

## Socio-Cultural Dynamics in K. K. Karmacharya's Artworks

Yam Prasad Sharma<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer in English at Lalitkala Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

\*Corresponding Author: yamprasadsharma@gmail.com

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### Abstract

*Contemporary Nepali artist K. K. Karmacharya's artworks present socio-cultural issues of the contemporary context of Nepal. The life of the people, their context and activities vividly appear on the canvas. The paintings explore spiritual themes, cultural rituals and social activities in the community. The compositions not only represent the external world but also respond to the situation in visual form. Nepali tradition and ordinary works get space on his canvas. Some art forms mirror the society as it is and some works take corrective measures. They criticize the people and society from distance. The works are connected to the artist, his surroundings and his living experience. This study follows a qualitative approach for research since the artworks can be interpreted in multiple ways.*

**Keywords:** Social, cultural, tradition, daily life, representation, corrective measure

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### Introduction

K. K. Karmacharya, one of the renowned contemporary Nepali artists, was born on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1948 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Among the eight children, he was the last one, thus, he was named Kanchha Kumar (K. K.). Karmacharya (2007) writes about himself and his family: "Only the last two lived and I am one of the lucky ones. The rest, three brothers and three sisters, died in infancy. As I was the youngest of the lot, I was naturally a Kanchha and that very word has stuck after my name" (Forewords). His family had encountered many sad moments and the artist has experienced hard life. When he was a little kid, he was a bit unruly scamp (Acharya, 2007, p.10). The artist showed unusual nature from his childhood. Discarding the mainstream, he took the alternative path (Rhee, 2005). The mass is going on one way whereas the artist took the other alone. He was keenly interested in drawing pictures but he did not have paper and pencil for it. Yet, his creative urge never stopped – he used to draw pictures with a stick on the dusty roads (Acharya, 2007, p.12). Karmacharya further reveals: "I used to draw pictures on my friends' copies. In return of it, they would give me new copies, which I took home and showed to my mother. She looked so happy knowing my artistic skill was not useless after all"(qtd. in Acharya, 2007, p.12).

Karmacharya is a multidimensional artist, and the sign of this could be seen when he was child (Shrestha, 2066). He was not only interested in painting but also in other forms of arts such as music, sculpture and drama. The creative impulse within him was searching for an outlet in various art genres. Karmacharya expresses:

Since childhood, I was interested in music. I could play the flute, harmonium, murchunga, guitar, violin and mouth-organ. This music has strange power to mesmerize the listeners and win their good wishes and blessings. When I was ten years old, I sold guava on the footpath. To pass the time I used to play flute. A man from a nearby house came to me, listened to my flute enchantedly. He told me 'keep on your hobby of playing music. One day you will earn name and fame

as a good artist!' I have not seen that man again but I have not forgotten him till this day. (qtd. in Acharya, 2007, p.16)

As a young boy, Karmacharya began his art of sculpture by making toys (Wagle, 2004). He was interested in toys but he could not buy them, for he did not have money. Then, he began to make his own toys. From his student life, he began to use human body as canvas. His attitude and approach to art was experimental (Gurung, 2057 B.S). He created art on human body. He painted his friend Madandas Shrestha, as Mahadeva (Acharya, 2007, p.25).

K. K. Karmacharya is the perfectionist. He seldom compromises with lower things. He creates detailed, well-finished and perfect art for the sake of aesthetic pleasure (Mainali, 2000). As Karmacharya was interested in arts, he was admitted at Juddha Kala School, the first art school of Nepal. But his parents heard that art was useless thing, he was forced to leave this school and was admitted to Durbar High School (Acharya, 2007, p.22).

His first painting was sold for forty rupees. He was amazed, for it was more than he had expected. He joined the job as an artist at post-office in 2024 B.S. He has designed a great number of postal stamps including the subjects of nature, culture, history, art and nationality (Regmi, 2007). The stamps designed by him have helped to carve the distinct identity of Nepal across the globe (*Men and women*, 2014). He has painted realistic pictures, that is, his works represented the objects and events of external world objectively. He is not only imitating the real world but showing the personal response to the external world (Sharma, *Socio-political*, 2021). He expressed his experience, emotions and internal feelings in his works (Bhattarai, 2061 B.S.). His art forms seem to be unusual, altered and strange. The exhibition catalogue of his first painting exhibition mentions:

He can express ideas both through abstract design and perceptible shapes. He has been trying to depict human feelings, human sufferings, struggle for social justice, and many other ideas and sentiments in colors like dark brown, crimson red, emerald green, pink, sky blue and others used separately or in combination. His work is powerful enough to leave lasting impressions on people. (Exhibition of Paintings by K. K. Karmacharya)

Karmacharya also created arts using collage technique (Yatri, 2062 B.S.). In collage artwork, the pieces of colored papers or fabrics are pasted on the canvas or the board (Karmacharya, 2070 B.S.). The surface of the images projects out from the plane creating three dimensions to some extent (*Agenda*, 2063). Instead of colors, objects are used to create images.

