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Performing Trauma in Gaijatra Festival

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This thesis entitled “Performing Trauma in Gaijatra Festival” submitted to the Central Department of English, M.Phil. Programme, Tribhuvan University by Jiva Nath Lamsal, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This dissertation unravels the performance of trauma in Gaijatra festival. This research project proposes that what the Newars of the Kathmandu valley collectively commemorate as Gai Jatra festival is a kind of compulsive repetition that acts out the trauma of the loss of their departed dear ones. Through this festival they engage in different ritualistic performances in an attempt to work through their traumas. The commemoration is meant for not only remembering the traumas but also coping with the present and for the future survival. This research work also foregrounds the fact that collective memory, which Gaijatra festival is, is socially framed since social groups determine what is memorable and how it will be remembered. The contention is that social remembering is a performative codification of trauma which help the Newar community come to terms with familial bereavement.

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Chapter I: Performing Trauma

The last two decades have been a period in which trauma as an object of inquiry has moved beyond the parameters of clinical study to become a prevalent preoccupation, if not a fetish, among theorists, literary and cultural critics. It has even become an obsession, an occasion for rash amalgamations or confluences. The idea that contemporary culture, or even all history, is essentially traumatic or that everyone in the post-Holocaust context is a survivor can be taken as an example of this obsession on trauma. So, the problem of trauma has become crucial in modern thought in general and especially prominent in post-World War II thought bearing on the present and the foreseeable future. Trauma and its symptomatic aftermath pose particularly acute problems for historical representation and understanding. The theoretical and literary-critical attempts to come to terms with trauma as well as the post traumatic testimonies-- notably Holocaust testimonies-- have assumed the crucial role in recent thought and writing. That is why to elucidate trauma and its aftereffects in culture and in people, the critics and the theorists have adapted psychoanalytical concepts to historical analysis as well as socio-cultural and political critique.

In an attempt to answer the question of why, at this moment, trauma should attract such attention and become a pivotal subject connecting so many disciplines, and to clarify the relevance of trauma theory today, James Berger writes:

“Trauma” is not simply another word for disaster. The idea of catastrophe as trauma provides a method for interpretation, for it

posits that the effect of an event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not only obviously associated with the event [...]. In its emphasis on the retrospective reconstruction of the traumatic event (for the event cannot be comprehended when it occurs), a traumatic analysis is both constructivist and empirical. It pays the closest attention to the representational means through which an event is remembered and yet retains the importance of the event itself, the thing that did happen. (573)

Thus, a concept of trauma can be of great value in the study of history and historical narrative, and also of narrative in general, as the verbal representation of temporality. The idea of trauma also allows for an interpretation of cultural systems- -of the growths, wounds, scars on a social body, and its compulsive, repeated actions. Trauma is a medical term that refers to a serious bodily injury or shock from an accident or external act of violence. Traditionally understood, trauma (from the Greek word for ‘wound’) centers on an injury or disturbances and arises from some kind of blow to the body, but more often nowadays to the mind. With the publication of three important new books on the psychoanalytic concept of trauma-*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* by Cathy Caruth; *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* by Dominick LaCapra; and *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* by Kali Tal- the term ‘trauma’ has been used in a wide variety of disciplines as it intersects with literature, literary theory, historiography, and contemporary culture.

Trauma studies have become central within both the humanities and the politics of social movements. In these fields, Freud's notion of memory work and his idea of mourning as a form of working through which is necessary in the process of acceptance of traumatic memories are conceptualized as types of reconciliation with the loss of objects of love. According to the culturalist version of psychoanalysis, nations -- like individuals -- must work through grief and trauma. Giving voice to one's traumatic past and recognizing it as part of one's history is a necessary step in escaping from patterns of suffering. Beerendra Pandey remarks that "one way by which the dominant culture codifies its trauma is by domesticating the unspeakable" (130). The chasm between the unspeakable past and the favourable present makes traumatic memory functions as a cultural-political force, the significance of which lies in solidifying the notions of nationhood or community. As Jenny Edkins remarks, nationhood as a form of political community in contemporary society "produces and is produced by the social practices of traumatic memory" (qtd. In Beerendra Pandey 130). Such a "cultural-political codification of trauma", Pandey further writes, "gives rise to essentialized version of identity politics, the exploration of which exposes the performative nature of testimony. The performativity of testimony, apart from normalizing the traumatic memory, may conversely overplay it by cooking up some even more unspeakable atrocities" (130). In both case the goal is to raise the question of identity in order to highlight the ways through which surrender to such politics can be avoided. It will be in the fitness of the things to begin a survey of trauma theory with reference to Cathy Caruth to whom goes the credit

for pioneering the theory.

Cathy Caruth is a leading exponent of the poststructuralist approach to psychic trauma. She incorporates the neurobiology of trauma into her work in accordance with the views of the physician Bessel Van der Kolk's views according to which massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporarily delayed. Instead, there occurs an "undistorted material, and the literal registration of the traumatic event that, dissociated from normal mental process of cognition, cannot be known or represented but returns belatedly in the form of 'flashbacks, traumatic nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (Leys 266). Caruth brings the lesson of deconstruction to bear on a reflection about the conceptual status of trauma in Freudian psychoanalysis, while acknowledging the function of trauma as a figure that illuminates the relations and deferrals organizing signification and knowledge in a wide range of texts. For Caruth trauma registers itself as a belated shock which leads to the constructedness of subject's history.

The publication of Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* in 1996 marked the years 1997 through 1999 as something of an apex in the preoccupation with trauma among literary and cultural critics. Caruth's name has become a household word for literary critics who are interested in questions of trauma. In its general definition, Caruth describes trauma as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena: "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of

sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations, and other repetitive phenomena (11). Referring to the paradoxical and enigmatic nature of trauma, Caruth writes:

[...] trauma seems to be much more than pathology, or the simple illness of the wounded psyche: it is always the story of the wound that cries out, that addresses in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our every actions and our language. (5)

Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other repetitive phenomena. Trauma, as Caruth further argues, unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience. The original traumatic event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. Thus to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished. The traumatized carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they can not entirely possess.

Cathy Caruth participates in a general postmodernist tendency to appropriate psychoanalysis for the discussion of the trauma of the Holocaust and the post-holocaust condition. However, Caruth rejects Freud's castration model and the associated concepts of repression and unconscious symbolic meaning. What replaces the concept of castration and repression for Caruth is the notions of the traumatic accident and of a latency that inheres in the traumatic experience. Specifically, she returns to the railway accident as the archetype of modern theorizations of trauma and shock and to the connected idea of a temporal delay that intervenes between the fright and the subsequent appearance of the traumatic symptoms. What Caruth emphasizes is the idea that traumatic experience is defined by temporal unlocatability; a temporal unlocatability that is central to her notions of trauma as necessarily implicating others. But when she goes on to define repetition in terms of belated, literal and unmediated return of the traumatic event, she seems to define trauma in more traditional causal terms, as if trauma is involved a linear determinism or direct action of the past on the present. In short, Caruth calls for a radical reconfiguration of psychoanalysis in which the traumatic nightmare is defined as an "unclaimed experience" -- as a literal, nonsymbolic and non-representational memory of the traumatic event. Caruth argues that trauma can be experienced in at least two ways: as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experience and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others. Such a dual experience of trauma renders traumatic testimony a political act.

In States of Trauma: Gender and Violence in South Asia, Piya Chatterjee

and company make the point that activist and scholarly work on injury and trauma often insists on testimony as an ethical and therapeutic imperative. And yet, work after work demonstrates that the logic of witnessing and testimonial is far from straightforward. Most famously and persuasively, Cathy Caruth insists that knowledge and trauma exist in a difficult relationship with each other, in a complete relation between knowing and not knowing. Part of trauma's character is its unassimilated nature; trauma generally registers as trauma not at the moment itself of the traumatic event but belatedly and retrospectively. But even as it troubles any desire for legibility or for identification and facile sympathy, it demands witnessing as an ethical obligation can be easily fulfilled (13). Caruth further goes on to argue that the integration of traumatic recall into a stable, comprehensible story might end up losing the traumatic event's force and precision, precisely what can be conveyed in speech and what survivors are reluctant to give up. Rather than enable what Caruth calls "the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience to emerge, the narrative cure can domesticate and discipline there, and eventually lose the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding" (254).

Similarly in another book edited by Cathy Caruth entitled *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, she writes that because traumatic events are unbearable in their horror and intensity, they often exist as memories that are not immediately recognizable as truth. Such experiences are best understood not only through the straightforward acquisition of facts but through a process of discovering where and why conscious understanding and memory fail. Literature, according to

Cathy Caruth and others, opens a window on traumatic experience because it teaches readers to listen to what can be told only in indirect and surprising ways. Sociology, film, and political activism can also provide new ways of thinking about and responding to the experience of trauma. In her introduction of the second part of the book "Recapturing the Past", Cathy Caruth writes that "at the heart of this volume is the encounter with a peculiar kind of historical phenomenon -- what has come to be called "post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD) -- in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them" (82). This singular extends beyond the bounds of a marginal pathology and has become a central characteristic of the survivor experience of our time. Yet what is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent reenactments of the past do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred. Trauma, that is, does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned.

Jill Bennett, however, diverges from Caruth's deconstructive-psychoanalytic concept of trauma when she asserts that writers from Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman to Antjie Krog have, in fact, "usurp[ed] the position of trauma victim -- of appropriating testimony and treating trauma as an available or 'unclaimed' experience [...] when, in fact, its ownership is deeply contested. Such writers often make a point of foregrounding self-reflexivity" (8). Bennett mentions that if the concept of trauma long ago entered the popular vernacular

through the discourse of self-help manuals and television talk shows, it was generalized to an unprecedented degree after 9/11. The term “trauma” came to encompass a range of responses, including those that might more accurately be described as anxiety, shock, fear, sympathy, compassion, and so on. But at the same time, for many secondary witnesses -- those affected by the tragedy, but not directly involved -- the symptomology of trauma offered a means to articulate an effective response and also to identify as a victim -- even at some remove from the locus of the attack.

So trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back. The human history at work here is an odd one, but it draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back. The human chemistry at work here is an odd one, but it has been noted many times before: estrangement becomes the basis for communality, as if persons without homes or citizenship or any other niche in the larger order of things were invited to gather in a quarter set aside for the disfranchised, a ghetto for the unattached.

Indeed, it can happen that otherwise unconnected persons who share a traumatic experience seek one another out and develop a form of fellowship on the strength of that common tie. Veterans haunted by dark memories of Vietnam, for example, or adults who cannot come to terms with childhood abuse sometimes gather into groups for reasons not unlike the Holocaust couple cited earlier: they know one another in ways that the most intimate of friends never will, and for that reason they can supply a human context and a kind of emotional solvent in which

the work of recovery can begin. It is a gathering of the wounded. For the most part, though, trauma damages the texture of community, there are at least two senses in which one can say that a community -- as distinct from the people who constitute it -- has become traumatized. A distinction needs to be made between individual trauma and collective trauma. To quote Erikson in this regard:

By individual trauma, I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively [...] The] Buffalo Creek survivors experienced precisely that. They suffered deep shock as a result of their exposure to death and devastation, and, as so often happens in catastrophes of this magnitude, they withdrew into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone. (Erikson qtd. in Caruth 153-54).

