

## Chapter One

### Introducing Maithili Performing Arts

Naach is a traditional form of drama in Mithlanchal. In Maithili language, the term 'Naach' denotes two different kinds of performances. The term literally means 'dance'. However, it also resembles with 'Naat' of Ashami language as well as 'Natya' of Sanskrit. However, in Mithilanchal, people use the term 'Naach' for folk drama and 'Natak' for modern theatre. However, Naach meets all the elements of drama such as story, acting, costumes, language, stage and musical instruments marked out by Bharat Muni (7).

Phulo Pashman defines 'Naach' as a drama that emerges out of unwritten script. 'Naach', for Phulo Pashman is different from the drama of educated society. 'Naach', he argues, includes social changes and entertains the people at the same time." (216)

Maithili 'Naach' exploits a large number of folklore from society. Since the dialogues are not written, their effective delivery depends on the wit of the artists. Nonetheless, Maithili 'Naach' aims at bringing social changes through stage. The 'Naach' Company, now a days uses amplification and electric bulbs. Furthermore, it dramatizes moral issues in the context of Maithil society. It also communicates ethics of the people of marginalized caste. That's why Phulo Pashman mentions, "in these dramas we find the seed of cultural consciousness of the lower caste Maithili people" (215).

It's very difficult to trace out the history of Naach back to its origin. Jyotiswer Thakur (A.D. 1280-1340) first time talks about it in his book '*Barnratnakar*'.

Dhirendra Premarshi puts this very idea in his paper presented in a seminar in Gurukul:

While the classical Maithili dramas were written and performed in the courts of the kings, the common Maithili folk were entertained by Naach that has been in existence from ancient times. The fact about the existence of a long tradition of dance and drama in rural areas outside the palace and free from their convention has been mentioned in Jyotishwar's '*Barnratanakar*'. (Seminar 2006)

Phulo Pashan believes that Maithili folk drama was born and took its shape along with the birth of Maithili language. He puts it: "Maithili folk drama came into existence along with other regional languages in the eighth and ninth century. As a dialect is born before the particular language in its standard form, folk drama comes into existence before classical drama" (214).

Jyotishwar mentions about the existence of 'Naach' in his book '*Barnratnakar*' that was written in the early period of fourteenth century when the Kirtaniya style of Maithili court theatre had still to take its shape. So, scholars trace the history of 'Naach' back to the eighth and ninth century A.D.

There are still some points that have remained unexplained by the scholars. What kind of folk drama did Jyotishwar mention in his "*Barnratnakar*"? Is he talking about the dramas that 'Jhijhiya' and 'Jat-Jati' are or is he talking about the folk dramas that 'Salhesh' and 'Brijbhar' are? Has 'Naach' been influenced by the court theatre? If it is, to what extent?

I put these questions before Mahendra Malangiya a Maithili dramatist from Nepal. He views that the way the artists use the stage and the use of musical

instruments show that 'Naach' seems to have been influenced by the court theatre of Mithila. And the kind of 'Naach' that Jyotisor mentions in his '*Barnratnar*' may refer to the kind of Naach that 'Jat-Jatin' and 'Jhijhia' are.

Maithili language uses the term 'Naach' for both forms of folk drama: the form that 'Jhijhia' and 'Jat-Jatin' have got and the form that 'Salhesh' and 'Brijbhar' have got. But these two forms are different in form, content and context. 'Jhijhia' and 'Jat-Jatin' do not contain all the elements of drama marked out by Bharat Muni mentioned above.

'Jhijhia' does not have a story and 'Jat-Jatin' lacks a clear outline of it. Though they used acting, they don't use stylized costumes. They neither use stage nor any musical instruments. The subject-matter for these Naaches is always fixed. 'Jhijhia' is played to keep the witches and their witchery away from the village. Similarly, 'Jat-Jatin' is played to bring rain. These dramas are the part of annual ceremony. Jagdishchandra Mathur writes that 'Jat-Jatin's' literary structure and poetry "is different from those dramas that developed at the point of time when the Sanskrit drama was losing its popularity. We find in it a unique freshness in its poetry and tactless symbolic structure that is quite unavailable in other folk dramas" (155).

'Bidhapat Naach' is one of the many folk dramas that seem to be related with the name Bidyapati a popular Maithili poet of fourteenth century and who produced some dramas in the court of Siv Singh. Here the interesting point to remark is that in the name of 'Bidhapat' performing groups perform 'parijathan' which was not written by Bidyaapti but by Umapati Upadhyaya. Mathur observes the reflections of Kirtaniya style of court theatre in 'Bidhapat Naach' and remarks it as the remaining of 'Kirtaniya Natak' (12).

‘Naach’ can be studied together with regional dramas like ‘The Jatra’ of Bangal, the ‘Tamasha’ of Maharashtra, and the ‘Bhavai’ of Gujrat. ‘Naach’ shares with them a number of features particularly when it makes extensive use of music and dance, verbal texture that is primarily poetic, and stylized gesture, and costume.

However there is a dispute whether to call the Indian forms of dramas like 'Jatra', 'Tamasha' and 'Bhavai', folk drama or not. Gargi and James R. Bardon use the term folk drama for these theatrical activities. On the other hand, Jagdish Chandra Mathur and Kapila Vatsyayan do not like to use the terms 'folk drama' for there theatrical activities. They find themselves convenient with the term ‘Parnparsi Natya’ or ‘Traditional Theatre’ in the place of the term 'Folk drama'.

‘Oxford companion to Drama’ defines the term ‘folk play’ as:

The rough and ready dramatic entertainments given at village festivals by the villagers themselves. They were derived with the minimum literary intervention, from the dramatic tendencies inherent in primitive folk festivals and should not be confused with the productions of professional minstrels. (267)

Jagdish Chandra Mathur argues that these folk dramas exhibit better artistic excellence than the mumming play (17). Similarly, Kapila Vatsyayan finds it difficult to articulate the different forms of ‘Indian Theatre’ as ‘folk’ and ‘classical’. She views that the distinction between them has been the cause of much misunderstanding regarding the Asian or Indian Arts (2). She writes: "They do not come under the category of what are popularly described as ‘folk’ or ‘classical’ and yet there are many areas of overlap because the movement is a two-way traffic and not merely the penetration of “great art” into popular levels" (4).

Even Kathyren Hensen in her extensive study 'Nautanki: A folk Theater of India' views that the form "does not fit neatly into the category of 'folk drama' as the term used by western folklorists" (41).

But there is a major difficulty of using the term 'Traditional Theatre' for 'Naach' as it contains elements from 'the Court Theatre' too. The term does not point out the line of demarcation between 'Naach' and 'The Classical Maithili Theatre'. Furthermore, the term 'folk play' may not be viewed identical with the term 'Folk Drama' and 'Folk Theatre'. 'Salhesh Naach' is a part of the tradition of folk theatre while 'Jat-Jatin' is a part of 'Dramatic Ritual'. If we mark out the difference between these two categories we can call 'Jhijhia' and 'Jat-Jatin' 'folk play' and 'Salhesh' and 'Brijvar' 'folk drama'. As Kathryn Hensen mentions:

Folk drama exists on a village or small group level. The performers are the members of the community and therefore known to the most of the audience. The dramas are given on special occasions only, most commonly a seasonal festival. (44)

'Naach', in this sense, is a folk drama that exists at a village or small group level. The performers are the members of the same community and performances are given in special occasions like 'chhath' and 'Dashain'.

So, we can articulate the Traditional Maithili Theatre in three categories: (i) the folk play that 'Jhijhia' and 'Jat-Jatin' are (ii) folk drama or folk theatre that 'Salhesh' and 'Brijbhar' are and (iii) the 'Classical Maithili Drama' that 'Dhrutsamagam' and 'Gorakshbijay' are.

