

Common Patterns in Contemporary Nepali Arts, Life and Society

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Abstract: There are common trends and patterns in contemporary Nepal arts, politics, society, culture and education along with other dimensions of life. Such similarities suggest the interconnectedness of diverse dimensions of reality. One area mirrors the other one. Looking at art, we can infer the life and culture of the people. Superstructure is reflected in the base; and the base has been reflected in superstructure. Hypocrisy, pretention and imitation are the common patterns of Nepali art, culture and life in contemporary context. Due to such features, the foundation of the nation is shaking. The things that need to remain in the foundation are drifting on the surface. The drama of art, agriculture, education and politics will not support life and survival. It is just for showing until the disaster takes place. When there will be critical and catastrophic situation, we are sure to be drowned. Before this apocalypse, it is necessary to do little things that are real which enhance our art and life, which add a little stone on the foundation of the civilization. This research paper analyzes contemporary Nepali artworks and links them to cultural, social and political dimensions of the contemporary context. This is qualitative research since it interprets arts and events, and the interpretations can be multiple.

Keywords: Common patterns, imitation, pretention, drama, hypocrisy, lethargy

Introduction

Western influences are overt in some Nepali arts. We can put contemporary Nepali arts and western arts side by side, can see more similarities than differences. Despite the cosmetic differences due to simple and crude manipulation of certain images, shapes, lines, colors and forms, the key elements remain the same. To be modern, we imitate the west. By imitation, we pretend to be modern. It is only hypocrisy. Similar patterns are found in life and society as well. The visualization of the result of such pretention and drama is horrible.

This situation reminded me of a folktale about a shepherd and the tiger. The story goes like this: A young shepherd used to go to jungle to graze his sheep. He thought to amuse himself with his unusual action. He spoke aloud, "A huge tiger is coming and eating my sheep. Please, come to rescue my sheep and me." The busy farmers working in the nearby farm are coming hurriedly to help the boy. To their surprise, the boy is laughing loudly seeing their arrival. Actually, the tiger has not come there. The disappointed farmers returned back to their farm. After few days, the boy repeated the same deed. The farmers remembered the joke the boy created but they again thought that the tiger might have really come. So, they again went to help the boy. But the boy had only made fun of them.

After some days, the boy was again in the jungle with his sheep. The tiger really came and grabbed the sheep one after the other. He climbed a tree and cried for help several times. The farmers listened to his cry but they did not go to help him, for they thought that he was only pretending and making drama. The tiger killed several sheep and went into the jungle. In the evening, the boy returned home with only few sheep. He paid price for his joke. In the context of our contemporary arts, social practices and politics, the imitation and pretention looks funny until we face the critical situation. When real difficulty arises, our situation can be like that of young shepherd. The pretention of art cannot become art but only the joke. The drama of leadership cannot become leadership but only the farce and melodrama. There are so many

political leaders, they consider themselves great and dedicated to the nation. The nation has been squeezed from all sides but so-called great leaders are silent as if they have not heard and felt anything. The tiger eats the sheep but the shepherd is silent as if he has not seen anything. This is the tragic situation of so-called modernity, revolution and significant achievement. The words we have heard in reality are only words used in jokes and comic drama. We believe the words have real substance but they appear to be the dialogues in drama. Real people need real food, clothes and shelter for living; the images in mirrors will not satisfy your hunger. The greatness in words does not show greatness in real action. Tragedy is sure to follow. The real tiger has almost grabbed the sheep. Some Nepali artists consider themselves modern for using western techniques (Sharma, shocking trends, 2021). There is a competition to be the first modern Nepali artist. The measuring rod is the use of western technique and form. Do you think we can become modern by imitating others?