By collective trauma, on the other hand, Erikson means a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with trauma. But "it is a form of shock all the same; a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. [...] 'I' continue to exist, though damaged and may be even permanently changed. 'You' continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But "we" no longer exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no

longer exist as a connected pair or linked cells in a larger communal body”
(Caruth 154).

Traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its prevailing mood and temper, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, govern the way its members relate to one another. The point to be made here is not that calamity serves to strengthen the bonds linking people together - - it does not, most of the time - - but that the shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a source of kinship. So, communal trauma can take two forms, either alone or in combination: damage to the tissues that hold human groups intact, and the creation of social climates, communal moods, that come to dominate a group’s spirit.

Trauma, therefore, should not just be understood as a somewhat lonely and isolated business simply because the persons who experience it so often drift away from the everyday moods and understandings that govern social life. What must be kept in mind is that the drifting away is accompanied by revised views of the world that, in their turn, become the basis for communality.

In her seminal work on trauma titled *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Kali Tal deviates from the approach of Cathy Caruth and her followers. Hostile to psychoanalysis, Tal bases her views of trauma on the intersection of cognitive psychology with feminist politics that identifies strongly with the testimonies of rape and incest survivors. She shows a keen awareness of systematic violence against women and a sense of how traumatic literature might produce social change. Tal’s main contention is with the social appropriations of

individual testimonies. The literature of trauma consists only of the writings of victims and survivors of trauma. Consequently, writers like James Berger argue, we must be wary of how others interpret the survivors' accounts, especially when those are transformed into sacred texts (as with Holocaust testimony), mythic supports for some vision of national identity (as with Vietnam literature), or medical cases, as happens with all these discourses, but especially with experience of incest survivors (508). "Literature of trauma", writes Tal "is defined by the identity of its author [...]. The works of the critics of the literature of trauma are both to identify and explicate literatures by members of survivor groups and to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experience" (17-18).

Tal's hostility to psychoanalysis is by virtue of the fact that for her it is one of the chief cultural mechanisms that appropriates and codifies accounts of trauma, and that it is itself inevitably a discipline that reinforces social practice of domination under the guise of therapy. Tal agrees with Monique Wittig's characterization of psychoanalysis as a 'cruel contract, which constrains a human being to display his/her misery to an oppressor who is directly responsible for it, who exploits her/him economically, politically, ideologically and whose interpretation reduces this misery to a few figures of speech' (57). Testimony, for Tal, must be as nearly as possible unmediated and uninterpreted. Therapy should consist of survivors talking with each other and speaking out to a wider audience, and its goal should be political account of trauma. However, her opposition to all interpretive "appropriations" prevents her from seeing trauma in broader social

and historical forms. Tal has no sense of a traumatic return of the repressed, of widespread cultural systems and fetishes, of the role of trauma in ideology. As a result, her political diagnosis seems simplistic: essentially that men are systematically injuring and dominating women and women should rise up and stop them.

Moreover, in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Kali Tal describes the relationships between individual trauma and cultural interpretation, using as its focus the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and the phenomenon of sexualized violence against women and children. Survivors of these traumas constitute themselves as unique communities and bear witness to their experiences both privately and publicly. Survivor-authors write a "literature of trauma" -- born of the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it real to the victim, the community and to the larger public. Tal's brilliant idea is that survivors of trauma create a literature of hurt that contributes to the dominant culture's self-understanding. She makes us aware that personal narratives about traumatic experiences -- whether they come from Holocaust survivors or troubled Vietnam veterans or victims of incest and other forms of sexual assault -- threaten the larger society because they reveal power relationships and social contradictions. In this book, Tal makes important contributions to our understanding of cultural politics.

Like Caruth, Dominick LaCapra's theory of trauma is also inflected with psychoanalysis: the return of the repressed; acting out versus working through; and the dynamics of transference. LaCapra argues that a traumatic historical

event tends first to be repressed and then to return in forms of compulsive repetition. In his seminal work on trauma entitled *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory and Trauma*, LaCapra intervenes in and clarifies some of the recent public controversies regarding the Holocaust representation like the German “historians’ debate” and the de Man and Heidegger affairs; and elaborates a theory of historical trauma and its transmission. He regards the de Man and Heidegger controversies as symptomatic return of the repressed. LaCapra is concerned primarily with the return of the repressed as a discourse rather than with the physical returns such as the genocidal repetitions in Cambodia and Bosnia. LaCapra wants to create a position that avoids both redemptive narrative and sublime action out. He sets out to describe a way to work through trauma that does not “deny the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and aporia” but avoids becoming “compulsively fixated” (193). It’s a very thin line, for LaCapra acknowledges a certain value in acting out. If there is no acting out at all, no repetition of the traumatic disruption, the resulting account of the historical trauma will be that teleological, redemptive fetishizing that denies the trauma’s reality.

The most pervasive of LaCapra’s concerns is transference. The failure to come to terms with the discursive returns of some traumatic event usually signals the failure to recognize one’s own emotional and ideological investments in the event and its representation. Transference in psychoanalysis is itself a return of the repressed, or rather, as James Burger argues, a more conscious summoning of the repressed; transference repeats or acts out a past event or relationship in a

new, therapeutic setting that allows for critical evaluation and change.

Transference is the occasion for the working through the traumatic symptom. It is imperative therefore to recognize the symptom and the trauma as the one's own, to acknowledge that the trauma still is active and that one is implicated in its destructive effects. The failure of German nationalist historians and of the defenders of de Man and Heidegger, their constructions of various redemptive narratives, LaCapra argues, ultimately is a failure to recognize their transference relations to their objects.

LaCapra describes two important implications of his view of historical trauma. First, trauma provides a method for rethinking postmodern and poststructuralist theories in a clear historical context. As LaCapra suggests, “the postmodern and the post-Holocaust become mutually intertwined issues that are best addressed in relation to each other” (188). This relation would include a new, traumatic understanding of what he calls “the near fixation on the sublime or the almost obsessive preoccupation with loss, aporia, dispossession, and deferred meaning” (xi). Secondly, LaCapra provides an original rethinking of the debates over the literary canon, suggesting that a canonical text should not help permanently install an ideological order but should, rather, and “help one to foreground ideological problems and to work through them critically” (25). Each text would be, in effect, a site of trauma with which the reader would have to engage.

Trauma, writes LaCapra in his book *Writing History Writing History*, is:

A disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered. The study of traumatic events poses especially difficult problems in representation and writing both for research and for any dialogic exchange with the past which acknowledges the claims it makes on people and relates it to the present and future. Being responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims, implies not the appropriation of their experience but what I would call empathetic unsettlement, which should have stylistic effects or, broadly, effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or rules of method. (41)

The question is whether historiography in its own way may help not speciously to heal but to come to terms with the wounds and scars of the past. Such a coming-to-terms would seek knowledge whose truth claims are not one-dimensionally objectifying or narrowly cognitive but involve affect and may empathetically expose the self to an unsettlement, if not a secondary trauma. LaCapra proposes writing trauma through an empathetic unsettlement that allows the historian to express empathy without confusing past and present, loss and absence, or one's own experience with that of the other.

LaCapra also considers aesthetic works that perform trauma without necessarily succumbing to melancholic excess. His insistence on the distinction between working through and acting out trauma, however, is far from dogmatic.

Indeed, he admits that working through is itself a process that may never entirely transcend acting out and that, even in the best of circumstances is never achieved once and for all (144-9). In this vein, literary criticism takes on a special role of “analyzing and giving voice to the past” (186). The most intriguing forms of analysis take the empathic risk of probing trauma without losing the differentiating frame “of an affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other (213-214). LaCapra is not insensitive to the problem of where exactly to locate this fine line between mourning and melancholy, and he does not presume to police the distinction in aesthetic criticism. Instead, he devotes his conclusion to exploring the interplay between performative and analytic modes of literary reading in a highly nuanced consideration of Cathy Caruth’s traumatic writing , which remains in many ways exemplary of the kind of “moving rendition” of empathetic critique LaCapra proposes (184).

Whether Caruth, Tal or LaCapra, the theorization of trauma insistently points towards its cultural contours. This direction of trauma theory has given Jeffrey Alexander the clue to a theory of cultural trauma which, according to him, is “a tear in the social fabric” -- a hole which the victims try to sew up with a memory that is socially constructed and is historically rooted collective memory which is aimed at creating social solidarity in the present (1).

Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma draws on ideas of Emile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs according to whom memory is collective in that it is supra-individual, and individual memory is conceived in relation to a group, be

this geographical, positional, ideological, political, or generationally based. In Halbwachs' classical account, memory is always group memory, both because the individual is derivative of some collectivity, family, and community, and also because a group is solidified and becomes aware of itself through continuous reflection upon and recreation of a distinctive, shared memory. Individual identity is said to be negotiated within this collectively shared past. Thus, while there is always a unique, biographical memory to draw upon, it is described as always rooted in a collective history. This collective memory provides the individuals with a cognitive map within which to orient present behavior. From this perspective, collective memory is a social necessity; neither an individual nor a society can do without it. As Bernhard Giessen points out, collective memory provides both individual and society with a temporal map, unifying a nation or community through time as well as space. Collective memory specifies the temporal parameters of past and future, where we are going, and also why we are here now. With the narrative provided by this collective memory individual identities are shaped as experiential frameworks formed out of, as they are embedded within, narratives of past, present, and future.

According to P. Connerton, the body is the main container of habitual memory because the past is passed on to us in practices of the body or in the ways of doing and being (qtd. in Misztal 80). The non-verbal articulation of memory can be seen as a practice of representation that enacts and gives substances to the discourse of collective memory. If "there is such a thing as social memory [...]" we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies' because commemorative

rituals are a means of transmitting social memory” (80). While examining the similarities and differences between commemorative rituals and other rituals (religious rituals), Connerton discovered that commemorative ceremonies function effectively as mnemonic devices because of their formalism and performativity, two features that share with other rituals. Moreover, commemorative ceremonies are of cardinal importance for communal memory because of their ritual re-enactment of persons or events from the past. If therefore, commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they performative, we should examine bodily automatism and habitual enacting: the performativeness of rituals, seen as encoded in set postures, gestures and movements, send a simple and clear message; “One kneels on doesn’t kneel” and to kneel in subordination is not to “state subordination, nor is it just to communicate a message of submission. To kneel in subordination is to display it through the visible, present substance of the body” (Connerton qtd. in Myszal 80). Bodily practices of a culturally specific kind entail a combination and distinction. So, we preserve versions of the past not only by representing it to ourselves in words or through storing and retrieving information, but also through commemorative ceremonies, in which we re-enact an image of the past through memorized culturally specific postures, gestures and practices.