He has created pictures and sketches to illustrate children's books and literary works. The illustrated pictures capture the mood and attitude of the characters, atmosphere of the setting. They express the spirit of the texts. He created Artworks for 41 books of children literature. He was awarded four times by Nepal Children's Literature Society for best illustrations.

Karmacharya has been exhibiting his works since 2021 B.S. He has organized six solo art exhibitions in Nepal, Germany and Korea. Karmacharya has participated in dozens of group art exhibitions within the country and abroad like Indian Triennial (2038), Asian Art Exhibition, Japan (2042), Asian Art Biennale, Bangladesh, Asian Art Show, Fukuoka Art Museum at Fukuoka. He is the designer of the statue of Araniko at Hwaid Dago square in China. His paintings have also been collected by individuals and organizations from Australia, England, America, South Korea, North Korea, Austria and Germany. He was the Member-Secretary of first Academic Council, Nepal Academy of Fine Arts (N AFA) from 2067 to 2070 B.S. At present, he is the Chancellor of Nepal Academy of Fine Arts. Karmacharya has won a number of

awards and honors. Nepal Philatelic Society honored him as best postal stamp designer in 2038 B.S. (Koirala, 2060 B.S).

As a successful artist, K. K. Karmacharya has his own art philosophy and aesthetics. He has his own individual definition of art, function of art, the relation of art with artist, external world, viewers and the work of art itself (Karmacharya, 2009). The following lines show his aesthetics:

Art is not for the artist or for the one who possess it only, in fact, it should be able to disseminate the message of awareness to the world at large. Art is life and life is art. We have to struggle to achieve something in life. . . .Art supports life, heals aches and flows with life. That flow is indescribably pleasant. When an artist flows with life, he forgets his own achievements and failures. . . .It is my conviction that art must influence society positively. While painting pictures, we have certain class of people in our mind as our subjects. The painting must touch to the core of their being and invite them to go through exhilarating experience. . . .Art obsesses an artist in a same way as an alcoholic is gripped by the desire to drink. Many a times I have left my office stealthily when I could not resist the urge in me to create a work of art. I am so addicted to art that no amount of threat or temptation will make me give it up. I have dedicated my life to it. It may not have helped me to grow rich, but it has given me wealth of joy and contentment. I want nothing more (qtd. in Acharya, 2007, pp.28-32).

K. K. Karmacharya struggled a lot to be a successful artist of Nepal. The journey of his life and creativity shows many ups and downs like the wave, yet there is the rhythm of art and life. Shyamprasad (2007) aptly comments on the artist's life:

Though born in poor family, it did not stop him from getting interested in music, and gain excellence in that field as well. He is a famous artist in Nepal who has designed more than 350 postage stamps. Perhaps he is the first person to design so many stamps in the world. He always reiterates that an artist should endeavor to protect and preserve his freedom of expression in art. As a person who has struggled in life from the very tender age, he is very rich in experience (p.6).

Some of his artworks are mirror to the nature. He captures the beauty of white Himalaya, green forest, flora and fauna. Religions, cultures and rituals get space in his artworks. The artist creates visual history of Nepal capturing, historical events, social activities, poets and painters. Some of his creations are satire to corruption and socio-political evils (Sharma, 2001). He takes corrective measures aesthetically. As our life is interconnected to innumerable things in the world, so are his arts(Graham-Dixon, 2008). His art is the expression of his life and experience. This article explores the social and cultural issues in Karmacharya's works.

### **Research Methodology**

K. K. Karmacharya's paintings having socio-cultural issues are the subject matters for this research. Secondary sources like art history books, journal articles and exhibition catalogs are the sources which have been used to create the background of the study and literature review. Karmacharya's paintings are the primary sources that have been analyzed and interpreted to support the thesis statement of the paper. Art galleries have been visited to view the artworks. The artist's studio has been visited for an interview. Art critics have been interviewed in relation to Karmacharya's artworks.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

Socio-cultural contents are dominant in Karmacharya's paintings. The artist also gives space to the subject matters related to archeology. He captures the image of Ashoka's pillar at Lumbini. The pillar is remarkable as it has the inscription that Lumbini is the birth place of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha related to nonviolence, kindness and altruism are even more relevant in present context of conflict, violence and war. Lumbini has assisted to carve the identity of our country.