The theatrical activities of Mithilanchal do not keep itself limited with the performances of 'Naach'. People of Mithila region have experienced the other forms of theatre like 'Lila theatre', 'Jhanki' and 'Modern Theatre'.

### **'Lila' Theatre:**

The 'Lila' theatre that particularly evolved in North India also took its entrance in Mithila region. The 'Lila' theatre is based on the lives of two Hindu deities, Ram and Krishna and respectively known as 'Ramlila' and 'Raslila'.

The 'Ramlila' is based upon Tulsidas's narrative of Ram's adventures 'The Ramcharitmanas', a long poem composed in Abadhi language. Here, chanted passages from Tulsidas's text intersperse with song and drama. Actors use Hindi language for dialogue. There is a convention that the actors who take part of Ram and Sita must be from Brahmin caste.

A 'Ramlila' troop enjoys a better respectability among the upper castes who take the Lila theatre as something sacred and the Naach profane to be performed and watched by lower caste people. Like 'Naach', 'Ramlila' is not presented throughout the night. It is shown three or four hours at night. The 'Raslila' collects the events from the life of lord Krishna and present them on the stage. Raslila is rarely seen in Mithila region.

### **Jhankhi:**

Jhankhi is mainly presented during Bibahpanchami. It mainly captures the episode of the marriage of Ram and Sita. Unlike Ramlila, the songs and dialogues used in 'Jhankhi' are in Maithili language. This drama can rarely be seen out of Mithila region. The actors impersonating Ram and Sita barely speak or sing or dance.

They rather sit silently in the same posture throughout the performance while other actors sing, dance and create laughter on the stage by cracking jokes.

### **Hindi Melodramas:**

Different Hindi dramas have regularly been played by the youth in Mithilanchal. These dramas are melodramatic in form and most of them are identical in their plot and dialogues. The plot is always the same. The villains, either in the forms of landlords or in the form of robber torture the hero's family members. The hero becomes a robber and takes the revenge. Most of the characters appear in black dresses with guns in their hands and the show is filled with the sound of crackers. Delivering the dialogue in a loud voice and in a high pitch is considered the hallmark of good acting in these dramas.

### **Modern Maithili Drama**

Jeevan Jha (1848-1912 A.D.) is known as the first modern Maithili playwright. He is followed by Esh Nath Jha and Mahendra Malangia.

In recent years, some of the institutions like 'Mithila Natya Kala Parishad' and 'Akriti' have become active in production and performance of Maithili dramas. The modern Maithili Theatre concentrates on social realities and exposes the evils prevalent in Maithili society. Mahendra Malangiya is one of the famous dramatists of the region whose dramas, according to Abhi Subedi, "are simple and themes they deal with the ordinary problems of life. Mahendra Maalargiya represents the subaltern voice in his theatre and incorporates strong folk elements in his texts and theatre" (173).

## Naach

‘Naach’ is now identified as the folk drama of Mithila region. It is rooted in the peasant society. However, it is not related to the seasonal or devotional rounds of activity that generate many forms of folk poetry.

‘Naach’ players are from the village itself. The actor-singers are mainly artisans. Lale Raut an actor of Kumhraura Bhagwatipur ‘Naach’ party is a farmer. The other actor Ram Birich Thakur is a barber by profession. We can rarely find the artists from upper castes performing in ‘Naach’.

A performance is given by a ‘Naach’ company that belongs to an individual rather than to a society. The company owner is called the manager. The manager keeps the artists on daily wages. An artist gets Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 per night these days for performing throughout the night. Ramdev Mandal, the manager of ‘Kumhrara Bhawatipur Naach Party’ informed me that he charges Rs. 30,000 for three to four nights performance from the organizer. He told me that the business is seasonal and one can not depend on the performance for his livelihood. He complains that previously they were called for many performances. But nowadays, they are called for a very few.

‘Naach’ is one of the many forms of theatre in Mithila region. However, it is the most popular form. Dhanusaha and Siraha districts, my selected regions for study, have a number of semi-professional Naach with different stories. The modern Maithili theatre has not earned a professional status yet. It’s only the Naach companies in the region that are professional though in a limited sense.

With this brief introduction about different performing arts practiced in Mithilanchal. I now would like to explore ‘Naach’ by comparing it with other forms



of drama/theatre of Mithila Pradesh. While doing it, I will be exploring on the folklore and culture. In the third chapter, I will be discussing 'Naach' in terms of its story and mode of presentation. Since I could not find much material on 'Naach', I narrate the story of 'Naach' that a 'Naach' company presents on a regular basis. I have done this for familiarizing Naach with non-Maithili natives. I am aware that my narration is too simplistic. In the last chapter, I will present the conclusion or the finding of my research. My finding is that Maithili 'Naach' needs to be reinterpreted in the context of changing cultural and epistemological values and agendas.

## Chapter Two

### Features of 'Naach' and Methodology of Research

#### 2.1 Folk versus Classical

Folk drama has always been understood in its relationship with the classical. Folk drama has its origin in the folklore of the unlettered people living in rural areas. In spite of certain borderline cases, it normally stands in direct contrast with written literature. A folk item always depends on memory to exist. Since it depends on memory for its existence there is always the possibility of manipulating the folk item. So a folk item can exist in many variants like different dialects of the same language. Similarly, we can find differences in the centre of interest of the same folk material. Since a folk community lacks authority, all the variants are supposed to be right. But this is not the case with classical drama which is written and produced and disseminated by formal institutions like court and university.

Folk drama is considered to be naive and simple while the classical one is supposed to be complex and sophisticated. While marking a sharp distinction between classical and folk drama, Balwant Gargi writes:

Folk drama is self conscious, spontaneous, boisterously naive. The classical theatre is rigid, complex, sophisticated. The folk is unhewn, the classical chiseled. The folk sprawls, the classical demands mathematical exactness. One is rural, the other regal. (3)

The folk theatre appeals to the mass, the ordinary man, the classical is for the elite and demands previous knowledge from the spectator. Folk drama retains its vitality and gathers its motifs from the common life of the people. Folk drama is a communal property and is produced within the community while the later is produced and

disseminated by formal institutions like court. In folk theatre, a whole community can take part while in the classical drama, a few are selected.

However, the distinction between folk drama and the classical one is not straightforward. We can not make a watertight distinction between them. The relationship between them is complex as they interact with each other and help them in shaping their form and content. Describing the complexity, Gargi writes:

The relationship between the classical and the folk theatre is complex. They are not antithesis of each other. They coexist; they borrow and lend. Greek tragedy and comedy were born out of fertility rites and the frenzied worship of Dionysus. The classical Indian drama also grew out of pageants, rituals, mimes and ancient folk forms. (3)

Writers and song makers have always used themes from oral legends and folk songs. However, it can also take the other way. Folk artists living near centers of fine art production frequently adopt new fashions. Musical instruments like tabla and clarinet have been adopted in 'Naach' that were missing previously.

In the context of Indo-Nepalese theatre, Maithili 'Naach' and the Court Theatre of Kathmandu Valley developed at the dubris of classical Sanskrit theatre. Gargi writes:

When after the tenth century, the classical language splintered into vernacular and took root in the form of regional languages, the Sanskrit drama petrified many centuries was replaced by growing folk theatre, puranic tales, mythological lore, and stories of Sanskrit plays were populatized by the present folk theatre. In this way the tradition flowed not from the folk to classical but from the classical to folk. (4)

Indo-Nepalese folk theatre and the court theatre that developed in the Kathmandu valley shared a number of stage conventions from the classical Sanskrit drama. Researchers divide performance time into several segments, beginning with the symbolic instruction of the performance space, its ritual sanctification and worship of deities followed by musical overtures played on various instruments introductory dance items and finally the stage manager director(Sutradhar) who formally invites the audience to view the play.

