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# Hamartia in Ghātu Cultural Activity

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## **Abstract**

*Ghātu has hamartia, a fatal flaw as it is about the deaths of the royal couple, the protagonists, who become the victims of unfortunate state or fortune hunter. Their early deaths moved the audiences that they have pity on the royal couple. It is the nature of audiences that they want the happy ending but there are very few people who have happy ending. Most people face the sufferings, a kind of tragedy. Only death is not a tragedy, facing different hardships is also a tragedy. Some sufferings can be much more torturous than the death. Death is one time death but suffering is hundred times death. The findings of the study show that the audiences entertain tragic story more than the happy story because tragic story is more didactic and philosophic as well as lesson oriented. And nobody can escape the ill fate. So, this paper employs Aristotle's theory of pity and fear to analyze this Ghātu site. In Ghātu, the tragic flaw is not because of king's arrogance or mistakes but because of his ill fate. His opponents suddenly attacked him. When he was slain on the battle field, this affected his queen and she immolated. This Ghātu story is about how people become the victims of ill fates. The innocent people are victimized and punished. The audiences become aware of others mistakes as they have pity and fear. They do not want to fall into the vault of misfortunes although it is not avoidable. The study concerns on why people entertain tragic story.*

**Keywords:** *Ghātu, self-immolation, tragic flaw, woman tragedy*

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## **Introduction**

Ghātu is a tragic epic. The main theme of this cultural performance is located around the tragedy of a woman. She is the queen Yemphawati. She has several names like Hemawati, Yemphawati, Ambawati and so on. Her husband, king Pashramu's untimely death in the battlefield provokes the tragic flaw. "Catharsis is not an intellectualization or cleansing of the emotions, as in the purification view, but a purgation of them. Tragedians thus heal the soul much as doctors, often, heal the body: by getting rid of bad things in it" (McCumber 54). Queen Yemphawati died means it is her purgation of her agonies and pains she had. She is the tragedian who has healed her soul as much as the doctors heal the body and make it free from the ills. But the world view is different that the protagonist should not face the death as such miseries in the middle of the show. Protagonist is the victor and s/he does not have to be defeated from his/her opponents, but happens otherwise. This is what world is like. The world does not move toward the direction where a man wants. Generally, it moves to opposite or otherwise directions. The humans have to go accordingly for his survival. Ghātu site has been a full of tragedy as the protagonist's situation has been worsened against his/her wish. The study applies the theory of pity and fear propounded

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by Aristotle. There is catharsis in this tribal festival. As “[t]he best tragedy is so composed as to arouse pity and terror. Firstly, it is clear that morally good men must not be shown passing from good fortune to bad; this does not arouse pity or fear but is repulsive” (Stinton 221). Ghātu arouses pity and terror or fear simultaneously. The protagonist has passed from good fortune to bad. Bad could have changed into good but there has been a death. How can it be undone? There is no way out except regretting in untimely death of the protagonists for the audience. As the audience does not have only pity on the tragedians they also have disgusting feeling toward the queen for her immolation.

Ghātuis observed by some ethnic groups of Nepal about how the king Parshuram was killed by his enemy despite his bravery and strength. Tragedy starts when the hero dies unexpectedly. Everything was going on well but the young and energetic king was bound to wage war sudden of all and he died in the war. His queen was a mother of two and half year old breast feeding baby son, Balkrishna. She was badly shocked when she listened to the news of her husband’s untimely death. She could not believe her ears. It was the first time her husband had ever been defeated by other persons in his life. Once he was defeated he was slain and killed. This is suggestive that there is not only the victory of a single person for ever although his power is unbelievable or excess, it gets changed and victory lurks like a pendulum that hits not only one side.