Collective memory cannibalizes on the recollections of a shared past that are retained by members of a group, large or small, that experienced it and passed on either in an ongoing process of what might be called public commemoration, in which officially sanctioned rituals are engaged to establish a shared past, or

through discourses more specific to a particular group or collective. This socially constructed, historically rooted collective memory functions to create social solidarity in the present. A collectively imagined past is crucial for the unity, while a shared past is essential element for the reconstruction of social solidarity. The function of remembering is not to transform the past but to promote a commitment to the group by symbolizing its values and aspirations. The modern society refashions its past in order to further some present political objective. Collective memory, being both a shared image of a past and the reflection of the social identity of the group that framed it, views events from a single committed perspective and thus ensures solidarity and continuity. An individual memory separated from collective memory is provisional and without meaning. Thus, memory is not only plural and changeable but is also a crucial condition of social order and solidarity. The underlining argument is that a stable identity, personal or national, rests on an awareness of continuity with a beloved past. Collective memory functions as a unifying process that provides a framework of meaning through which society maintains stability and identity, while adapting to social changes. Memory is often a reconstruction, not a reproduction, and that an egocentric bias is a normal element of remembering. It is that bias where renders collective memory a performativity. The performativity is visible in commemorative ceremonies which function effectively as mnemonic devices because of their formalism and performativity -- the two features shape the solemnizing of rituals. Commemorative ceremonies are of cardinal importance for communal memory because of their ritual re-enactment of persons or events

from the past. If therefore, commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative, we should examine bodily automatism and habitual enacting: the performativeness of rituals, seen as encoded in set postures, gestures and movements send a simple and clear message. Commemoration celebrations, writes Misztal, are the means of re-establishing social cohesion and the legitimacy of authority. Commemoration always involve the construction or a unitary and coherent version of the past that still provides comforting collective scripts capable of replacing a lost sense of community. Furthermore, this type of investigation, by focusing on the uses of the past in monuments, museums, theme parks, historical films, textbooks, public oratory and other domains, highlighting the role played by the media in refashioning tradition and framing acts of commemoration. Generally, the invention of tradition type of commemoration studies illustrates the significance of rituals for solidarity and the acquisition of shared forms of seeing and experiencing. Commemoration is analysed as an attempt at mourning and an effort to repair the psychological and physical damage of war and other traumatic experiences. Novick writes that “we choose to center certain memories because they seem to us to express what are central to our collective identity. Those memories, once brought to the fore, reinforce that form of identity” (qtd. In Misztal 132). Misztal writes that collective identities are seen as implying notions of group boundedness and homogeneity, and an emotional sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity with fellow group members and a felt difference from outsiders.

Today, memory is widely called upon to legitimate identity because the core meaning of any individual or group identity is seen as sustained by remembering. Memory, as a collective belief in some vision of the past as being the true one in a specific moment of the group's life, is assumed to be the essential anchor of particularistic identities. Social memory, according to this perspective, is an expression of collective experience which identifies a group, giving it a sense of its past and defining its aspirations for the future. Thus, memory, when organized into patterns so that they make some kind of continuing sense in an ever-changing present becomes the main source of a group or a personal identity. Moreover, memory and identity depend upon each other since not only is identity rooted in memory but also what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.

Thus, cultural trauma emerges as a socially mediated attribution which emphasizes the representational aspect of culture. The mediation, through representations, gives rise to cultural trauma which is performative in nature.

Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation. This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere; it is the meaning that they, as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe. In order for their display to be effective, actors must offer a plausible performance, one that leads those to whom their actions and gestures are directed to accept their motives and expiations as a reasonable account. In this connection Barbara A Misztal writes that the performative nature of traditions,

articulated somewhere between public and private representations, allows us to see how public representations join private ones. Examinations of various people's and groups' traditions provide insights into their relations to the past and throw light on what is actually being preserved in the popular memory of the past and what was officially invented. Referring to the diverse area that performance covers, Alyshia Galvez argues that to perform is "to imagine, represent, live and enact present circumstances, past events and future possibilities. Performance takes place across a very broad range of venues from city streets to the country side, in theaters and in offices, on battlefields and in hospital operating rooms" (1). The genres of performances are many, from "the arts to the myriad performances of everyday life, from courtrooms to legislative chambers, from theatres to wars to circuses" (1).

There exists an umbilical connections trauma and performance for a traumatized subject cannot fully transcend trauma but must to some extent perform/ act it out or relieve it. Besides, an attentive secondary witness to, or acceptable account of, traumatic experiences must in some significant way be marked by trauma or allow trauma to register in its own procedures. This is a crucial reason why certain conventional, harmonizing histories or works of art may indeed be unacceptable. But there is no single view of how trauma should be addressed in life, in history, and in art. Freud has argued that the inevitable tendency to act out the past by reliving it compulsively should be countered by the effort to work it through in a manner that would, to whatever extent is possible, convert the past into memory and provide a measure of responsible control over

one's behavior with respect to it and to the current demands of life. For example, the isolation and despair of melancholy and depression, bound up with the compulsively repeated reliving of trauma, may be engaged and to some extent countered by mourning in which there is a reinvestment in life, as some critical distance is achieved on the past and the lost other is no longer an object of unmediated identification. But one may argue that, at least with respect to secondary witnesses in art and in historiography, there should be interrelated but differentiated attempts to supplement acting-out with modes of working through.

The problem of working through brings up the question of how performativity goes beyond any restricted idea of representation or understanding. Performativity may be identified with acting-out or reliving the past. But this is a truncated view, however prevalent it may be in post-Freudian analysis or criticism. Performativity in a larger sense may be argued in to require the conjunction of necessary acting out in the face of trauma with attempts to work through problems in a desirable manner, attempts that engage social and political problems and provide a measure of responsible control in action. The question is whether Lanzmann in his more absolutist gestures tends to confine performativity to acting out and even tend to give way to a displaced, secular religiosity in which authenticity becomes tantamount to a movement beyond secondary witnessing to a full identification with the victim. This full identification would not only allow one to act out trauma vicariously in the self as surrogate victim but cause one to insist on having the victim relive traumatizing events, thus concealing one's own intrusiveness in asking questions that prod the victim to the point of breakdown:

[...] Trauma becomes a universal hole in “Being” or an unnamable “Thing”, and history is marginalized in the interest of History as trauma indiscriminately writ large. [...] There is also a routinization of hyperbole [in Shoah] or excess, an uncontrolled transference and acting-out –often justified through a restricted theory of performativity or enactment- seem to be the horizon of psychoanalysis and of Felman’s own discourse. (111)

Srila Roy writes that the “working though of traumatic memory in testimony - - of reconciling oneself with a lost or destroyed object - - is what imparts to testimony its curative power (the narrative cure). For in transforming traumatic memories, marked by the belated, repetitive, embodied and incoherent nature into linear and temporally ordered structures of meaning, testimony enables a ‘remaking’ or reconstitution of selfhood in the face of trauma. It enables, in other words, the integration of traumatic experiences into existing narrative structures and meaning frame, initiating the process of psychological remedy for the sufferer” (142). Roy emphasizes the fact that in its transformation into narrative, the wound is not only integrated into the survivor’s life story but also made cognizable in ways that it can be verbalized and communicated to communities of listeners whose empathetic response can be palliative, if not ‘curative’. Her focus is on the fact that from the standpoint of current literary, trauma studies and in older psychological perspective, the modality of recovery in memory of atrocity and loss can be understood in terms of the integration of trauma into the narration of memory.

The integration of traumatic recall into a stable, comprehensible story might end up losing the traumatic event's force and precision, precisely what cannot be conveyed in speech and what survivors are reluctant to give up. Rather than enable the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experiences to emerge, the narrative cure can domesticate and discipline these, and essentially lose the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding. To work through the trauma and become healed can become, for the survivor, not a mode of mourning but one of forgetting and thus betraying the memory of an unjust past.

The confluence of trauma with performativity is established in the book *Psychoanalysis and Performance* where in Adrian Kear writes in its preface entitled "The returns of psychoanalysis, and performance" that there is wide range of connections between psychoanalysis and performance, both as concrete historical practices and as conceptual modes of enquiry. Psychoanalysis and performance are situated within a dialogical framework that speaks to the affiliations and correspondences between the two fields (xii). The methodological moves to this encounter are multiple: from returning performance to its proper place within a psychoanalytic scene, to tracing the psychodynamics of the rehearsal process to foregrounding the political and ethical imperatives embedded within psychic and social performatives. In the process, it offers various kinds of indications as to the current and future configuration of the historical palimpsest that constitutes these relations. As such Psychoanalysis and performance is not intended to be the definitive statement on its subjects; rather there is the 'complex

relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts' that performance studies can currently envision in the discourse of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis and performance are, of course, in dialogue with one another; but, taken together, they can be seen to chart a course -- however hazardous -- that is flagged by the section headings. Psychoanalysis's relationship with rehearsal process and theatre practice helps to consider its social and political connection to parallel modes of performance, to investigating the insights into the effects of historical trauma produced by remotivating psychoanalysis in the service of materialist cultural critique. Thus psychoanalysis and performance will contribute to the current renewal and future development of performance studies as a critical practice.

In the introduction entitled "Umbilical Connection" of the book *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, Patrick Campbell says that the connection between psychoanalysis and performance have rarely been considered in a systematic way, either in terms of analyzing the nature of performance itself, or in terms of making sense of specific performance-related activities. Indeed, the two fields seem hermeneutic theory. Rather than simply providing further grist to the mill of psychoanalytic interpretation, performance constitutes an activity that both resembles and resists its procedures. As Shoshana Felman has observed of the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis, the two fields appear to imply and mutually depend upon one another for their analytic coherence. After all, if performance is a process in which individuals, then that very activity must throw into relief crucial questions about human behaviour. In making the hidden

visible, the latent manifest, in laying bare the interior landscape of the mind and its fears and desires through a range of signifying practices, psychoanalytic processes are endemic to the performing arts. Similarly, the logic of the performance infuses psychoanalytic thinking, from the ‘acting out’ of hysteria to the ‘family romance’ of desire (1).

Andre Green specifically characterizes performance as occupying a transitional position in mediating between the individual and the social, making possible the displacements of sublimation that commute neurosis into theatrical pleasure. The sentient, corporeal space of performance constitutes a world of objects that both are able and are not what they present for the spectator, setting into play ‘the inevitable disguising and indirect unveiling that the fantasy structure of the work undertakes. For Green as for Freud, performance contributes to the “assuaging of unsatisfied or unsatisfiable desires” by providing a “yield of pleasure from deeper psychical sources” -- a partial discharge emanating from the commerce between revelation and the threat of further repression (qtd. In Campbell 2).

Summing up, performance and psychoanalysis are the offsprings of the same ancestor. Despite transgressive signs to the contrary, both in their own ways seek to please, to be acceptable, and both are characterized by their psychological rather than their physiological effects. It is at this confluence in which the foregoing reading of the performance of the Gaijatra is situated.

Chapter II: Performing Trauma in Gaijatra

Nepal is a country with innumerable forms of performing arts. When we make a review of the vast panorama of our performing cultures across length and breadth of the country, we can find an amazing number of well-known classical forms as well as uncountable lesser-known folk forms. These traditions have contributed significantly to the cultural identity, creativity and development of the nation. It is this creative life which gave Nepali folk, especially here Newari people as they are the ones who mostly celebrate the Gaijatra festival, an alternative for social expression, found in their ecstatic body movements, their singing, their ritualistic performances, their expression of color combination and rhythm, their use of musical instruments, their creativity in modeling gods, humans and demons of their imagination and acquaintance. All these were integrated into a wholesome way of life, not as a particular art form for a certain commercial purpose.