One thing that we still need to consider about the distinction between the classical and the folk is the context in which the distinction is set. The distinction between the classical and the folk always depends on the approach of the student and the material approached. A foreign specialist who studies on South Asian folk theatre can put the court theatre that developed in the Kathmandu Valley during Malla reign in the category of folk drama and thereby further his study comparing it with classical Sanskrit drama. However, the distinction will not work for a student who studies Maithili 'Naach' as a form of folk drama. The dramas that have been written by the courtly people in the lavishness of the palace can not coincide with Naach that took its shape among the common people. While the court dramas have written form, Maithili Naach is still unwritten. The dialogue delivery totally depends on the spontaneity and wit of the artists on the stage. While classical Maithili drama, for much of its story depends on the Sanskrit scriptures, Maithili 'Naach' depends on the common Maithili Folklore like 'Raja Salhesh' and 'Bihula Sati' for the same.

While making a distinction between classical and folk, Kathryn Hansen writes:

A textual authority must be present that legitimizes and governs the art form`. Second, this textual tradition must be studied and passed on by

trained specialists (gurus, teachers, scholars, or performers) who control reproduction of the art form. Third, the producers, performers and their institutions must be supported by a dominant social group.

(44)

Dramas written in the courts of Mithila and Kathmandu Valley meet all the landmarks put forward and by Kathryn Hansen whereas 'Naach' does not fit any of the given three categories. 'Naach' exploits the traditional folklore for its story. We don't find any training center that teaches the art and it is an institution dominated by so-called 'lower' caste people. 'Naach', thus is a kind of folk drama of Mithila Pradesh.

## **2.2 Folklore and Folk Drama**

Folk drama has little been discussed in the folklore literature and its recognition on its own has been some what belated. Encyclopedia Americana does not make a separate entry for folk drama rather puts it under the broader category of folklore and leaves little space for its discussion. While discussing about the scope of folklore, it puts, "It includes . . . folk song and folktale . . . folk dance . . . folk plays and ancient rituals" (498). Encyclopedia Britannica, on the other hand, studies it as a part of folk literature and keeps it parallel to fable and ballad. Much of the scholarship on folklore focuses on the narrative genres such as folk epic and folk tale. Kathryn Hansen believes that folk theatre may have escaped notice because of its dual citizenship, being perceived as theatre more often than 'folk' (48).

Whatever the reasons, folk theatre of Mithila shares so much with other genres of folklore, such as folk epic, folk song, and folk tale. Furthermore, a single folk item exists in so many forms. 'Salhesh' exists in Mithila as a legend, a folk epic and a folk play at the sametime. Similar is the case with other folk items such as 'Gopi Chand'

and 'Brijbhar'. In Mithila, where folk drama, folk narrative, folk song and folk dance reside in close proximity, it is difficult to draw an outline in between 'Naach' and other forms of folklore.

In Abraham's terms, content, form and context are the significant variables that separate generic categories (49). Content or theme refers to the story, the sequence of events of a narrative genre. Form designates the prosodic structure of the genre and its possible use of music, dance and painting. The context refers to the genre's connection with social structures and the characteristic interaction between the audience and the performers.

In terms of context, 'Naach' belongs to a large group of narrative that includes the various legends and tales known to the Maithili people. These tales and legends include 'Rani Saranga', 'Dinabhadri', 'Salhesh' and others. These stories are far more secular than religions.

At the formal level, these stories are structured according to a musical and prosodic plan distinctive to the genre. The drama is performed in episodes throughout the night and to finish a story, it takes seven to fifteen nights. 'Naach' uses musical instruments like Nagara, (Kettle drum), Shahanai, Clarinet and harmonium. Each dialogue in verse is followed by a musical passage using the same melody and rhythm which is followed by a dialogue in prose often as an explanation of the things in verse.

The concept of interpersonal distance between audience and performer is central to Abraham's way of perceiving the contextual dimension of folklore genres. Abraham outlines a continuum relation between performers and audience extending for total interpersonal involvement to total removal. In folk drama such as 'Naach',

the actors maintain a psychic distance with the audience and it becomes necessary for them when the actors belong to the same community the audience belongs. The raised stage and the dialogue in verse help them to maintain that psychic distance that they require to communicate with the audience at formal level. Thus, 'theatre' can be distinguished from 'debate' and 'verbal context' on the one hand, in which respondents have an equal role, and from religious ritual on the other, in which, audience members often participate both as officiates and as recipients. Folk drama differs from the narrative forms when makeup, costumes and movement visually represent the narrative events to the audience. The techniques of theatrical representation bring the audience closer to the performance, closer to the action and emotions of the characters, than a recitation mode that employs no dramatic role-playing Kathryn Hensen writes, "A performance genre that mimes human action through the artifice of stage acting-showing the audience the times of the story not simply taking about them is fundamentally different from one that simply narrates" (54).

'Salhesh' as a 'Naach' differs from 'Salhesh' as a folk epic. The former is stage performance accompanied by musical instruments and dance though both melody and plot are brought from its epic form. 'Salhesh Naach' differs from 'Salhesh' as religious ritual when it lacks the recipients who come with flowers and other items to offer to the deity. In 'Naach' the audience comes to watch the performance rather than to ask for blessings.

'Naach' can be observed as a performative form of folklore, related to oral epic and other narrative genres in context but distinct from recitational forms in its dramatic mode of performance.

### 2.3 Drama and Ritual

Drama and rituals exist in close proximity. The rituals give an opportunity to the people for theatrical realization. Actually, drama has been evolved out of the practices of ancient rituals. Lee A Jacobs mentions:

In its origins, drama probably evolved from ancient Egyptian and Greek rituals, ceremonies that were performed the same way again and again and were thought to have a propitious effect on the relationship between the people and their gods. (2)

Abhi Subedi in 'Nepali Theatre as I see It' also views "dramatic performance originated from the community festivals where people watched plays dramatizing their cosmic and human dimensions of relationships"(28).

Macgowan and Melnitz think that it is a limited view to see 'theatre' based on the study of the play i.e. written, performed by professional actors in an envelope of auditorium on a stage with scenery, costumes and lights or some of these. They have proposed to view theatre in rituals where it appears far more powerful than it appears on the stage. They argue that theatre exists when a little girl "plays name" or Australian aborigines give a canoe dance or the Navajos go through the ceremonies of their mountain chant (15). This approach to theatre is far wider than the previous one and it takes us to the remote past when the first man started imitating around the campfire.

We find different elements of theatre in the festivals and cultural practices. These festivals include songs, dances, proverbs, and the use of marks and stories. These theatrical elements are found to be very much in effect in the Indrajattra, a



festival of Newar community in Kathmandu Valley. These theatrical elements have been observed very minutely by Subedi:

The effectiveness of the Indra-Jatra is enchanted by the element of power that is embodied in the masks and dances. Ornate costumes, colourful masks and the dancers' skills bring forth the dramatic quality of the festival. (30)

We find the theatrical elements like songs, dances, proverbs, stories in almost all the festivals in Mithila. It can be seen in 'Sama-Chakeba' where women sing together and event the relationship of brother and sister between 'Sama' and 'Chakeba' by making idols out of clay and expressing their pains and anguish in songs. These theatrical elements are also evident in 'Jat-Jatin' where women in group dance, each keeping, on their head, an earthen pitcher having a hundred holes and burning butter lamp inside. It's a dance to keep the witches away from their witchery.