When the Rana regime began in Nepal from the middle of the nineteenth century, rulers sought the approval of British India to maintain their power in Nepal. In politics, Britain is democratic in its own land but Nepal followed dictatorship of the Ranas. In the domain of art, western realistic techniques were followed in Nepal. In present context, some critics of Nepali art argue that modernity in Nepali art began in the period of the Rana rule when western realistic techniques were used (Sharma, shocking trends, 2021). There is enough ground to question this statement. First, how can the techniques of realistic art practiced in the west since Greco-Roman period be modern in Nepal? This is only the old joke in new place. The argument reveals our ignorance and lack of awareness of history. Or it can be the blind acceptance of the west as modern. The most important genre that developed in this period was portrait painting that presented the portraits of the rulers. Did it have any significant impact on life of people and the nation? Of course not, except the wages for working artist. The art is the praise and eulogy of the dictators. Do you call it the modern art? Can you guess what kind of mindset produces such statement? The west is white, so it is beautiful. The west is rich, so it is modern. The west has big cities with many facilities, but we do not have good house and beautiful cities. Thus, west is modern and we are primitive. To become modern, we should imitate the west, we should follow the west. This attitude of poverty finds modernity in imitation, and newness in centuries old techniques. Because of hegemony, we ourselves paint our face pitch black with joy. This is the irony of our elite and intellectuals. We get satisfaction in slavery.

The situation is similar in other domains of society. We destroyed our culture of health, hygiene, traditional treatment and medicine because it is not western. Since it is not western, it is barbaric and primitive. We threw the gold in our hand, and are running and begging iron and stones thinking it is valuable. The practice of hygienic habits and practices were blamed as superstitious and dismantled. The sickness and diseases in the disguise of junk are welcome because they are coming from west. And west is modern. Sanskrit, the root and the source of our history and knowledge, was banned in the schools, the books were burnt, and Sanskrit teachers were beaten. The root was separated from the stem and the tree. Naturally, the tree is about to fall down. We conduct revolution to show and surprise the west like a joker. The top-level leaders of the nation state that the world is shocked and surprised looking at us. Here, the question arises: Are we doing something to improve the life of the people or to surprise others like a clown? There is imitation in art, food, fashion, education and politics. Imitation and hypocrisy are the common elements in the diverse fields of Nepali life. This point is further discussed in the article.

Research Methodology

Contemporary Nepali art in relation to its context is the research area of this paper. History of Nepali art and books and articles on social and political events of Nepal are the secondary sources. Artworks and the existing socio-political practices are the primary sources that have been analyzed, interpreted and discussed to support the thesis statement of the paper. This is qualitative research since the artworks and social practices in life can be interpreted in multiple ways. Various events in the domain of art, culture, society, education and politics in contemporary Nepal have been discussed and similar patterns in these fields have been pointed out to suggest the general trend of life in Nepal. Since the results and findings of the research may be bitter to some readers, the identity of the analyzed events, characters and works have not been overtly revealed by the researcher but only suggested through objective correlatives. The article does not aim to reveal the person and particular work but the general trends in life, society and art. The issues have been discussed on the basis of the perception of the researcher. In the present context, my interaction and interview with artists, art critics, academicians and ordinary folks reveals that there is similar experience and perception among the people of diverse fields but the articulation has been limited in informal talks over coffee cups. This article attempts to document those informal expressions in formal manner. The paper also assumes that the common experiences of the writer and readers in the present context need not be cited.

Analysis and Discussion

There are some common trends in contemporary Nepali arts, life and society. Lack of faith on the self, seeing greatness and modernity in the white and west, imitation of the west and the so called greatness, lethargy in creativity, inclination to reap and harvest what we have not sowed and planted, we need money without hard work, need degree without study; we want to show others what we really are not, and we attempt to cheat others by underestimating their intelligence and common sense. In the domain of Nepali art, some artists imitate the distorted forms of western artists like Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Matisse, Edvard Munch, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Kandinsky, Salvador Dali and Jackson Pollock (Sharma, shocking trends, 2021). The imitation is more distorted due to the lack of skills. Why is there such imitation? The perception is we can become great by imitating the great artist. There is no value of the self, there is not their own world to explore. There is the lack of the concept of art. There is lethargy in life and work.