## Methodology

The study employs Aristotle’s theory of pity and fear for the analysis of Ghātu site. Aristotle discusses the Greek tragedy but there is no one to discuss the Ghātutragedy. So, this paper discusses the Ghātu tragedy that is heart-cracking. The popularity of Greek tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy is unquestionable and this study shows the Ghātu tragedy is not different from these two. Although this is purely local and it is not different from Greek tragedy, it has not been a subject of analysis for the western scholars. Even the Nepali scholars do not put the students of literature don’t know much about the Ghātu tragedy that is a matter of concern. Tragedy provokes the death or too painful situations of the protagonists. Death or painful situation does not take place in the tragedians because of their flaw or human error but it happens unexpectedly to them that arouses pity and terror in the audiences. This is what Ghātu tragedy is. This tribal festival presents the lively tragedy of the royal couple. They suffered not because of their flaw but because of their ill fate. Aksionov, for instance, the main character of “God Sees the Truth but Waits” a tragic story by Tolstoy, suffers for twenty six years without no reason at all. He died when his release was announced by the jailer. There are thousands of Aksionovs in the world who have been suffering. King Pashramu and his queen, Yemphawati are another Aksionovs who suffered without their faults. Makar Semyonich is the real culprit but Aksionov has been accused of murdering a merchant and he has been put into the jail. Unlike this, King Pashramu’s neighboring kings waged war against his interest and he had to sacrifice. And Ghātu is about the tragedy of Yemphawati’s immolation, the sati system that it was abolished by Chandra Shamsher in Nepal. One can watch the *Jhola* film for the witness or for knowing how tragic Ghātu is. People suffer not because of their mistakes, they suffer because of their misfortune. Aksionov suffered because of his misfortune. “For twenty-six years Aksionov lived as a convict in Siberia. His hair turned white as snow, and his beard grew long and thin, and grey. All his mirth went; he stooped; he walked slowly, spoke little, and never laughed, but he often

prayed” (Tolstoy 209). It is unimaginable to think of twenty six years long time imprisonment without any fault. Makar was the real culprit but he suffered without no reason at all. Likewise, King Pashramu suffered or faced death.

## Results and Discussion

Some dies naturally and timely, whereas some dies committing suicide or accidentally. The natural death does not create tragedy in the audience. Yemphawati’s death is untimely and unnatural. As Aristotle said, “Tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude” (qtd. in Schechner 29). Whatever the reason of death is there, it is an imitation. Every man’s death is an imitation of action. Naturally or unnaturally, every human faces the death. But the readers or the spectators are badly moved and shocked when they know that there is untimely death of a protagonist. Ordinary person’s death may not affect the audiences. King Pashramu, the protagonist of *Ghātu*, is the highly public figure. His death is a matter of great concern to the public. Therefore, this tragedy moves the spectators. As he dies in the battlefield of a war according to the story of *Ghātu* performance, his death causes his wife’s bereaved condition. This bereaved condition led her for self-immolation. Here, death attracts death and tragedy attracts tragedy. So, this tribal festival is all about the tragic death of young king and young queen, and pathetic condition of their breast feeding baby son, Balkrishna.

Main cause of Pashramu’s death is the war and his death is the cause of Yemphawati’s tragedy. War is nothing than the man eating monster. The war related images signify bravery and the performing images enact the agony and lamentation, especially by the *Ghātu* songs. It means there are a performing trauma and a tragedy to the queen, Yemphawati. Her husband, who died young, was brave and energetic but war swallowed him. War is the killer of all kind of people like brave, energetic, non-brave and non-energetic. Mostly war kills the brave ones because they go near war. War is not a matter of choice; it is anecessary evil. Mainly the woman suffered much as their fathers, brothers, uncles or husbands participate in the war and they die. Therefore, this tragedy is considered as worth having. This is universal fact that woman tragedy is much more moving than that of man. It is a human nature that man is very serious about the woman tragedy. “The spectator” he says in one passage, is lifted out of himself. He becomes one with the tragic sufferer and through him with humanity at large . . . he passes out of himself” (Fairchild48). The readers or the spectators are lifted out themselves and they become the tragedians. The main protagonists in *Ghātu* performance, become the sufferers or tragedians.

*Ghātu* tragedy is the female tragedy and female tragedy is more sensitive than general tragedy though king’s tragic death cannot be overlooked. King Pashramu was beheaded in the battlefield. Then the queen’s tragedy starts. “The king’s death intimates a larger tragedy” (Haboush 104). His death provokes much tragedy for the spectators. Because of the obliged condition of the queen, who has no way out at this critical moment, the situation worsens. How to go ahead? Does she have to run the governance or not? She is in dilemma like the prince Hamlet, “To be or not to be.” At last she makes a bold decision that she herself immolates. This adds the tragic quality more.