Gaijatra is a ritualistic performance among the Newars in different parts of the country. Especially this festival is quite popular in three districts-Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur- among the Newar community. It literally means the festival of cows, hence Gaijatra, (Gai means cow and Jatra means festival) and it is part of the commemoration of their loss of their loved ones. It has abundant performative, psychological and theatrical qualities.

It is believed that Yama Raj, the God of Death who decides at what level the soul of the deceased shall be reincarnated again on earth. He maintains a great ledger in Patal, the Underworld, wherein is recorded every mortal's birth, his

good and bad deeds, and the predetermined date of his death. When one's time is up Yama sends a henchman, perhaps a black crow to see that the released soul sets out for the judgment gates of Patal which are opened only once each year, the day of Gaijatra.

The route to *Yama's* gate may be exceedingly difficult, leading possibly through the rivers of fire, and most bereaved families pray that a sacred cow may guide and protect the spirit of their dead along this dangerous journey by allowing it to cling to their tail. Most families also aim to ensure by the performance of the good deeds on Gaijatra day, that a sacred cow will be in readiness in Yama's gate, where thousands upon thousands souls are waiting, to push open the portals with their horns and assist the soul to enter for judgment.

This is why on Gaijatra, the day immediately following the sacred thread festival of the August full moon, every very recently bereaved family must honor the souls of their dead by sending a religious procession through the streets along the route prescribed ages before. The Gaijatra, or cow procession, consists for each family of a live, decorated cow or a young boy gorgeously costumed to represent one, together with the family priest, a troupe of musicians and a small boy in the guise of a *yogi* or holy man. After early-morning rituals for the dead at home, each parade starts on its way to join hundreds of similar groups in an endless procession past temples, idols and holy places along the narrow, winding streets. Householders give food and coins to members of each procession including the cow, real or impersonated. All must pass by the ancient royal palaces -- Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu -- and it is believed that old Malla

kings kept census of the annual death by counting each group. When cow procession return to the bereaved households, religious ceremonies are performed and the cloth 'tails' of the cow- costumed boys, which drag along the ground during the pilgrimages, are cut into strips and tied about the necks of family members to protect them from misfortune.

Gajatra ceremonies vary with financial status, religious inclination and locality. In Patan town the processions do not parade as separate units as in Kathmandu. Instead, all the costumed boys meet at a central point and proceed around the shrines and rocky streets, accompanied by as much noise as the blaring musicians, beating drums, clanging domestic utensils (tied to the cloth 'tails' of the cows) and huge stone-filled metal rollers, which are dragged over the cobblestone lanes, can produce. It is thought that this common may appease some irate deity and perhaps frighten away evil spirits or the wrathful souls of the dead, who through neglect, return to haunt the homes of their kinsmen.

Bhadgaon inhabitants stage spectacular processions, in which bereaved families engage persons to parade for their dead with heads encased in huge, cloth covered baskets to which horns of straw and a painted cow's face are affixed. Families of means make enormous cow-heads by wrapping long bamboo structures with cloth and having them carried through the streets to a din of local music.

In some villages the entire populace participates in one long procession in which the masked inhabitants hold the tail of the preceding masquerading 'cows'

carrying plough and other implements. They parade through a number of neighboring villages, return for tremendous family feasts, and at night in the town square for religious rites, to watch performances of local dancers, and to sacrifice animals to their gods.

Festivity, ceremonial form, and the transgression of social boundaries in Gaijatra festival are animated with the strongest possible feeling of solidarity and community affiliation. In its pure form the festival must be defined as “the paroxysm of society”, purifying and renewing it simultaneously. The “paroxysm is not only its climax form of religious but from an economic point of view. It is the occasion of the circulation of the wealth, of the most important trading, of prestige gained through the distribution of accumulated reserves” (Caillois qtd. in Schechner 7). It seems to be summation, manifesting the glory of the collectivity, which imbues its very being.

Gaijatra is also a comic theatrical event: comic in desire, even if sometimes tragic in outcome. When people go into the street *en masse*, they are celebrating life’s fertile possibilities. They make theatre, enjoy each other’s company. They put on masks and costumes, erect and wave banners, and construct effigies not merely to disguise or embellish their ordinary selves, or to flaunt the outrageous but also to “act out the multiplicity each human life is”. Acting out forbidden themes is risky so people don masks and costumes. They protest often by means of farce and parody, against what is oppressive, ridiculous, and outrageous. “For one to join the many as a part is also a socially and politically generative activity. Festive actions playfully, blasphemously, and

obscenely expose to the general eye for approval and/or ridicule the basic (and therefore bodily) facts of human life and death”. Such playing challenges official culture’s claims to authority, stability, sobriety, immutability, and immortality (Schechner 46).

Many ritualistic practices are involved in Gaijatra. Individual and collective anxieties are relieved by rituals whose qualities of “repetition, rhythmicity, exaggeration, condensation, and simplification stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins directly into the bloodstream yielding ritual’s second benefit, a relief from pain, a surfeit of pleasure”. In saying that religion was the opium of the people, Max may have been right, biochemically speaking. But ritual is also creative because as Turner said, the ritual process “opens up a time/space of anti-structural playfulness. And whereas in animals the non cognitive is dominant, in humans there is always a dialectical tension between the cognitive and affective” (233).

While talking about the ritualistic aspects of Gaijatra, we can cite an example of village where Gaijatra rituals took place in the hamlet of Tikanpur near Thankot. A rural family had lost both father and son some months earlier, at which time the bodies were cremated and ashes scattered upon a nearby stream. On Gaijatra day the entire family and clan gathered in a small upstairs around two young boys ornately costumed to represent cows. From vividly colored woven can caps two bamboo sticks protruded, topped with brilliant circular festoons signifying the horns, between which the white paper mask of a cow was fixed. Garlands of flowers and jewellery hung about the boy’s necks. Draped around

their waists over flowered sari skirts and trailing the floor were widths of white cloth representing tails. Their dark, somber eyes, ringed with lampblack, looked enormous above perspiration-streaked dabs of yellow on their cheeks.

In a haze of burning incense and smoking cotton wicks an old priest intoned a prayer from a frayed holy book while sprinkling the 'cows' with holy water, rice, red powder and flower petals. In the background the ageing mother sobbed hoarsely, while mourning women murmured prayers. Suddenly, a drum sounded outside and the smoke permeated cloud clomped down the ladder stairs in the procession, out across the muddy courtyard, up slippery stepping stones and narrow footpath leading through the village. Behind trooped the grieving relatives, neighbors and a band of musicians blowing horns, clashing cymbals and frantically beating drums. Bringing up the rear was a gaily costumed troupe of 'actors' to perform rice-planting pantomimes at each halt along the route.

At the temples of Narayana, Ganesh and Natisuri (the goddess of music and dancing), and at countless homes, the procession paused for an outdoor performance, receiving from each household scraps of food and some rice-beer. Needless to say, things became livelier as the morning progressed.

As a first act a comically dressed man representing a lowly field worker, one leg painted white and the other orange, mimed the pulling up of young rice seedlings moving rhythmically with the beat of the music. Next the two little cows were driven round and round, miming the tilling of the soil, guided by a colorfully costumed young ploughman representing the *yogi* or ascetic. His

graceful gyrations under the reins, in a fancy series of sidesteps, brought cheers from the crowding throng of spectators.

Now the plumed soil was ready for hoeing by a lively farmer, who chopped away in stylized, exaggerated steps. When the music blared forth again, four slender young men leaped into the circle, dressed in bright saris and headscarves of women rice planters. Moving backwards, they stopped in unison, mimicking the thrusting of seedlings into the mud. Twisting and dancing among them, two overseers shouted directions, delighting the spectators with their songs, “If you women plant the rice well, we’ll give you your pay”. Through all the acts an energetic master of ceremonies cavorted and pranced, slipping in the mud, announcing the numbers and swaying under upstairs windows to catch in his hat coins tossed down by laughing women and children.

Four hours and many drinks later, when the procession returned for a last performance at the bereaved family’s courtyard, the effects of a long and strenuous day began to show. Two of the ‘rice planter girls’ quarreled, one standing with tears streaming down her muddy face while amused adults held off the angry younger boy. Each maintained the other had pushed her and torn his sari. Then the master of ceremonies, after a particularly lively performance, threw his hat in the mud in disgust and pointed out the meagerness of the offerings tossed down from the windows. However, when the band struck up again everyone returned to his act and all was forgotten.

A married daughter of the bereaved family performed the final rites of washing the cow's bare muddy feet bending to touch them with her forehead. The grimy cloth tails were washed in water which now considered sacred was sprinkled over the family members. Finally, when the last prayer was intoned, and smoke and incense died away, the happy crowd joined the bereaved family in a long and a joyful feast. What matter if the Gaijatra festivities brought the family into debt? More important that the gods were appeased by the generosity of this simple family, for a sacred cow would be waiting at the judgment gates to assist the souls of father and brother into *Yama's* kingdom.

All over the valley similar rites are performed during the morning of Gaijatra, but late afternoon offers entertainment of an entirely different nature, which may continue for the next eight days. In all the streets, but especially in the Kathmandu bazaar streets of Indrachowk, Asantole, and before the old royal palace at Hanuman Dhoka, the spirit of carnival is in the air. Crowds gather on the temple steps and in balconies and at the windows of the surrounding houses to watch outrageously garbed citizens blatantly burlesquing Nepalese institutions, social and religious customs, the government, the political leaders, the army, foreigners and sometimes the god themselves. Anyone may join the parade to lampoon one and all.

Men dress up as freakish ladies, or as monsters and animals under mangy hides. Some wear ludicrous masks or plain white cloths over their faces, while others come black- faced or paint their cheeks and forehead in garishly colored streaks and designs. They parade with bands, happy very often under the

influence of home libations, to clown before the waiting crowds. Farmers and villagers, free for frivolity with the completion of the rice planting, flock into the city. A man in women's attire carries a rag doll in his arms, crying that he has no milk to feed the baby and bares his breast to prove it. Another laments having to wait his wife, bring tea to her bed and do the housework, both very improbable in Nepal. Others carry placards decrying social ills-real, exaggerated or entirely imaginary.

Local newspapers participate in Gaijatra banter, with stories announcing a great increase in salary for the superfluous masses of government workers. Others tell of the release of all the political prisoners, who are now to be absorbed into the ranks of officialdom. Again it is reported that the abolished caste system has been replaced with rank according to wealth. On this day, supposedly citizens are free to express themselves without the fear of reprisals.

The cultural history of Nepal shows that these traditions originated during the reign of King Pratap Malla in the eighteenth century, when he was desperately searching a means to quell the inconsolable grief of his queen at the death of their son. He sent out a great procession of sacred cows to parade in the boy's memory, but the queen remained despondent. He ordered the citizenry, those who had had a death in the family during the year, to do the same, pointing out to his wife the number of others who had suffered as she had done, but to no avail. At last the king announced that a sizeable reward would go to any person who could bring the slightest joy to his wife, granting the people the complete freedom to go to any lengths. When the populace appeared in droves before the palace,

garbed in preposterous costumes to mimic and lampoon all aspects of social injustice and the accepted order, the watching queen could not refrain from laughing. Then and there the king ordained that such parades would be repeated every Gaijatra day. People still remember when those of wealth engaged great dramatic and musical troupes to enact fabulous pageants, legends, dramas and religious stories, to which they invited the general populace. It is believed that such charitable and generous deeds performed in the name of the recently dead, will earn for the donor great religious merit -- all duly recorded in the God of Death's ledger.