The leading artists of art institutions themselves reveal the dark spots in themselves. The attitude is: *"I am already great leader of the art field, now it is the high time to enjoy fruit of this greatness, I need not to work hard, whatever I do that is art, and the viewers and other artists cannot question what I do."* Then, he creates mess on the canvas and serves garbage to the viewers. The pride of the post makes one blind. At present our memories are fresh that some leaders of Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority squeezed medical colleges, universities and rich institution for bribe for themselves instead of controlling irregularities. The voice of the leader is: *"Provide me this amount, otherwise, I will suspend you, investigate your conducts and file a case in court against you."* Most of the public institutions are terrorized using such statements. Then, he reaps and harvests the crops that he has not planted. The institution, which has the highest authority to maintain rule of law in public institutions, itself forces to commit crime. This is the irony. Some Judges of supreme court, the guardians of the constitution, give judgment on the basis of the amount given to him by the brokers. He terrorizes the government, political leaders and public servants with such statements: *"If you speak or do*

anything against me, you will lose the case in the court." The judge imitates the actions of chief commissioner of Investigation for Abuse of Authority. He begins negotiation with government for his part and portion in constitutional bodies, council of ministers and in all political appointments. The most responsible person who has responsibility to maintain the rule of law in the nation is the one who has the highest mark to break the law. This is the ironical situation. Is the judge or commissioner hungry? No. He has enough food to eat and shelter to sit. Why does he do so? The hunger is in the gene. The hunger is coming from his forefathers and primitive apes. Otherwise, why is it necessary to commit such crime? To stay in the post for extra 6 months, a judge of supreme court changes his date of birth through forgery. Can you expect fair judgment from such person?

Who appoints the judge and the commissioner? The government. What is the basis of appointment? The head of the executive appoints those persons who can act like a puppet, and who can provide a great chunk of cheese in advance. When the ownership of the puppet is changed, the puppet can act against the person who appointed him. Sometimes, the weapon thrown against others comes back to the thrower. Who selects prime minister? The members of parliament. Who elects MP? The ordinary people. This is democracy. An ex-inspector general of police kidnaps a member of parliament. Can you expect security from his institution? The core has been corrupted. There is decay at the center. The center has been reflected in grassroots. The nation has been reflected in the university. There are common patterns of hunger, lethargy, drama and hypocrisy in many sectors including art, life and culture of Nepal. The hard work is looked down upon, sitting and doing nothing is considered great. The hunger in the gene along with laziness is the root of corruption, imitation, drama and hypocrisy.

At university, to pass the exam is more important than to gain knowledge, skills, critical and creative thinking. There is the hunger at the root to misuse certificate and grab undeserved opportunity. The student passes the exam but he becomes disabled while coming out of the university, for he has not learned skills and forgotten to work in the field and farm. A man in city runs for an hour along the dusty road for morning walk but takes vehicle to go to office which is just 30 minutes away from his house. Why does he do so? What kind of culture is it? This is the drama and hypocrisy. Keeping a cow and supplying milk is considered low-grade work but keeping dog, taking it to public road and facilitating it to pass stool in front of other's house is prestigious work. What is this culture? Where is the common sense? This is beyond barbarism under the cover of so-called civilization.

Western realistic style influenced the art of portrait paintings during the Rana regime from the mid-nineteenth century (Sharma, 2009). Rana Prime ministers visited Europe, got their portrait executed in western style and brought some western paintings home (Singh, *Samasamaik*, 1976, pp.35-36). The rulers were exposed to western art forms and fascinated by them, these rulers made these artists execute the portraits of themselves and their family members in western style (Sharma, 2014). This is the attitude of seeing beauty in others. This is the state of inferiority complex. I am low grade person; I want to become like him to become great and prestigious. Such attitude cannot be called modern. These artists used imported canvas and western media like oil color, water color and pestle for their paintings. Pal (1978) evaluates the paintings of the Rana rule: *"After the mid-nineteenth century Nepali portraits were rendered entirely in the European tradition"* (p.132). Leaving religious and mystical paintings, realistic style of painting and western media entered in the domain of Nepali painting during the Rana rule (Sharma, 2009). Subedi (1992) writes about Bhajuman's visit to Europe and its effect in Nepali art:

Bhajuman's visit to Europe can be considered a significant event in Nepali portrait making. . . . he brought western techniques of paintings home. As a very talented artist he must have learnt many things from his European visit. A careful study of the portrait he executed after his return to Nepal from the European visit can show many things in terms of the western influence in Nepali art (p.121).

The portrait of Mathabar Shingh Thapa dated 1986 BS by Dirghaman Chitrakar shows the influence of western realistic style. The portrait of Jung Bahadur Rana, dated 1993 BS, by the same artist has fully used the western realistic style. The costumes of Jung Bahadur show that not only the artists but also the rulers were fascinated by the western fashion of the aristocrats. The attitude is: *"I follow their fashion and I become like them."* It is the imitation. The change is cosmetic. It is difficult to accept as modern. How did the western fashion contribute for the development of the nation? This is the question.

