



Research Article/ Performance Studies

Ropain Naach as Performance: The Intersection of Gender, Ritual, and Agrarian Culture in Western Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This study has examined *Ropain Naach*, a paddy planting dance, traditionally being exhibited in the western town of Nepal through the perspective of performance studies. The dance enacted during the July planting season, involves male performers disguised as females as planting workers and other participants acting as diggers, who sing songs expressing desire for communal values and demonstrating true love while performing agricultural labor. Employing a qualitative interpretative method, primary data were taken from the

text, "*Ropain Naachamaa Patali Naani*" (A slim girl in paddy planting dance) written by a local pioneer. The paper has specifically applied Schechner's concept of restored behavior and Butler's theory of gender performativity along with other relevant ideas to analyze how the dance transforms labor into symbolic, embodied, and affective performance. The findings indicate that *Ropain Naach* functions as a site for enacting gender, expressing emotional and romantic narratives, fostering social cohesion, and reinforcing cultural continuity. The study highlighted the dance's dual roles as both ritualized agrarian practice and performative medium through which local knowledge, social norms, and communal identity are transmitted. By focusing on Baglung Bazaar as a specific context, this study addressed a gap in Nepali performance scholarship, underscoring the importance of documentation and preserving indigenous agrarian performances. The study contributes to visualize a local tradition to a broader context and that will be a source of scholarship for global citizens.

KEYWORDS: Agrarian performance, communitas, embodied ritual, liminality, performance studies

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is rich in the performative practices especially in folk tradition that blend ritual, and cultural expression. These

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practices are diverse as per the geography and social variations. People from different ethnic group organize their own cultural performances to make their tradition alive. People from *Newar* communities have been found to be more sincere to preserve their culture to the comparison of other ethnicities. Among these practices, *Ropain Naach* (Paddy planting dance) being performed in Baglung Bazaar is the study of this research. Baglung Bazaar is the headquarter of Baglung District, Gandaki Province, Nepal. Although *Ropain Naach* has its traditional importance as a part of culture, it can be studied as the part of cultural performance, the newly prescribed domain of pedagogy despite the fact that the unwritten historical performances have been continuing for a long time, along with the initiation of the human and non-human activities. Here and now, performance studies has drawn the attention of the scholars. In the 1980s and 1990s, university theatre departments of Europe and America began to rethink their mission to develop performance studies as an academic discipline (Schechner, 2002). Hence, the coverage area of performance studies is getting broader and wider. However, the proper reading of cultural heritages in Nepal through the lens of performance studies are found to be limited due to the lack of adequate researches. Hence, linking the trends and the values of performance studies, this paper tries to seek out and highlight a cultural performance being demonstrated in Baglung bazaar, for a long period of time that is *Ropain Naach*, the traditional paddy planting dance.

The design of the dance and the pattern of performance of *Ropain Naach* remains the same except the performers, the place and the audiences as Schechner has claimed performance studies to be a "repetition of-the-never-the-same" (2002). He might mean that the events become fictional after they occur because they do

not have their real existence but can be existed as made-up stories. Nevertheless, the practice of the performance as a part of culture is repeated in same form. This present research has explored the relationship of *Ropain Naach* and its cultural significance to bring the history on the surface with its performative repetition. To fulfill this objective, the study has focused on *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar representing gender, ritual and agrarian culture and its social meaning with reference to some concepts of performance studies such as ecology, geography, history, space, trace, walking and more. The cultural article, "*Ropain Naachma Patali Nani*" (The slim girl in paddy planting dance) has been selected as a primary source which is published in the book, *Mansarobarma Dubulki Marda* (Sinking into Mansarobar Lake) by Kaji Rosan, one of the pioneer literary figures of Baglung District, Gandaki Province, Nepal.

