. He was the first Nepalese artist to introduce modern art in Nepal in a real sense.

However, there were some self-taught Nepalese artists who were experimenting with the new theme, medium and technique. Like Gehendra Man Amatya, an eminent Nepali self-taught artist claimed to be the first Nepali modern artist to exhibit his solo exhibition in Kathmandu in 1945. There many an evidence to substantiate this claim. Supporting Amatya’s claim Narendra Raj Prasai says “the first man to hold an exhibition of modern art was Gehendra Man Amatya. He had held a solo art exhibition in 1945” (299). Regarding Bangdel’s works, work resources and

style, Dina Bangdel says:

His works have the universal appeal that continues both his personal vision with his immense creative genius. Much of his imagery is derived from nature that is interpreted and rendered through the artist's own perception and imagination. His style is marked with its own perception and imagination. His style is marked with its own distinctiveness- it expresses both his familiarity with the trends of modern art and neglects his inspirations that are rooted to his native soil. (9)

Similarly, the veteran art critic Abhi Subedi asserts: "Our times speak in Bangdel's painting. They show structuralism of the influence of western art and Nepali artist's assimilation of western influence" (9).

To sum up, though Nepali art has long history from the ancient time and it has undergone with different changes with time and makes its own tradition and gets influence from west too. Bangdel is considered the artist who introduced western modern art in the field of Nepali art. No doubt, his influence is tremendous to the contemporary artists in Nepal.

IV. Individual and Tradition

Since the division of caste according to their occupation and the talent, the particular caste-Chitrakar, dominated Nepali art history for hundred years and this dominance slowly declined when Nepali political and economic relation widely open to other countries. Nepali artists' thirst for learning new styles, techniques and forms, pushed ahead going abroad for higher studies. The movements which said to the established movements of the west like Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, and Dadaism and so on were practiced highly. And from this revival of western art scenario, Nepali artists could not go away without adopting the western tradition. Mainly the artist Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, Chandraman Singh Maskey, Gehendra Man Amatya and Lain Singh Bangdel introduced modern art in the field of Nepali soil.

In the history of Nepali Modern art Lain Singh Bangdel is highly celebrated among many modern artists for his contribution for depicting contemporary Nepali Notion. Lain Singh Bangdel, returning in 1962 from his study in Paris and London, introduced to Kathmandu the stylistic and indeed philosophical elements of modern European art. At the time when Bangdel was in Europe, he was infatuated by seeing modern masters like Monet, Picasso and Braque. The infatuation by the great masters Bangdel, followed their path by working in Impressionistic, Expressionistic and Cubist forms. Bangdel later established his career as being expressionist. Beside this, Bangdel has created huge paintings that they solely pay homage to his land and people.

No doubt, Nepali painters were heavily influenced by the western artistic style, technique as well as forms. Thus, many painters naturally get influenced from other artists in their tradition like Bangdel who has greatly been influenced from expressionism but his paintings have its own uniqueness that distinguishes Bangdel from other expressionist painters. In the similar manner, needless to say N.B. Gurung, being a very promising young Nepali artist has immense influence from the timeless work of Bangdel but he establishes his paintings in Impressionistic tradition rather than Bangdel's expressionistic tradition of painting. So, it is quite true that having get

influenced from someone does not necessarily mean to follow that tradition as it is rather it is creating some uniqueness which gives a individuality of the painters and create a kind of 'ness' of an individual painter.

Almost all physical necessities of Nepalese social life were met, till a couple of decades ago, by the skills in the hands of simple but quite industrious Nepalese craftsmen. Even more than this, these artisans, in the years bygone, put forward some such emblems of their artistic dexterity that helped the Nepalese to achieve much gold and glory. Time has brought the conventional skills and technology of Nepal at the crucial cross-roads. Increasing exposure of Nepal to the International forums, her growing familiarity with them and her endeavour to drive economic inequality out the country within as shortest the period as possible, have all resulted in

the increasing adoption of modern technologies which in fact is threatening the conventional technology to extinction. The economic contribution of this technology to the uplift of public social life and a close familiarity, of all common Nepalese living at every nook and corner of the country, with it, were either inadequately realized or not realized at all. One can very well conceive the importance of conventional technology aiming at the country's modernization, if he tries to have a slight dip into it. Hence, it is only after the realization of the greater prominence of conventional technology that the Royal Nepal Academy and National Council for Science and Technology have now begun to give a special attention towards the preservation and modification of traditional skills.

Therefore, at a time when conventional technology is going to be extinguished and also when the necessity of its preservation and modification has been seriously perceived, this work of these two authors about the introduction of Conventional Technology of Nepal, their position at present and their scientific analysis and development, has been, quite reasonably, considered timely and significant. The authors, it may well be said, have considerably served the Nepalese society by exploring these many technologies, putting the details in such a simple language as it is and inciting particularly the youth to let them know and further enhance the glorious tradition of Nepalese arts and skills. This work deserves due credit in introducing ourselves to the basic skills and technology that had greatly contributed to keep our society alive even in the gloomy days of the past. It has, at the same time, tried to gauge out ability of using modern technology for the preservation of and modification of conventional one.

“Is traditional technology a saviour of mankind of the Third World Countries?” This question is often asked and discussed in greater detail in different forums at the national and international levels. The answer, however, is not unanimous, yet the conclusion drawn is quite

significant. Especially, the Third World Countries which have the long tradition of using traditional technology to solve human problems can not simply ignore their own technology and depend merely on the imported capital intensive technology has not been a rewarding experience for many developing countries.