The exposure of the Nepali artists and the rulers to the western arts brought changes in the field of Nepali painting, sculpture, architecture and fashion. The Ranas built Gola Baithak, Seto Darbar, Lal Darbar and Simhadarbar in western style, and got the walls and ceilings decorated with the paintings executed in western techniques (Pandey, 2046 B.S.). The royalties *"commissioned the busts in Europe"* brought to Nepal and installed in public places because of *"their love for themselves, and love for projecting their awe and power"* (Subedi, 1992, p.121). The sculptures of the Rana rulers' huge figures riding horses also suggest their *"love for power and exclusiveness"* (p.121). Mishra (2045 B.S.) states:

During the century of Rana autocracy in Nepal before 1950, seeds of contemporary art were germinated in the hearts of Nepalese artists. . . . Artists who joined the royal entourage had good opportunity to be acquainted with the new techniques, styles and techniques practiced in the western world, consequently, the influence they brought with them gave way to new styles and techniques in the construction of palacial buildings and sculptures in Nepal. Some talented young artists were sent to study fine arts to Calcutta Art school in British India, subsequently, these trained artists, when they returned to Nepal were commissioned to paint huge oil paintings in western methods and media. (pp.19-20)

The above extract clearly shows the writer's positive attitude toward western art. Such attitudes from senior artists and critics encouraged to emulate the alien form instead of inventing new forms themselves (Sharma, shocking trends, 2021). It is difficult to find even the seed of autonomy, self-respect and faith on the self. The driving force inside is animal instinct of hunger. Mishra (2045 B.S.) further points out:

Under the Rana patronage, the works of artists were focused on them [sic] according to the tastes and preferences of their patrons. Therefore, artists had to paint, not in accordance with the spontaneous overflow of their powerful feelings but they had to paint family portraits and picturesque landscapes etc., to please their patrons. (p.20)

How can we call the art modern which has been created to please a dictator? On the walls and ceilings of their huge palaces built in western style, they made the artists paint the landscape to decorate their rooms (Singh, 1976). Sharma (*socio-political*, 2021, p.6) writes:

Some art historians of Nepali arts consider that modernity in art began during the Rana period in the sense that western realistic techniques were used by Nepali artists. It is difficult to agree. Let's see the concept of modern and try to relate it to the Nepali context. The term 'modern' means new and recent. Is realistic technique new and recent? No. This technique has been applied since the Greco-Roman period throughout the

history of western art like renaissance, mannerism, baroque, rococo, neoclassicism and realism along with other art movements. Thus, it is not new. It is old. We bring the thing in our country that has been used for centuries in other countries. Imitating others cannot be modern at least in the field of art. Each work of art is like an autonomous individual. Modern art is linked to the contemporary context. It captures the mood of the then people. It may be dissatisfied with the present and raises a voice for change and a better world. How are realistic techniques related to the context of the Rana period? The politics and external world are regressive and autocratic. Was that political change modern? Do these artworks give a voice for change and revolution in society? No. They are mainly the portraits and hunting scene. Do these paintings capture the people's mood? Do they provide new insight to the people? It is very difficult to find this. One thing can be said with certainty, that is: Nepali artists were influenced by western realistic techniques. No need to boast and be proud of.

Nepali artists used the techniques of western art movements like impressionism, expressionism, fauvism, abstractionism, cubism, surrealism and abstract expressionism. Subedi (1992) states: "The imagery is drowned into the abstract form. The colored shapes and the brush strokes give the painting a pattern. The colors themselves, not the images, spring to the eyes of the viewers and influence the mind (p.124). Nepali artists imitated abstract forms but it is not clear why they used it. Perhaps they thought this was modern western form. Altered images, broken forms and unusual combination of images and colors in art works create distance from the objects and events of the world (Sharma, 2009). They used images and colors without any reference to external world.