Some orthodox Buddhist, absorbed in ceremonies for their holy month of Gunla, do not involve themselves in Gaijatra celebration, and some frown upon the antics of the afternoon revelers, likening them to the demons that disturbed and tempted Lord Buddha during his long meditation in search of enlightenment. In general, however, judging from the vast numbers of dazzling processions leading live cows or lavishly costumed youths to represent them the clowning of hordes of merrymakers and the size and the enthusiasm of the watching crowds, the majority of Nepalese follow Gaijatra traditions as handed down by their forefathers, thereby fulfilling time-honored obligations to the souls of the recently dead on the one hand and on the other the collective commemoration of Gaijatra festival helps them to come to terms with trauma of the loss of their loved ones. It helps them not only work through their past trauma for the present survival but also for the decent future as well.

What is the cultural and social significance of Jatras and festival like Gaijatra? As Barbara Ehrenreich argues, humans are social animals, and rituals ecstatic or otherwise could be an expression of this sociality, a way of renewing the bonds that held a community together. They are the mechanisms for achieving cohesiveness and generating feelings of unity (10). This collective joy has, as Victor recognized, a “universal capacity” and is an expression of what he called “*communitas*”, the spontaneous love and solidarity that can arise within a community of equals. The rituals also provide an occasional relief in the form of collective excitement and festivity. Jatras and festivals like Gaijatra function as the safety valve for the community. Obeisance of the rules, regulations, norms, values and laws of a civilized society which they are bound to accept creates the tensions among its citizens. That is why, they look for occasions which help release them from that boundary and appear spontaneously and collectively out in the public. It not only makes them mentally healthier by providing a relief from the repressed tensions and rejuvenates them from the automatized, regularized, monotonous mode of life again to return to daily course of actions, but also help in social solidarity and integrity. Jatras and festivals provide an opportunity for digressions from the existential ennui and angst creating a sense of togetherness and collectiveness.

Moreover, festivity, ceremonial form, and the transgression of social boundaries, as Bristol argues, are animated with the strongest possible feeling of solidarity and community affiliation (47). The fundamental purpose of the

festival is “to set the stage for a sacrificial act that marks at once the climax and the termination of the festivities” (Girard 47).

Thus, while assessing the social and cultural significance of Jatras and festivals like Gaijatra and the ritualistic practices involved in it, it becomes clear that ritual has performed the work of solidifying the collective identity and embedding the cultural system in individual actions. As Jeffrey C. Alexander and Jason L. Mason argue, “social forms of organization have grown more complex and cultural system more differentiated, however, interaction -and collective- rituals have grown more contingent” (16). The range of potential understandings that govern how social actors relate to ritual processes has dramatically expanded. Participation in, and acceptance of, ritual messages are more a matter of choice than obligation. The process by which the culture gets embedded in action, in fact, more closely resembles the dynamics of theatrical production, criticism, and appreciation than it resembles old fashioned rituals. Rituals are episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication’s symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another’s intentions. It is because of this shared understanding of intention and content, and in the intrinsic validity of the interaction, that rituals have their effect and affect. Ritual effectiveness energizes the participants and attaches them to each other, increases their identification with the symbolic objects of communication, and intensifies

the connection of the participants and the symbolic objects with the observing audience, the relevant community at large (17).

Drawing on recent social scientific scholarship on performance theory, Gregory Price Grieve looks at religious practices, festivals and rituals like Cow Procession as a “technique for constructing and structuring lived worlds” (471). He further argues:

[...] Yet, while no religious agency is completely free of asymmetrical power relations, some are more flexible than others. In Bhaktapur, because the Cow Procession is the most minimally structured public celebration, marginalized social groups have the greatest access to its generative cultural matrix. During the Cow Procession there is a noticeable difference in the city: strict hierarchical boundaries and the city's normally reserved nature soften under the weight of Carnival. Transvestitism, the grotesque, the obscene, and the nonsensical are celebrated. Those in power are derided. Peoples' laughter overcomes fear and allows the city to face up to its biggest fears-"death" being just the most evident. Hence, more than the mere cessation of productive labor, more than a ludic undermining of all norms, more than just "anti-structure," the Cow Procession allows for the creation of new and the transformation of traditional social structures so as to forge innovative social worlds. (484)

By observing minutely the Cow Procession, Grieve writes:

There is a connection between Gaijatra and death. As Peter Childs argues death always has a fascination- as is evident from the reactions of passing motorists or highway accidents- and the death of someone so famous can exert a powerful attraction as well as prompt an unprecedented degree of reflection on one's own mortality (53).

So, death creates a traumatic stress as the relatives of the dead ones lose their loved and dear ones. The anthropology of death has generated theories based largely on a perception of a stark boundary between life and death and, related to this, between society and the individual. Marking the nexus between this mortal life and a possible immortal after life, funerals and other death-related rituals have been regarded within much of the literature as salient cultural arenas for a symbolic rejection of death in order to resolve the discordance of troubling individual human finitude with the desirable continuity of the social order. This has been recognized to be, as Kristin Norget argues, “a protracted process during which society, disturbed by the shock, must gradually regain its balance. Death happens to all of us, to be sure, but the way it is greeted and what it is taken to mean differs radically from place to place” (71) . Indeed, because they bridge attitudes toward and relations between the living and the dead, funerals rites have often taken by anthropologists to offer a particularly telling view of core aspects of a given culture.

Death ritual in Gaijatra has an ontological role. It was bound up with the very possibility of being, both individually and collectively. Special ritual

language highly coded modes of behaviors and many other non-discursive ritual contents serves to provide a context within which a collective narrative experience could accumulate around the death event. Ultimately, this narrative served “to organize individual perceptions; it confers a sense of communal belonging on participants that override personal interests and instrumental goals” (78). Death provides the occasion for community members to dramatize for each other the script of moral ideals to which they aspired, despite their inabilities, in other spaces and in other occasions, to measure up to it.

The spontaneous and pronounced manifestations of generosity and idealistic cooperation that one can witness in Gaijatra during the course of these celebrations and in other ritual situations might be regarded as self-interested, in that such acts of giving imply certain acts of reciprocity. Those who give shall also receive- in an appropriate and commensurate manner. But to reduce the meaning of these gestures of charitable extravagance to calculated moves in a series of strictly ‘economic’ exchanges could lead us to miss other significant aspects of these rituals. Different ritual occasions of Gaijatra festival are integral to the production and maintenance of a shared social space; while such ritually created spaces are clearly liminal in many respects, they continuously reinforce delicate web of relations between people by allowing favors to be repaid and new links and new debts to be incurred. The particular ritual content and quality of the Gaijatra festival also enable the regular revitalization of traditional values, norms and practices considered by the Newari community to be important to collective welfare; often such customs take on a uniquely material social force and weight.

The metaphor of sociality that surround the treatment of the dead have, as Norget argues, “to do with the principles of ongoing exchange between the community of the living and that of the dead; these are part of the processes that work to ground a sense of local belonging” (83). The rituals involved in the Gaijatra festival are not merely a sort of spiritual “savings plan” for the next life. For, these sacrificial, “penitential practices testified to a widespread insistence upon the reality and gravity of a moral economy in which actors, both mortal and supernatural”, may change one another’s fates. What one person does has an impact on other members in the community, whether living or dead” (83). The ritualistic practices are performed in Gaijatra festival to ensure that the proper rites are carried out for a soul in need as obligations that the living owe the dead if the souls of the dead are to leave the earthly realm in a tranquil and properly oriented state. These rites help to guarantee that the souls will eventually achieve peace and salvation or entrance to heaven. An overarching ritual script allowed mourners to display to each other their personal commitment to a given set of ideals and to reconfirm a moral vision of the social environment in which they were immersed.

Thus, the ritual invocation of idealized community ties, the sharing of time and resources and the acting out of beliefs that ensure the correct ordering of the world, including the proper treatment of the dead, their separation from and ongoing relationships with the living and the orientation of the entire community towards a better future life, all serve to construct important parameters individual and group self-understanding. What were individual, interior memories and

intimate events become exterior, social events. There is a cooperative organization of required tasks, a collective participation in the performance of religious rites and a general accent on accompaniment and commensalisms- all symbolically adorned by the sharing of food and flowers. A highly stylized but deeply felt community of sentiment is thus formulated, which holds fast throughout the ritual period and dissolves only arriving at home. These ritual practices serve to articulate the ritually constructed world of the sacred with the world of everyday experience and understanding.

Such ritual practices thus serve as cultural mnemonics for the conservation of certain aesthetic sensibility, part of a shared experience of life and death. Ritual words, as Norget argues, senses, actions, and symbolic metaphors help to ensure that participants will be able to muster certain proper ways of behavior toward one another. Arguably these ritual practices operate on several levels- through the special tastes and odors, the particular modes of speech and prayer called for by the event, the timing, intensity, lateness of the hour and unusual activities. Such profusion, such out- of-the-ordinary experiences help to crystallize a certain configuration of feelings within the popular social environment: emotionalism, altruism, and communal affect are thus valued and consolidated. “Sometimes, participation in Death rituals and rites served to project group feelings of strong community loyalty and sentiment-an archetypal example of Durkheim’s conscience collective” (Norget 17). Typically, social boundaries are reflected or constructed by the selective participation in, or observation of, particular customs or ritual events. Not only do death rituals and

rites display the sensuous, mimetic and performative character of popular religiosity but, like other popular ritual practices, they also allow participants to construct a moral identity that is independent of other national religious practices.

Thus, death contributes to an ongoing social life. It affirms and extends local social memory and renews and builds new networks of exchange and interdependence between neighbors, family friends and generations. “Popular death rituals”, as Norget argues, “also involve a solidifying of rural - urban ties, for it was customary, even with migrants for family members to make a strong effort to return home for the funeral of the loved ones” (102). Popular rites thus enact a redemptive scenario; idealized aspects of the self and the community are reasserted within ritual contexts that permit them to live on, for the moment at least, along with the personal ties and obligations that they demand in spite of a host of pressures toward change.

