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**Self and Tradition: A Case of Influence**

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**Self and Tradition: A Case of Influence**

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## **Abstract**

The thesis portrays history of Nepali painting by showing how it gets gradually influenced by the western tradition of painting. Different artists like Lain Singh Bangdel who comes under the banner of expressionism- a western movement. But he has his own way to paint in the same tradition. In the same way, artist N.B. Gurung, an emerging painter of Nepal, though having influenced by Bangdel, he follows the impressionist way of painting. So, being influenced by other does not mean to copy one's tradition as it is. The case of influence is multi-dimensional and it crisscrosses individual style and schools in deterministic modes.

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## **I. Introduction: Ideas and Impressions**

The focus of the thesis is to draw parallel lines between two modes of influences, one is Lain Singh Bangdel's influence on artist N.B. Gurung's works, and the other is Western artistic influences on Bangdel's works. The case of influence, however, is not merely a case of his imitating Bangdel's expressionistic technique, but being influenced by the impact of western avant-garde painters in general. Gurung's techniques are not the direct borrowings of Bangdel's expressionistic techniques, but creating a space in his mind and developing modes of representation as an impressionistic artists.

Gurung attempts in his paintings to record the external objects like urban streets and rural landscapes objectively to capture the transient effect of light on color and texture as in western impressionistic paintings. Thus, he abandons the traditional muted browns, grays and green in favor of lighter, more brilliant palette. Instead of using grays and black for shadows one builds of forms out of discrete flecks and dabs of color one attempts to choose more casual and less contrived disposition of object within the picture frame to capture the essence of external objects. He uses colors to show the effect of light on things and to suggest atmosphere rather than showing exact detail, since the detail ness of traditional way of painting cannot expose the objective essence.

Impressionism is a style in painting that presents a moment of perception in relation to mind and eyes and the external object. What one's mind perceives, that

speaks out through the painting in distorted form to present and give a general idea of the object rather than giving particular facts or details.

Gurung creates what he is impressed by and what his mind reflects. The impression on objects helps his mind to speak in the form of painting. So he finds impressionism an appropriate style to give a general idea of an object. As a lover of nature, he studies how the lights split leaving the impression of color on object. It is some how logical that as the sun light moves on the color of nature changes on accordingly. For these Nepali surrounding is appropriate for him to execute.

The paintings, placed at the end of this research, help to understand how the paintings have been executed. Firstly, the landscape entitled “Mountain and Yaks” (fig. 1) represents absolute form of impressionism by implying its features, vivid and direct colors giving an impression of silence and seasonal impact of nature. Some part of the painting is distorted in order to catch the essence of the Himalaya and its surroundings. On the other hand, the dabs of color indicate ones sense of mental images as well as pressure to finish the painting within certain time and space. The dominant part of the painting is its simplicity, since water color painting requires transparency and spontaneity. In order to grab those feelings, he has handled carefully on the parts of sky, mountain and its foreground.

Talking about formation of painting, he has applied water color as the medium to create painting which helps one to speak with nature and people. Technically, the style is known as ‘wet on wet.’ In this technique any painting is to finish within the time before water applied on the paper dries up completely otherwise the impression of an object cannot be shown properly. There are other ways to imply water color though.

Other paintings are also similar with the above mentioned painting. They differ only in subject and in the use of texture. Of course, these paintings entitled “Durbar Square” (fig. 2) and “Buddha Birth Place” (fig. 3) are executed in water color medium and they share a bit complexity in the form, however, they are just the moment of artist's perception on those objects in which he has applied salts for creating texture and dabs for distorting the real objects. Common colors like grays, yellow, red, blue, green etc are applied in order to capture the certain moment of atmosphere.

The painting entitled “Durbar Square” includes crowds and is very rough at looking but it shares the current phenomenon of time. Crowds seem in hurry, moving fast to meet their destination but they have obstacle on it. On the other hand, the temples, electric poles and sky are blurred. Simply, the artist has done to represent same situation faced by the crowds, especially those of blurred parts, share the mental position of urban people. The application of the color also seems uncontrolled because it is the artist’s mind with experiencing external objects.

The artist following the technique of western art form like Impressionism does not seem to correspond with the Nepali artist Bangdel’s following of expressionistic tradition. The reality of influence, however, develops in shuttle ways. Since the style of the impressionism reacted against realism for choosing personal than sordid condition of real life, the moods of impressionism suits the artist for being and creating subjectively. Consequently impressionism influences Gurung to take up its techniques. Bangdel on the other hand, is an expressionist whose style too influences me for the very reason that it drifted away from realism. Many of the works of the expressionists have a comparatively coarse and unfinished appearance. They are individualistic like the impressionists are personal. Both the style try to achieve greater personal in art which Bangdel understood and which in terms influences him.