The influence of western techniques like fauvism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism, abstract expressionism and pop art appears in contemporary Nepali arts (Bhattarai, 2057 B.S). Nepali artists *"fully used the techniques and media now universally recognized as occidental"* (Subedi, 1992, p.124). Mishra (2045 B.S.) remarks: *"One could easily visualize the parallel development of traditional and contemporary art, nevertheless artists of young generation are growing more inquisitive for discovering something heartily acceptable for them in the western method"* (p.20). The above statements indicate that the west was considered as modern. Around 1973, *The Indian Express* writes on the paintings of Nepali artists:

In the history of modern painting, impressionism and expressionism are inalienably associated with the European experience of industrialization and technicised life style. The movements, when transformed into modern idioms of visual expression and used by painters in other parts of the globe where the social history has had a different run, tend to betray a confused pattern of imagery and execution. Contemporary Nepalese paintings, now on view at the Shridha Fami art Gallery, have this contradiction. Most of the abstract expressionist paintings are confused (qtd. in Singh, 2035 B.S, p.66).

The art forms, developed in the industrial and technological western society since 1870, made their presence suddenly in the agrarian society like that of Nepal. This created dilemma and confusion among Nepali artists. Sharma (*socio-political*, 2021, pp.7-8) states:

Some art historians of Nepali arts argue that modernity in art began in Nepal after 2007 B.S. when Nepali artists began to paint abstract paintings but it is difficult to agree with the same logic that by sharing the other's technique which is almost a half-century old, how can we claim to be modern? How does it capture the time and the mood of the people of that time? The technique developed in a different context was picked up and used as our own. It gives a feeling of guilt drenched with sweats. It will be worth

exploring: *"What is art, actually?"* The boast, arrogance and pride without the study or the faith in the self, confidence on the self, one becomes the clown, the object of mockery and laughter; the real drama turns into melodrama or farce. The faster we are aware of it the better. In my view, we need not be big, great, large or famous, what we need is humbleness, faith in the self, recognizing the uniqueness on the self, preparation of foundation and putting a brick on it. Let's see our arts, and let's see our politics. There is complete parallelism and fitting analogy. Politics and society have been reflected in art and education. Listen to the conversation of a political leader, a minister, a renowned artist, a professor, a businessman, a laborer and a broker. Observe their syntax, lexicon, attitude, tone, voice and perspective objectively. You will be surprised to find the similarity. This is the model of equality and socialism. The boundary between art and reality has been blurred. When you view the arts, you find politics; when you view the politics, you find drama.

In "Foreword" of Dina Bangdel's book, Neubauer (nd) states about renown Nepali artist Lain Singh Bangdel: *"He painted these local images in an international style- a special blend of western technique learned in London, Paris and America."* According to Bangdel (nd), when he got exposure to many western art forms, a "new vista of art was opened for him, he was both excited and confused in trying to internalize the plethora of art movements, styles and artists" (p.11). His intense attraction toward western art forms and constant practice to use western techniques *"immeasurably enriched his artistic horizons, and broadened his technical ability, and multiplied available creative options"* (Neubauer, nd, Foreword). Bangdel's early figurative works and their color scheme, which depict sadness, poignancy and loneliness, echo to the Picasso's paintings of blue period (Singh, 1976). His later paintings depict the influence of Gauguin, Cezanne and van Gogh's post-impressionism, Braque's cubism, Kandinsky's abstraction, and Pollock, Rothko and de Kooning's abstract expressionism (Bangdel, nd). Bangdel (nd) further writes:

One finds in many of these works the undeniable influence of the elongated rhythms of Modigliani's works, the quite vigor and laborious sobriety of Braque as well as the balance and force of Gauguin's colors. As experimental works, Bangdel considered these influences necessary and helpful in grasping the technique to master the oil medium. (p.12)

Subedi (1992) remarks about the impact of the exhibition of Bangdel's artworks in contemporary Nepali art: *"The exhibition of Bangdel's paintings in the oldest college gallery in Kathmandu in 1962 marks the turning point in the history of Nepali art. It is perhaps the beginning of the contemporary or modern period of Nepali paintings. . . . Nepali art saw a new configuration of emulation which was new, alien, complex and challenging"* (pp.123-24). Uprety (2007) points out three possibilities when native Nepali arts encounter western forms:

It seems possible to argue that while in some cases the forms of western modernity were imitated or copied, in some other instances they were rejected as the non-western societies sought to protect the forms of their own indigenous traditions. In addition to these two cultural responses of mimicry and indigenization, a third alternative was also possible. This consisted in a selective appropriation of the forms of both western modernity and native traditions in a production of what might be called hybrid forms in the areas of music, economy, painting and literature among others. (p.22)

The first option is dominant in the context of Nepal. About the identity of contemporary Nepali painting, Pandey (2046 B.S.) states:

Although the paintings of Nepal are not distinctly different from such arts in other countries . . . Artists have not developed their own styles and in the selection of motifs in the contemporary arts, the artists do not use native subjects on a large scale. As such very few artists influenced by western styles and colors are successful in giving Nepalese touch and identity in their works while most of artists share the same features as any artists of the globe. (p.41)

Their "*ambivalent approach*" towards contemporary western forms has been "*both a strength and unnecessarily problematic*" (Subedi, 2005, p.117). Subedi (1992) writes about Nepali artists: "*Their 'modern' is basically a western concept*" (p.123). Hegewald (1996) further explains modern Nepali art: "Only good art, influenced by new and foreign ideas but allegedly coming out of their own tradition, as they would have it, is considered to be true modern Nepali art (p.100).

The period after 2007 B.S. is considered modern period in art by some critics because after this point of time, western techniques of art like impressionism, expressionism, cubism, abstractionism, surrealism and abstract expressionism came to Nepal, and Nepali artists followed these techniques (Sharma, 2019). Sharma (2019) further states:

Do you think that following other, imitating other we can become modern? Of course, not. Imitating others, we can become actors but not the artist, let alone the modern artist. We are following more than one hundred years old techniques, and we call ourselves modern.

There is the competition to become first modern Nepali artist. There are many blames and claims among each other. The argument of these so called first modern Nepali artists is that he brought the western techniques in Nepal for the first time; he used the western techniques for the first time. It means by using western technique, we become modern. How do you feel listening to this? Likewise, he is first modern Nepali artist because he made first abstract art in Nepal. Abstract was already practiced in the west about a half century ago when it was practiced in Nepal in 1950s and 60s. Bringing the western art in Nepal, we become modern. Look at our status. I am surprised how such idea germinates in our mind.

Look at our traditional art and look at our so called modern art. Compare and contrast yourself. Which has the bigger weight? Which do you prefer? And why? I think the more we have become so called modern, the more we have been degenerated and decayed. I think we have lost all values, self-respect and dignity. We have commodified ourselves. We do not count ourselves in human being but slaves. However, sometimes, we pretend to be leader, teacher and artist; even we demand and expect respect and honor. I think it is only rehearsal and drama. (pp.2-3)

Rajan Karki says that Amatya is a "*leading figure among the modern Nepalese painters representing the abstract school of Modern Painting*" (qtd. in Amatya, *Adhunik Kala*, 2061, p.32). Narendra Raj Prasai also states: "*The first man to hold an exhibition of modern art was Gehendra Man Amatya. He has held a solo art exhibition in 1955*" (qtd. in Amatya, *Adhunik Kala* 2061 B.S, p.30). The above statements imply that Amatya brought the western techniques of abstract art for the first time in Nepal, so he is first modern Nepali artist (Sharma, *Shocking trends*, 2021). This argument appears fallacious.

Andre Alexander (1992, p.28) points out that Shashi Shah is the surrealist, and Krishna Manandhar is abstract painter. Mathema (2006) states about Krishna Manandhar's works: "Like all other abstract expressionists, Krishna is essentially a romantic in the extreme personalization

of his art" (p.21). Vijay Thapa depicts social conflict and suffering human figures in his impressionist and cubist paintings. Like impressionists, he plays with light and shade in his canvas (Mainali, 2062 B.S.). Geometric forms of Cezanne and Picasso influence his works (Adhikari, 2058 B.S., p.28). In his paintings, Shankar Raj Singh Suwal juxtaposes contrary images with free association like the surrealist artists (Singh, 1976). He took inspiration from the works of van Gogh, Cezanne, Salvador Dali and Picasso (Mainali, 2053 B.S.). About Durga Baral's style Singh (1976) states that his works depict the influence of impressionism and surrealism. In an exhibition catalog, about Baral's works, Sama (2006) writes: "I believe a Salvador Dali has been born in the country". Shashikala's paintings depict the influence of Picasso's cubism and Cezanne's post-impressionism (Mainali, 2053 B.S.). Most of her paintings are created in cubist style using oil color (Singh, 1976). Most of the above judgments have been made giving focus to western influence. There is the pride in being like impressionist, cubist, expressionist and surrealist but not in being oneself. This clearly defines who we are.