Performance studies provides an interdisciplinary framework for examining folk dances that integrate ritual, labor, embodiment, and symbolic meaning. Agricultural performances such as *Ropain Naach* in Nepali contest is not merely entertainment forms but they are rooted practices which articulate social values, gender roles, spiritual love and communal identity. To support this argument, the scholars argue that such performances should be understood as dynamic cultural texts shaped by time, collective labor, and embodied enactment (Schechner, 2002; Turner, 1982). This thought is well applicable in the cultural performance being demonstrated in Baglung Bazaar for a long time. Schechner (2002) conceptualizes performance as "restored behavior" focusing the continuum between ritual, work, and theatre. While connecting this perspective, *Ropain Naach* emerges from agrarian practice of paddy plantation which is reflected in the ritual simulated as street performance. In Nepal, July is the

prime time for planting paddy (the major crop) when the monsoon enters to Nepal from the Bay of Bengal. The season provides a ritualized temporal context in which agricultural activities become performative, reinforcing cooperation and communal harmony. The recent scholarship reaffirms this view by emphasizing the transformative power of performance in collective and ritualized context (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). These rituals transfer the message to the audience for solidarity in working together for agricultural activities.

Victor Turner's theory of ritual process and liminality further illuminates the cultural significance of this dance. Turner (1969) argues that ritual creates liminal phases where ordinary social structures are temporarily suspended, allowing symbolic inversion and *communitas*. Paddy planting season functions as such liminal period in Nepal, particularly in Baglung Bazaar. In the dance, some male performers cross normative gender boundaries by disguising themselves as young women, while others play the roles of diggers and laborers. This inversion reflects Turner's notion of anti-structure, where fixed identities become fluid and expressive. Contemporary studies on agrarian performance similarly emphasize seasonal rhythm and embodied labor as central to rural meaning-making (Rautio and Jokinen; Sikes 2021). The ritual certifies the people's labor for agricultural productions and their contribution for human survival.

Butler's (1990) theory of gender as performative-produced through repeated acts-offers a productive lens for interpreting cross-dressing in *Ropain Naach*. Recent South Asian performance scholarship has further demonstrated that gender disguise in folk traditions often enables emotional expression and symbolic desire rather than parody (Banarjee, 2021; Macrom, 2022). The attractive yet stubborn girl enacted in

Ropain Naach becomes a symbolic site through which themes of romantic pursuit, patience, and moral love negotiated within culturally sanctioned performative framework. In the dance gender performativity is a central element, particularly the portrayal of female characters by male performers.

Paddy planting songs performed during *Ropain Naach* articulates longing, affection, and social harmony, transforming energetic labor into shared emotional experience. This galvanizes the relationship between labor and creativity as illuminated by de Certeau's (1984) notion of everyday practices as sites of symbolic production. Recent ethnographic studies of dance and affect confirm that such performances enable emotional circulation and communal bonding in traditional societies (Wulff, 2020) which is applied in *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar. Similarly, this dance has become the medium to blur the history by resurfacing the culture for new audiences as Subedi (2008) observes that Nepali folk performances blurs the boundaries between ritual, theatre, and social practice functioning as living archives of cultural memory. Studies on Himalayan rituals and performances further emphasize how local performances reinforce belonging and communal identity (Pettigrew and Schneiderman, 2020). In the context of Baglung, local cultural writings and oral traditions identify *Ropain Naach* as a significant seasonal performance staged in bazaars simulating the real performances of the fields, where young men enact romantic narratives along with agricultural labor, reflecting both agrarian rhythm and social imagination.

Although existing studies in performance studies and anthropology have extensively examined ritual, labor and embodiment, there is a notable lack of focus research on agrarian folk performances in Nepal through a performance studies lens, particularly at

local level. Prior Nepali scholarship has emphasized documentation and description of folk dances, with limited theoretical engagement with concepts like liminality, gender performativity, and affect. Specifically, *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar has not been systematically analyzed as a performative event. To address this gap, the study has been conducted to identify whether this dance can be taken as a performative event, limiting within the text "*Ropain Naachamaa Patali Naani*" collected in the book *Mansarobarmaa Dubulki Marda* (Sinking into the Manasarobar Lake) published in 1978.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study has followed the qualitative, interpretative research design using the performance analysis approach. The Primary data were taken from the text, "*Ropain Naachamaa Patali Naani*" incorporated in the book *Mansarobarmaa Dubulki Marda* (1978) written in Nepali language by Kaji Rosan of Baglung Bazaar. Hence, the study has been carried out by analyzing the primary text rather than field observation. Supplementary data were collected from folk song lyrics, performance narratives, and local cultural documents. Other secondary data were collected from relevant books, journals, and publications from both national and international sources. The original quotes are presented in Romanization or transliteration and are translated into English by the author before analysis. The analysis has employed after the thick translation of the text in Nepali, attending not only linguistic meaning but also to the cultural, temporal and embodied contexts in which the utterance is performed. Thematic analysis has been employed to identify recurring motifs related to labor, gender disguise, romantic pursuit, and emotional expression. Rather than seeking generalization, the study has emphasized contextual depth, interpreting *Ropain*

Naach as a culturally specific performance practice embedded in agrarian and social life of rural areas of specified areas.