There is close connection among Karmacharya's artworks, and social and cultural rituals. The artist takes part in the rituals or views them when they are observed in his locality. That always has lasting influence in his mind. The rituals become a part of his collective unconscious, that is, the recurrent images and patterns shared by the community and the legacy runs from one generation to another through religion, culture, myths and arts. The same images and events come forth on the process of creation. In his painting "Jatra" (Fig.1), a group of people are carrying a chariot with a miniature pagoda temple, and a god within it. The interesting feature of the painting is that the god is travelling on the back of human being. As the god travels along the street, people pray and worship the divinity. There is two way relationship – sometimes people go to the temple to worship the god, and sometimes, the god himself comes to the door of the people. The picture shows the attachment of the people to the religion and spirituality. The painting is the artist's response to the contemporary Nepali society where such cultural values are declining (Sharma, 2009). The artist appeals for the preservation of our traditional culture. The artist has been influenced by his traditional culture (Sharma, Tracing the traditional, 2020). Without our being aware, the cultural values enter in our consciousness. While creating art, those cultural symbols and archetypes come out from the artist's mind and appear in the artworks.



Fig.1 K. K. Karmacharya. "Jatra", 2005

Karmacharya's artwork "Bhotejatra" shows the pragmatic cultural ritual about the lost and the found vest. In the painting, from the chariot a man is displaying a vest in front of the huge audience. The scene brings forth the narrative. Once a vest was lost. It was searched in many places but it was not found at that time. But later it was found, and asked whose vest it was. But nobody accepted the vest. To restore the vest to its owner, the vest was displayed in front of many people including the King and the Queen, and now the president is present in the ceremony. But, again, nobody took the vest. Thus, the tradition of Bhotejatra initiated. Every year on the day of Bhotejatra the vest is displayed.

The ritual of Bhotejatra shows social and cultural balance in the time when this carnival was initiated. This depicts the practice of social justice at that time. Even the lost vest was searched using state power. The state attempted to restore the lost good of the ordinary people even if it is very small and insignificant like a vest. Compare this period of time with our own era where lost goods are rarely found, and the property of individuals is stolen and robbed, and even the human beings are kidnapped for the sake of money.

K. K. Karmacharya has recycled the myths in some of his artworks. As the everyday practices make sense to the society, they become tradition. As the traditions become useful to the community, it is followed as the rule to run the society. Early people that set the tradition knew the relevant meaning of the myth. As the myth becomes ritual, people follow it blindly or unconsciously sometimes without knowing the meaning. Yet, that has done well to the society. A myth can be scientific and practical. Without knowing its essence, we should not neglect them considering conservative idea and useless practice. Recycling myth means to reuse the myth in the present time with new significance. Myth is the narrative that is believed to be true but we do not have proof. The supernatural events and divine characters take part in the myth. The events and characters themselves may be unbelievable but the essence that the myths communicate is generally true. It may not be factual but it can have truth. The same myth is presented in different form or the same myth is used to suggest different meanings. Sometimes, the same myth is appropriated or altered.

The painting “Identification of Pashupatinath” recycles the myth about making of the temple of Pashupatinath. In the picture, a cow is pouring her milk on a pile of stones by the river bank. A cowherd is looking at the cow hiding himself behind the tree. The picture unearths the myth at a glance. The story goes like this: A cowherd used to graze his cows on the bank of the Bagmati River. The cow used to give much milk. But all of sudden it stopped giving milk in the evening. The cowherd attempted to treat the cow in various way but the cow did not give the milk in the evening. Secretly, the cowherd followed and observed the cow for a whole day. He saw the scene as shown in the picture. The cowherd went and saw at the pile of the stones. He found Shivalinga there. As he informed other people about the event, they also came and saw the image of the god. Then, they built the temple of Pashupatinath there. The myth has been presented in visual form.

The artist integrates religious images, figures and symbols in his works. Some of them are traditional lamps in the temple, temples, stupas, icons of divinities, sages, saints and monks. In traditional societies, religion and spirituality occupy central space (Seuphor, 1960). Daily life, work, success, future and the life after death are guided and controlled by spirituality. Divinities are worshipped in the morning before beginning the work, and in the evening. People visit temple asking for success, prosperity, son, riches and sometimes for enlightenment. The spiritual activities of life determine their future.