About the influence of other artists in his own paintings, Manandhar (2006) himself states: *"I adore the artists Willem de Kooning, Emile Nolde, Pablo Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Uttam Nepali and Laxman Shrestha whose paintings have motivated me in a number of ways"* (xi). Shahani (2006, p.54) remarks: *"Any influences governing the art of Kiran? Among many others, perhaps there is one of De Kooning of German School of Abstract Expressionism, where figures are not always banished but flow out of the abstract canvas"*. About the reintegration of native elements in Kiran Manandhar works Singh (2006) writes: *"What makes him distinct from the rest is the way his art has absorbed a number of a "foreign element" in terms of stylistic tendencies"* (p.66). The expressions suggest that foreign elements are assimilated with pride and prestige. Our concept of modernity is paradoxical and our argument is not persuasive. Sharma (2019) states:

After the return of Jung Bahadur Rana from Europe, modernity entered Nepal, we have heard people saying this, we have read scholars' written texts. The then monarchy had been subdued by autocratic and tyrannical Rana rule initiated, established and institutionalized by Jung Bahadur Rana. We say at this point, modernity began in Nepal. It means autocracy and tyranny is modernity for us. What kind of people are we? Let's look at our own face in the mirror. Look at the paradox.

What did Jung Bahadur Rana bring from Europe? Realism, oil color, canvas, perspective, light and shade. Realism was the essential feature of Greek art almost 2400 years ago. This technique has been continuously used in the west since Renaissance (15th/16th century). We bring realism in Nepal and we call it modern. It means, for us, what is west is modern. Even the old thing becomes modern for us. Who are we? What are we seeking? Are we the children? Or matured men? Let's secretly see our face in the mirror. (p.2)

The foreign is modern for us. We blindly follow it without judgment. In the same way, we discarded our traditional educational system, health practices, food, fashion and culture, and followed the foreign culture proudly imagining ourselves modern.

We never eat the same thing all the time; we never stay in the same place all the time. We keep on travelling in new places and keep on tasting new food. We enjoy listening to new songs and watching new films. However, I do not know, fortunately or unfortunately, why most of our contemporary Nepali artists are always painting the similar figures and working on same subject matters (Sharma, 2019). Sharma (2019) further states:

Some artists are painting only trees; some are painting flowers; some others are making bells; few artists are making only horse; some renowned artists are making similar figures and patterns forever in their life. Why are they doing so? For the sake of their own distinct identity (Maybe it is an excuse or pretention). For them, doing same thing all the time is their identity because viewers know that they do that all the time. Eating the stale food all the time. They seem to be ignorant of the fact that identity is revealed unconsciously on the process of creation, not imposed consciously from outside. Govinda Dangol is free from this chronic disease of Nepali art. I think it is easy to make the same thing all the time. Making a formula and apply it forever. Making a rubber stamp, and inking and stamping forever. I think it is the result of laziness. You are lazy and tell us that you are creating your identity. Do you take us as a fool? Do not tell us the same old joke. You need to search another technique to cheat us. Do you think I am arrogant to say such things? Of course not. I am sad, yet I need to say because who will say if I do not say? The story of naked emperor will be repeated again. I wish it would not happen. (p.11)

The society and life have similar pattern. Doing new thing is difficult and it demands creative faculty. We repeat same thing and beat people with our experience. Life and culture are separated. Life is alienated from culture (Martin & Jacobus, 1991). Life is for living, and culture is for showing. Culture and identity have become the burden to be carried. They are not the ways of life.

Some so called Nepali abstract paintings are confused by haphazard use of colors. They are neither well composed nor have visual rhythm (Sharma, 2019). The lines and colors are clashing. There is no visual melody, harmony and coherence. They bring nausea, dizziness, headache and a sort of sickness. One can differentiate between sonorous melody and cacophonous quarrel, the garland of flowers and the garbage heap. Exhibition such works is an underestimation of viewers.