However, the relationship between actors and the audience is not the same in the enclosed theatre and rituals. Almost all the members or any member can take part in the dramas of rituals. But this is not the case with enclosed theatre where actors are professional and trained. The next element that differentiates the theatre in rituals with the theatre on stage is the power of realization. The actors in the rituals are far truer for the participants than the actors on the stage regarding the socio-economic life of the people. How powerful actually a ritual can be can best be realized through these lines of Subedi:

The ritual embodies the power of the people in the community who want to see the continuity of the show whatever may be the reason.  
The last king of Kathmandu Jaya Prakash Malla with the crowd

engrossed in this festival on this day in the year 1768, was watching the Kumari alighting gently on the chariot, when the king of the house of Gorkha, Prithavi Narayan Shah came from nowhere and filled the royal seat fallen vacant after the last king fled to Patan at that juncture of time. The virgin goddess put tika on the Shah King's forehead which he considered as the legitimisation of his power. It shows that rituals are canonized as the dramatic performances of power on the stage of history. (29)

Rituals also provide an opportunity to establish the people's relationship with their deity who can solve their problems of day to day life. And this can be observed in 'Salhesh Naach' when it is practiced as a religious rite. The priest keeps the people surrounding them stunned when he walks on the edge of a sword or over burning coal or put this hand inside the boiling rice-pudding pot. The people are entertained here but also overtaken by the magical power of the priest who is supposed to be overtaken by the spirit of the deity, Salhesh at that time. The drama has also got a medicinal function when the people asked for blessings from the priest and solutions for their problems and when the priest gives them the ways to solution. And it is here where drama exercises more power than the life itself.

#### **2.4 Maithili Classical Drama**

Maithili literature starts with drama and song watered from two different currents: one from the common folk and other from the classical Sanskrit. Classical Maithili drama was influenced by Sanskrit drama of Kalidas and others. These dramas use Maithili songs that were based on the classical ragas.

Around 1000 A.D., Sanskrit drama starts losing its popularity and it gives way to vernacular that starts replacing it gradually throughout the Indian sub-continent. Jay Kant Mishra writes "The edifice of vernacular drama was built on the ashes of Sanskrit drama. At the time when the vernacular were gaining ascendancy, Sanskrit drama had almost died" (243).

Maithili, thus, starts replacing Sanskrit in the dramas written in Mithila Pradesh. The Maithili dramas written in this context were heavily influenced by the classical Sanskrit theatre. The Maithili dramatists based their dramas on the Sanskrit format and develop them drawing themes, characters, and motifs from the classical Sanskrit dramas.

The classical Maithili drama takes its shape in three different places: one in the Mithila region, i.e. the court of Hari Singh Dev, second in Nepal i.e. in the courts of the Malla kings of Bhatgau, Kathmandu and Lalitpur and finally in Asam in the form of Ankiya Naat.

Jyotiswar's 'Dhrutsmagam' is regarded as the first written Maithili drama. In the drama, the stage direction and the dialogue are written in Sanskrit; only the songs inserted in different places are written in the vernacular. However, it is the first play where Maithili language has got its place and scholars identify it as the first Maithili drama. Based on the same format, the famous Maithili poet produces the next play 'Goraksh Bijay' drawing on the popular story of Gorakhnath and his master Machhindranath.

The Malla kings of Kathmandu valley are also found to be very much fascinated by this very style of drama developed in Mithila. After Tuglak's attack on

Mithila, the Maithili scholars escaped to Kathmandu with Hari Singh Dev who later established a small state near Bhaktapur. D.R. Regmi clarifies the fact more clearly:

During Harisinghadeva's reign, Nepal also received a number of manuscript works from Mithila as a result of local scholars taking refuge in the valley for fear of being molested by the Muhammadan invaders. Since his time, we have a number of Mithila Brahmins in the Nepal Valley. (146)

Under the influence of these scholars, there evolved a tradition of drama writing in the courts of Malla kings under their patronage.

The Malla kings of Nepal were great patrons of drama from whose courts in Patan, Batgaon and Kathmandu come many of the surviving play texts. These dramas follow the same Kirtaniya style developed in Mithila. 'Bidyabilas' is the first Maithili drama written in the valley under the patronage of Bishwas Malla of Bhadgaun.

Some of the remarkable texts of Maithili drama were produced in Asam. These dramas are known as 'Ankiya Naat'. But the mission after producing these texts was primarily religious. It was to spread the Baisnav cult in the region. Sankar Dev's 'Rambjay' is one of the remarkable texts.

The Maithili dramas written in Mithila, Nepal and Asam, share some common features. Most of the texts were written in three different languages and in some cases more than three. 'Dhrutsamagam' of Jyotiswar, for example, included some Maithili songs and the dialogues and the stage direction are written in Sanskrit that it can rarely be called a Maithili play. These dramas are based on the classical Sanskrit format and they use Sanskrit (poetry and prose) for dialogue and stage direction. They draw their storyline from mythological Sanskrit texts. Gods and goddesses are the

main characters in these dramas. 'Krishna', Rukmini', 'Narad' are the characters in 'Parijatharan' by Umapati (1580-1660) and the drama is based on the story from Haribanshpuran. These dramas use 'Maithili' songs mainly for music and in some cases to forward the action as well. The actors of 'Kirtaniya Natak' were known as 'Natua'; the group of the actors was called 'Mandali' and the chief of the 'Mandali' was the 'Nayak'. These plays were acted out on a ceremonial occasion.

Classical Maithili drama, thus, represents the upper class taste of the educated Maithili people who knew Sanskrit. The texts themselves create division between Sanskrit and the vernacular. Sanskrit has been used for developing the plot and carrying the action and the vernacular has been used for amusement. So, the drama creates a line of demarcation, classical versus folk, serious versus frivolous. More than that, these texts were unable to use the rich mythological lore present among the common Maithili folk.

The classical Maithili dramas were written in Kings Court rather than on a public platform. They represent the upper class taste of educated people who knew Sanskrit. These texts create a division between Sanskrit and Maithili. While they use Sanskrit for serious purpose i.e. to forward the action and develop the plot, Maithili is used for music, amusement. They draw the story from Sanskrit mythology; the folk myth was left behind and is still uncoded. It is folkloric tradition of Maithili Naach that saved a large number of folk epic present among the common Maithili folk. Thus, Naach has remained mostly practiced form of performing art in Mithilanchal. It has remained rooted to the village people, and it draws upon folklore, and is driven by commercial purpose. Still, it has remained a vehicle of rural and moral reformation.

## Chapter Three

### Textual Analysis of 'Salhesh'

#### 3.1 Content: Story of 'Salhesh'

The drama 'Salhesh' starts with the king of Mahisautha on the stage. He calls his servant Mangla to help him as he has to go to 'Manik Dah'. Mangla brings his cloths and he leaves for 'Manic Dah'. After taking bath in the lake he leaves for the king's Garden. He reaches in the graden and starts collecting flowers.

The Malins appear on the stage. They sing the song of their youth and absence of partner. So, they pray to Lord Shiv and ask for blessings. They reveal that they want to marry with a man who is more graceful than the sun. The god appears and instructs them to go to 'The king's Garden' where they can meet the one they are waiting for. They searched him in all directions but could not find him in the garden. Once again Sivjee helps them by telling that they can meet him in the north-west corner of the garden.

When they meet Salhesh, they ask for his introduction. Salhesh says that he is king Salhesh of Mahisantha and he belongs to Dusadh caste. He asks for their introduction in return. They reply that they are Malins and they belong to Taregnagadh and they have promised to marry with him.

They will give him rice and milk to eat if he is ready to go with them. But Salhesh is not ready to go with them. He argues that he belongs to Dushadh, a lower caste and people will langh at them if they marry him.