This study is grounded in performance studies, drawing primarily on the works of Schechner's theory of performance studies, Butler's theory of gender identity and Turner's supplementary insights from anthropological performativity theory. Performance is understood as restored behavior in which ritual, labor, play and theater intersect (Schechner, 2002). Within this framework, *Ropain Naach* is analyzed as an agrarian performance that transforms paddy planting labor into embodied, symbolic action enacted during the liminal agricultural season of July. Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* challenges the idea of fixed natural gender identity as constructed by the culture that is presented in *Ropain Naach*. Turner's concept of liminality and *communitas* (1969, 1982) provides a lens to interpret the temporary suspension of social norms, particularly gender roles; visible in male performers' enactment of female characters in *Ropain Naach*.

Schechner (2002) defines performance studies as a broad based discipline which takes its subject as human performance behavior in cultural, aesthetic, and social contexts. It is a field with a continually moving center of gravity that is relevant to this present study. He further opines that performance studies concerns itself broadly with culture and identity involving a study of human as a performing being. He has forwarded the major domains of performance studies as religious rituals, formal theatre, dance including street performance and more. Henceforth, *Ropain Naach* as street dance falls under one of the subjects of performance studies. Quoting Ann Cooper's (1993) view as "While issues of diversity are never confined to the physical body- they are always implicated in social contexts and representational structures- they are made present through our bodies", Anderson's

theory has brought analogy between history, culture and human bodies as mediums to bring the culture into surface.

Similarly, Butler (1990) claims that what we consider "male" or "female" is not innate rather it is the production of cultural norms and power structure. She criticizes traditional feminist ideology of stabilizing female as "woman" focusing that identities are fluid, contingent, and shaped by discourse. In *Ropain Naach* female dancers are not real, they are males disguised as females. This simulation signals that the society does not allow females to take part in such cultural street dances because of various social issues such as security, prestige and family precision. However, the playful imitation and role reversal and communal participation in such dances connect Butler's idea that gender is something people "do" not what they "are". Hence, this dance has challenged the rigid gender norms via such performances.

Turner's (1969) concept of liminality and communitas explain the social processes of cultural safeguarding through various rituals. In liminality individuals are "in between" social status who no longer hold their previous status but are not fully integrated into new one. Within these temporal phase the social norms are suspended. Communitas blurs the hierarchy and social division by creating spontaneous sense of equality, unity and humanity among the participants. Both of these concepts emphasize how established structures are temporarily dissolved and spaces for transformation and social bonding are created like *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF "ROPAIN NAACHAMAA PATALI NAANI"

Every year, in July and August, when heavy rainfall of monsoon recharges the earth converting her dryness into witty form, the farmers devote themselves in cultivating the crop of paddy. Meanwhile,

the youths particularly from *Newar* (a caste in Nepal) community of Baglung Bazaar, perform different types of dances to continue their ancestral culture with the performance of some traditional dances such as *Naaga Naagini Naach*, (Snake Dance) *Jyogi Naach* (Yogi Dance), *Bhalu Naach* (Bear Dance), *Ghode Naach* (Horse Dance), *Lakhe Naach* (Mask Dance), *Ropain Naach* and so forth. *Ropain Naach* along with other sorts of dances in Baglung is supposed to have been started to perform in between 1750 and 1755 (Rosan, 1978).

According to Rosan (1978), all around 50 performers the dance together, including 35 young women (males disguised as females) as planting ladies and 15 men as *Bause* (person who digs the field) in a row in the street as the theater. The women performers are dressed in expensive sari, blouse, bangles and golden color's bracelets in their wrists, ring in the fingers, garland with corals around the neck, *kajal* around the eye-lids, cream and powder on faces and *Tika* (ritual mark) on the foreheads. Similarly, the *Bauses* put turbans on the heads, wear *Khadi* (handmade clothes to wear as an outer) in the body, tie flat belt around the waist and short knee dropped dhoti. They hold hoes in their hands. The planting ladies catch the small bundle of paddy plant and act to be planting to the right and left side while moving ahead. The *Bauses* pretend to be digging holding the hoes in both hands.