There is a tragedy of king and queen. Moreover, their two and half year old baby son’s bad luck of alienation sensitizes the spectators even more. In the time of queen’s self-immolation, she

requests all her relatives to look after the breast feeding baby boy. Mostly, she suggests the baby sitter, the dummy mother, to give a good care for her baby son. The baby son knows nothing what is happening. His pathetic condition also helps the tragic flaw. The queen says good bye to all her relatives and well-wishers. All her relatives and other attendants reflect the image of funeral procession as the unprecedented tragic severity, which depicts the uniqueness of *Ghātu*. When the relatives and attendants had been to dancing girls' houses as if they were there with a marriage proposal but when they reach to the crematorium, their return turns into a funeral procession. In the time of her immolation, Yemphawati weeps too much for she makes such a bold decision of a kind of committing suicide. The weeping of the protagonist is far more different from the same in other enactments in that the latter is just an enactment while the former is filled with so much life that the dichotomy of acting and reality gets obliterated here. Queen Yemphawati becomes a widow in her young age and the attendants feel sorry for her immolation. This self-immolation action creates the real feelings in the spectators. "In his *Poetics*, Aristotle argued that tragedy, for instance, so stimulates the emotions of pity and fear that by the end of the play the spectator is purged of them" (Danesi 163). Similarly, when the queen self-immolates, the audiences feel sorry for her untimely death. Both the king and the queen died untimely. This moves the spectators in a great deal. Thus, *Ghātu* represents not only the royal couple's tragedy but the entire tragedy of human life.

The activities which are performed in the *Ghātu* suggest something deep meanings. They are all about the bereaved conditions of the queen. "Tragedy is placed on the dissonance between social norms which require that a woman rearrange her priorities and her inability to shift her emotional attachments accordingly" (Haboush 103). As the Queen Yemphawati seems unable to shift her emotional attachments, she wants to unite with her husband spiritually in the heaven. According to social norms, she had to survive for her breast feeding baby son. She seems to have escaped away from the social responsibility. But it is her obligation because she would not tolerate the domination of her husband's enemy. Generally, the winner consumes not only the state land but he also consumes the loser's wife. This is the trend of war. Thinking all this, the queen has chosen the safe landing of self-immolation. This adds the tragedy.

The world is very sensitive about the female and small children as well as the state heads. King Pashramu is the state head and public figure. There has been a tragic death of the royal couple. Likewise, little child's suffering also moves the man. For example, Siyona Shrestha has been viral in the social media. This is why because the public have pity on her. Public sympathy more on such female characters. Her parents have not been capable to manage that much amount of money for her treatment although they are both medical personnels. Their income is not bad but to support the expenses that require for their baby girl, their saving was not sufficient. Siyona has been successful to win the heart of many kind hearted people from different corners of the world, especially, Nepali. So, many Nepalese, who are living in different parts of the world, have collected money for her treatment. About 80% of her total treatment expense has been collected so far. According to media, it is Rs. 250 million the doctors demand for the treatment. It is not a joke to collect that much amount of money. If there was a sixty years old man in the place of Siyona, ([https://www.instagram.com/siyona\\_fight\\_sma/](https://www.instagram.com/siyona_fight_sma/)) it would be impossible for him to collect that money. Why? The general people are not so sensitive of death of over age people. The world was sensitized by Siyona Shrestha's case. It means, the queen's death sensitizes the audiences as Siyona does. She suffers unexpectedly. Similarly, queen Yemphawati's unexpected suffering, her

self-immolation, her untimely widowhood and death, moves the audience in *Ghātu*. So, *Ghātu* gives the vibes of tragedy because it is about female tragedy. This makes the spectators feel sorry. The world is really very sensitive for woman and children.

Why did the queen choose death? Many women had chosen death in the time partition of India, “the women and children had offered themselves up for death because death was preferable” (Wallenius 58) because if they had not chosen the death they would have surely been dishonored and raped and killed. Queen, Yemphawati, here chose the death, the self-immolation as she knew that she would have been badly dishonored by the neighbouring kings. Queen, Yemphawati’s early death has been a great tragedy to the spectators. This is because of sati system, a kind of suicide or forceful killing. This tragedy is local one. How can this tragedy be similar to the worldly tragedies? Do all the people become the victim of ill fate like the queen? The paper has discussed on this queries as well.

