

## *Performing for Change and Stability:*

### *Applied Theatre in Donor-Dependent Nepal*

**Shiva Rijal**

#### *Abstract*

This paper argues that by working for donors, Nepali applied theatre speak for the changes and transformations for the people mainly at countryside, on the one hand, and try to establish themselves as professional theatre practitioners in city. While doing so, they define themselves as theatre practitioners of a donor-depended nation. The practitioners of applied theatre in Nepal follow interest and priorities of donors, mainly international non-governmental organizations. As opinion creators, they reach at target community. Accompanied by representatives of donor organizations and government offices, the applied theatre practitioners disseminate consciousness expected by both government and non-government organizations. Back to town, same theatre practitioners spend money that they have managed to save by performing such consciousness raising performances to stage modern plays. As theatre practitioners of a nation that has been going through political transition of historically significant order, they find themselves working for donors as well as involved in creating a market for production of modern plays. The paper concludes that applied theatre practitioners in Nepal while working with donors do not only stage for target audiences, they also represent themselves as theatre artists of a donor-depended nation that has been going through political and social transitions.

Keywords: applied performance, panchayat regime, donor-dependance, 2005 people's uprising, pragmatism

#### **Introduction**

Historically speaking, Nepali theatre creators set out to practice applied theatre as reaction to the cultural policy adopted by the party-less Panchayati regime (1960-1990) that had come to power by displacing the 1959 historical democratically elected government. Needless to say the Panchayati regime under the control of the Royal Palace monitored the activities of the then Royal Nepal Academy, the Naachghar and several City Halls, the centers for modern theatrical performances.

Generally speaking the zeal to apply literature and other forms of art to create liberal societies had begun as early as 1960s, but the applied theatre as such became very vocal in early 1980s in Nepal. As a form of expression, it critiqued the regime's animosity towards democratic political culture. After almost forty five years of history, applied theatre in Nepal is mainly understood by three names now: street theatre or *sadak natak*, *Kachahari* theatre or Nepali version of Forum theatre propounded by the Brazilian theatre creator late Augusto Boal, and the works of Kathmandu-based performance artists. The first form emerged in the early 1980s mainly with the playwright and director Ashesh Malla, the second one emerged in the early 2000s mainly with Sunil Pokharel first and then is being followed by his disciples, and mainly Ashmina Ranjit, Salil Subedi, Manish Shrestha, Saurganga Darshandhari and Prithvi Shrestha among others have been practicing the last one since 2000s.

### **Performing for recognition**

Cultural performances in the Kathmandu Valley are staged publically in street and chowks, temple precincts and Dabali or raised platform architecturally designed for such performances and public gatherings and so on. In the capital city that has got a strong heritage of performance culture, the closed theatre introduced by the autocratic Rana regime (1847-1950), was an emulation of theatre form practiced in Calcutta, the then capital of the British India. The theatre loved and promoted by the families of the rulers was the metaphor they loved to live by since it was exclusive in nature that they used it as something that marked their class and life styles. But the spirit of theatre is such that individual talents always know how to take it to the public as it were. Many artists, mainly Manik Man Tuladhar, someone who had been trained in theatre in Calcutta, set out to stage plays in the open space for the public as early as 1929 (Kansakar, 2069 v.s., 30)<sup>1</sup>. Individual talents then staged performances known as *pyakhan*, a name given for the dramatic performance in the open spaces and chowks in local Newari language. *Pyakhan* became popular, and emerged as an alternate form to the ones loved by the Rulers in their palaces. It celebrated the public spirit of performance culture. This made the rulers hire such performance in their palaces as well. Tuladhar and his troupe played important role in creating theatre styles or mode of staging plays that was loved by both the commoners as well as the rulers (Subedi, 2006, 84-87). For the artists this form of theatre was a power that provided popularity among general public as well as ruling families.

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<sup>1</sup> All the citations of Nepali texts are my translation. Publication year of books and articles in Nepal has been mentioned Vikram Sambat (v.s.).

With the introduction of democracy in 1950 that was displaced by the party-less Panchayati regime in 1960, did emerge modern theatre centers such as Rashtriya Naachghar, Royal Nepal Academy in Kathmandu and several City Halls across the country. But the resources required for running modern theatre centers gradually got in direct control of the government. Since theatre productions centers, artists and other forms of resources started to function under the direct control of government, in no time did the theatre artists and critics realize the suffocating environment that did not favor the market and freedom oriented spirit of modern theatre (Rijal, 2007, 38-39). Such centers run under the regime that had come in power by displacing the legitimately elected democratic government naturally did not favor artists who held free thoughts and ideologies.