What becomes ostensible is that the Gaijatra performance is an attempt at redeeming the trauma of death. This line of interpretation is also underscored by the interview conducted with leading cultural historians of Nepal. Highlighting the folklorist, cultural and anthropological approach to Gaijatra festival, Tulasi Diwasa says that Gaijatra festival helps the individuals and family members to get relief from the shock of the death of their loved ones. Gaijatra, he further argues, is a public festival which is mundane and profane celebrated collectively in the street. It is not a private festival which is more sacred. There are spontaneous participations of audiences who are passive as well as active participants. Boundary between actors and performers is blurred here. Use of colorful

costumes, role reversals, satire on socio-political evils which compels the authorities to ponder about it, procession with musical instruments is some of the fascinating spectacle of the Gaijatra festival. He also says that satire also helps to disseminate the ideas about what is happening in the society and politics. Laughter aroused out of the jokes cracked during the celebration and of the disguised appearances of the performers has cathartic value and it helps to sweep all the vices and evils gathered in the society throughout the year. Diwasa also talks about the variations of Gaijatra festival in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan, Lalitpur. The mode of celebrating Gaijatra festival also varies in terms of the class the family belongs to. Those who can afford even take out the procession and go round the city “singing Ramayana” prepared, which is costly, in the name of the dead one (Personal interview). Referring to the history of Gaijatra Festival, Prachanda Malla, a veteran Newari cultural critic and theater personality, says that the genesis of Gaijatra festival lies in an attempt of the king Pratap Malla to console his queen from the grief of the death of their only son. By ordering the ministers and other authorities to make a procession of cow festival, King Pratap Malla began the tradition of celebrating Gaijatra festival. But Satya Mohan Joshi argues that may be there is a political implication behind much agony of the queen over the death of her son as the hope of her son being a king was no longer possible. People came out in the street with the procession of the cows attired in vibrant, colorful costumes accompanied by songs and musical instruments. The king showed this to his queen and tried to get her relief from the pain of loss of her only son by saying that it is not only “our son” but other people also died.

Malla further says that at first, this festival was celebrated mostly by Newar only as there were mostly Newar inhabitants. But later as people migrated to Kathmandu valley and joined in the celebration of the Gaijatra festival. In the course of time, the mode of celebrating the festival was also changed. Laughter was added to it later.

Talking about the social and cultural significance of Gaijatra festival Malla says that “this festival attacked heavily on social vices and evils and compelled the rulers to ponder about it”. Very interestingly, Malla narrates, the artists/people involved in the festival even did not leave Rana rulers to ridicule their follies and excesses. Diwasa and Malla agree that at first, Gaijatra was merely a *Yatra* (journey) and later became a *Jatra* (festival). Malla also talks about the variation of celebrating the Gaijatra festival. In Panga, Kirtipur, sometimes a single family, sometimes with the help of the “Guthis” bears the financial burden of celebrating the responsibility. On the one hand, Malla continues, this festival is celebrated for the peace of the spirit of the dead and on the other hand, it is celebrated to reduce the pain of the families who were suffering from the loss of their dead ones. Quite confident of the continuity of the celebration of Gaijatra festival and its entertaining capacity, Malla says that this festival will be celebrated in the future to as the national artists and satirists are also involved in ridiculing the socio- political vices and evils. So, through Gaijatra festival, Malla argues, people perform the trauma of the loss of their family members on the one hand, and on the other, this festival provides the occasion to compel the rulers to think about the vices and evils raised by the

people. Gaijatra is a unique festival of Nepal as in no other part of the world is such type of festival exists.

From 2034 B. S., as Hira Bahadur Thapa, the director of the drama section, Nepal Academy says the then Royal Nepal Academy started organizing the Gaijatra festival in the name of *Gaijatra Mahotsab*. Many famous artists took part in it. The Gaijatra festival was in a sense performed on the stage. Then it was organized in Rastriya Nachghar and finally again came to the street. Thus, Prachanda Malla, highlights the performance side and healing aspects of the festival as well as talks about Gaijatra as an occasion to come heavily upon the socio-political vices and evils (Personal interview). Highlighting the cultural aspect of Gaijatra festival, Satya Mohan Joshi, a veteran cultural expert, says that Gaijatra is a festival but of a different kind. There is no *Bhoj* (party), worship of God and animal sacrifice, shopping of goods as we find generally in other festivals. This is a festival “celebrated to commemorate the event of death of one’s family members”. “This festival is based on two philosophical insights. The first is that death is inevitable. Every famous figure like Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Confucius all died. But in reality people do not accept death easily and grieve over it. It is the occasion of Gaijatra festival which helps them realize the inevitability of death and get relief from it” (Personal Interview). So, Joshi further shares, the cow procession came into existence as a *parva* (festival), an event. Every year, *Jhanki* was taken out going by the Hanuman Dhoka durbar square. If males are dead, the procession in Kathmandu includes many yogis’ representation and the emotion of *bairagya* is focused while if the females are

dead, the procession tends to be highly costumed and decorated. The costume used in the procession is quite vibrant and colorful. The use of chilli's garlands, mask, black-smearred faces, role reversals create funny ambience and laughter. It draws the attention of the public making the socio-political satire effective.

Joshi believes that it is the festival of Newar community as they began this tradition. "If not so, why are Gaijatra festival not celebrated in the community where there are no Newars? Participation of other people in a festival and possession of it are two different things", Joshi argues.

When the Gaijatra festival began, Joshi says providing the tentative data, there were almost 80% Newar people in Kathmandu valley. But now, there are 35% Newars and 65% other people. So, as it originated in Newar community, obviously it belongs to Newar community. After Rana regime, other people also participated in the celebration of the festival. Some people also "sing Ramayana" and go round the city. But Buddhists do not take part in it. Joshi says that Gaijatra festival allows one to seek "sense within nonsense, nonsense within sense" as it is related with satire and "madness" as well. Different political developments in the political history of Nepal have affected the celebration of Gaijatra festival. For example, in 2017 B.S., there was not as much political satire as it is today because no one dared to satire on the partyless Panchayat system.

Highlighting the historical aspects of the Gaijatra festival, Triratna Manandhar says that this festival was first mentioned in the *Gopal Banshavali* composed at the end of 14th century (1389 AD) as *sayata kohanu* (day of Gaijatra)

and “saya Wanegu” (walk disguised as cow). The tradition of celebrating Gaijatra began in the medieval age but it is not mentioned in detail. It came into vogue systematically from the time of King Pratap Malla in Kathmandu and Jagat Prakash Malla in Bhaktapur. Then, Newars of Patan, Lalitpur also started celebrating this festival.

Manandhar says that there are two philosophical bases of Gaijatra festival. The first is related to relieve the traumatized family members from the pain of loss of their dear and near ones by the use of vibrant and colorful costumes. The second is related to the way cow is taken in the Hindu philosophy, according to which cow is taken as a sacred animal assisting the dead soul to enter into the gate of heaven. Very famous terminology used in this aspect is *Baitarni Tarne* that is to liberate the dead souls -- *pitriko uddhar garne*. Taking about the social and cultural significance of Gaijatra festival, he says that it on the one hand provides entertainment to the people and makes them aware of the socio-political vices and evils and on the other it is related to the religious belief: “healing of the spirits”. Answering the question of why do people use masks and smear the faces black, Manandhar says that people hesitated to ridicule the kings and political leaders of the country face to face. So, the last king of Bhaktapur, Ranjit Malla asked the people to use masks and express their ideas without any fear. Thus, people started using masks and spoke about the social and political vices and evils.

Highlighting the memory of the dead and the performativity as the unique aspect of Gaijatra, playwright Abhi Subedi writes:

Literally translated as cow festival, Gaijatra is a famous Newar festival. This day as, triggers ambivalent impulses of fun and sadness. Fun is associated with sadness because Pratap Malla's queen, inconsolable after the death of their son, had laughed at seeing the fun and frolic created on this occasion. According to historians, the originary of this festival can be traced from much earlier times. However, the dead become the motif of the festival on this day. A combination of street performativity and the memory of the dead constitute the uniqueness of this festival. (6)

Moreover, Abhi Subedi relates Gaijatra to different issues such as rituals and travels; performance and street marches and highlights the theatricality and performativity of Gaijatra festival:

Gaijatra festival or literally, cow festival is a journey to the world of the dead. In this festival death is dramatized through movements, impersonation and imagined and ritualized signs of cultural formation. Colorfully decorated bodies of the persons who take out the procession, the movement of the cow or the bovine incarnation of the human person follow the contours of the journey through the towns, visiting important temples and places of worship. (49)

Subedi provides the models to study the semiotics of the festivals and rituals that have the significance of performance based on travel which has played very

significant part in the performance art in Nepal Mandala. The journey has been both metaphysical and realistic in nature. Travel is one such trope that brings human beings on a par with the movements of the divinities and the weather and calindrical cycles. All the spectacles of a performance are generated by the performers' movements over the space defined by the religio-architectural formation. Highlighting the performative part of Gaijatra festival, Subedi further writes:

The beaten tracks -- the lanes and streets form the main choreography of the cow festival performance. People who offer worship, tips and things, or those who look at these processions dedicated to the deceased standing on the fringe of the street or sitting behind windows are the audience or spectators of this street drama. The story is linear, colors are fixed and the methods of movement more or less similar. What gives dynamism to this performance is the space itself, the cultural terrain that this journey covers and the silent grief of people who say goodbye to this journey and remain behind the doors swallowing tears. So this street performance carries the invisible grief, tears and soft moaning. In short, Gaijatra is the humanization of grief and the memories of the dead through performance. (49)

In an essay entitled "Saparu, The Cow Festival of the Dead of the Previous Year, and the Annual Carnival", Robert Levy writes that the first day of the waning fortnight Gu (n)laga (August) is the time for a major festival

commemorating those who have died in Bhaktapur during the previous year. The festival includes two elements in an intimate mixture, commemorations of death and carnival. The day's events and the inaugural procession of the previous afternoon introduce a period of related activities lasting until the eighth day of the fortnight. The day is called *Saparu* (sometimes *Saparu*) or *Saya* in Newari, and Gai Jatra in Nepali. *Sa* means cow, and *paru* may derive from *parewa*, the name of the first day of the lunar fortnight. In local speculation the word derives from *sapa*, cow mask, with the *ya* of *Saya* supposedly deriving from *jatra* or *yatra*, procession. All these terms refer more specifically to one of the day's elements (which give the day its name) a procession of real and symbolic cows. The carnival is mixed with this procession.

There are various stories that relate the cow, death and this particular day. The consensus is vague and the details vary but it is on this day that the Cow Goddess can help the wandering spirits of the dead who had died during the previous year to cross the river *Vaitarani* into death's realm. Once the spirit enters death's kingdom, *Yama's* realm, it can, in traditional doctrine, be "judged" and then transformed into its proper next stage. Much more usual in Bhaktapur seems to be the idea that it is on this day with the help of the Cow Goddess that the wandering spirits will enter heaven, the idea of judgment in *Yama's* realm being ignored or suppressed.

Some of the other annual calendrical commemorative ceremonies for the dead, namely, those devoted to mothers and fathers apply only to those who have been dead for more than one year, that is, after the first year's period of mourning

has been completed. However, the Saparu festival, as its legend indicates, concerns those who have died within the past year, with the exception of the period just prior to the festivals, in which case the first sequence of death rites is still being performed and the members of the household and the *phuki* are still impure. Members of all *thars* except the untouchables take part.

The procession is made up of constructions in the form of the Cow Goddess and, rarely, actual cows representing her, each of which represents a particular dead person. Each figure preceded by a carnival group made up of friends or *phuki* of the household to which the dead person belonged. The groups vary in number, but in the case of important or particularly popular people they may include hundreds of participants. The symbolic cows may be either long or short ones, the long ones representing adults, the short ones children. Other aspects of their decoration indicate whether they were male or female. It is commonly said that in the Malla period officials standing at the palace -- which the procession must pass on the festival route -- could, by counting the figures, tell how many men, women, boys, and girls had died in Bhaktapur during the previous year. In the few cases now where living cows are used, they are not differentially marked. The long images have a mask of a cow mounted toward the top end of an elaborately decorated long pole. The pole, which requires four men to carry it, is carried in the procession by the representative of the family. The short is simply a basket with a mask on it, which is worn over the head of the family representative. Traditionally for the upper *thars* these representations were carried or worn by farmers who farmed portions of the deceased person's family's

land and performed various services for the family. Those of the middle and lower *thars* were carried by *phuki* members.