Now *Ghātu* is compared to other iconic tragedies. Many people enjoy reading tragic stories because they are afraid of facing such bad lucks and they express their pity on the tragedians. They have some lesson from the tragic play or films, too. They want to escape from such misfortunes even if it is unavoidable sometimes. They want to be alert. One has to experience it against his desire. “In the *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that tragedy provokes fear and pity for the spectators through the mimetic representation of an action” (Malekin 136). The queen’s ill-fate provokes fear and pity. The spectators are feared of such ill-fate. So they have a pity on her. For this, Sati *Ghātu* creates catharsis in both readers and spectators that there is pity and fear. The spectators have fear of such bad luck. There is a chance of such bad luck to anyone. How to avoid it? Is there no way out? Anyone can be victimized by his/her ill fate anytime. This makes the spectators feel sorry. Queen’s bad luck is an unavoidable situation. Her young age and female gender is another factor to promote the level of tragedy.

So, tragedy of *Ghātu* and *Romeo and Juliet* is of the similar category. Shakespearian tragedy is worldwide famous, whereas *Ghātu* tragedy is almost unknown to the Nepali scholars. It is under eraser. Few people understand this just as a cultural activity. If this *Ghātu* was performed by Richard Schechner and written by Shakespeare, it would have a highest value in the world. The subject matter of this epic is not less worth having than any other tragedy of Shakespeare. It is no less tragic than *Hamlet*. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo’s death might be less worth having than the queen’s death. Romeo’s death’s effect on Juliet is worth having. Similarly, king’s death’s effect on Yemphawati is more worth having. For instance, if the tragedy of King Lear, in such an old age, is really moving, the tragedy of the queen Yemphawati is heart-rending. Lear’s mismanagement of his three daughters caused his downfall, but ill-fate befalls Yemphawati no account and her tragedy seems of a higher rate. So, there is no difference between the tears of Yemphawati and Juliet.

Romeo’s death is simply interpreted. But the effect of his death on Juliet is taken as a matter of great concern. Death of Romeo is related with Juliet’s tragedy. The readers may not have pathos over Romeo’s death but they are very much sympathetic to Juliet’s suffering. If there was no Juliet, Romeo’s death would not affect the readers in this rate. The readers are sad to know Romeo’s death because his death affected Juliet. Likewise, the queen’s tragedy is very much sympathetic to the spectators as “the emotional impact of premature death . . . transforms physical sensations into sentiments and attitudes and enables us to react to such a tragedy” (Geertz 216).

Tragic feeling of the spectators is because of early death of the protagonist. The tragedy comes to her one tragedy after another. Her young age is symbolic to make theme tragic that no one wants this type of tragedy. Female, young age and a little boy sensitize the tragic theme. As the weight of the tragedy we see in the *Ghātu* performance may not be in the exact rate which this study predicts. The story of Yemphawati is not only heart-rending but it is heart-cracking, with the belief of spiritual unification and love of spouse, is unforgettable and nothing can replace it. Similarly, if the characters of Shakespeare suffer much without their tragic flaws, Yemphawati suffers in the same way but a bit in higher rate. "Gesture appeals more intuitively to our senses and sense-making capacities than purely linguistic academic discourse could" (Mittelberg 147). One gesture does not indicate only a single thing, it denotes a number of meanings, and it is more than the linguistic academic discourse. Language is limited, whereas gesture is unlimited, and it has plural meanings. Furthermore, the question's gesture is slow motion walk of the queen, and the slow motion verses of song in *Ghātu*.

The tragedy starts after king Pashramu is beheaded in the battlefield in spite of his bravery and strength. He happens to wage the war with the principle of "*Hatowaprapysysiswargajitowwabhokshashimahim*" (Mishra 335). Means, the brave person's stay is in the heaven if he is killed in a war or he will rule the state if he wins the war [my trans.]. The particularity of the universality is also informed by the death of Pashramu, whose death is conveyed by a pigeon, a messenger, to the queen. The queen, however, does not believe the messenger until she sees a sign. So, she sees the sign in the image of milk-well and water-well turn by turn. She sees the blood spot there in the well. Then she knows that her husband is dead. This is one way of interpretation of *Ghātu*.