On top of that the then king Birendra called for the national referendum to choose either the multiparty democratic system or retaining of the partyless Panchayat regime with certain reforms in 1979. This announcement had brought euphoria among free thinkers, politicians, cadres and voters of multiparty democracy. But since the resources needed to conduct the nationwide referendum were in the control of the regime, the Panchas made the best of it and the 1980 result came in favor of them. Because of the ‘mounting pressure within the palace, and perhaps his own assessment of the future of the Crown in the event of a multi party camp victory, gradually tilted the king towards preservation of the Panchayat regime’ (Phadnis, 1981, 441). This directly played a major psychological role in garnering mass supports for the almost status quo situation. Historians believe that the then Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa is supposed to have ‘made full use of the government’s resources to affect the outcome, allegedly allowing lucrative logging concessions to businessmen in return for ‘donations’ and also encouraging people from the hills to occupy government land in the Tarai on the understanding that they would vote the right way’ (Whelpton, 2005, 109). The result made the supporters of multiparty democracy followers feel miserable. The Panchas after their victory set out to ban newspapers and journals and other forms of expression, Phadnis further writes that the ‘public media’ remained under ‘increasing fire’ (453).

On top of that Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala (1905-1982), the charismatic leader of democratic politics in Nepal, someone who had played a leading role in introducing democracy in Nepal by bringing the 104 years long autocratic Rana regime to an end, a novelist and storywriter, who represented a hope of freedom and multiparty democracy died in July 1982. This created certain sense of helplessness among freethinker youths, writers and common citizens of Nepal. Ashesh Malla, a poet and theatre artist in his mid twenties, who would also take part in the theatre festival organised by the then Royal Nepal Academy, found the atmosphere unfriendly to work for the artists who held free thoughts and

politically liberated ideas. Malla had already written plays and staged them in the closed theatre. Mostly known for the plays with anti-establishmentarian spirit, Malla represented a force that challenged the regime through creative works. Malla writes that he had conceptualized a play 'Hami Basanta Khoji Rahechhau or 'We are Searching for the Spring' as a response to the almost claustrophobic situation that the regime had created. He thought that the 'search for the spring' was an apt metaphor of the political spirit that the free thinkers, writers, artists and youths lived with then (Malla, 2066 v.s., Preface). Basanta in the play is a character that has gone missing. Narrator and other characters try to locate him. It reveals to them that finding Basanta is not an easy task, as it requires journey that takes one through all kinds of suffering both fire and rain. This play metaphorically speaks about the loss of democracy, the immediate political situation after the referendum. It evokes the collective pain, and the need for greater endurance and dedication.

Malla staged this play in the open ground at the Tribhuvan University Campus area in Kirtipur on 05 September 1982 targeting university students as main audiences. Mentioned should be made here that students agitation had played a major role for making the King call for the referendum, and the students represented a strong alternate political and intellectual force in the then political contexts. He shared his experience with Chandra Pandey for Shilpee Three Monthly about the first performance in the following manner: it was open grassy land, audience mainly the university students and university staffs and teachers as well as common public stood in all sides, artists made their exit and entrance through the crowd, there was no light, no sound, no single trace of sophisticated architectural elements of modern theatre, no bureaucratic hassles. It was like breaking all the barriers and creating a performance that was free from all constrains, and the theme of the play too was about freedom of people (Pandey, 2069 v.s., 05-08). This performance and the play are taken as historically and intellectually significant important applied forces created by theatre creators. Mention should be made here that Malla and his fellow theatre artists had to get their script approved from the censor board before they set out to perform. Police and the agents would closely watch the performance. Anything that was political and spoke against the regime would put the artists' career at risk. 'With the ever present threat of being shut down, harassed, and arrested by the authorities, Malla and his performers began to perform 'secretly' as he calls it. Malla wrote brief playlets that could be performed with lightening speed before spontaneously gathered audiences at the crossroads and meetings sites of Kathmandu and other cities in the valley' (Davis, 58). Malla and his 'Sarwanam theatre group' became a force that evoked people's zeal for freedom and political agility.