Since Salhesh is not ready to go with them. They find it easier to change him into a parrot with their spell. They throw their spell on Salhesh and instantly he changes into a parrot. They carry the parrot to their place. Salhesh, as a parrot reveals

to them that he has already got married and it is sin to get married with a woman of other caste. The Malins threaten him that he will remain a parrot if he does not accept their proposal. Salhesh says that he will follow their wish. After being assured they take their spell back and the king again turn into a human being. Sahesh leaves them with the promise that he will see them soon.

In the palace Mahisantha, Motiram the brother of Salhesh is thinking to bring Salhesh's wife to Mahisantha. So, he calls for Mangarna Hajam and orders him to go to Biratpur to fix the date of 'bridal procession'. But he urges Motiram not to force him to go there because he is newly married and he can't leave his wife alone in his home. But Motiram gives a letter in his hand and tells him to go there.

Mangarua goes to his house to tell his wife that he is leaving her for a few days. But his wife does not want him to go. However, he leaves for Biratpur without the consent of his wife.

Mangarua Hajam appears in the court of Biratpur. He throws the letter and tries to escape from there. But he is not allowed to escape. King Birat asks him the reason for his arrival in Biratpur. The Barber answers him that he lives in Mahisautha and he has come here to fix the date for 'bridal procession' with the order of Motiram. He says that he has not made any mistake. So, he must be allowed to go. But he is imprisoned.

In the court of Mahisautha, Motiram is making inquiry why the Barber has not returned yet. He promises to go to Biratpur himself along with his sister's son 'Karikanha'. So, he calls Karikanha in the palace. Karikanha comes and asks for the reason he has been called. Motiram explains that Mangarua Hajam has not returned yet and he needs to go himself there to make arrangement for the date to bring his

sister in law in his palace from her father's house. He also reveals that the king of Biratpur is very cruel and he might have imprisoned the Barber. Karikanha reveals that he will swallow king Birat's kingdom if things go wrong.

Motiram together with Karikanha leaves for Biratpur. When they are near to reach there, they are interrupted by grass-cutter women on the way asking for their introduction. Motiram says that they belong to Mahisautha and they are going to Biratpur to fix the date of the 'bridal procession' of the king's daughter. The women start teasing Motiram and putting colors on his face. Seeing his uncle irritated by grass-cutter women, Karikanha becomes very angry and threatens the women that he will beat them if they don't stop teasing his wife. The grass cutter women leave the place saying they will complain the matter with the king of Biratpur.

The king and the ministers are there in the court when the grass cutter women reach there. They appeal to the king that a great misfortune is happening in the kingdom and that two powerful men have attempted to kill them.

King Birat is informed that Motiram has come from Mahisautha to meet him in the palace. The king is not ready for 'bridal procession'. So he takes advice from his ministers what to do if they don't agree with him rather force him to accept the date. The king gives the order to take the Barber out of the prison and send him giving five rupees.

Motiram enters in the court with Karikanha. They bow to the king. Motiram makes inquiry whether the Barber has come or not. The King replies that he has come but he has already returned to Mahisautha. Motiram asks whether he has accepted the date or not. The king says that he has not accepted the date to send his daughter to father in law's house because his daughter is not mature enough.



But Motiram says that he has already fixed the date and that it is not necessary to make any further argument.

In Mahisautha, Salhesh has already arranged for the bridal procession. He comes to Biratpur. Meanwhile, Durga gives a dream to Kushma that the man they promised to marry with is in Biratpur now. So, Kushma and her sisters plan to go there to steal Salhesh. They go there and change Salhesh into parrot and bring him to Sarash Ban, a forest.

Durga gives a dream to Motiram too that Salhesh has already been stolen by Malins and has been taken by them to Sarash Ban. Motiram along with Karikanha goes to Sarash Ban to find Salhesh out. They find the Malins out and tell them to release Salhesh, but they get threatening instead from the Malins that they can be changed into sheep. But, when Karikanha become ready to beat them, they release Salhesh.

When Sahesh, Mortiram and Karikanha approach king Birat, he is not ready for the bridal procession. So they fight with the king's army, defeat them and take Satyabati, daughter of king Birat to Mahisautha.

Salhesh is sleeping with his wife when he is given a dream from Goddess Durga. Durga instructs him to visit king Kuleswor's garden in Pakariya. Durga also tells him that Kuleshwor has got a daughter and she has promised to marry with him. So, Salhesh must visit the garden once, otherwise he will be responsible for the death of Chandravati. Salhesh answers that he should take consent of his family members before he leaves for the place. He goes to take the permission from his family members but no one is ready to let him go. However, Salhesh leaves for Pakariya.

Chandrawati is sleeping when she gets dream from Durga that the man she has promised to marry with is now visiting the garden. So the goddess instructs her to visit the garden quickly. She takes the permission from her father to visit the garden telling a lie that she is going there to collect flowers. With the consent of her father, Chandrawati visits the garden and starts looking for Salhesh. When she meets him, she asks him for his introduction.

Salhesh tells that he is a king of Manisautha and belongs to Dusadh caste. Chandra tells him that her father Kuleshwor can imprison him. However, they are found talking with each other by Kuleshwor and his minister who has been listening to them.

The Minister suggests the King to take Salhesh to the palace and keep him as a gatekeeper because Chuhara, the gatekeeper has already become old. Kuleshwor finds it interesting and takes Salhesh to his palace.

A Farmer comes with complain in the court of Kuleshwor. The farmer charges against Bhatpelua whose oxen have grazed his paddy crops. Bhatpelua is called into the court to face the charge. But he defends himself saying that he has bought chaff from Chuhara while he was feeding king's oxen. The farmer and Bhatpelua are sent out from there and Chuhara is called into the court and he is released from his duty there on. Chuhara asks money for his life long service but the king does not listen to him and orders him to leave the palace. Chuhara leaves the palace but with a vow that he will take revenge on the king for the injustice that has been done to him.

Chuhara is out of the palace and starts praying Durga. Durga appears before him. He asks for her help to steal jewelries from the palace of Kuleshwor. Goddess Durga says that he needs to pray to Ganga because she can only guide him for stealing

things. Chuhara prays Ganga and the Goddess appears before him. Chuhara asks for her help in stealing jewelries from Kuleshwor's palace. Ganga asks him what he will offer her in return if he becomes successful in theft. Chuhara says that he will give sacrifice of one hundred goats once he becomes successful in theft.

Ganga teaches him the art of digging tunnel that he digs from Mokama to Pakariya. Through the tunnel, he enters into the room of Chandra and takes out all the jewelries that she has worn and finally takes out her sari too leaving her naked in her bed. After taking out all the jewelries, he leaves the palace for Mokama.

When Chuhara reaches near Ganga, she asks for the offering but Chuhara assures Ganga that he will give the offerings the other side of the river. So, Ganga gives him the way to go the other side of the river. But once Chuhara goes the other side, he collects some insects and offers them to the river Ganga. Finding herself being cheated, Ganga becomes very angry and curses him that a misfortune will befall on him in near future.

When the princess's attendants go to wake Chandra up, they find her lying naked on her bed. They inform Chandra that she is now naked lying on the bed without any clothes and all of her jewelries have already been stolen.

The attendants go to inform the Minister about the theft. They inform him that all of the Chandras's jewelries have been stolen away. The Minister goes to inform the king about the theft. The king faints when he listens to the story from the Minister. The Minister holds him. The King asks the Minister who two gatekeepers were guarding at that time. He was informed that Salhesh was there at that time. But Salhesh is not ready to accept the blame of stealing Chandras's jewelries. However, he is thought to be the culprit and is kept into the prison.

In the prison, Salhesh starts blaming Durga that has been cheated by her that his family members might have been crying for him. Salhesh asks help from Durga.