## II. Western Art Tradition

### Modern Art Movements

Modern painting began at the point where feudal society had just disappeared, taking with it arts oldest and best customers: the church, the monarchy and the nobility. Since then the modern artists have wandered about at the mercy of a newer and much more difficult clients. Less sure of themselves than their predecessors, the new middle class patron of the arts was bound to be far more conservative. Holding on with a deathlike grip to the established style of the past, they stubbornly refused to admit any kind of innovation. This intellectual uneasiness in bourgeois lenders of finance and government was combined with a parallel political conservatism that made new ideas—artistic or otherwise highly suspect. In fact, artistic liberalism soon becomes synonymous with political liberalism.

Painting in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is basically abstract and non-figurative. This essential holds true despite the vast amount of painting created in this period which more or less adheres to the aesthetic of Renaissance realism. For some reason the image of objects conceived in terms of solid forms enclosed in a defined space (realism) no longer alone has power to move people, to stimulate their imagination or to excite admiration. Naturally this holds true for the artists of our century somewhat more than for the general public which is slow in responding to changes, especially to aesthetic innovations.

Before exploring the characters of the recent aesthetic revolution, it is impelled to seek some explanation for so drastic a turn of events. Many people accustomed to the art language of the old masters feel a sense of frustration before works which often seem to deny any of the values of ordinary beauty or significance

apparent in the older art. Because modern art's abstract character, the work of the modern artists have been called barbarous, infantile and degenerate by a few responsible and many irresponsible critic. For example, in French National Art Exhibition in 1863 more than 4000 paintings had been rejected due to the same reason. In addition the art critic Marsall Carvandish comments in his weekly collection: "The Critics and cartoonists found the impressionists an easy target. Their bright colors and bold brushwork made their paintings seem crude and unfinished compared with the more traditional and sober works to which the public was accustomed" (68).

The appearance of cubism and the method of abstraction are no eccentricity of recent times, for such transformations are recurrent phenomena in the art history. An equally radical reversal of style occurred at the end of the middle ages with the advent of the Renaissance. The changes that took place after 1400 in Italian and Flemish art were no less remarkable than those occurring shortly after 1900. Medieval painting was, in many respects, like the new painting of our age. Artist of both periods were concerned with ideas or concepts rather than realistic images. We find this method employed in a child's drawing. When a child makes a picture of an apple, he draws a circle or disc which is in fact a definition of a mental image. In this image there is no indication of mass or space construction which would create an illusion or imitation of an apple. While the method of the medieval and modern masters is related to the spontaneous method of children, he does not involve duplicating a pre-established mental image as in the case with children.

The people of middle ages rejected realism because of external world of physical reality was, according to their philosophy and their religion, a master of

relatively little importance. The physical world was, at best, a kind of waiting room. Beyond that it was the unquestioned reality of heaven or hell unseen by mortal eye.

When the men of the Renaissance lost their faith in the unseen world, they created a doctrine generally called humanism. According to humanistic view, man is the measure, not god. Men become the explorer of a world which science classifies and reason explains. Faith in man and his reasoning faculty replaced faith in god and his beneficences. The world view of our time has, quite naturally, many of the attributes of both medieval and renaissance thought. But our age reserves judgment about the life here after, and is skeptical about the ability of science to solve all human problems. Despite the violence and the disruption of our time, there is every reason to believe that our age is emerging from a period of dangling doubt, of negative questioning? In the works of artists, scientists and statesmen, there is a sober and chastened faith in a new order for a horribly disrupted world. In all spheres, notably in physics, art and politics, positive advances are being made against chaos. The work of Roosevelt, Einstein, Picasso and Wright are that of heroic builders who have received strong foundations for a stable world structure.

The disappearance of the realistic image from painting was in itself a symptom of the upheavals in the general culture of our time. Its disintegration may be traced in the art of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are namely come under following movements.

### **Impressionism**

A revolutionary movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century is: Impressionism because it challenged all the existing academic realism then popular and itself become a popular type of art by 1890, and has persisted up to our own time. Especially it is a sort of painting based upon catching the immediate aspect of the scene – the impression.

Details which are the main feature of realism were forgotten, the subject was fogged over, almost lost in a shimmering veil of color. Britannica Ready Reference

Encyclopedia clearly mentioned the distinction of art from realism in modern time:

The identifying feature of their work was an attempt to record a scene accurately and objectively capturing the transient effect of light on color and texture. To this end they abandoned the traditional muted browns, grays, and greens as favor of a higher more brilliant palette, stopped using grays and black for shadows built up forms out of discrete flecks and dabs of color and often painted out of doors, rather than in the studio. (113)

In other words, impressionism is a type of painting that studies light and shade and its impact on the object. Therefore, the impressionists always go to outdoor for the same purposes. And painters try to analyse bright color by the law of physics. For example, they wanted to represent the visual qualities of sunlight at various times of the day and seasons of the year. They put small colored strokes side by side, so that at a little distance the hues seemed to blend and shimmer with reflection of color even in the shadows.