The 1970s and 1980s was also a period when Nepal started to receive foreign aids, especially in the field of family planning from the government of the USA, mainly through the USAID that has 'partnered on many successful family planning efforts since the early 1960s' with the Nepali government' ([www.usaid.gov/nepal](http://www.usaid.gov/nepal)). In fact, the USA had been helping Nepal's modernity from the early 1950s. Often taken as the cold war strategy, the USA support to Nepal had begun in the field of modern education. Malla also a staff in the family planning office, managed to draw some fund to stage street play to raise awareness about the importance of using contraceptives, a subject itself of modern secular value that was being applied amid the mindset dominated by religious and conservative faiths and life styles then. He writes, 'I wrote a script about the issue. It was to go for a trial. We were around a dozen of artists. The year was 1985. The district was Kapilvastu (a district in the western Nepal). It became very popular' (Malla, 2069, 07). This was the first donor-driven, social awareness-oriented sadak natak or street drama in Nepal. Since the artists came in contact with the audience in their own places with message oriented performances, street plays became very popular medium to disseminate message for the I/NGOs and the government. Moreover, it also freed theatre artists from some economic and architectural as well as technological constrains set by modern theatre. As a result, street plays became a favorite form of media among donors, artists and public though the Panchayat regime strictly watched it as any public gathering held without taking prior permission from the government would be regarded as something illegal. With Ashesh Malla, street plays mainly become three types. The first one raised and dramatised intellectual issue and targeted educated audience, and the second one that targeted general public and spread the development-oriented consciousness at local level. With the first type Malla and his group challenged the domination of the Academy and the regime. And with the second type, his group helped the donors and government to disseminate the messages, and also helped themselves economically. His group could stage intellectually driven plays for the city based audiences only after it managed to generate money by staging donor and government driven social message oriented plays in the countryside. The third one Malla and his group staged with 'lightening speed' in the everyday gatherings and happenings to evoke the deep-seated public desire for political liberation in the county that had lived through the ages of autocratic political regime. Malla's methodology of working has remained a continuum among artists of new generation as well.

The restoration of democracy in 1990 did not bring significant changes in the modus operandi of the government run Academy and other theatre and art centers. Same institutional structures started to function under a new form of polity, democratically elected government system now. Independent theatre artists found it challenging to work in the art centers going through the process of over politicization. This development took place at times when the I/NGOs driven agenda in Nepal was

increasing tremendously: ‘The average aid to GDP ratio increased from about 2 per cent in the 1960s to almost 10 per cent in the 1990s’ (Bhattarai, 284). Though this development is often critiqued for creating a class of people that played important role in mobilizing fund and creating their influence, the rise of the I/NGOs directly helped theatre artists become economically resourceful. It mobilized them and provided a space that inspired as well as lured them to write script, develop methodology of presentation, and also maintain a balance between dependency upon donors on the one hand and spirit of creative freedom on the other. In the immediate 1990 change, Sarwanam and Aarohan theatre run by Sunil Pokharel and his team became popular among donors, public and theatre artists. ‘The country’s relative stability garnered generous donations from other countries and from international aid organisations. Often these aid groups sought out Aarohan or Sarwanam to carry their messages in theatrical form’ (Davis, 2019, 75). Importantly, it enabled them to earn or save some amount of money that helped them produce modern plays on a regular basis.

On top of that the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) set out to launch ‘people’s war’ in February 1996. This war was reviewed by the same party one month later as ‘the correct implementation of the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge’ (Excerpt from the report). The experiment or application of this form of political ideology resulted into mass migration, violation of human rights and rise of conflicts. It was at such contexts, I/NGOs looked theatre as a medium to reach out to local communities. Sunil Pokharel and his theatre group Aarohan are credited for discovering a form that suited best for the time. Influenced by Augusto Boal’s theatre pedagogy and poetics, Pokharel set out to invent ‘Kachahari’, a Nepali version of ‘Forum theatre’. Promoted partly by donors mainly from Norway and Denmark and partly by Pokharel himself, this form of theatre has become popular among theatre creators in Nepal since 2001. Regarding how he took this adventure, Pokharel recalls that it was in 2001 that he got a call from a Danish INGO named MS Nepal that asked him to produce performances according to the theatrics warranted by the Forum theatre as part of their objective of promoting peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict. Pokharel further confesses that he then had no idea of Forum theatre but his spirit to know this form and work with such influential organization made him study about Forum theatre (2061 v.s., 11-12). Timothy Whyte, a Danish researcher to Nepal was particular about this form not the regular street play, says Pokharel. *Nepathya*, the bulletin published by Aarohan Gurukul states that Pokharel was at Germany attending a workshop on Forum theatre, and Julian Boal, the son of Augusto Boal had come to Nepal at Gurukul to run the workshop in 2004. It provides a list of 8 different theatre groups across the country that Arohan Gurukul trained and produced Kachahari plays. This all was done with the help of MS Nepal, the office Timothy Whyte worked for. And, the issues these groups dramatised in Kachahari forms were: drug abuse, gender