Each family supervises the production of the figure that will represent them in the *jatra*. They are assisted by *phuki* members, friends, and neighbors. The day before the *jatra* the household members undergo a major purification. On the day of the festival the cow figure is worshipped by all family members, male and female, as the Cow Goddess, in a *puja* (worship) that is referred to as *tarae yagu*, literally crossing a bridge or river, in keeping with the legend with the legend explaining the day's events. The cow figure is asked to help the dead person get into *Vaikuntha*, *Vishu/Narayana's* special heaven. Participation in the *Saparu* procession and the related worship is considered a necessary part of the long sequence of rituals done after the death of any individual. In keeping with the legend associated with the festival, it is believed that the dead person will remain as a *preta* (dead spirit) if this participation is neglected, as would also be the case if the various other essential death rituals were neglected. Most upper-status participating households have also on this day and prior to the procession a *gaud an*, a special memorial ritual requiring a Brahman *purohita's* (priest) assistance, with the main ritual mourner, the *kriya putra* (ideally the eldest son) as the central worshipper. The Brahmans themselves, will-in contrast- have their *gaudan* (cow donation) following the termination of the procession.

The Gaijatra procession moves around the city's main festival route. Each symbolic cow, preceded by revelers, enters the festival procession at a point on the *pradaksinapatha jatra* near each family's home. The group makes the circuit

of the route, which takes roughly two hours, and then leaves the procession when they are back at the same point at which they entered it. Family members, consisting of the chief mourner, his brothers, and some *phuki* members, close affinal relatives and friends, will walk as mourners behind the cow. This group consists of men and children of both sexes. Women watch from the sidelines of the procession. Each group enters the procession at its end as it passes their entrance point, but the result, because of the mixed social constitution of most *twa:s*, is that the various *twa:s* are represented in the line of the procession in more or less random social order.

When people from all other neighborhoods have entered the procession the people from the large *Lakulache(n) sub-twa:* in the *Ta:marhi* main *twa:* enter it. They then arrange themselves differently than the participants of the previous *twa:s*, in a way that makes an impressive visual climax to the procession. For this group all the carnival dancers and maskers representing all the participating households in that neighborhood enter the procession as one group. This group of carnival dancers is joined by anyone in Bhaktapur who wishes to join in the carnival whether or not they are connected to any bereaved household. The dancers are followed, in turn, by a large group of musicians playing the special dance and processional music associated with the *jatra*. Behind the musicians men carry a tall image constructed of bamboo and rice straw in shape resembling the long cow images but painted and dressed to represent *Bhairava* rather than the Cow Goddess. Behind the *Bhairava* image all the cow images from the *Lakulache(n) Twa:* households are carried one after the other in a dense mass of

images and followed by the household mourners. This large group constitutes the end of the procession. When it gets to *Laeku* Square, it circumambulates the statue of the Newar King Bhupatindra Malla which located there, three times and disbands.

Except for the Brahmans, who still have to do their *gaudan puja*, the day's religious activities are finished. People return to their houses, and the cow images are taken to the river and thrown into it. Household feasts are held in the bereaved households for all who have worked with the household on the image and/or accompanied it in the procession. The married-out household women are expected to return to the household for this feast.

Although the aspect of the *Saparu* jatra to which we have referred as carnival is, as we have seen, an integral part of the day's events, it is convenient to discuss it separately. It is often terminologically distinguished from the remainder of the jatra by referring to it as *Ghe (n)ta(n) Ghesi(n) Mhetegu*. The term *Ghe(n)ta(n) Ghesi(n)* is said to refer onomatopoeically to the sound of a particular kind of drum beat. *Mhetegu* means to play, as to play at a game. The activities referred to by the term take place only at this time, beginning with the preliminary performances on *Gunhi Punhi* evening, which we have noted above. Traditionally only farmer *thars* and above (including it may be noted, young Brahmans) participated, but now people from lower groups, with the exception of the untouchables, do. Traditionally, and still, only men take part. This is an anti-structural festival, but as always in Bhaktapur within strict limits.

On the *Saparu* day people are free to choose their costumes and their dance performances. Sometimes a subgroup of those preceding a cow image may work together as a thematic unit but often individuals have their own individual theme. The free choices, however, usually are among a conventional set of forms.

A popular group of costumes and performances portrays *Jyapu* activities, and is done both by *Jyapus* themselves and by upper-level participants. Many of these are derived from traditional *Jyapu* dances. People may mimic breaking the soil with the hoe, or cutting grain stalks. Frequently, the dance represents a *Jyapu* couple, with one man taking the man's part, and another the woman's. It is important to remark that these dances are not lampoons but serious and graceful dance forms. A variant portrayal of *Jyapu* life shows a *Jyapu* and *Jyapuni*, represented by either dancers or puppets carried on the tops of poles by mask dancers. The farmer and his wife often carry sticks, and the couple performs a burlesque fight something like a Western Punch and Judy performance.

In addition to dancing *Jyapunis*, men may sometimes dress and dance as pretty girls of undetermined social status. Sometimes they perform as a mother, cradling a doll baby. Such dances, like the *Jyapu-Jyapuni* dances, are not done satirically but, often, with considerable grace, beauty, and seriousness. There are gross and obscene sexual references in some portrayals, of kind that would be publicly unacceptable otherwise except during the Devi cycle's *Gatha Muga*: *Ca:re* celebrations. In these dances, for example, two men will dance as heterosexual couples, embracing and moving their lips in coital movements. Others may construct a large model penis and vagina, banging them together in

mimicry of sexual intercourse in time to the music of the festival musicians who accompany each group of mourner-revelers. Other men may add mock genitalia, such as banana and two globular fruits or vegetables to their costumes. Some dances mimic drunkenness, the performer pretending to drink from a container, and staggering. Another popular group is animals and supernatural forest creatures –bears tigers monkeys, Yetis, demons of various types, and so forth. Participants frequently dress as *sadhus* and other types of holy renouncers. Men dress as various deities, both male and female. These include most prominently *Siva* (who is perhaps the most frequent deity chosen) and *Parvati*, *Krishna* and *Radha*, and *Ram* and *Sita*. Performers often dress as *Mongul Rajas*, with turbans and robes. Sometimes the costumes and decorations are purely abstract and decorative, such as a face painted half black half white.

There is another category of role taking that we have saved until last because it has been emphasized in some of the literature on this festivals but seems, at least in Bhaktapur in the period of this study and the preceding it, to be a minor and muted one. This is the category of satire with some political implication. There are some examples of this. People may carry a play card with a caricature of some unpopular figure in the government, sometimes as part of mock-funeral procession. Most often the satire is more veiled. In one procession, for example a man danced as a particular rhesus monkey that lived near (and often on) the Bhaktapur royal palace, which now houses some central government administrative offices. It was clear to onlookers with a little coaching that this represented the chief administrative officer of the district at the time. But the

political satire is carefully guarded, and really important figures would be represented, if at all, in most veiled, ambiguous, and it is hoped safe forms. Other upper status figures are represented, but gently. Brahmans dressed in dhotis , public storytellers (who are traditional Brahmans) represented as telling obscene stories , tourists complete with Western grab(or a reasonable facsimile thereof) and mock cameras hung over their shoulders . Although these representations are both muted and rare at present, one can imagine conditions in which they might become dominant.

The carnival performances of *Sarparu* play with the constraints of Bhaktapur's social structure. Satire is only one small component of this. On this day the participants can express things that are usually difficult to express in ordinary civic life. Constraints of gender, role, decent behavior, and (more carefully) respect for hierarchy are overcome, within the usual limits that Bhaktapur imposes on such Dionysian behavior. It is said by older people that on *Sarparu* anyone can be king; anyone can be anything he wants. In fact, however, social criticism and political criticism, is limited; women and the lowest level *thars* cannot take part; among those who do take part, upper *thars* usually represent lower ones, and the reverse is less frequent. This latter constraint, however, indicates perhaps something more than some limit on lower status people escaping the system even in fantasy. The lower level *thars* represent for the upper *thars* not only the negative aspects of lower status but also a greater freedom from constraints, including the sexual constraints whose fantasized overcoming is represented in many of the carnival performances. Upper *thars* in

Bhaktapur, conversely, represent greater constraints of propriety and self-control for people in the lower *thars* looking up. Motives of satires and resentment aside, it would be contrary to the spirit of escape symbolized by the carnival to change ones role for what is, in a certain sense, a still more socially constraints one .

Saparu involves the entire city in public space, that is, the procession on the *pradaksinspatha*. In its concern with the death that took place in the city during the preceding year, in its differentiated representation of those deaths by age, sex, and area and in its carnival expression of the kind of fantasy that reveals something of the structure of the city's life, this variant of the Gaijatra festival performs the evacuation of the pressure of trauma in a spirit of carnivalesque jouissance.

The carnivalesque jouissance manifests in forms of numerous banter also available in different forms -- print, audio-visual, and live programmes that launch in a good humored manner an attack on social, political, economic, cultural affairs of the entire nation. Sometimes, they are full of grotesque imagery, jocular and merriment. Such writings/presentations aspire to variety and to an intermixture of wit and humor, quickness of fancy and jocular as in the *Kamana Magazine* and the video CD entitled "Remote Control". The voice -- often colloquial, mocking, denunciatory -- is carefully attuned to a broad audience.

Thus, this research uses three types of texts -- printed, audio and visual -- produced during the Gaijatra festival for the purpose of analysis in an attempt to reveal how serious political, social, cultural and economic issues are raised

through humorous presentation. These three uses of popular materials together create a parodic questioning of the social order that is not only profound, but remarkably forward-looking in its awareness of people. The artists use popular, lower-class forms to set up parodic mirrorings which propel the satire of social systems and their power relationships.

Before talking about these materials produced during the Cow Procession, it is quite relevant to mention the view of Gregory Price Grieve regarding the fun and laughter that this festival creates who draws upon Michael Bakhtin's theory of carnival. For Grieve, Cow Procession creates the possibilities for new realities different from conventional rules and restrictions. Further inquiring into the question of why the Cow Procession is fun, Grieve argues that the obvious answer is that carnivals are entertaining because one can dance and drink, and "wear" personalities that one cannot at other times. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes in *Rabelais and His World*, during carnival there is a "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers, "and there is an inversion of the standard themes of societal makeup (15). Interviewing numerous Bhaktapurians Grieve further writes that during the Cow Procession people can be whatever they want: anyone can be king for a day. This of course is not true in the strictest sense. In the past, both women and the lowest castes have been denied access to the festival's merriments. A farmer who dresses as a king may feel himself empowered (and probably will enjoy himself), but he does not actually get to rule the city.