The artist also presents the figure of Kumari, the living goddess of Nepal. The belief on the living goddess is unique and strange. Generally, the divinities are represented in painting or sculpture. The pictures or the images of deities are worshipped and prayed. The idols of the gods and goddesses are installed within the temple and worshipped. Despite the fact that the image of the deity is considered almighty and supreme, they do not speak and do any activities. In contrast to this, Kumari, the living goddess of Nepal, speaks, listens to the prayers and responds to the visitors and devotees. There is a complex process of identifying the living goddess from among the young virgin girls of Shakya clan, the ethnic group of Nepal.

In Nepal, art is closely related to religion and traditional rituals. In the world where most of the things are mysterious it is difficult to find the solution of many things. Thus, the ordinary people's final resort is the religion, the belief in the god or the supreme power that is regulating the universe. Another thing that shocks human being is the death. The walking or working individual collapses all of a sudden, then rots and becomes soil. What is driving the living being? As the mystery of the universe cannot be solved so easily, sometimes, even the scientists believe in some supreme power. Even if we wish we cannot escape from religion. Thus, Karmacharya has also been influenced by religious activities existing in the society.

In the artwork "Worship", while going to the temple or returning from the shrine, women visit on the way. They are holding the special pot that contains the materials for worshipping the divinity as flowers, lamp, water, *tika*, incense sticks, fruit, sweets and so on. The temple in the background is the example of *pagoda* architecture which can be found in many places of Nepal. This is the religious ritual that is observed everyday especially by the women particularly in towns, for in village the women have to go to work early in the morning. Rural women also do so but not as much as the urban women particularly of Kathmandu.

Nevertheless, in some cases there lies irony in such worship. People pray and worship but they commit serious crimes that they know themselves well. The shopkeeper worships the god in his shop but cheats the costumers unusually. Stealing things, beating others, cheating, grabbing others' property go hand in hand with worshipping and praying. Sometimes, the more a person worships the more he commits crimes. In some cases, some people worship the god to give him success to commit the crime.



Fig.2 Karmacharya. "Mask Dance", 2005

Karmacharya's "Mask Dance" (Fig.2) presents religious ritual in the form of painting. People are worshipping divinity and celebrating the festival. Temples of pagoda style architecture have dominated the landscape. The setting looks as if it is open theatre. The mask dancers are in the front line. The dancers have been followed by musicians. Then other people are taking part in the procession. The dancers dance with the tempo of music and march ahead toward the designated place. The dancers may assume the figure of divinity or do worshipping activities to the divinity.

The mask dance may have various functions in the society. It may be the way to reveal ourselves disguising our real identity, or to be someone virtually for some moments that you want to be but you cannot be in real life. As it is also the occasion for gathering people, and drinking and feasting, it releases ourselves from the torture and hardship of everyday life. The painting indicates different genres of art as music, dance, theatre, architecture and painting (Sharma, *Creative motions*, 2020).

Some works of Karmacharya attempt to teach moral lessons to the viewers. It does not mean that the artist consciously tried to be didactic. What I mean is the viewers may derive some lessons from his works. In ancient time, artists played the role of educator as well. Art was not only the medium to teach but also delight. Art teaches through delight. While getting enjoyment, we learn some valuable lessons unconsciously (Beckett, 1994). The artwork "Buddha" brings forth the didactic narrative. The woman is on the floor at the feet of the Buddha. The story goes like this: There was a cruel man that killed many people. Even the king and his army could not control him. There was a kind princess who was pondering over the way of stopping so much killing. She visited the cruel man and proposed to marry him. He agreed. Even after the marriage, he continued to kill people. One day she took him to the lonely place and killed him with a sword, for he did not suspect her she would kill him. After the killing, she felt sad, for she killed her own husband. She went at the feet of the Buddha, and she cried and confessed her guilt. The Buddha asked her not to cry, for it is not her sin. He explained that by killing the cruel murderer she saved many people. The story teaches a number of lessons. The cruel murderer gets tit for tat. As we sow so we reap. To stop crime, you have to live near the criminal. The princess goes near the murderer by getting married to him, and kills him. Saving many by killing one is not the sin but virtue. The narrative seems to suggest such things.