Durga gives dream to Kushma that the person she has promised to marry with has been imprisoned in Pakariya. Kushma tells the story to her sisters. She takes the form of a Natin and goes to Pakariya. After asking so many persons, Kushma finally reaches the palace of Kuleshwor for Godna. Kushma explains to Chandrawati that Salhesh who is now imprisoned in the palace is her husband. Chandrawati claims that he has stolen her jewelries. Kushma somehow convinces Chandrawati that Salhesh is innocent.

Chandrawati calls for her father. She tells his father to release Salhesh from prison. But her father shows reluctance to release him as he is held as a thief. However, Chandra insists to release him. The King questions who will bring five quintal of jewelries that has been stolen. Kushma promises to return the jewelries.

Kushma changes herself into a wine seller woman and she goes to Mokka Bazaar. Chuhar Malla has become the king of Mokka. Chuhara's attendant informs him that a beautiful lady has come in Mokka Bazaar. Chuhar Malla goes there along with his attendants and asks her what she is doing there. Kushma replies that she is selling herself after her husband died. Chuhara asks for the cost. She replies it is five quintal jewelries. Chuhara brings jewelries that have been stolen by him from the palace of Kuleshwor. Meanwhile he is caught by Salhesh and is submitted to Kuleshwor. Kushma tells Salhesh that his family members have been waiting for him. Salhesh leaves for Manisautha after greeting her.

### 3.2 Analysis of Story

*Encyclopedia Britannica* counts repetition of certain episodes and motifs as one of the major characteristics of folk literature (456). The stories of Maithili 'Naach' are not exceptions. In stories of Maithili Naach, particularly in 'Salhesh', we find abundant use of formulaic expressions. We find the repeated motifs both on the verbal structure and on the structure of dramatic action.

In 'Salhesh', a basic pattern that runs throughout the dramatic action is problem; a journey undertaken by the hero to solve the problem, the obstacles faced by the hero on the way and finally triumph over the antagonistic forces. In 'Salhesh Naach' we find three distinct plots.

The first is the story of love between Salhesh and Malins. The Malins want to keep Salhesh with them. Salhesh can't live with them because he is already married with Satyabati. The Malins change him into a parrot twice, first while Salhesh is collecting flowers in his garden and second while he is in Biratpur for bridal procession. In the first case, he escapes from the Malins clutch with a promise that he will return after he meets his family members. In the second case, his brother Mortiram threatens the Malins that he will beat them. With this very threat the Malins restore Salhesh's human body again.

The second problem that he has to face is with the king of Biratpur. King Birat is not ready for bridal procession that Salhesh's family wants. King Birat thinks that his daughter is too young to live in his father in law's house. Salhesh's brother Motiram sends a Barber to fix the date but he is captured by the King. Motiram comes himself in the palace of King Birat but he doesn't listen to Motiram's threatening. Motiram wages a war against him wins the war and finally brings the bride home.

The third problem is the problem of Pakariya where Salhesh is put into the service of Kuleshwor, the king of Pakariya. Chuhara steals jewelries of King's daughter but Salhesh is put into the custody as he is thought to be the culprit. Finally, Kushma, his beloved, helps him to capture Chuhara and come out of the prison.

The repetition of motif is evident on verbal structure too. 'Naoch' has got formulaic expressions in almost all uses of language i.e. pleading, threatening and asking questions.

While Kushma expresses her love of Salhesh to her sisters, she uses this formulaic expression:

"Listen! Listen sister my true heart  
I'm pouring my heart to you."

While Salhesh gives his introduction he also uses this very expression.

"Listen! Listen Malin I'm telling you  
I'm telling my heart to you."

While giving instructions to Salhesh to visit the garden of the king of Pakariya, Goddess Durga uses similar type of expressions.

"Listen! Listen my son! Listen to my voice  
Listen to my sacred heart. "

This very type of expression is used by almost all characters while they want to express themselves, while they give factual details and while they give instruction to others.

In 'Salhesh Naach', characters use quite different formulaic expression while pleading. While the barber's wife is urging him not to go to Biratpur, she uses such an expression:

"I'm pleading you my lord, I'm pleading you

I'm pleading you with my both hands joined.

It's only four days that I've been living with you."

Similar type of expression is also used by Malins when they urge Shalesh not to leave them:

"I'm pleading you my lord, I'm pleading you.

I'm pleading you with my both hands joined.

I put all my faith upon you."

Actually Maithili 'Naach' uses a very formulaic expression for pleading, expressing, explaining, suggesting, threatening or asking for introduction. The formulaic expressions vary according to the drama. But we find the use of formulaic expressions in almost all 'Naach'. The linguistic formation of these expressions does not vary according to caste, gender or social position. The expressions do not vary according to the caste, gender or social position. The expressions do not vary with individuality of the character. The formulaic expression used by Kushma is used by Salhesh as well in the similar kind of situation, though they belong to different castes and gender. This very point points to the communal character of folk drama.

*Encyclopedia Britannica* marks out 'violent actions and simple strong emotions' as another characteristic of folk literature. This is true to the stories of 'Naach' as well. The very pattern of reasoning of the character is emotional rather than intellectual. Kushma and her sisters promise to marry with a man whom they have never seen before. Even Chandrawati the daughter of Kuleshwor, has not seen

Salhesh before she promises to marry with him. The Malins change Salhesh into a parrot when he is not ready to go with them. Motiram attacks on Biratpur simply because king Birat is not ready to sent Chandra to her father in law's house.

Kuleshwor, the king of Pakariya, who has already listened to Chandrawati and Salhesh talking about her love for Salhesh, forcefully Keeps Salhesh as her gatekeeper though the does not want any such relationship between them. Salhesh, the king of Mahisautha agrees to be a gatekeeper in the palace of the king of Pakariya only to keep up with the instruction of goddess Durga. Almost all the characters act emotionally than intellectually.

It's not only human beings but also their deities act emotionally in 'Naach'. Goddess Durga instructs Salhesh to visit Pakariya simply because the king of Pakariya has planted a beautiful garden. Ganga, another deity in the drama helps Chuhara in stealing jewelries from the place of Kuleshwor for promise from his side that he will offers hundred and one goats. When Chuhara offers hundred and one insects instead, Ganga curses him.

### **3.3 Naach as a Folk Theatre**

Since 'Naach' exploits folk epics for story, the vary nature of its presentation becomes one of extension many characters, many plots, many events that takes months to complete. For beauty 'Naach' mainly relies on orchestra, songs, dances and poetry. Actions are always supplemented through dialogues.

Ranjan creates atmosphere before the presentation of Naach in this way:

From four o'clock in the evening people started arranging bamboo poles. Some of the people started fixing them in the ground. The loud



speaker was producing the filmy songs along with the Maithili and Bhojpuri folk songs.

First, the bamboo poles were fixed. Then, the bedsteads were arranged. Thereafter, multi-coloured tents were hung. A lot of people were gathered-for making proper arrangements. Some of them were gazing in inquisition what's going to happen. The passing of time was adding to the people's excitement some of the actors were also involved in erecting the stage while the others had already started doing make-up surrounded by the crowd in the make-up room. The actors' facial expression showed that they didn't like the people surrounding them in the make up room. And the leader started muttering. What strange people are there' the actors also need some rest. But who cares! Some want to have a glimpse of Rudal, some Sonma, some Deva, and some Annar- they wanted to see their favourite actors in spite of all the abuses from the manager (49).

### **3.3.1 Stage in Naach**

Naach is performed on a waist high platform. Naach artists make temporary stage that can be removed later on. Mostly, they gather materials for stage making from villagers and place it in an open village square. They collect wooden bedsteads, wooden logs and bamboo, bedsteads and make a stage that face the audience from three sides left, right and front while the upper and back side of the stage is curtained with tent. A closed theater is quite foreign to the common Maithili folk.

We find some permanent stages erected using bricks and cement in some village square. But such stages are open from all directions and need to be tented before the performance. The dressing room is a few meters away from the stage.