To response of impressionism, in 1963, seeing totally gone against traditional type of paintings, French Academy's Salow consistently rejected most of their works. As a result, impressionists held their own exhibition in 1974. The group originally including Claude Monet, Pierre- Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, and Berthe Morisot and so on, had revolutionized western painting.

## **Dadaism**

Dadaism began in Zurich, Switzerland during the First World War and swiftly spreaded to the other European cities. The Dada movement attacked established values of the painting and society. Civilization was the subject of their violent attack. It "proclaimed the futility of reason, logic and science and declared their bankruptcy, they had failed to avoid war and then had helped to drag it out and increase its horror" (Muller 28).

Moreover, Dada did not only attack the futility of war but "also attacked the artistic ideas cherished by bourgeois society; either by setting new ideas against them, founded on a belief in the creative value of chance and the irrational; or by destroying the notion of art itself" (28).

Dada defined both civilization and artistic conventions. There is no invitation to participate in painting. They believe that God has gone down the drain; capitalism has made technology in to God. To make an example, Ducham adds moustache and beard in Leo Nardo's the most popular painting Monalisa in his painting L.H.O.O.O. It is a bitter comment upon the tendency to glorify certain works beyond their artistic values. Dada is pocking fun at the absurdity of everything including painting. They exhibited a toy monkey inside a frame entitled, portrait of Cezanne.

It is obvious that these artists, who not long before had both produced remarkable paintings; no longer considered themselves involved in the same kind of artistic creation; they wanted to ridicule what they saw as the ideas of society; technical progress and an art that was blindly simply because it was enshrined in a venerable museum.

## **Surrealism**

Surrealism is another of the many modern art movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its philosophical father was Andre Breton, a French poet and writer. Surrealism is a revolt-against all restraints on free creativity. It radically challenged established convention as well as the standards or norms of sense of coherence in grammar, logic, pictorial representation etc.

Surrealism emphasizes the unconscious, the importance of dreams, and the psychological aspect in arts. This group of artists were heavily influenced by the philosophy of Freudian psychoanalysis. Surrealists turned for automatic writing. Breton believed that dreams were the natural expression of the unconscious mind. Automatism, irrational thought associations, hallucinations, and the recollection of dream images offered a way to liberate the creative mind from the bonds of logics and reasons.

In this sense, Surrealism is totally distinct from all other contemporary schools and indeed makes a complete break with all the accepted tradition of artistic expression. Within surrealism one can get many variations like some artist practiced organic, emblematic, or absolute surrealism, expressing the unconscious through suggestive yet indefinite biomorphic images. For example, we can get such differences in the work of artists like Jean Arp, Max Ernst, Andre Masson, and John Miro. Others created realistically painted images, removed from their context and reassembled within a paradoxical or socking framework. For example, Salvador Dali's and Rene Magritte's paintings.

With its emphasis on content and free form, surrealism provided a major alternative to the contemporary, highly formalistic CUBIST movement and was

largely responsible for perpetuating in modern painting the traditional emphasis on content.

## **Cubism**

Cubism, another modern art movement, had a major influence on the development of modern art. Cubism was initiated by the Spaniard Pablo Picasso and the French man Georges Braque in Paris before World War I.

The means used by Picasso and Braque, and soon by most of the other serious painters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were even more revolutionary than their aims. The breaking up, destroying of the image; the rupture of the picture's two dimensional surface; the inclusion of words, not just images, on the canvas; the attempt, often made to express the ugly or hideous; and the use of shocking and displeasing, not beautiful combination of colors-all reflected the effects of cubist and other non-representational painters to create an entirely new kind of art that would express; as they said, and thereby revealed the chaos, confusion, and weird, thwarted drama of modern life. As the art critic Coplestone tried to define cubism. He writes that the artists "do not use the conventional perspective, or realist color, nor do they necessarily conform to a single viewpoint" (18). The artist presented a kind of reality that broke away from renaissance tradition, especially from the use of perspective and illusion.

Furthermore, Cubism had strong roots in African tribal art. In Cubism geometrical forms and fragmentations are favored. Everything is reduced to cubes and other geometrical forms. Often several aspect of one subject is shown simultaneously.