discrimination, corruption, girl education, child marriage and caste discrimination among others (2061 v.s., 4-7). The *Nepathya* next issue provides a list of 13 theatre groups that Arohan worked with to produce Kachahari plays. Regarding its effectiveness, the journal reports that staging Kachahari among subalterns and victims and sufferers of the war prone zone gave an impression that locals took it as an opportunity provided them for the first time in their life to stage their opinions. 'At times the elements of feudal system still prevailed and elites still controlled politics and policy making levels, the participants enthusiastically expressed their views on the issue, and openly stated their position and commented on the performance' (Ghimire, 2005, 12-13).

Mention should be made that the war between the Maoist guerrillas and the Royal Nepal Army was rampant. Most of the government offices and political organisations at locals levels had ceased to function. Journalists faced hard time to travel to such places. At such times staging this form of theatre itself was a daring act. Moreover, Sunil Pokharel's Aarohan Gurukul in Kathmandu had become resourceful: it had artists, rehearsal space and halls, and had become a hub for artists and intellectuals, who believed and acted the political ideology that challenged the monarchy and dictatorship. To support the on going public protest against the then king Gyanendra-led government, Gurukul launched 'Loktantrik Natak', or plays for greater democracy. Regarding this form of performance that would take place amid the public gathering, Monica Mottin, someone who closely watched and researched about the activities of Gurukul then writes, 'The 'genre' grew spontaneously out of the development of the political situation. Actors participated through personal choice, as their individual contribution to the popular movement. Collectively created by the actors from topical events, the plays were staged in the realistic and minimalist style of the street theatre' (PhD Dissertation, 124). The media covered this form of performance widely. Since it would take place as part of the public gatherings and protests against the dictatorial regime that the then king Gyanendra was trying to apply, it exuded its political spirit, the change making spirit the most. It also convinced people that theatre practitioners are not mere donor depended and driven puppets. On the contrary, their performances could be the best medium to articulate people's suffering. This form of performance occupied politically intensified space and moments. As an art form of expression, it maintained a distance with the political party driven slogans and propagandas, in the mean time it articulated the urgency of changes the nation was waiting for.

The 2005 people's uprising brought political euphoria and Nepal entered a new phase of transformation. Political and legislative road to the federal structure became the agenda of time. The historical Constituent Assembly (CA) election took place in 2008. It was at such context Aarohan Gurukul came with the concept of Legislative theatre, another form of theatre introduced by Augusto

Boal again. The 10 April 2008 CA election took successfully. Arohan theatre worked with its partner groups and had produced 360 legislative theatrical productions in 16 districts of the country. All these performances centered on the issues that the new constitution needed to include. The member of the CA also used this performance as a medium to know the spirit of the people. People participated in the performance as if it was right time to intervene and state their opinions. Later, the suggestions and comments provided by the participant public were submitted to the speaker of the CA (Booklet, 06-7). Introduced by Sunil Pokharel, the Legislative and Kachahari theatre became favorite mediums among donors, locals and theatre artists to disseminate the message. He trained artists from different parts of the world, and let them produce issue based Kachahari performance from his Arohan Gurukul (2003 - 2012). Pokharel used performances of modern plays, Kachahari plays and lokatantrik or greater democratic plays for changes for greater causes. He produced performances of modern Nepali plays of political nature, and also plays of Brecht and Dari Fo in Nepali language. He worked with donors, created resources to run modern theatre centers, and also supported greater political movement. He like his predecessor Malla practiced pragmatic and set a model role for aspiring artists.