The entire dance moves around along with the local folk duet songs from one of the diggers and the slim girl, followed by all. They move ahead acting as if they are digging and planting paddy. They move from one chowk to another singing and dancing. In the section below, their songs in the Romanized version have been excerpted from the text "*Ropain Naachamaa Patali Naani*" by Kaaji Rosan. There has been a thick translation in English which is followed by an analysis via performative lens. In this

thick translation, every second line has the entire meaning, and the first one is the opening sentence to adjust the rhyme with the second one in Nepali language. The songs were translated by the author of this paper.

As the dance begins, one of the *Bauses* sings tricky songs in order to persuade the slim girl in love who is skeptical and stubborn. The more beautiful she has been the more committed she is in her stand. She claims her to be the daughter of the village headman and from the well fed family. As the dance begins with music and song, the local audiences view the performance through the windows of their houses and the audiences from villages watch standing on the footpath of the street curiously. After seeing the slim girl, the *Bause* gets spellbound emotionally and sings to impress her:

*Asaramasa dabdabe hilo,
chhunalai ghin lagyo
Patali Nanilai Phariya kinda,
Chhabisa rin lagyo* (p.77).

(In June, the mud lay thick and deep, so foul to touch, it made the bad senses. To buy a sari for the slim maiden, a debt of twenty-scores weighed then.)

The song indicates the change in season inviting the need of performance of paddy planting when the young romancers grasp the opportunity to get united in love. In the song, the *Bause* talks about his sacrifice for love. Many years ago, when the amount of 6 scores (120 rupees) was extremely high that would burden with debt to the buyer. The phrase, 'thick and foul mud' indicates their hardship sensory and physical labor with limited traditional equipment. The theme of affection is shaped by material limitation that is expressed by the male lover.

Here, harsh agrarian socio-economic reality has been depicted vividly. Conveying his difficulty the man again sings:

*Syanlamaa base lamkhutte lagchha,
Jhulamaa upinya
Phariya dinda jahera hunchha,
lau kanchhi rupainya* (p.78)
(Sitting in the shade, the mosquitos bite flea in in the net, gifting a sari, people may notice please, take this rupee.)

The *Bause* wishes to give the slim girl the cash because people may notice their affair if he offers her the sari. But she doesn't accept the money and ignores him. From Schechner's (2002) perspective, the statement reflects restored behavior, where everyday actions like sitting, giving and receiving are performed consciously to produce meaning and social response that is seriously followed by the digger.

The slim girl has the pride of being the daughter of village headman. So she replies in this way:

*Chhupuma chhupu khetaima ropne
hatama biyu chhanjel
Valo ra khamla valoma lamla,
babako jiyau chhanjel* (p.78)

(Let's plant in the field one by one until seedlings remain in mud-stained hands I am carefree to wear and eat till my father's body survives).

The girl feels her strong and powerful because her needs have been fulfilled by her father. It signals her immaturity to express her dependency to feel strong with her father. In patriarchal society, father is taken as economic protector, moral authority and symbol of continuity. However, her performance using powerful linguistic tool is motivational. In performance studies, kinship is not fixed biology but performed responsibility. The father's "aliveness" is not just physical-it is a living structure of care that allows the speaker to be "carefree."

The debates go on, but the *Bause* can't change the sentiment of the girl. However, he doesn't lose his faith and tries to make her more practical, singing:

*Rimi ra jhimi pani hai paryo,
rujhayu ki rujhinau?*

*Aakhako sarle bolaya maile,
bujheuki bujainau?
Asaramasa hariyo ghanasa,
khayana tattule,
Phakaudakheri mandinau nani,
lajjala chhattule.
Surilai gayo banskon lingo,
bhuin chhoyo tuppaille,
Yattiko bainsma gharbara chhaina,
ke garyo rupaille. (p. 80)*
(Softly and gently it rained down were you drenched, or not? I called you with the language of my eyes, could you understand, or not? The grass of June grew lush and green yet the young calf refused to graze you do not yield even when I coax, a cunning man may take you away. The bamboo bends in a graceful curve and tender tip kisses the ground; at such a blooming age, still no home what does your beauty do?)