Some of the artworks of Karmacharya reread, revise and reformulate the forms and contents of early arts and reintegrate them in contemporary paintings. The artist takes the traditional form and exploits it in contemporary contents and themes. Sometimes he takes the subject matters of our traditional art and treats them with modern form. In some cases, he modifies the forms and contents of tradition to suit his purpose in present context. Referring back to early traditions is not unusual in the domain of art (Powell, 1972). Renaissance refers back to Greco-Roman arts, Neoclassicism again follows classical art strictly, Romanticism goes back to medieval mysticism. Expressionist artists have taken inspiration from Post-impressionist artists, Futurism shared the form of Cubism, Surrealism took the technique of Dadaism.

Karmacharya's artwork "Bodhgaya" shares from the form of paubha and mandala. Paubha and mandala are the early Nepali paintings in which there is definite center, and other elements are organized around it (Shakya, 2000). At the center, there is principal divinity, and subsidiary deities are around it. Mandala is a geometric structure which functions as a yantra for meditation and concentration. The center with principal divinity is surrounded by a number of circles, rectangles and triangles. In "Bodhgaya", the image of the Buddha is at the center of the painting. He is sitting on the throne. His feet are on the lotus flower. Lotus is the symbol of enlightenment. The Buddha is the enlightened one. The central image has been surrounded by a circle. Then, around this circle, there are the images of the Buddha in other forms along with green trees and water garden in which the visitors are walking. These images have been encircled by another circle. Outside this circle, there are other images of the Buddha and Bodhisattavas in the garden. Within this big mandala, there are other small mandalas with a deity at the center. Then, the circular space has been surrounded by a square. Within the geometric structure, there are a number of gates and ways. The composition is such that it leads the viewers from periphery

to the center, where the principal divinity resides. Our eyes take rest at this point. The painting can function as an instrument for concentration and meditation, for the union of the individual self and the Cosmic Self. The painting also suggests our consciousness or the whole universe. The theme and the form of the painting resemble to mandala.

We can see archetypal pattern in K. K. Karmacharya's paintings. Archetypes are the recurrent images, icons and symbols that appear in art, culture, ritual and other activities (Sharma, Archetype, 2021). For example, Shivalinga, temples, stupa, prayer wheels, *vajra*, *trisul* (trident), lotus, images various gods and goddesses can be the archetypes. Such images and ideas enter our mind, consciousness or experience without our being aware about them because as our family or other relatives observe festivals or practice rituals or narrate myths, we absorb them within us, and they remain in our unconscious mind. While creating art, again without our being aware, they appear and reappear in artworks. This is called archetypal pattern. In Karmacharya's art, we can see the recurrent images as stupa, pagoda temples, religious procession, images of Hindu divinities and so on. In the painting "Kali", the image of the goddess is the archetypal image. Generally we see the goddess on the back of the lion but in this picture, the lion is at the side of Kali. Both the images of the lion and the deity are not realistic but cubist, for the artist has created the images using geometric shapes. However, the use of color in the figure of the goddess is expressionist, for the artist has distorted and altered the colors. He has painted the goddess too red to suggest fear, ferocity and destructive nature. The image of the goddess has magical and mystical features. She has eight hands holding various instruments as sword, *trisul* (trident) and wheel along with other unrecognizable instruments. The balls in the garland around her neck are the chopped off human heads. This unusual power creates the ambience of supernatural. The icon of Kali is related with a myth. As the gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Indra could not defeat Mahisasur, the buffalo demon, they prayed for Durga and offered her a half of their own power. As Durga became the most powerful divinity, she assumed the form of Kali and killed the buffalo demon.

K. K. Karmacharya presents Nepali culture in visual form aesthetically. His painting "Musical Procession" (Fig.3) captures the Newar cultural ritual. The musicians are playing various musical instruments and perhaps going to some religious shrine. It may be the occasion of certain carnival or local festival. The folks are attired in their traditional ethnic dress and having *tika* on their forehead. This shows they are celebrating certain ritual. The artist captures the ecstatic moment in visual form. The musicians go on play the music forever.





Fig.3 K. K. Karmacharya. "Musical Procession", 2005

Karmacharya has the insight of inter-art relationship. His paintings explore the contents and forms of other art forms like sculpture, architecture and painting. In the artwork "The Abode of the Soul", the artist presents miniature stupa, a form of Nepali architecture, along with Buddhist religious and cultural aspects. The small stupa stands on a hillock along with a prayer flag at a side. The stupa is considered as the house of the soul. According to Buddhist rituals, the dead body is buried in the underground chamber and a mound is constructed above it. The top of the stupa is pointed toward the sky symbolizing the heaven.