The critic Myres states, "Cubist were interested in the study and analysis of objects in a formal logical, architectural and structural fashion that ultimately led to



such machine-age" (295). To put in other words, Cubism was born unexpectedly in 1907. Spheres, cylinders and cones gave way to cubical shapes and faceted planes. The cubists use simple outlines and then planes to Juxtapose or overlapping was used to give every remembered aspect of an object.

Besides, Cubist also experimented by gluing paper and other materials onto their canvases. For example, cuts/bits of newspaper, a cigarette, labels from bottle, playing cards, plastic, pieces of glass etc. in compositional arrangement in background.

### **Expressionism**

Expressionism is the art of the emotion, the art of tension provoked by consciousness of the forces which surround modern human being. The inevitability of world war, the rise of industrialization, the new power of capitalism- all these things weighed on man's mind at the beginning of the century. In similar manner, the critic Abraham points out that. "Expressionism is a revolt-against the artistic and literary tradition of realism, both in subject and in style which overrides fidelity to the actual appearance of things" (62). The subjects of expressionist works were frequently distorted, or otherwise altered. Landmark of this movement were violent colors and exaggerated lines that helped certain intense emotional expression. The art critique, Joseph-Emile Muller also has similar attitude towards expressionist as he writes:

They usually distorted the form of visual reality more to reinforce the expression of their feelings than to serve the requirement of painterly vision. ...Their works had a certain common flavor, which was harsh, emotional, often anguished. Beyond this, it is impossible to generalize. While some were in such a hurry to pour them out that they neglected

their technique, others never sacrificed the plastic beauty of their painting. While some remained faithful to chiaroscuro, modeling and traditional space, there were others that gambled with pure colors and there were even some who showed the influence of cubism. (5-6)

Expressionists were trying to pinpoint the expression of inner experience rather than solely realistic portrayal, seeking to depict not objective reality but the subjective emotions. They respond that objects and events arouse in them. In simple terms, the expressionist artist or writer undertakes to express a personal vision-usually a troubled or tensely emotional vision of human life and human society. This is done by exaggerating and distorting what, according to the norms of artistic realism, are objective features of the outer world and by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling.

Expressionists were visionaries and irrationalists, and poured their emotion ecstatically. Expression determines form such paintings are exclamatory, dynamic and bewildering. The painter instead of representing the world as it is, undertakes to express inner experience by representing the world as it appears to his emotional, abnormal and troubled state of mind. Often such a work implies that this mental condition is representative of anxiety-ridden modern man in the industrial and technological society which is drifting toward chaos. The following extract by the art critic, Muller makes clear people to know the experience of an artist:

Once Edward Munch (1863-1944) himself went to Paris where he admired Van Gogh Gauguin, Seurat, Lantrec and the Nabis. His first exhibition, which he held at Berlin (1892) caused a considerable scandal but established his reputation in Germany [. . .] the solitude of human being before the immensity of nature as well as among the

crowds of great cities was in anguishing experience for this pessimistic, morbid, restless man. Woman attracted and at this same time frightened him. In his eyes, the exultant happiness they procured only brought conflict, regret and bitterness in its train. (7)

All these experiences Munch expressed in his paintings through "long lines, stretching into the distance and curving with melancholy, and by using colors that were nostalgic even when they were bright" (7). Likewise, expressionists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Enrich Heckel did not seek refinement in their harmonies; they wanted strong piercing and strident overtone. Similarly, Kirchner (1880-1938) whose nervous, uneasy temperament is revealed in his nudes, landscape and city streets.

In 1905, Dresden, a group of artists formed a group known as Die Brücke, The Bridge. It gained its name from the group's goal of bridging all the revolutionary elements of culture and to provide the direction for the future. Van Gogh was an initiator of this group who fought with his landscape and his various pictorial subjects to get them to express his feelings; James Ensor, who mocked those things which would stop him from living in society and his own death; Edward Munch, who tried to cope with the difficulties and torments that faced his existence.

Expressionism, therefore, is to be a way of painting through suffering to cope better with the unhappiness which surrounds everyone. The famous artist, Kokoschka wanted his picture to make the viewer empathize with the spirit of the subject; the purpose of a painting was not the object painted but the feeling and the impression it made on the person looking at it.

In 1911 another group known as Der Blaue Reiter, Blue Rider was formed. The Blue Rider artists involved expressing a general disillusionment with the values of

society. This group sought a marriage of spiritual and symbolic values in nature. The painters of this group like Kirchner, Schmidt - Rottluff, Heckel tried to find the primitive nature of man by living in a community and using the expressiveness of color. What counts are not so much their actual paintings and how they painted, but what is perceived even though it is not formulated. These painters; they could not look away from it. The painters OTTO DIX and George Grosz forced themselves to depict Germany after the war: the invalids, the misery and the bourgeoisie they blamed for it all. They believed theirs was the new objectivity in painting.