The principal characters wear strong colorful dresses while the minor characters have their normal day to day life dresses. A King's costumes follow the Mugul style. The tunic is tight at the waist and flares below. The pajamas are narrow at the calves and bulge at the thighs. The queens appear in sari and blouse that got colorful pattern and linings them over. The Brahmin is dressed in a thin red bordered white dhoti. The sacred thread (Janiyau) runs from over his left shoulder across his bare chest down to his waist at the night. A crimson spot is there at the third eye center. The characters of humbler social status as a washer man, a farmer a barber, a merchant or a gardener appears in their day to day life dresses.

The actors use kajal on their eye-brows and red colored powder on their eye-lids. They use cream colored powder on their faces. Kings and chiefs have exaggerated moustaches and eyebrows and faint radish paint over their faces.

### **3.3.2 Music and Dance**

Music and dance are inseparable companions of Maithili folk drama. While discussing about Southeast Asian theatre, James R. Bradon writes, "Music sets a tone and an atmosphere within which a performance is created. It offers possibilities unrivaled by the spoken word for conveying and amplifying emotional states" (15).

‘Naach’ for its story and tune depends on the existing folk epic. The difference in between the two ‘Naaches’ does not lie in the dresses, costumes, dance or the orchestra but in the tune and the story. The tune of Salhesh is quite different from that of 'Birijbhar' Common Maithili people can easily identify a ‘Naach’ through tune.

We approach the over all character of 'Naach' through the consideration of folk stage. Shows are performed on temporarily created stages. Three sides of stage were generally open to the public and large crowd gathered as many as ten thousand spectators by some accounts. In the absence of electricity and amplification, the foremost demand was that the music and voices of actor singers be audible. Hearing was very more important than seeing because sight lines would have been abstracted for many in the throng. Probably for these reasons, 'Naach', like other traditional theatres favored instruments with piercing timbers. The core of 'Naach' ensemble consisted of a high pitch imported clarinet and the rhythm is maintained by the booming Nagaras, a kettledrum played with sticks supported by a Dholak or harmonium.

In 'Naach', singing is extremely important. It is considered as the most important dramatic element. Sixty to seventy percent of performance time may be devoted to singing. As with the instruments, the singing of the actors has to be very loud and project to the crowds. To reach this goal, they cultivate open throated vocal style. Though, electric amplifiers are used nowadays, they have not brought any sort of change in their singing style.

Folk songs also exist outside the folk theatre that marks the different occasions of Maithili culture life. For example 'Sohar' is sung on the occasion of the birth of a baby and 'Samdaun' is sung when a daughter leaves to settle in her husband's house. 'Sohar' and 'Samdaun' vary in their tune. But such is not the case in the tune of 'Naach'. The actors perform on the same tune at the birth of a baby and at the death of a beloved one. The difference is brought into light through action and narrative.

According to Natyasastra, a dance has a meaning or several meanings. This is true to the classical indo- Nepalese dance or Bharatnatyam. But this is not true to

‘Naach’. In ‘Naach’, meanings are not associated with finger movements or hand movements. The movements of the actor's limbs are just for entertainment. The dance of ‘Naach’ comprises a handful of hands movements, legs movements and hip movements. These movements are much or less similar in almost all Naaches. Most of the time their hands are seen in a posture of addressing directly to the audience. Still the dance of Naach appeals to the sense of the audience.

### **3.3.3 Actions on Stage**

‘Naach’ presents minimal action on stage. They rather depend on the vivid description of their poetry. ‘Naach’ focuses more to tell the story than to present the action. Communication is mostly verbal. If Salhesh has to go to take bath, he moves in a circle on the stage singing a song:

“Salhesh starts his journey from Mahisautha.

It has already been noon.

He reaches at Manik Dah within minute.

He keeps his loin cloth on the edge of the lake.

He starts taking bath in the lake.”

It's the dialogue that carries time, space and action.

### **3.3.4 Actors**

Most of the actors are artisans. They belong to the lower strata of society. They come from different occupations like farming, shoemaking, and they get very low wages for acting throughout the night from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 per night. And they take acting or dancing or singing as hobby rather than profession. While enquiring why they don't adopt acting as profession, they all seem to be pessimistic,

because of low wages they get from it and the performances are quite occasional. Then, why do they participate in acting? Because it's a matter of interest than money. The job, however, is not a respectable one. Though they are appreciated sometimes for their performance, they do not enjoy any respect and value for their art.

Ranjan explains the condition of an artist in Maithili 'Naach ' in this way:

Do you know why the manager's face is gloomy? "Because Ram Sinehi has not arrived yet," he replied before the listener could be able to answer. The other gang of five to six people, one of them guessed, "How can Ram Sinehi come? He is suffering from typhoid and is lying in bed for a month, unable to eat anything."

Something else in another place, "Why should he come? The Naach Company is popular due to Ram Sinehi but the manager does not take care of him. He does not pay him well". "The manager has become mad", other remarked, "The manager was ploughing others' field previously; but now see, he has got his own oxen to plough and a buffalo for milk. Not only that, he has also bought a piece of land in Janakpur. And it's all due to Ram Sinehi. But what did he get? A goat and some silver pots. He doesn't have even his own land. He works in others' farmland. (52)

In 'Naach', it's the man who impersonate woman on the stage. It's thought to be improper for women to dance on the stage. Only prostitutes dance on the stage, a respectable woman doesn't - this is the conception of a common Maithili folk.

### 3.4 Context

In determining the very nature of a performance, context plays a vital role. 'Naach' reflects the very essence of Maithili culture. While talking about the role of context, Kapila Vastysyan writes, "It is useful to bear in mind that while genres can be divided on the basis of content and form, they can also be classified in terms of the particular communities who have been the repositories of particular forms."

Context plays a vital role particularly in a performative genre. Maithili 'Naach' sheds some light on Maithili culture and life particularly when it focuses on male female relationship, and the distribution of power among different characters.

As Mahendra Malingia points out 'Naach' bears both the time of history and time of performance. The gap of past and present can be filled by the total transformation of the historical material. Sometimes character on the stage speaks more of the actors than the historical hero. Such a transformation of character can be seen in the presentation of 'Salhesh Naach'.

Salhesh, the hero of 'Salhesh Naach', is called 'Surma Salhesh'. The word 'Surma' connotes powerful, courageous and heroic. But the characters' action on the stage reveals something else. Salhesh, in spite of being the hero of Salhesh Naach, is not heroic at all. In the three journeys made by Salhesh, its other characters who are far more heroic than Salhesh. He seems to be quite timid before the Malins when he is turned into a parrot. He can not respond their love with love as he is already tied with the thread of marriage. It's the Motiram who wages war against the king Birat and brings the bride home.

Salhesh can easily be captured and put into the service of a gatekeeper though he is a king. He is too impotent to work for his safety. It's Kushma, his beloved who

helps him and gives him victory over Chuhra. In the story of pakariya, it's Kushma who is the real hero and Salhesh seems just a helping hand to her.

Salhesh is a king but on the stage he does not behave like a king. He is a common man in the guise of a king on the stage. He lacks the kingly manner when he pleads the Malins to restore his human body. He lacks the kingly wit when he is kept into service as a gatekeeper in the court of Pakariya and when he is put into the prison for stealing jewelries from the palace. Actually, Salhesh is a common man in the guise of a king on the stage.

Actually, 'Naach' is more a property of actors than a property of history or myth. 'Naach' is performed by the actors from poor economic background. Acting is profane than prestigious in Maithili society. Unheroism of the hero undergoes beneath all the heroic deeds of Salhesh.

'Salhesh Naach' as product of Maithil society sheds light of different aspects of it. As the story unfolds we come to understand male female relationship, the relationship between people and their deity, the role of caste system and the institution of marriage in Maithili society.