The artwork "Bauddhanath Stupa" depicts the magnificent architecture of Nepal. At the top of the stupa, there is a pointed stipple. From under the stipple, the prayer flags in strings extend down far and wide. There are several steps over the semicircular mound and under the stipple. Around the mound there are some steps. Around the whole structure, there are lamp stands and prayer wheels carved with the mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hung'. The structure is wider below and getting narrower and narrower as it goes up and ends at a point of the stipple. There is wide space for the visitors to go around the stupa. The huge stupa controls the view of the settlement. It seems to be at the center and the settlement is organized around it. While planning the town and constructing buildings, ancient people have given importance to its aesthetic value.

The painting "Krishna Mandir" presents the model of shikhara style architecture in Nepal. The term 'shikhara' means pointed at the top. The structure is wider below, and getting narrower as it goes up and ends at pointed top. The unique feature of this temple is that all the parts of the temple as pillars, beams, doors windows are the carved stones. The image of lord Krishna is at the center of the temple. There are the stone sculptures of animals on both sides of the path in front of the door. The representation of the temple depicts K. K. Karmacharya's mastery over realistic technique of painting. He has presented the temple as it is.

K. K. Karmacharya's "Temple" captures the pagoda architecture of Nepal. Pagoda temples have multiple roofs gradually becoming smaller as they go up. At the top of the inclined roof, there stands the stipple pointing toward the sky. The outline of the temple creates beautiful skyline. Big pagoda temples stand at the center of the town or the village and, the settlement is organized around it. As the god or the heaven is at the center of traditional society, the temples occupies the central position in the setting. The temple has been decorated with tundals and torana. Tundal, the supporting roof rafter, supports the inclined roof from below. It is remarkable for its woodcarving having the images of various deities and scenes of erotic union. Torana is the

semicircular structure above the main entrance of the temple that has the image of the principle deity in the temple. Even before entering the temple, the devotees or the viewers can see the figure of the deity outside the temple above the door by the wall of the temple. The artist makes Nepali architecture as his subject matter in his painting. One art form explores another art form, thus, the work can be considered as meta-art. The warm and sweet colors in the welcome the visitors.

In our present context, sometimes we think that art is for its own sake, that is, the function of art is to provide aesthetic pleasure. It is not used for other purposes. However, in our tradition and culture, we find that art and life, art and ritual, art and culture, art and spirituality go hand in hand. Art has been integrated in all these social and cultural aspects of life. While observing rituals, people create painting, sculpture and music as well. Art enhances the quality of life. The painting "Devotion" shows the close relationship between art and spirituality. The Lama or the Buddhist monk is playing the musical instrument in the lonely place in the lap of white Himalaya. The monk is worshipping the divinity with his music. The music or the melody of the pipe is the abstract spiritual path from the individual to the universal spirit (Kandinsky,1977). The vision of the sage is flowing along this path. The music and meditation have been blended. Chalise (2013) writes: "He attempts to depict the music of meditation. We can see fluidity and spontaneity in the picture. . . Meditation is associated with peace and joy. When there is peace and joy in the mind of individuals, peace is possible in the nation (p.35).

The artwork "Sarangi" shows the pragmatic aspect of music. A poor man is playing sarangi and singing the song. The place might be the street or outside the house of somebody. The man does not have shoes or sandals. He is wearing half pants in the public place. His other clothes are old, torn, tattered and shabby. His face is burnt in sun. All these evidences depict that the player is poor. Sarangi is popular for the creation of folk music. There is a caste in dalits called *gaine* (Sarangi player). Even now, these *gaines* go house to house playing sarangi and singing songs, and get petty amount of money from the people. Sometimes, they are found in market places and in the long distance bus. It has also been the instrument for begging and supporting one's life.

One art form always takes inspiration from other forms of art. The artist is not always controlled by the certain rules of any art genres (Martin & Jacobus, 1991). The boundaries of art genres are blurred, criss-crossed and redrawn. Karmacharya's painting "Mask Dance" presents the traditional dance. Mask dance is performed and observed frequently while celebrating rituals and festivals. In addition to religious and spiritual significances, mask dance provides entertainment to the mass. It is performed in a public ground where a lot of people of the locality are gathered. Sometimes, the dancer accompanied by a group of concerned people dance along the street, and the people watch from their house or standing by the road. However, in the early times, mask dance used to be performed even in the compound of rich people. People want to express themselves but sometimes they are afraid of being criticized or feel shy. Using mask is the safe way of expressing ourselves. For the ritual purpose, physical mask is used but most of the time we are putting on the mask, that is, we appear to be something but actually we are something else. There is the distance in internal reality and external appearance. The mask dance also depicts the irony of our artificial life.