### **Paintings after the Second World War**

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, several art movements appeared day by day in Europe. The thirst for life and optimism for the betterment of future, the artists began to explore and innovate new ideas and thoughts to enrich the European art further. However, in the late 40s and 50s the centre of western art gradually shifted away from Europe towards the United States.

Those artists who had migrated to the United States during the two World Wars, tried to find their own identities experimenting with various styles and techniques. Most of the established movements which said to be the origin of Europe, the American artists staged a strong rebellions against their influence in their art, mainly the influence of Cubism, Futurism and Surrealism.

However, at this point, an art movement appeared in American which is called as an Abstract-Expressionism under the influence of surrealist idea, especially the desire to tap into the unconscious through the technique of automatism. Abstract expressionist emphasized the process of painting by allowing evidence of the artists' gesture to remain visible on the canvas surface. In other words, they emphasized

freedom of emotional expression technique and execution, they displayed a single unified undifferentiated field, network or other image in unstructured space; and the canvas were large, to enhance the visual effect and project monumentality and power. Jackson Pollock, Willem DeKooning, Robert Motherwell and Hans Hofmann were among the leaders of this movement, who had practiced such style and technique in their innovative paintings.

In the early 60s, another art movement appeared in America which is known as 'Pop Art'. It simply means popular art. The name itself indicates that this art movement wanted to bring back the arts into the daily life of people who were bitterly reacted against abstract painting because it didn't concern the usual day to day life. So, this movement took its themes from the subjects like films and commercial materials which weren't previously associated with art and its subjects. As a result, pop art represented an attempt to return to a more objective, universally acceptable form of art. It was intensified more after the dominance in both the United States and Europe of the highly personal Abstract Expressionist movement. Its effects including decisive destruction of the boundary between so called high and low art- has continued to be powerfully felt throughout the visual art to the present day. Therefore, the movement totally rejects any distinction between good and bad taste. The famous artists like Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Tom Wesselman, James Rosenquist etc had painted such paintings and were the forerunner of this movement.

On the other hand, the rise of a small group in 60s added a new dimension in fine art known as Minimalism. The Minimalist believed that a work of art should be entirely self-referential; personal elements were stripped away to reveal the objective. And it mainly focused upon purely visual elements. For example, the painters such as Agnes Martin and Frank Stella concentrated on color, line and shape.

It is important to note that the Minimalists abandoned the traditional method of composing a picture in which the artist gradually adds elements to bring the picture in to balance, in favor of a method by which the painting virtually paints itself. Other important Minimalist artists in this line were Americans Carl Andre, Robert Morris and Dan Flavin.

Similarly, in between 1960-1980 many art movements were practiced in Europe and America. Though these movements were short lived, brought so many changes in visual arts such as Performance Art and Conceptual Art. Performance art emphasized the audience often expected to participate in order to blur the boundaries between art and everyday life, whereas the conceptual art carried the process of separating art from the creation of a physical object to its logical conclusion. In the mid 1960s Conceptual artists began to make works of art indistinguishable from the ideas that brought them in being. For instance, the painter Kossuth juxtaposed a real chair with a photograph of a chair and a written dictionary definition of a chair in his painting. In doing so, he called attention to the distinction between reality and representation and between representation and language.

Likewise, an art movement appeared known as Photorealism, advocated a return back to more traditional technique and subject matter. The Photorealistic painters including the American artists Chuck Close, Don Eddy, Richards Estes, Audrey Flack, and Ralph Goings, and the British artist Malcolm Morely painted their works based closely on photographs where realistic scenes are rendered in meticulous details.

Although the photorealist worked on the base of photography, it is realism of new kind. It is not representation so much as representation of representation. It has a

clear acknowledgement of the role of the camera as an intermediary between reality and the artists.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the return to figurative art took a more personal form in Neo-Expressionism. The subject matter and topics such as classical mythology and ancient culture which were ignored by modernists were once again explored in the basis of expressionism to address difficult issue of humanism. Their art was characterized by a tense of great playful presentation of object in a primitivist manner vivid color harmonies, large scale and a sense of inner tension and alienations.

Period between 1980 and 1990 in visual art has been often described as Pluralist known as also Post-Modern. The only thing that seemed to unite most artists were their continuing belief that art can never be fully defined because it consists irony, allegory, references to language and ambiguous meaning. "Postmodernist does not oppose discarding outworn traditions but oppose innovatism in style that are made for their own sake. Pluralist believe that any form of representation is valid?" (Encyclopedia, 88).