Ghimire Yubaraj, one of the students of Pokharel at Aarohan Gurukul, now the artistic director of the Kathmandu-based Shilpee theatre group has been giving continuity to Kachahari theatre mainly after his guru's center closed down. Like his fellow theatre directors, Ghimire belongs to the political context, when I/NGOs and major political parties and social activism in Nepal have promoted issues related to gender equality and federal political and developmental structure. Ghimire has given continuity to the same modus operandi that Malla and Pokharel had practiced earlier. The bulletin titled 'Theatre in the Village', published by his theatre group in 2014 mentions about four Kachahari plays: 'Naree', 'Dahitan Dhenki', 'Ke Lagyo Halkale' and 'Dhupenke Dhuiya' his center had produced with the support provided by INGOs such as ESP Nepal and UK/Aid. And these plays were performed in 40 different districts of Nepal at times when the first Constituent Assembly had failed to deliver the constitution, and the second Constituent Assembly election had recently taken place, and the issues to be included in the constitution were being debated intensely.

He believes that performing Kachahari plays enabled him to know two kinds of mind set: one that looked for change, the radical mind, and another that was comfortable with the status quo, the rigid one. Kachahari plays let both kinds of mind come to a single space and interact. Regarding this encounter, Ghimire writes, 'Our spectators had their own set of beliefs. They openly declared that there were witches in reality and that they should be punished. That men are not supposed to help with the housework and women must not step outside of their houses' (2014, 6-7). But once such a belief and



ideology comes in interaction with liberal one, the former can no longer claim to have its exclusive space. Kachahari plays and their performances have created such encounters of important nature. Significantly, such encounters make difference at times when Nepali society has been going through the phase of political liberalization.

As a member of the team of Shilpee that toured across the country with ‘Dahitan Dhenki’ and ‘Biltu Bimar Chha or Biltu is Sick’ at two different times, I would like to briefly report here about the Kachahari performances of these plays. Directed by Ghimire Yubaraj, ‘*Dahitan Dhenki*’, a forty-minute-long play was performed mainly in the Tharu communities in the southern part of seven different districts in the Mid-Western and Far Western Development Zones of Nepal from 21 May - 01 June 2013. As part of its structure, the performance of the play would stop at some point and let the audience’s participation take place. This prolonged the performance by half an hour more. *Dhenki* is a husking wooden block with pestle attached to it at the end that pounds rice put in a mortar, and is operated with legs at the other end mainly by women folks who push and release it at the other end in a regular rhythm. This particular Dhenki belongs to a Dahitan Tharu family in the Belasa village. As the *sutradhara* or narrator of the performance, Dhenki brings a story of several generations of women going through the same form of predicament i.e., childhood marriage. Moreover, *Dhenki* is a space where Tharu women meet on a daily basis. A place and medium to husk rice, it is here they gather and share their stories. By providing a persona to the Dhenki, the performance created its strong bond with rural audience. ‘Many audiences after the show came and tried their best to convince artists that witches do really exist. They equally emphasized that local shamans known as Guru Ba are genius as he can cure severe forms of diseases. It was very hard to convince them that branding individual woman as a witch is inhuman, and is going against the law and is a violation of human rights. Many audiences were befuddled’ (Rijal, 2014, 75-76). But then there would also be ideas of modern and liberal order. As a result, the discussion became very live and intensive.

Similarly, ‘Biltu Bimar Chha’ or ‘Biltu is Sick’ was performed in the eastern part of Nepal mainly in the southern or plain areas. Biltu is a very diligent student in a local government school. As usual, he scores good marks in the final exam this year too. His parents are proud of him. A very fine day, they tell him that it is high time he started studying books written in his own mother tongue, the Maithil language too. Since Biltu loves studying, he is eager to get and read the books. He rushes to buy them but finds none. He searches them disparately. Booksellers do not have any idea if such books are going to come to their stalls. Schoolteachers tell him that such books are printed in Kathmandu, the capital city. They too are not sure if such books are going to be available at local school this year too. Partly of

physical exhaustion that he is bound to go through and partly of frustrations and humiliations he encounters in this process, Biltu falls ill.