The artist has also captured the pictures of folk dance. The young men and women are dancing spontaneously in the folk music. In some of the rural areas, the tradition is to sing and dance for long time in the carnivals. There is the competition in two groups – boys and girls – at the end of the competition the boy takes the girl home. In other words, the girl elopes the boy.

The arts – music, songs and dance – help to reproduce life and continuity of their heredity. It assists in struggle for existence as Charles Darwin says.

Karmacharya also represents the ecstatic moment of women's dance in the festival of Teej, the festival solely dedicated to women. After marriage the women leave their parent's home and go to their husband's home. Most of the time the women should stay in the husband's home where she has to do many works as cooking food, washing clothes, cleaning utensils and house, feeding children and animals. She does not have so much free time. Sometimes, she is tortured by father in law, mother in law and even by her own husband. However, at the time of Teej, the women have some freedom. They are allowed to go to their parent's home. They can eat what they like, they sing and dance, and forget their pain and suffering. The women are gathered together and share their stories. This is the time to recharge themselves and get refreshed for the next year.

The artwork "Sahid" (Fig.4) explores the theme of martyrdom. The white shape has been created in the black background. The white figure represents the martyr and the black background symbolizes the world and the society. As the people become corrupted and tyrannical, the world becomes darker and darker as symbolized by the background of the painting. In such situation, someone is needed to rescue the world and the people. The person who does so is the martyr and the act is the martyrdom. Thus, the white image of martyr is distinct from the gloomy background. The martyr has dedicated his life for the right cause.



Fig.4 K. K. Karmacharya "Sahid"

The artwork "Against Corruption" makes viewers aware about the consequence of corruption. A bureaucrat, attired in national dress of Nepal, approaching toward darkness carrying a briefcase in his hand. The briefcase contains the bribe he has just taken from public. A hand is giving or may be taking the bribe. The white gloved hand of a policeman catches the criminal red-handed. The handcuff on the left hand side shows the consequence of the corruption and crime. The criminal will go to jail, and he will lose social status.

The artist has depicted the idea that corrupted people should be punished but it has not been happening in Nepal. Lack of morality, humanity and accountability has been the obstacle for the development of the country. We call ourselves modern but our behavior and manner resemble to wild animals. We are still primitive in the sense that we want to eat more, we want to

earn more, and we beat and bully others. We have been guided not by reasoning and conscience but by instincts.

Karmacharya presents village life and scenes with utmost realism. Country life is the attraction of many poets and painters. Perhaps the writers and artists prefer to stay in hinterland and create art as they enjoy the simplicity of people, and peace and solitude. We can sell things in the noise and crowd but cannot create things. Despite the simplicity, there is warmth in village life. The painting “Countryside Huts” shows the architecture of most of the villages. The walls are made of stones and clay. There are wooden pillars and beams. The dry grass makes the thatched roof. The walls have been decorated with colorful clay. All the materials have been derived from the nature. Such houses are not so costly to build. Nevertheless, they are warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Most of the villages of Nepal have such houses.



Fig.5 K. K. Karmacharya. "Chautari"

The painting “Chautari” (Fig.5) depicts typical rural scene. The porters, travelers, farmers or the cowherds are sitting and taking rest under the big tree on the elevated space called chautari. In the background, we can see the hills. The picture reminds us the activities in countryside. While the cows are grazing in the meadow, the cowherds take rest on the shade of Peepal or Bunyan tree. When the porters feel tired, they put down their load on the step of the chautari and take rest under the tree. Nevertheless, now, the tradition of planting Bunyan and Peepal trees has declined. People are seldom constructing the *chautari*. The Hindu religious tradition and belief is that if a person plants such trees and makes *chautari*, he can get a son in case he has not got the son; he can be rich if he is poor. The myth became the tradition. The tradition was followed spontaneously and unconsciously. Indirectly, the tradition has helped to plant trees and create human happiness. The culture has scientific and pragmatic values.

The irony is that we reject our tradition considering it as conservative. We do not analyze the good and bad aspects of the culture. Most of the cultural values are scientific and pragmatic (Arnason, 1988). There is the need of study and analysis of them. The artist gives this insight through this painting. His figures and forms are not detailed but suggestive. The artist leaves some space for reader’s imagination.