In art, we want to be great without hard work. In life, workers are considered lower grade people. The purpose of our life is not to work. The purpose of our life is to earn without working hard. The goal is earning to sit idle and sleep. I am educated, so, my job is to sit, not to do physical work. The food and clothes do not come from sky. Without the workers' sweats, we cannot live, yet, we hate to do works and workers (Sharma, 2019). Such questions come in our mind: What is this culture? Is it civilization? It is high time to reflect on ourselves. Sharma (2019) writes about Nepali artists' response:

When I ask them why they do not make realistic works, they reply me that they are modern artists, realistic painting is not modern art, so they do not do realistic work. I am not satisfied from their response. I clearly see that their figures and landscapes are not like the real persons, things and places, and I also feel that they do not have aesthetic pleasure, at least, for me but I do not understand why they distort figures and break the linear surface. I do not see any purpose in doing so. I also know that such paintings do not strictly observe the rules of proportion, perspective, balance, and light and shade. Such artworks are jokes and caricatures of impressionism, expressionism, cubism and surrealism. The surface, fashion and the clothes seem to be modern but inside they are empty. As a viewer, I feel like I am cheated. No need to do hard work, no need to follow the rules, no need to learn the skill, so, I do modern painting. I am sure, sooner than later, the mystery of so called modernism will not remain mystery. (p.33)

According to Singh (1976), contemporary Nepali artists have exploited the western art techniques from impressionist to abstract expressionist which are already old in the western world (p.214). They have not been able to develop their own distinct idiom for their expression yet (Singh, 1976, p.214). Bangdel (2061 B.S.) states that during the last forty years Nepali art could not achieve any concrete progress, and it still remains as if it is in the beginning stage. Bibas (2055B.S.) argues that contemporary Nepali artists have failed to create their distinct identity in their works by exploiting the alien influences (p.31). They are only imitating alien art forms and pretending of being so called artist which is a suicidal act. Due to the lack of the artists' sensibility toward native tradition and personal vision, contemporary Nepali art has degenerated and declined (Bibas, 2055 B.S., p.31). According to Bhaukaji (2053 B.S.), contemporary Nepali painting is degenerated due to the lack of thought, creativity, craftsmanship and expression. In the name of creation, so called artists are splashing the colors in the canvas randomly and superficially (Bhaukaji, 2053 B.S., p.6).

Nepali modernity should have other parameters but not the following of western forms. Civilization and culture are not always progressive. Sometimes, they are regressive. We cannot always say the things of the past were always traditional and the things of present are always modern (Sharma, shocking trends, 2021). Modernity is also related to manner and attitude (Arnold, 2020). We seem to be more regressive than our forefathers. They had some ideals like exploration of the self and the universe, the dignity of the self, respect for the humanities, but we seem to have lost any ideals. We are running for our food, fashion and shelter. Our primitive biological instincts have come to the foreground of our canvas as my final goal (Sharma, 2019). Close observation reveals similar patterns in art, culture, education and politics. Majority of the leaders of social institutions seem to be guided by the hidden hunger for food. It does not mean that food is unnecessary thing. Of course, food is necessary but I think we should go beyond food to become an artist and a human being (Sharma, 2019). Reflection, self-evaluation and the quest of the self are the needs of contemporary artists, scholars, leaders and ordinary individuals.

Conclusion

There are similar patterns in contemporary arts, culture, politics and life of people. One domain of life mirrors the other domain. The greater chunk of society and nation has been guided by common values and assumptions. These values include the feeling of inferiority, ignorance, imitation of west and others, pretention of greatness, hypocrisy, disconnectedness to the roots, lack of depth, and drifting on the surface. Some artists imitate western art to make themselves modern. There is no convincing reason to do so. We blamed traditional culture as orthodox and superstitious and rejected it to follow the western food, fashion and medicine. We rejected Sanskrit, the source of our root and culture, and we are rejecting Nepali language to learn English. English has been one of the measuring rod of intellectual life. We rejected free and philanthropic Gurukul system to commodify education. The shift is from free education to extremely expensive education; the poor villagers cannot even dream to afford the price. Education and health are the matter of business controlled by mafia. The disconnectedness to the roots has made the tree of life and nation dry. This trend is pervasive in most of the areas of Nepali life including art, culture and politics.

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