There are several interpretations. First, the king's horse, which is blood-stained, comes alone. She does not believe it. Later the king's minister comes with the king's head and he puts it on the lap of queen. How tragic is this? She falls in an unbearable situation. She gets shocked and fainted. After some time she comes back into normal state. She tries to manage this unbearable situation anyhow. First, she follows the rituals like washing of her vermilion and breaking her bangles as well as changing the colourful clothes and wearing the simple ones, mainly white. "During the death of a close relative. . . as a sign of deep grief, (o)n death of her husband a widow removes everything from her *kupas* other than cowries" (Malik 211-12). This is a mythicocultural tradition that the married female has to remove the colourful clothes or *kupas*, the headdress of the woman in Shrilanka. This represents the broader Hindu cultural rituals. The women's vermilion and their bangles symbolize their living husbands and their lifelong make up. Both the husband and wife do not die together. If a husband dies at the age of seventy or eighty, it can be considerable. Queen's situation is different that she is still very young but her husband is dead in so early age. To be a widow or widower is natural process but in early age it is pathetic and touchy. She says good-bye to her breast feeding baby son of two and half years old. She requests her family members to feed her baby boy from time to time. She asks them to give him water if he is thirsty and food if he is hungry. She also requests them to clean all the clothes of her baby son. And he should not feel that his mother is dead. She wishes that he should sleep on time; eat on time; take a bath on time; change the dirty clothes on time; play on time and he should not cry in the absence of his mother. Therefore, Shakespearean tragedy is heart rending, whereas *Ghātu* tragedy is heart-cracking.

## Conclusion

*Ghātu* performance is a tragic epic, a play. Mainly the unexpected death of a protagonist provokes the tragedy amongst readers or spectators. The premature death of both the king Pashramu and the queen Yemphawati adds the level of tragedy in the optimum point. By looking at others painful situation the audiences get alert and become aware of such silly mistakes because every downfall of man is not because of big reason but some time it is so negligible and sometime ill-fate. King Pashramu did not surrender in spite of his weak performance. His opponents were more powerful than he had expected. His arrogance is the cause of his death. Many people are like King Pashramu. He must have underestimated his enemies. This is the characteristics of every ruler. Thus, this paper is about the *Ghātu* tragedy, the tragedy of the queen, Yemphawati. She has to face an unexpected death of her husband in early age. Then the queen immolates as she knows that her survival is not meaningful and prestigious to live alone without her husband's love. So, she committed a kind of suicide. This moves the spectators. How the queen prepares to immolate is the most tragic moment. As she says goodbye to her relatives and family members, the spectators get moved. She feeds her breast to her baby son for the last time and asks him to be happy even in the absence of hers. These activities of the queen add the tragic elements of *Ghātu* performance. *Ghātu* is a spectrum through which a number of tragic stories are woven.

The major concern of the study is to project the tragic theme of *Ghātu* in the field of English literature. The *Ghātu* tragedy has not been considered as the matter of concern among the scholarly figures of Nepal. This tragedy is not as popular as the Shakespearean tragedy and the tragedy of *GauriKabya* by Madhav Ghimire. The suffering of the queen Yemphawati and the suffering of Juliet are similar or more, but only the tragedy of Juliet is considered to be iconic tragedy but not *Ghātu* tragedy. All the tragic stories of *Ghātu* have not been addressed here in the study. The study has analyzed *Ghātu* only from tragedy point of view; there are several aspects and angles which have not been addressed here. Only very few anthropologists have researched on this site. *Ghātu* site has not been an interesting subject or area of study for many scholars in the field of literature. Like *Ghātu*, there are many other ethnic cultural activities that they are the goldmine for the researchers but their eyes do not fall on these sites. It is not only the ethnic scholar's responsibility to highlight such cultural activities. Even in the masters' thesis, only ethnic people like Gurung and Rai choose this type of topics for their theses or most of them choose feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, diasporas, structuralism, criticism, comparative studies, and so on, but their eyes do not fall on Kaura, Chudka, Lokdohori, Badkanach, Chandinach, Kattiknach, Sorathi, *Ghātu* etc. Do not these cultural activities address human grounds? This paper appeals both the national and international scholars to uplift these, too. It is not only the Greek tragedy that creates the catharsis; it is also *Ghātu* tragedy that creates catharsis in the audiences. The audiences have pity on the unexpected sufferings of the queen Yemphawati and they have fear of such bad luck because everybody has a chance of such bad luck or ill fate. Therefore, *Ghātu* is the hamartia of the royal couple that they are the tragic hero and tragic heroine.

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