The artwork “Red Cock” represents a household setting in rural area. The cock’s crow is the sign of morning and the sunrise as shown in the picture. The red cock is near the small hut and by the bamboo basket. The basket is sometimes used to trap or imprison the cock. In rural area, the higher class households rarely keep the cocks and hens, for they make the environment a bit dirty. Thus, the poor, dalits and lower castes people keep poultry. But, most of the time the

rich enjoy the soup of red cocks. There is the irony in the sense that one grows the cock and another consumes it.

The local red cock is famous for its tasty soup. To get the work done easily, the red cock is offered to the public servants in government offices. This situation is also ironic. The public servant should serve the people but people are serving the public servant. This is the tragedy of underdeveloped country like Nepal.

Karmacharya's another painting "Mero Gaunko Katha" juxtaposes two aspects of rural life. On the one hand, there is poverty in the remote area, on the other hand, there is clean environment. There is the lack of education and health facilities but there is the beauty of narrative. The children are around the grandma, and the old woman is telling the folktales to the children. The children identify with the characters of the story and fly in the imaginative world. This is the beauty of the rural life. The family is combined. There is no generation gap. Despite the poverty and hardship, they enjoy the life. As it is the book cover, the artist juxtaposes the words and images, verbal art and visual art. The two genres of art come together.

Some of the works of Karmacharya explore the theme of farming and agriculture. In the painting "Harvesting", two women are cleaning the grains before storing them. The grains are spread on the floor for drying. The work has been done by the women. This suggests that in such works, females are more active than the males. The grains have been brought at home. Thus, it is the work of the women. The painting also indicates the roles of male and female – female for the household works whereas male for outdoor works. The artist shows the scene of harvesting as agriculture is the main constituent of Nepal's economy. On the other hand, the work also depicts the dignity of labor and hard work. The sweats and tears of the farmers supports the population.

Karmacharya presents the contents of everyday life in his paintings. An artist is not an alien and divinely inspired being but the ordinary man. Both common man and artist experience the similar things. Yet, there is the difference. The difference is we experience things and generally they are lost in our memory but an artist presents them aesthetically in visual form. Sometimes we forget to notice the ordinary things in our daily life. Due to the habit, our senses and experience have been automatized. An art makes ordinary things extraordinary. We notice the things which we have forgotten to notice. In other words, art de-automatizes the senses and experiences. Art renews and lengthens our perception. In real life we do not tend to look things but in art work we look the same thing for longer. In Karmacharya's artworks, women are filling pitchers in the traditional water spouts, preparing spices, farmers are selling their agriculture produce, old men smoking tobacco, looking after kids, women milking the cows and buffalos, preparing spices and so on.

Karmacharya is a multidimensional artist who has worked in diverse media, techniques, styles, genres, subject matters and themes. His skills are not only related to paint and canvas but also paper, wood, stone and graphics. Nevertheless, painting is his forte. He efficiently works with oil color, acrylic color, water color, pestle, pen and ink, and even mixed media. No rules of art control his creative urge (Delanty, 2000). If necessary, he even breaks the rules and creates experimental works. Some of his works show the use of impressionist, expressionist, cubist and surrealist techniques. In some cases, he blends several techniques in one artwork. What is important for him is the aesthetic dimensions and the projection of feelings and emotion not the technique and media. He has worked in diverse themes and subject matters. Despite the diversity in themes, his works have underlined unity, that is, the rhythm of the artwork. The forms seem to be dynamic and moving. The working of the music and rhythm makes the work lively.

## Conclusion

Karmacharya's works explore socio-cultural subject matters and themes like spirituality, religion, rituals, meditation, music and rural life. His works are inclusive in terms of religion, ritual, culture, caste and ethnicity. He gives space to multiple voices of Nepal. The artworks include images, symbols, metaphors and paradoxes to intensify the expression. The images appeal to our senses and create vivid visual picture in our mind. Sometimes, the images have been developed into symbols signifying something else beyond the image. Symbols do not point to the concrete things but provide possible suggestions. The paradox presents contrary images and symbols in the surface level but as we go deeper, they have been brought together in logical way. Karmacharya's works are modern, yet they have been rooted to our native tradition. He rereads and reformulates the structure of paubha and mandala. The contents of traditional Nepali art have been revised and reintegrated in his contemporary paintings. By doing so, he deautomatizes the perception and extends the significances. The use of modern techniques has made his artworks more subjective and plural. Karmacharya's rhythmic lines, running colors, sweeping brushstrokes, flowing shapes and spontaneous gestures carve his distinct identity with unique signature. His artworks are not only mirror to Nepali culture and society but also respond to the contemporary context and take corrective measures.

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