Meantime some artists have begun to use computer software to create art that brings its own existence into question. In 1997, Installation Art, which incorporates many elements, including paintings, photographs moving parts, video and computer, images, people or animals by American artist. For example, the artist, Peter Halley at the museum of modern art in New York City, used computers to change the images and colors the artist has chosen. The work raised a number of key questions: what is the work of art? Is it the image on the screen? Is it the printout? Is it the software program? And if the program is interactive, who then, is the artist? Or is the word artist itself no longer appropriate? These were among the important questions left unanswered by the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **III. Nepali Art Tradition**

#### **Nepali Art History**

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

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

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

Of all, Malla kings who ruled over this valley from 1200 A.D.-1769 A.D, within this period, the reign of king Pratap Malla is often referred as "the golden age of Nepalese arts". There are ample examples of arts to support this fact and no doubt



that the worldwide reputation Nepalese art enjoys today rests on the achievement of the past. Besides, the great King Prithivi Narayan Shaha fully realized the importance of the artistic heritage, is supported by the fact that he built Kailas Darbar at Basantapur in Kathmandu after his conquest of the valley. His successors were equally keen to preserve the tradition of Nepalese art, and developed it further, as exemplified by the temples, sculptures and paintings of the early years of the Shah period. But prior to this, the Nepal kingdom was said to be glorious in its art and culture in Lichchhavi regime. Yet we don't have sufficient evidence to prove it.

The art scholar, Abhi Subedi, quotes in his article entitled, "Nepali Art; An Overview" about the idea of Pal, a prominent art historian in his book "Art of Nepal" (1985: 17) divides Nepali history of Art from A.D. 300 to the Shah reign into five broad periods in the following. As he divides:

- i) Lichhavi (330-879)
- ii) Transitional (879/80-1200)
- iii) Early Malla (1200-1482)
- iv) Late Malla (1482-1769)
- v) Shah (Since the conquest of the Kathmandu valley and the foundation of the modern Nepal by king Prithivi Narayan Shah, of the house of Gorkha and the fore father of the king of Nepal in 1769). (7)

Many experts have concluded that the real modern art in Nepal began with the Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana. In 1846, Jung Bahadur Rana usurped all the administrative power in a sanguinary conspiracy. Four years after becoming prime minister, he went to England and on his way back visited France and other countries. After his return, there was a big shift in Nepali art. Jung Bahadur was so enamored of

western art and life style that the influence of the west was to be seen not only in everyday life of the higher strata of society but also in Nepalese art, which brought a complete change in art and painting too. During the one century of Rana rule, a number of palatial buildings sprang up in the valley, all built in mimic of western architectural styles.

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

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

Most of the artists (of that period) were self taught and had inherited a family tradition within a particular caste. Only in 1926 was this pattern broken when Rana Prime Minister Chandra Samsheer sent Chandra Man Singh Maskey for formal training in the government school of Art, Calcutta in British India, where he successfully completed a six year course. The artist's account for his career as a reformist, educationist, and a fighter for democracy is full of tussle with the Rana rule but Chandra Samsheer's position remain distinct. The exposure of these artists to western techniques brought the significant change on the portrait painting in the court. Since the Rana loved their own images, they got their portraits made by the artists.

Another artist was the late Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, also from the same school in 1929. Chandra Man Maskey including himself were the first Nepalese artist to receive formal art training in India.

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

### **Bangdel and Modern Art in Nepal**

It is strange to note that when Bhajuman Chitrakar visited England in 1850, a breakaway from the traditions of the past had already started in European art, particularly in France, but this trend reached Nepal only a century later. During the first 10 years following the events of 1950 Nepalese artists were busy mixing several styles of painting, amongst which the concrete or representational style of the west was dominant. However, a few artists had become aware of the modern art movement in Europe. Their works were just imitation since they were self-taught artists.

At this point Lain Sing Bangdel appeared in the Nepali art scene. He is the first Nepalese artist to get proper and full exposure to the western school of art. After

his return from Paris some scholars hopefully remarked that "the real modern art has begun on Nepal"(Singh, 232.)

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

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

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

Bangdel had completed his six years course from the government college of arts and craft's in Culcutta in 1945 with highest distinction. In 1952 he went to Parish where he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. During his sojourn in Europe, he also spent a few years in England. In France, he had the opportunity of meeting famous personalities including the Nobel Prize Winner's in Francois Maurice and Albert Camus and also Andre Malraux, Jean Cocteau and painters like Braque and Picasso.

They must have influenced his thoughts in arts and literature. This exposure to western art "immeasurably enriched his technical ability and multiplied available creative options and allowed young Nepali artists access to such masters as Picasso, Braque and Van Gogh" (Neubauer Foreward).