A conflict between love and marriage underlies the story of Salhesh. Salhesh is loved by many women at the same time. Kushma and her sisters want to live with Salhesh. Chandrawati the princess of Pakariya, also has also fallen of in love with Salhesh.

An affair outside the institution of marriage is not sinful for a landlord. But society always wants a respect for the institution of marriage. Salhesh marries Satyabati when he is a small child and the marriage is arranged by his family members. Salhesh, though loved by many women, is always faithful for that

institution. He never accepts either the Malins or Chandrawati. The hero, thus, meets the expectation of the common Maithili folk.

In Maithil society, particularly in so-called lower caste, child marriage is still prevalent children are married when they are six or seven years old. But the bride lives with her husband only when they become mature to live together. Till then, the bride lives in her father's house. When they become mature, the bridegroom's father send his barber to the bride's family to fix the date for 'bridal procession' In taking the decision of fixing the date, the bridegroom's family has always got the upper hand. When Kuleshwor seems reluctant to fix the date of bridal procession, Motiram attacks him, gets victory over him and thus becomes liable enough to put his decision over Kuleshwor. In Maithil society, the bridegroom's family does not have to wage war against the bride's family. The tradition itself provides them the opportunity of it.

'Salhesh Naach' also highlights Maithil people's relationship with their deities. Their deities are not omnipotent or omnipresent. They are rather anthropomorphic gods and goddesses who help the people when they need them. These deities have got their own limitations and specific qualities. We can understand the limitation of Durga when she tells Chuhara to take help from Ganga for learning the art of theft.

People ask their deities to fulfill their wishes. The deities want offerings instead. And sometimes, they can be cheated as well. Chuhara, after he becomes successful in stealing jewelries from the palace of Pakariya, gives sacrifice of hundred and one insects instead of hundred and one insects instead of hundred and one goats that he has promised to Ganga.

After observing Naach, we can also understand the complications and difficulties of deities. Why does Durga send Salhesh to Pakariya? The answer is: to



fulfill the wishes of Salhesh starts. And finally what happens to the Chandrawati? Does she be able to married with Salhesh? Certainly not. Salhesh returns to his own family. However, Durga helps Salhesh to come out of the prison. Thus, we find the role of deities in both ways, in creating the difficulties and solving them.

Maithil society is not a folk society as small, isolated, own literate and homogeneous' where there is not much division of labours as the term folk society is defined. It is like as Kapila Vastasyayan defines the organized village society whose origin can be linked with vedic concept of grama and where music, dance and dram have been into agricultural function and are integral to the daily and annual routines of the peasant and where drama contains the indigenous myths and legends of the oral tradition (13).

'Naach' presents a panoramic view of life but this life that is social and cultural. It's Maithil culture that is presented through singing, acting and dancing. In 'Naach', the story reflects the common people's life and the distribution of power in the difference layers of Maithil society.

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

Maithili drama has got two powerful traditions. The first is the classical Maithili drama that developed into the courts of kings of Mithila, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. These dramas have extensively been studied by the researchers and the scholars alike and they have primarily focused on this very tradition of drama that has got its written form. But no less powerful is the tradition of 'Naach' in Mithila region, a form of folk drama that developed and took its shape among the common Maithili folk. This form has always been discarded by the scholars whose studies concern the written form, not the oral.

Maithili 'Naach' has remained out of many of the scholar's attention and the reasons are numerous. First of all, Maithili 'Naach' lacks a clear identity. Mithila region falls into the parts of two different countries: India and Nepal. Indian scholars, though they have studied the written tradition of Maithili theatre, they have not included 'Naach', the oral tradition of Maithili theatre in their studies. Further more, this very tradition of drama has always remained out of touch for Nepali scholars. But the scholars can't exclude the written tradition because it has got a powerful presence in the courts of Malla Kings. So, Nepali scholars always leave space for it. Moreover, the tradition of written Maithili theatre has a powerful impact on 'Ankiya Naat' of Asham. As a result, Indian scholars have to include the tradition within their scope of study. But the oral traditional has been left behind.

In the context of Nepal, Maithili theatre itself is struggling for its identity. Pointing out towards the controversy behind the use of the term 'Nepali Theatre', Rijal writes:

Nepal is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. The term 'Nepali Theatre' refers to the different theatrical traditions and activities spread throughout the country. 'Nepali Drama and Theatre' does not only include the dramas written and performed in Nepali language. Dramas have also been written in Maithili and Newari language like those written in Nepali. (91)

When Maithili Theatre itself lacks a clear identity, it's difficult to say anything about the less studied Maithili 'Naach' and its clear definition and boundary line.

Maithili oral theatre, thus, lacks researches and studies for being Maithili and oral at the same time. Furthermore, it has also been disregarded because it's a theatre of marginalized so-called lower castes Maithili people and where language is encoded with cultural values and ethics of marginalized people.

The tradition of Maithili 'Naach', however, has proved itself a powerful cultural force. First of all, it has worked preserving the hundreds of folk lore and folk epics that might have been lost. By reviving those epics in drama, it has preserved them that might have been lost otherwise. Second, it communicates the ethics of common Maithili folk, particularly the lower caste people. Third, it has been inspiration for many playwrights. The plays of Mahendra Malangia, as I have observed have always included the elements from folk theatre. In most of their presentations, his plays start with a prayer that he has collected from the tradition of folk drama. Finally, 'Naach' is a form of entertainment that has been entertaining the common people by including the different ingredients like dance, music and story.

Maithili 'Naach' is popular in Mithila region. However, it's losing its popularity and there are numerous reasons for that. First, it's a kind of art that has

been developed to entertain the people involved in agriculture. But people are losing their interest in agriculture. Moreover, people don't find enough time to watch the drama throughout the night for months. Second is the less attention that the form of art has got from the scholars. This form of art is regarded as a sign of 'backwardness'. As a result, the artists involved in this performative art are losing their interest. Furthermore, the electronic media has replaced the common people's interest in the traditional form of art.

However, 'Naach' has still got a prominent form of theatre in Mithila region. It occupies major percentage of the total theatrical performances in the regions. Still there are more than fifty 'Naach' companies active in the region that shows their performance time to time.

Furthermore, we should not forget that 'Naach' is the only form of theatre that has got a professional status though in a limited sense. In Naach, an artist work for money and manager invest to get economic return and on organizer spend for good performance.

Dhirendra Premarshi finds the past of Maithili Theatre and drama to be glorious. I find the present too. It is necessary to discuss and analyze the powerful oral tradition of Maithili drama. Till we discard the oral tradition of Maithili theatre and its prominent role in Maithili dramaturgy, we will confine the present of Maithili theatre within a few performances of Janakpur centered institutions for Drama like MINAPA and Akriti. What is necessary is to redraw the boundary of Maithili theatre and drama again including the oral tradition and its various aspects in Maithili cultural life.

On the national level, the traditional Maithili court theatre and the Modern Maithili Theatre has already made its identity. However, 'Naach' is still unknown and unrecognized for Nepali audience. I agree with Siv Rijal when he writes:

Whether its modern theatre, folk theatre or theatre on street, they are parts of performative art. If we observe and analyze Nepali Theatre from this very perspective, we find the performance tradition of Nepal to be very rich but if we only regard dramas written in Nepali language as Nepali Theatre, we felt ourselves excluded from a big treasure of performative Art of Nepal. (91)

Maithili 'Naach' has yet to create its identity on both regional and national level. I conclude that 'Naach' needs to be re-interpreted in the present political, social and cultural context of Nepal in general and Mithilanchal in particular. As a folk form of performing art/drama it needs to be given greater attention. Its practicalities must be given proper recognition.

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