Traditional technology is the national heritage of a country. The very nature of such technology is labour intensive and it utilizes the national resources although found in pockets in different parts of a country without bringing any adverse effect to the society. It provides job opportunities to a great majority of people in their own localities. Unlike the capital intensive technology, it has profound impact on the society in which it has flourished. As a matter of fact, many such traditional technologies are found to be mingled with the local culture and art in such a way that it is difficult to draw a line demarcation between them. This is one unique feature of traditional technology that is rarely found in modern technology.

We are all aware of the fact that the Third World Countries are striving hard to solve their pressing economic problems by the application of science and technology. Even if the rural areas of the Third World Countries possess a wealth of rich technological knowledge, this wealth of information appears to be inadequate to meet the challenge of the changing times. This has forced these countries to look for sophisticated modern technologies. But unfortunately, the imported modern technologies alone have not solved all their problems of poverty and unemployment. Rather, the import of capital intensive technology has created several adverse effects. In many instances, they have proved to be inappropriate to local conditions of the poor developing countries. Most of them have functioned in isolation and their adaptability has been found to be rather poor. Moreover, the import of sophisticated technology has thrown away many traditional professionals out of their jobs and it has served the interest of a small minority.

In many cases, such import of profit-oriented technologies has neglected the utilization of indigenous raw materials and has disturbed the ecological balance.

These unfortunate conditions have compelled the Third World Countries to look for some sort of technologies that are suitable to solve their economic problems. These compulsions have led them to think of several alternatives such as 1. appropriate technology 2. intermediate technology 3. capital intensive technology 4. rural technology and so on. We are thus living amidst the jargons of technology. Technology, no matter whether it is traditional or modern, should be able to serve the basic needs of the people. Technologies in appropriate forms should be able to provide job opportunities to a great majority, should utilize the natural resources to the maximum without disturbing ecological balance and should be within the reach of many.

It is no exaggerating to say that traditional technology in an improved form can solve most of the problems of a developing country. If we are willing to modernize and revitalize them, they can be expected to play a role of much desired appropriate technologies. Viewed from this angle, traditional technologies can be paramount importance in rural development programme. This calls for an in-depth study of these rural technologies which will ultimately pave a way to innovation and fabrication of the technologies needed for a country. Nepal possesses a rich wealth of traditional technologies of economic importance. A survey and study of the traditional technologies of Nepal have revealed that she has inherited the technical know-how in several fields such as agriculture, housing, metal works, water management, health, cloth making, mechanical devices etc. from the hoary past. If a little impulse is given to these age-old technologies, rapid economic development can be expected in near future.

The present book is an outcome of the survey and study of the Nepalese technologies. These technologies are expected to serve as a cross-section of the traditional technologies should not be

radically different from the existing technologies of the other countries in the region except for minor differences. There was a time in history where the diffusion and transfer of technologies were very effective although modern means of transportation were not available in those days. This must be the reason for the obvious similarities found in traditional technologies in the whole South and South-East Asian Countries. This calls for a comparative study of the technologies of economic importance at the regional level.

The Nepalese technologies have been studied with a view to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To prepare an inventory of traditional technologies and to document them.
2. To study the socio-economic aspects of such technologies.
3. To identify the research areas for modernization.
4. To preserve the identity of all traditional technologies even though some of them are of mere historical importance.
5. To help diffuse, transfer and share the experience on traditional technologies by the countries of the Third World.
6. To examine whether such technology has been based on scientific reasoning.
7. To render help in the economic development of a country through the application of modernized technology.

It is our sincere hope that the present book will provide basic information to those who deal with the traditional or rural technologies that we have studied in different parts of Nepal.

Human endeavor to improve the quality of life is closely linked with the development of new skills and techniques to meet the challenges of basic needs. The history of the development of technology is therefore a fascinating area. However, little is known about the traditional technologies of Countries like Nepal, which for many centuries was inaccessible to and isolated

from the contemporary world. Nepal's developmental efforts through Centuries are, therefore, unique and so are its traditional technologies.

Within the last three decades, several changes have gradually started to appear in Nepal as it opened its door to the outside world in the early fifties. With other changes old technologies are being slowly but surely replaced by newer ones in every field. As traditional technologies of any country are the total outcome of long struggle towards better of all the people and Culture of that region and the period. It is very important that scientific studies of such technologies be carried out without loss of time and before they disappear from the scene or change the traditional character. Nepal offers a unique opportunity for the study of such traditional technologies which are still in their unspoiled stage. Traditional technologies have also additional significance because however obsolete and, primitive they may appear today, they were very much 'developed' at the time when they evolved and could be considered as the milestones of technological development in human civilization. The varied traditional technologies from the exquisite bronze and metal works and building of temples and towns, to agriculture and water supply for drinking and irrigation could be areas of fascinating studies.

The oil crisis of 1973 proved beyond doubt that the highly energy and capital intensive technologies of the West will be neither suitable nor desirable for the developing world. Need for adopting a different strategy for development based on technologies which can bring employment benefit to the masses, of the people has been advocated by many for the developing World. Various names like 'Intermediate Technology' 'Appropriate Technology' and 'Modest Technology' have been suggested and are gaining popularity everywhere. However, it is imperative for any country to make proper assessment of its own available skill and technology in order to decide policies and strategies with adequate understanding of implications before

importing new technologies of whatever scale. It is in this context that the studies of traditional technologies have a more direct significance in planning for the overall development of any developing Country.

Unfortunately' scientific studies of traditional technologies have not been very popular and more often than not foreign scholars seem to dominate over local scholars in most cases. The incentives to local scholars for such studies are almost non-existent. It is therefore a matter of great happiness and satisfaction that eminent scientists and teachers like Prof. It is heartening to know that their work is now being published in English. This version will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable reference material to scholars, others interested in the traditional technologies of Nepal, who acquire encouragement in their laudable work, and I sincerely believe that the studies initiated by them will continue to flourish in future.