In traditional Nepali painting figures of the gods and goddesses are dominant, but Bangdel gave emphasis to the "secular art by painting country people in their everyday lives with quite dignity, and his distinctive landscape, immense majestic mountains and terraced field, simple pleasant huts and country temples" (Neubauer, Forward). Yet he painted these local images in "an international style- a special blend of western technique learned in London, Paris and America, and Indian traditional drawings and religions representations" (Neuwauer, forward).

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

However, there were some self-taught Nepali artists who were experimenting with the new theme, medium and technique. Like Gahendra Man Amatya, a Nepali self taught artist claimed to be the first Nepali modern artist to exhibit his solo exhibition in Kathmandu in 1925 but we are not much sure of this argument. However, there are much spaces to discuss on this area. Supporting Amatya's claim Narendra Raj Prasai says "the first man to hold an exhibition of modern art was Gahendra Man Amatya. He had held a solo art exhibition in 1925" (299).

Regarding Bangel's works, work resources and style, Dinna Bangdel says:

His works have the universal appeal that continues both his personal vision with his immense creative genius. Much of his imagery is

derived from nature that is interpreted and rendered through the artist's own perception and imagination. His style is marked with its own distinctiveness- it expresses both his familiarity with the trends of modern art and neglects his inspirations that are rooted to his native soil. (9)

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

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

### **Interpretation of Bangdel's Paintings**

#### **Mother and Child (Fig. 4)**

Nearly 60 years span of his artistic career Lain Singh Bangdel was busy with experimenting various forms, colors and techniques in order to show his artistic energy and talent. Later at the end of his life he came to become famous for his art in abstract form as it was his main aim of his artistic endeavor. He concentrated fully and worked hard to be known for his art in the abstract form.

Though Bangdel painted in abstractions like "Mountain", "Summer Rain" etc, at the 90s onward, his paintings sometimes found to turn again to his previous style which is known as the figurative painting. The painting placed at the end of this thesis executed in the year 1994, oil on paper. He executed the painting probably due

to the recurrence memory of his hardship and poverty in the stay of Calcutta and in Paris.

Before the explanation of the painting it would be better to disclose his historical background at the stay of Calcutta where he suffered much for the love of his land. Dina Bangdel says in the same context:

After the independence of India from the British rule, in India, there was a growing consciousness of nationalism and self-identity among the young writers and artists. It was in his environment that Bangdel began to realize his own feeling toward his native land, Nepal.

Although his grandparent were from the east of Nepal Bangdel had yet to go there. Still, the memory of his ancestral home was kept alive by stories he had heard from his grandparents. (28)

In order to depict those feelings and memories, Bangdel painted several paintings, for example: Muna and Madan, and Mother and Child series to show the love for his native country. One can confidently claim that the painting "Mother and Child" reflects his recurrence desire to unite with his mother. On the other hand, the "Beggar woman" and "Old Stoppas" for displaying his hardship, mental torture and poverty.

As the topic itself indicates "Mother and Child", is the painting of love and affection between mother and child, connotatively it is Bangdel's love towards his country. In the painting as we can see, the mother holds the child so tightly as she trying to save her baby from any kind of difficulties and problems. She seems poor and frightened remembering future, but she is brave and hopeful for the future. This is suggested with the use of colors. Most of the part of painting is dominated by green

color. Green color naturally is the color of hope, pleasure and further it is the signal for bright future.

On the other hand, the figures are blurred and distorted in a way that they are the works of children; however it has many things to do with the modern age that we live today.

The bold line, heavy texture and the hues suggest the anger, dislike and mockery against the so called modern world where confusion, chaos, complexity distrust etc. have been prevailed everywhere. Bangdel has meticulously portrayed these tensions of contemporary time with the method of expressionistic technique.

### **Beggar Woman (Fig. 5)**

As discussed earlier chaptre, Bangdel began his career as a figurative painter. His earlier figurative works convey a sense of poignancy, sadness, loneliness and melancholy. The paintings are deeply moving with recurrent themes of hardship and poverty as well as with strength of human spirit. Another aspect of his paintings are romantic nostalgia. "A delicate balance exists between imagery and style-one derived from his own roots while the other followed the movement of modern art" (Bangdel Dina 14). Moreover, his works are never deprived of the character of his native homeland, and yet his style recalls the full vision of modern art. His famous paintings like "Poverty-stricken Families", "Blind Beggars", "Destitute", "The Old and The Infirm" are his projections and reflection on the social condition in Nepal and reflect his own period of difficulty and insecurity in Paris. In the following lines, Dinna Bangdel says as "financially and emotionally it was difficult time for him, away from home and family in an alien land and unsure of his future as an artist" (12) . The best example of this kind of painting is: "Beggar Woman", executed in the year 1956.