What makes the festival enjoyable then, is not an overthrow of the normative system, but its temporary loosening. Not only is this loosening enjoyable, it is key for understanding religious agency. For, if maximally structured religious agency can be seen as ritualized, then the forged carnivalesque sacrifice can be understood as minimally structured. Such minimally structured social practices allow for greater change and improvisation. Accordingly, carnivals are fun for the very reason they are useful for understanding agency. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, they "extend the narrow frame of life" so that people can experiment with social configurations that "lie beyond the existing social forms" (15).

Yet, how is it that the Cow Procession has become, a site for working out a new mode of interpersonal interrelationship between individuals?" As is shown by the forged sacrifice, rather than re-enacting a symbolic structure, people are manipulating cultural logics to improvise a new social structure. Yet, all social practices -- even that which is enjoyable and minimally structured- is socially mediated action. During the carnival one cannot do whatever one wants. Instead, the carnival emerges in a tug-of-war between needs, desires and goals, and the social logic of the festival. As such, the new realities are forged in the generative cultural matrix that stems from the interaction between the festival's social field and emergent collective action (Grieve 484-486).

Kamana magazine has published, as it does annually, a special issue on the occasion of Gaijatra -- *Gaijatra Bishesh* (Gaijatra Special). A wide range of genres- poems, essays, stories, cartoons and other visual texts- are included in it in

ironical, satirical and humorous tone. For example, Sagar Shah's cartoon depicts the contemporary political deadlock where politicians are hell bent on grabbing the power at the cost of the historical opportunities of writing new constitution (See Figure 1). He mocks at the political parties who are fighting for the chair/ power in the name of civil sovereignty. His cartoon throws a flood of light on the pathetic condition of people who are dying of hunger and diseases. People are not able to get even the basic necessities of live let alone the huge facilities of modern life. People are deprived of proper treatment. No citizen feels secure at home and outside. Violence, massacre, theft, abduction, corruption, poverty are rampant everywhere. Corruption has ruined the country severely. But the political leaders, as the cartoon depicts, are not able to shift their consciousness from their petty and vested interests to the larger interests, to the welfare and betterment of citizens and nation.

People's euphoria shown in the April uprising 2006 is slowly and gradually turning into disappointments and hopelessness. The fragile peace process is even more vulnerable. Two sides of the comprehensive peace accord are at war. Constitution writing process is uncertain because of the political leaders' obsession with power. The dirty game of horse trading has made the mockery of democracy and has done tremendous injustice to the dreams of martyrs and the vote of the people. So the nation is undergoing through a traumatic period. These traumatic experiences are vibrantly expressed in the video CD called *Remote Control* which is produced at the time of cow procession festival.

In the video CD called *Remote Control*, artists like Khem Sharma, Shiva Shankar Rijal, Niraj Subedi, and others have hurled a biting satire on different issues-national identity, border encroachment, and intervention of the foreign powers on the domestic politics, politicians who only deliver speeches rather than focusing on actions. Using humor as a catalyst, it addresses the sensitive social, cultural, political and economic issues.

At the beginning of the video, Shiva Shankar accuses the politicians that everything that happens in the country is because of the dictation of the “Remote Control”. The first scene that the Video highlights is inside the Constituent Assembly building, new Baneshwor. He comes heavily upon the constituent assembly members not being able to lead the nation in the right direction by writing new constitution and addressing the myriads of problems of people. They do not have their own vision for the development of the nation and the betterment of the life of the people. Instead they are guided by the “Remote Control” -- symbolically referring to foreign powers. He lashes at such tendency of politicians. He even threatens to punish them and advises to move ahead with the “remote control” of the people. If remote is in other’s hands, no one can use it save the one who is holding it.

Then, the video presents the song which is about the indelible influence of India on the minds of the leaders. The song mocks at the politicians whose fears go away when they get the chair. A very interesting aspect of the video is that the name of the satirized politician is not only alluded to but mentioned directly. Now the question arises: why do the artists have complete freedom to do and to

say whatever they want during the cow procession festival. There is a myth behind it. Uttam Jha, a practicing Brahmin and head of the local chamber of commerce, narrated a myth that explained how the cow and the death motif intertwined with the carnivalesque aspects of the festival: the Cow Procession originated during the reign of King Jagat Prakash Malla. The king started the festival when, after the death of his son, he was desperately searching for a means to comfort his grieving queen. To lift his wife's grief, Jagat Malla first sent out a procession of sacred cows to parade in the boy's memory. Yet the queen remained despondent. After the cow parade failed, Jagat had another idea. He ordered all his citizens who had lost a family member during the preceding year to parade below the queen's window so that she could see that she was not the only one who suffered the death of a family member. King Jagat Malla was about to order all of the costumed people punished when the queen began to laugh at all the carnival activities. In gratitude, King Jagat Malla proclaimed that every year on the day of the Cow Procession people would have complete freedom to do whatever they wanted (qtd, in Grieve 477).

Shiva Shankar simultaneously mocks at and emits harsh, violent and mordant attack on the top leaders of every party one by one- Madhav Kumar Nepal, K.P. Oli, Sher Bdr. Thapa, Surya Bdr. Thapa, who always looks for Delhi's help and meets the leaders there frequently. Similarly, he characterizes other leaders in the same way- Matrika Prasad Yadav- a drunkard and an insane, Kamal Thapa, Pashupati Shamsheer Rana, Shusil Koirala, Bal Bdr. K.C., Krishna Prasad Sitaula, Narayan Man Bujkshe-an advocate of presential rule, Chitra

Bahadur K.C. who keeps on blabbering on against federalism, Jhalanath Khanal, a footballer who lost a 'won-match' because of the referee, Bamadev Gautam-a translator working not for UML but for UCPN (Maoist), Bharat Mohan Adhikari -- always an honest man, Bijay Kumar Gachchhedar -- improving only after the investigation for the abuse of authority, Mohan Baidya -- a horned bull like man, Krishna Sitaula -- the odd leaders, Sujata Koirala, Shasanka Koirala, Shekhar Koirala, the old rags thrown by the Congress. He also pokes at home minister regarding emergence of various armed forces like Gohit, Tiger, and Kobra group. Similarly, he mocks at other leaders Ram Chandra Paudel, Arjuna Narsingha K.C., Shyam Sundar and Sarita Giri of Sadvana Anandidevi. While mocking at the leaders, the artist creates a rhyming pattern: Election commission helped Sarita Giri to win the race; Rajendra Mahato always wears Indian dress, Upendra Yadav always travels either in Madhes or Videsh (foreign country), Mahanta Thakur --worthless mike always saying "Uttar Pradesh".

Not only political aspect, the video also raises the economic issue. The country rich in water resources is mired by load shedding. People are destined to live in the dark. The price of goods of daily life has increased immensely creating a great problem in people's life. Theft, robbery, violence, massacre, is increasing day by day. Even then, the leaders turn their deaf ears to the plight of the people. There is an alarming gap between rich and poor. Rich people are getting richer and richer while poor people are turning poorer and poorer. "Why do our leaders all the time love to be leaders of the poor? When will they be the leaders of the

rich people and prosperous Nepal? Shiva Shankar asks the question. “To improve the life standard of the people, you should not only talk but also act”.

The satirical nature of the video emerges in the process of performance and oralization, other than in the written rendering of the same. Body gestures and the articulation of words communicate the hidden meaning of the otherwise straightforward composition. It is in the performance that its satirical nature truly emerges. In essence, the written text masks the communicative capacity of body gesture and movement to the extent that the moments of satirization experienced in performance are denied expression. Such a satirization shows certain features of the dialogic discussed in a number of works within dialogic criticism.

It would seem that such kind of performance resulted from a feeling of anger, indignation, and betrayal at those who wield political power. In the video under discussion, greed, injustice, criminality, economic sabotage, anti-religiosity, and political betrayal are subjected to satiric comment. The artists in the video utilize history to shed light on political trends. Their starting point is the understanding, reevaluating, and reshaping of the socio-cultural, economic, and political reality in the country in the living present. The performance is presented in a terrain of the immediate and familiar. The past and the distanced are presented in order to illuminate the present. Secondly, it has a multi-styled and heterogeneous tendency. The artists have a multi-toned narration especially in their use of direct and indirect speech; they make use of inserted genres, retold dialogues, and parodically reinterpreted citations; they use jargons, anecdotes,

familiar episodes, and registers, and connect languages such as the ones spoken by people from different regions -- Terai, Pahad and Himal.

The video is also informed by such socioeconomic issues as the unavailability of schools, good drinking water, health facilities, electrification, investment programs, and employment. In a sense, the video is bifunctional. On the one hand, it is a questioning of the lifestyle of political leaders and, on the other hand, is a collective reflection on the socioeconomic problems in the country. Furthermore, it is an answer to claims and tendencies attributable to the Constituent Assembly member. In that sense, the performance acts as the people's courtroom. It sensitizes people to reflect on the evils in their society and on how best to resolve them. Similarly, the performer of the video becomes social commentators. It invites everybody to speak out against evil because it is their right to do so. In other words, it is advocating for a "dialogics of the oppressed". By exposing political hypocrisy and oppression, the performer empowers the oppressed and disempowers the oppressors, by unmasking and demystifying them in public (in the spirit of carnival). It is done through reference to specific events and situations familiar to the public.

The subject matter of almost all the genres-poems, stories, essays, cartoons- published in the *Kamana* newspaper as well as that of audio and visual is somehow similar: social, political, economic and cultural issues.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

After reappraising the Gaijatra festival through the interconnection of trauma theory and performance theory, the researcher has come to the conclusion that what the Newars of the Kathmandu valley collectively commemorate as Gaijatra festival is a kind of compulsive repetition that acts out the trauma of the loss of their dear ones. Through these festivals they engage in different ritualistic performances in an attempt to work through their traumas. The commemoration is meant for not only remembering the traumas but also coping with the present and for future survival.

Collective memory, which Gaijatra festival is, is socially framed since social groups determine what is memorable and how it will be remembered. It is also found that social remembering is a performative codification of trauma, a performance that leads to the easing of the pressure of trauma.

As the very emergence of the festival -- king Pratap Malla's attempt to console his bereaved wife from the loss of their only son-- shows the sole purpose of collective commemoration of the festival is to come to terms with the trauma caused by the loss of the beloved kith and kin. The exhilarating and performative mode of festival in the street -- carnivalesque procession of people in colorful costumes walking along with Gods and demons together, dance, song, use of mask, cross dressing, etc. -- as well as the innumerable ritualistic practices at home go a long way in healing the traumatic experiences.

Another very interesting discovery of this research is related to the overwhelming play of numerous banter available in different forms during the

Gaijatra festival -- print, audio-visual, and live programmes that mount a good-humored attack on social, political, economic, cultural affairs of the entire nation. Sometimes, they are full of grotesque imagery, jocularly and merriment. Such performances mobilize an intermixture of wit and humor, quickness of fancy and jocularly as in the *Kamana Magazine* and the video CD entitled "Remote Control". The voice -- often colloquial, mocking, denunciatory -- is carefully attuned to a broad audience. These popular performances cumulatively satirize the seamy sides of the society. The artists use popular, lower-class forms to set up satiric mirroring from the below. These performances from the below contribute towards a healing of the social afflictions along with the personal grief which is worked through through the collective commemoration of the festival.

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