In these lines, the speaker frequently repeats the effects of the change in the season. The heavy rainfall of rainy season makes the land green with the revival of vegetation everywhere. The scenery thrills the feelings and emotions of all, especially the young romancers. Seizing the moment, the young *Bause* tries to win the sentimentality of the slim girl. This verse denotes that the changes in ecology the performative act of people, either verbally or kinesthetically, create the traces. Jon Anderson (2010) considers traces in two forms, material in nature and non-material. Here, the speaker uses the non-material traces that are emotion and sentimentalism.

The girl is still untouched even with those more realistic expressions of the boy. She has strong attachment with her birth place. She wants to live in her father's land even if she has to eat simple local food and wear unworthy clothes. She expresses her love to the birthplace saying:

*Wari ra pari danda ra kanda,
ramailo kasto gaun,
Baglungko thaun mohanijasto,*

*kasari chhodi jaun.
Nunama sasto Thakkhola,
phaaper sasto Taklung.
Baru khaunla paanchaimuthi
chhadne chhaina Baglung. (p. 81)*
(Across the ranges, hills and highlands, how lovely this village. Baglung-like a sweetheart charm, how could I leave it just so? Salt is cheap in Thakkhola's land, buckwheat thrives in Taklung fair let me live on five handfuls a day, but won't leave Baglung.)

Here, the girl expresses her deep love for her motherland that is Baglung which is so charming to live in. Her will of strong attachment to her birthplace is so strong that she is ready to eat little than leaving it. Rosan (1978) describes the history that in the past, Thakhola (Mustang) was the prime place to supply the demand of the salt of the then Dhaulagiri zone. Taglung lies in the then Lete Village Development Committee of Mustang district that used to be the main place to produce crops for food. So people would go there to purchase buck wheat in cheap price. Anderson (2010) states: "Geography is anything but abstract" (p.1). In general, geography denotes topography that exists in concrete form. But performance studies associates geography to the cultural activities that bring the physical geography into the light. What cultural geography seeks to do is to explore the intersections of context and culture. Many places are recognized through the cultural rituals performed by human beings. Places mentioned in the verse have been popularized due to people's performances. Therefore, the physical form of geography is not recognized and made well known without cultural performances within.

The *Bause* neither gets tired with the denial of the slim girl nor loses faith of persuading her. He asks several questions to win her sentiment. He has the confident that he will be able to make her his sweetheart. Then he again sings:

*Udima jane yo kaliganga
uvoma shir chhaina,
Dhan mero chhaina jyou mero yahi ho
man parchha pardaina?*

Because....

*Suna ra chandi nammatra raichha
ke garyo dhanale,
Saga ra sisnu khayako besa
aanandi manale. (p. 82)*

(The Kaligandaki is flying down fast without caring its origin I own neither riches, nor gold to my name but only this body, do you like it, or not ?)

Because...

(For what are gold and silver, only for the name, what worth lies in storing?)

Better to eat greens and nettles, with a silent heart and content mind.)

The speaker believes that the wealth is only for momentary pleasure. There are other things to give eternal pleasure such as spiritual love and mutual understanding between partners. The true love brings union in feelings and attitudes that gives real pleasure. While reading through performance studies, the speaker performs poverty as identity. The river-body metaphor enacts flow over origin, rejecting material props. Value emerges through lived practice, not objects. Happiness is staged via ascetic consumption, inviting audience's participation and ethical judgment rather than economic evaluation. Love becomes the performed question.