As seen in the painting, the old woman is not the fine representation of the beggar woman as found in the real world. The dominance of huge figure, which is distorted and bold lines are supposed to be the reflection of painful and disturbed emotions. It is suggestive rather than the concrete image and subjective rather than objective. The artist projects the mood in the expressive use of colors. Besides, there are harmony between color and composition.

The old woman has no cloth on the upper part of her body, her feet are bare, sits on the cold floor and on the whole she is only the bag of bones. These elements suggest the poverty and hunger, and question the so-called development and the progress of our world.

Furthermore, she extends her hand with a pot but tries to hide her face, her body freezes and she becomes still because of humiliation. If there were employment and opportunities, she would not beg. She is begging not because of laziness but because of her compulsion.

In terms of use of color, blue color is dominant all over the canvas. It recalls Picasso's blue period, blue is the symbolic of mood expressed, reinforces the atmosphere of despair. It is important to note that during Picasso's blue period, his financial condition was not so good. Similarly, Bangdel's condition was also in trouble financially and mentally when the biographer of Bangdel, Narendra Prasai questioned him about the dominance of blue color in his paintings Bangdel answered that blue brings out the life in paintings. The blue is directly associated with the mental disturbances as well as the physical condition of the woman.

### **Self Portrait after Bath (Fig. 6)**

Bangdel as an expressionist always sought different subjects, styles and techniques in order to prove himself as a true versatile modernist. His drawing and

paintings are the reflection of his mental status. In the same context Dina Bangdel says:

A marked feature of Bangdel's art has always been the variety of his artistic language. His versatility as an artist is nowhere clearer than in his long struggle with portraiture. Bangdel never visualized himself as a portrait painter, and depiction of precise realism always seemed to stiffen. This was in spite of the fact that early fifties he had painted portraits-mainly his wife and friends... to truly understand Bangdel's long struggle with portraiture is to also understand what portraiture meant to the artist. For him it was not enough just to capture the likeness of personality of the sitter, but that the brushwork and colors should reflect the artist's virtuosity. To him, portraiture was intensely personal, an expression of feeling about the individual and the relationship of the artist. (22)

For this, Bangdel poured his individual feeling depicting his own self portrait in nude posture. It is in fact, a satire upon whole modern human civilization. The dominance of warmer colors like pink, ash, red, cream, etc reflected his dissatisfaction to the growth of unhealthy and rotten behaviors that are being practiced in the name of modernization in the world.

This dominance of warmer colors in Bangdel's paintings were termed as the "ROSE PERIOD". The rose period came after the huge creation of blue paintings. Consequently, it shows Bangdel's interest for using different colors, mediums and themes. It was his second established choice of color.

As seen in the picture, the artist himself stands without any cloths in his body. He is alone and turns a bit aside with full of tense, misery and guilt as if he is the great criminal. This indicates his inner reality whereas the outer reality is totally different, since the people are trapped in a way that they can not escape from the individual reality. Thus, the painting shows today's people predicament in the contemporary era. At the same time, the painting is the symbolic representation of our time-where love, sympathy, justice, loyalty are sacked as W.B. Yeats expresses such condition of the modern world in his poem "Second Coming":

Turning and turning the widening gyre  
The falcon can not hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centric can not hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere.  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.  
The best-lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity (313 the Northern Anthology of Poetry).

#### **IV. Individual and Tradition**

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

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

No doubt, Nepali painters were heavily influenced by the western artistic style, technique as well as forms. Thus, many painters naturally get influenced from other artist in their tradition like Bangdel who has greatly been influenced from

expressionism but his paintings have its own uniqueness that distinguishes Bangdel from other expressionist painters. In the similar manner, needless to say, N.B Gurung being a painter from Nepal, has a lot of influences by the work of Bangdel but he establishes his paintings in Impressionistic tradition rather than Bangdel's expressionistic tradition of painting. So, it is quite true that having get influenced from someone does not necessarily mean to follow that tradition as it is rather it is creating some uniqueness which gives a individuality of the painters and create a kind of 'ness' of an individual painter.

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## Catalogue



**Fig 1**

**Title: Mountain and Yaks**

**Artist : N.B. Gurung**



**Fig. 2**

**Title: Durbar Square**

**Artist : N.B. Gurung**



**Fig. 3**

**Title: Buddha Birth Place**

**Artist : N.B. Gurung**



**Fig. 4**

**Title: Mother and Child**

**Artist: Lain Singh Bangdel**



**Fig. 5**

**Title: Beggar Women**

**Artist: Lain Singh Bangdel**



**Fig. 6**

**Title: Self Portrait after Bath**

**Artist: Lain Singh Bangdel**