A senior gentleman from audience hall stood up and argued that it is specialists who after serious research should decide about the criteria for dividing this country into federal states. He blamed politicians for over politicizing simple issues and making peoples' life miserable. Audiences applaud. One could see over three dozens hands rising up in the hall. Each of them had something to share. A woman audience stood up and said that common people should be very careful about their politicians' remarks. Everything that the political leader says may not be good for them and their country. Audiences applaud. One after another, dozen audiences expressed their view that Nepal should go for federal restructuration at any cost because resources needed to cater development in this country need to be decentralized. Down with the centralised forms of development, a new democratic and egalitarian political culture should be given a chance to rule over this country. A big round of applaud this time.

These observations in my view represent the spirit as well as historicity of applied performances in Nepal. Theatre provides a forum for public discussion. Theatre artists become the member of the team designed to evoke liberal ideologies. Theatre artists become middlemen, they become consciousness raiser, and also creative talents who invent forms and styles of expression. So far, Ashesh Malla is still producing plays but this time for his closed theatre built at Kalikasthan, Kathmandu. He managed to build this center out of the income he could make by performing plays based on donor-driven social agendas. His group seems to have given a halt to this tradition of performing development-oriented and donor-sponsored and social message centered plays now. With his own theatre hall and theatre centers, Malla seems to have given priority to academic form of applied theatre now. He actively takes part in the programs of the Academy in the changed political contexts. His group keeps on producing plays for the audiences who buy tickets and watch it. His plays retain the same anti-establishmentarian spirit. Sunil Pokharel runs short-term course for aspiring theatre artists, and performs intermittently. His life partner Nisha Sharma currently heads Nepal Music and Drama Academy as its Chancellor. Mr. Pokharel has been looking for the governmental support to revive his center, but no such luck has happened. But the fact that he trains aspiring artists and provides them skills of doing theatre makes one to realise that there are several ends of applied theatre making arts and skills. Ghimire and his team are in a month-long tour of Kachahari play 'Kalpana ra Urmila Dukhama Chhan' or 'Kalpana and Urmila were in Sorrow' in collaboration with Nepal Police when I started to write this paper in 2019. This play is about the importance of empowering girls through education. Time and again Kathmandu's streets keep on embracing the eruption of one or other kinds of public unrest. Ghimire's Shilpee theatre center

is seen staging short performance that suits the spirit of the people and the call for justice for the people. With such performances, Ghimire and his artists seem to liberate themselves from the role of performing for donors and ticket buying audiences. Such performances help them define as liberators and free thinkers. ‘The network of artists joining other professional groups in demonstration organised by civil society would play a crucial role in the 2006 movement... However, such connection can be traced back to the 1980s and were already at work in 1990’ (Mottin, 2018, 57). But when the existence in the city becomes burdensome economically, Ghimire’s group happily takes the opportunity of staging Kachahari performances in the areas the donors and sponsors want, and move out of the city so that they can return with greater energy and economic confidence as well. Back at his center, he directs and produces modern plays of his choice. He performs the same karma his predecessors have passed through in this country that has remained donor depended, and is trying its best to decentralize its art and cultural policies.

### **Performance arts and politics**

Performance arts in Nepal have become synonymous with the activities of some half a dozen Kathmandu based artists. However, I would like to concentrate mainly on the works of two performance artists: Ashmina Ranjit and Salil Subedi. As a performance art practitioner, Ranjit, herself a painter, has tried her best to remain iconoclastic. Her works address the immediate political changes Nepal has been going through since 2000. With the beginning of the 21th century in Nepal, violation of human rights and freedom of expression increased. Barbed wire, curfews, protests and bloods became the familiar metaphors of the times Nepalis experienced. She set out to use the very symbols as props in her performance. This very spirit of Ranjit’s performances drew the attention of artists, free media and freedom lovers. Capturing this very spirit of Ranjit’s works, Dina Bangdel writes, ‘Her socio-political experimentations are significant expressions of political activism which critically interrogate the issues of migration, dislocation, and cultural memory’ (2018, 72-73). Feminist voice of Nepali order can be taken as another major spirit of Ranjit’s performances. From the lock of hair to the sanitary pad and blood like color, Ranjit has tried to evoke the ‘gender troubles’, which Nepali women have been living with for ages (Rijal, 2018, 07).