This deep and touching expressions of *Bause* finally stirs the emotion of the slim girl and she softens herself and unties her knot of passion and feels as if her aspirations will be fulfilled which she is seeking in her prospective husband. She believes that one should be rich in emotion rather than in wealth and replies:

*Sanuma sanu bokako patho
bhairablai vaakeko,
pandharama pugi sohrama lagne
hajurlai takeko. (p. 83)*

(A tiny little he-goat, promised in vow to divine Bhairab Completing fifteen stepping into sixteen, targeting only on you dear one)

The verbal performance of the girl is the tone of her acceptance of the boy's proposal to marry. The marriage after such strong understanding from both sides is sure to be successful, permanent and happy. Finally, *Bause* is successful in winning the sentiment of *Patali Naani*. From a performance perspectives, the act ritualizes power and belief, transforming an individual life into a symbolic offering to *Bhairab*, a power deity. The dance ends with reconciliation. Somebody announces that it is getting late for the planting women to go home saying:

*Yo Baghungko Deviko thaan
sunko gajur
Khetalalai aaber vayo
bida payun hajur. (p. 83)*

(This is the goddess Devi's shrine of Baglung, with golden spire high.

The farmhand's hour has gone, let me say, goodbye.)

The reference of goddess Devi's temple creates another cultural geography. Many people come to worship in the temple throughout Nepal. The street drama ends imparting useful messages such as value of agricultural activities, true love for unbroken married life, to the audiences. The above lines enact ritual farewell. Recalling the sacred site (Devi's temple with golden steeple) the female performers ask for permission being delay for their homes. Hence, performance lies in waiting, asking to leave, and bodily presence as faith is not belief alone but an enacted relationship between duty and social time.

The love between the digger and the slim girl in *Rioain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar is true and appears as quiet endurance rather than luxury. Rooted in labor, poverty, and shared struggle, their bond resists social hierarchies and material lack. It shows that genuine love grows

from mutual recognition, patience, and lived solidarity but not wealth or status.

Ropain Naach in Baglung Bazaar has its performative significance. It's closely linked with the ecological change that directs people to shift from one performance to another. After the rainy season damps the land with water *Ropain Naach* takes place in the bazaar in the form of street drama. The dance is performed especially for inspiring people to involve in the task of agriculture closely connected to the works of cultivating and harvesting the crops. When the nature changes her form, the farmers should engage them in accordance to the cycle of the seasons. Paddy is the chief crop in Nepal. Therefore, farmers need to be more active and dedicated to grasp the opportunity given by the nature, i.e. the availability of enough water for planting paddy. It gives the message that idleness and passivity promote the dignity of none. Performance of this dance is targeted to the productive activities.

The other aspect of the dance is to focus on virtuous love for successful marriage. During the planting time the young men and women work together singing, talking and joking. On this occasion, some of performers get tied in fair love after understanding each other well. Unlike the love in the urban areas that may begin fast and end fast (materialistic), the carefully woven love in the village farm remains strong and long lasting (spiritual). The love between young and rustic romancers is tightened while working in the field. Their songs, dances and debate for love performed in the market places make viewers internalize the value of productive works, solidarity, and eternal love.

The dance and the love demonstrated in the street festival has its performative significance. This ritual has blurred the history by carrying the culture on the surface with new form and characters. This contributes in livening the communal

culture to the new generation for its future continuity as Schechner (2002) conceptualizes as "restored behavior" focusing the continuum between ritual and work. The dance is performed not only for entertainment but also for signifying the agrarian activities that is directly connected to human survival. The dance is the antithesis for this so called age of information technology which has warned people that that technology is good but without agricultural production technology remains less valuable for humans. Hence, the dance gives the message that agricultural activities become performative, reinforcing cooperation and communal harmony in the "collective and ritualize context" (Fischer- Lichte, 2008) in paddy planting process.

The attires they are adorned with, have distinct performative values. While watching, the audiences internalize their cultural significance that seems to bring the past into the present. As Abhi Subedi (2006) opines, "Heritage of theatre implies a transmission of dramaturgical and performative experiences from one generation to another. Dramatic heritage is thus the continuation of a culture of performance that is vibrant at a particular time and culture" (p. 18). The process of acting they perform are almost similar to that of dancing, the songs they sing and the dramatic actions they perform have been transmitted to new generation for years and years. The performative pattern of previous generation and culture seem to blur the history. When people watch the dance they feel as if the past culture has come to the surface at present. The dance with same sorts of costume, style and ritualistic performance makes the audiences feel as if the history is repeated. While applying Butler's (1990) concept of gender the dance has clearly classified the role in agrarian tasks such as ploughman and digger from male side and planting job is handled from females. But the males are disguised in female attires signaling

the dance as gender performativity, particularly the portrayal of female characters by male performers simulating the act without actually involving females. This ritual is connotative to Butler's idea that gender is something people "do" not what they "are". Hence, this dance has challenged the rigid gender norms by such performances.