Subedi on the other hand is a musician and writer. He has used performance arts to evoke the primordial bond between earth, animal and the nature. For this, he has used national park areas as the site of his performances mostly. He writes his experience of doing it in the following manner. As part of the ‘Monsoon harmony’ (2003), he ‘...got buried under the earth. Felt very heavy when they placed the earth over my chest. The moment I started blowing on the didgeridoo – the land became fluid. I

thought wow earth is fluid' (Blog iSalil). Subedi is credited for introducing didgeridoo, the Australian aborigine musical instrument into the mini-world of contemporary Nepali music. Over one and half a decade now, he has given a solo performance of didgeridoo and has also performed fusion music and importantly ran workshops for the aspiring musicians to play it. In the later times, he has been working with nature conservation organisations from raising awareness about the preservation of one-horned rhinoceros and Dolphin in Nepal to Horn Bill bird preservation in Arunachal, India.

Subedi used his didgeridoo-based performances to evoke hope and light in the mind of the 2015 earthquake affected people. He has toured around the place of the epicenter and staged performance. He writes about his own experience of performing it with local students in the following manner. 'They had dug the pit that morning on a small mountain slope near their school and had buried me there as a part of our performance art together. The big chunks of earth and patches of grass they placed above my belly moved and collided against each other every time I pumped my breath out to make sound on my instrument. To that, everyone shouted: "Look, an earthquake!" We symbolized the movement of the tectonic plates in a miniature form above the belly of the earth, her sound epitomized by the droning instrument' (Subedi, 2015, 07). Subedi's works come out of the context of the crisis that nature and wild life are facing.

Ranjit has staged her performances to address peace and conflict resolution and gender equity, some of the dominant agenda supported by DANIDA and DFID, the influential INGOs operating in Nepal over the decades. As an artist, Ranjit's power lies in creating space among free thinkers and supporter of liberal culture on the one hand and evoking the agenda and issue promoted by donors in very powerful and visuals forms. Similarly, Subedi has created powerful theatrical semiotics to disseminate the message promoted by organization like WWF. Both of them like their fellow artists have addressed the dominated themes of the time. Like their fellow theatre practitioners they have worked with donors, and freed themselves from dependence on donors. They have collaborated with local artists and their art centers. Most importantly, they have come out in the street and joined the public protests held to expand liberal societies. They have proven that performance artists are not mere dreams and meditators but also political aware beings, and hold guts to liberate people politically, and can use their performances for meditative and healing purpose.

## Conclusion

The contextual reading of the applied theatre in Nepal vis-a-vie Nepal's political and social development allows me to conclude that theatre creators have used their medium of expression to

challenge the existing regime. These theatre and performance artists have carved out important space of credibility among public, and also got mastery over the medium. On the realistic side, they with supporters, collaborators, donors and sponsors. They share the space with other forces since they alone are not the sole generators of applied force. Sharing the space with their fellow partners creates problematics as critical position by its very nature demands departure. And, since one cannot claim to have exclusive alternate power nor can one claim to inhabit alternate space all the time. This has made them learn the rule of the game that pragmatics is the best policy. Applied theatre and performance practitioners in Nepal get and provide help, and remain dependent and in the meantime try to free themselves from such dependence. Vigilance, liberalism, creativeness and pragmatism are the mantras of Nepali artists performing applied performance in Nepal. They have used it to expand the very medium of expression. In this process, they have kept on shifting their role. When they work for on any social and cultural movement that erupts in the capital city, they produce performances that project them as free thinkers, and supporters of human rights issues and concerns. When they produce performances to challenge the regime, they project them as radical thinkers. When they perform it for locals as part of deal with donors, they project themselves as mediator, consciousness raiser and trustworthy partners. Back to their working station in city, they perform modern plays, which question social issues directly and indirectly. They project themselves as modern theatre artists concentrating seriously in the medium. They practice theatre profession in a modern capital city of a nation that has passed through historically significant changes, and still is donor depended and survives on the remittance. From Ashesh Malla and Sunil Pokharel to Yubaraj Ghimire, all of them know how to improvise their methodology of working. Flexibility is the common characteristic of the applied theatre these theatre and performance art creators have used in Nepal. Instead of getting glued to a particular form and getting limited to the very medium of expression, these theatre creators have developed methodologies of using the medium that would suit the context most.

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### ***Authors' Profile***

Shiva Rijal PhD teaches at the Central Department of English, (Kirtipur) Tribhuvan University. He has conducted research on performance cultures of the Kathmandu Valley as well as Bali, Indonesia. He has produced books, journal articles, chapters in the anthology, and newspaper articles. He has been writing plays in Nepali, and translating plays from English to Nepali and vice versa.