While discussing the transformation of the tradition, Vatsyayan (2005) states, "The flow of tradition may be compared to a double-reed flute. One reed is a perennial strain, a tonic, immutable trans-space and time; the other reed plays the tune of immediate space" (p. 40). *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar, has got its long distance historical background as a reed and its simulation continuing every year as main spirit of its originality though being mingled with some immediate transformations as another reed. The performance of dance begins along with the folklore song, *Patali Naani* (Slim girl) is the principal character of the performance whose beauty is beyond the description. She is the center of fascination to all. Her teeth are like the grains of pomegranate, her waist is pretty cut like that of doe with rosy cheeks.

The cultural mobility also creates performance of walking. The concept of walking as Certeau (1993) mentions in his essay, "Walking in the City" can be linked with the *Ropain Naach* in Baglung. The performers walk ahead dancing, so do the audiences, watching. People walk to the city having different experiences of that locality. They make the frozen street vibrant. They walk down from all sides of the hilly villages to the Bazaar and create a *communitas*. Thus, the dance has got its own cultural identity, history, and value for saving the tradition, resurfacing the performance, signifying the agrarian works and glorifying the carefully woven love.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The performance of *Ropain Naach* has helped Baglung Bazaar to be recognized as a cultural city among the people. This and other such activities create the *communitas* in the society and the particular topography is made familiar to the external communities as well. The idea justifies that geographical context can exist wherever there are human and non-human performances. The trick is to acknowledge them, work out what produces them, and what effect they have. The culture creates space that is associated to geography. Though the same historical event can't be repeated, its trend, procedure, system can be performed repeatedly. Cultural nuances are very powerful that exist for epoch to epoch. These are possible when people devote them to perform their arts to preserve the culture. Therefore, the *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar has been one of the cultural acts with social meaning, to identify its topography along with its performative nature. It has also been one of the powerful domains to create solidarity among people in the community.

This study has revealed that *Ropain Naach* in Baglung Bazaar is not merely a folk entertainment but rich performative practice that integrates ritual, labor, seasonal liminality, gender performativity, and emotional expression. Male performer's enactment of female roles, coupled with work songs and choreographed planting movement, transforms ordinary agrarian labor into an embodied cultural performance, fostering communal cohesion and articulating values of patience, desire, and social harmony. Theoretically, the study of demonstrated the applicability of performance studies frameworks, including Schechner's restored behavior, Turner's liminality and Butler's gender performativity to analyze local agrarian tradition are its attachment to pure love, bridging gaps between global performance

theory and Nepali cultural practices. The study has also highlighted the dance's dual roles as both ritualized agrarian practice and performative medium through which local knowledge, social norms, and communal identity are transmitted.

The dance has multiple performative significances such as cultural continuum, reinforcing in the agrarian activities, promoting pure love and entertaining people. The songs sung by the performers in Nepali folk tone have very pragmatic implication in forthcoming conjugal life of the slim girl and the male singer. The debate they are undertaking is for knowing each other deeply before getting married. The imageries used in the song have promoted the local places and the locally available materials in order to conserve the cultural heritage. The reference of local deities like "Devi Than" and "Bhairab" gives message that the people especially from *Newar* community love Hindu culture and are highly devotional to God. Practically, the research underscores the importance of documenting and preserving local performances, which serve as living repositories of social knowledge, emotional, and cultural expressions, and identity. These findings also suggest that similar agricultural and ritualized performances in Nepal and broader Himalayan region can be approached as sites of embodied knowledge, offering insights for cultural heritage preservation, education and community engagement programs. By focusing on Baglung Bazaar-specific contexts, this study addressed a gap in Nepali performance scholarship, underscoring the importance of documentation and preserving indigenous agrarian performances. This study may kindle the interest to researchers to explore cultural performances in other parts of Nepal and elsewhere for making them familiar to global readers which will help preserve the local cultural heritages which are in crisis to extinction.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I hereby declare that the information, data and analysis and other sources incorporated in the article are true and authentic to my knowledge. I have been conscious about the ethical values as a researcher and I have followed the norms carefully.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I declare that this manuscript is my original work.

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