

**Archetypes in Ragini Upadhyay's Paintings****Koshal Hamal^{#*}**[#]Teacher (Painting) at Lalitkala Campus, Tribhuvan University.^{*}Corresponding Author: koshal_hamal@yahoo.com**Citation:** Hamal, K. (2023). Archetypes in Ragini Upadhyay's Paintings. *Journal of Fine Arts Campus*, 5(2). 18-26. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jfac.v5i2.67286>**Abstract**

Archetype signifies the reflection of primordial symbols belonging to myth, culture, or rituals in the work of an artist from his or her collective unconscious. The main aim of this study is to reveal the archetypal character in the works of Ragini Upadhyay. The most recurring motifs, such as Bell, Kumari, Kali, Kamadhenu, Tulsi, Shiva Linga, Shiva, Buddha, Stupa, Lotus, Temples, and Garuda, are some of the key primordial symbols presented in her works; all of these symbols are associated with Hindu myth, culture, and rituals. The artist comes from a Brahmin family background, a caste within Hindu culture. Thus, there is a huge impact of Hinduism in her paintings, which she expresses in the form of art through her collective unconscious. This study is qualitative in nature and attempts to give a solution to a problem through observation and interpretation of the archetypes and paintings associated with this research topic.

Keywords: Ragini Upadhyay, archetype, primordial symbols, collective unconscious**Introduction**

Ragini Upadhyay is one of the most celebrated visual artists from Nepal and the first female chancellor of the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts. Her paintings present archetype imageries based on Hindu culture, myths, and rituals. Archetype is a Greek word that literally means original pattern, form, or model. The method of using an original pattern based on primordial symbols refers to an archetype. An artist who presents primordial symbols from his or her collective unconscious can be called an archetype. In the context of Ragini Upadhyay's works, she has used primordial, original symbols associated with Hinduism.

Before highlighting the further discussion on archetypes, a brief biographical background and important series of art works of the artist are highly important to mention; they can give hints as to how she was raised, trained, and worked as an artist. Ragini Upadhyay was born in 1959 into a Brahmin family in Kathmandu. She has been a huge enthusiast of art since her childhood. She received a graduation degree in fine arts from Lucknow College of Arts and Crafts (1982) and studied printmaking technique at Artist Corner-Lalitkala Academy, Garhi, New Delhi (1983–1985). She received a fellowship from Peacock Printmaker, Scotland (1987), Oxford Printmaker, England (1988), and Kunske Academy Stuttgart, Germany (1989–90). She has had more than 60 solo art exhibitions at the national and international levels. And has participated in numerous national and international art exhibitions and workshops, including "Double Vision," organized by Satrang Gallery, Islamabad (2012), "Separating Myth from Reality Status of Women," organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu (2009), and "Nepal Art Now," organized by Welt Museum, Vienna (2019). Her latest solo exhibition, "Ragini Upadhyay: A Retrospective of an Artist (1971 AD–2023)," was held at the Nepal Art Council,



organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu (8–22 March 2024). Some workshops include "SAARC Countries Artists Workshop" organized by Lalitkala Academy, Hyderabad (2006), "BP ko Samjhanama" organized by BPKF, Darjeeling (2008), "Search for Ethics" organized by Women Artists' Group of Nepal, Dhulikhel (2012), and "Indo-Nepal Art Symposium" organized by State Gallery of Art, Hyderabad (2023). Upadhyay has received many important awards, including the Birendra-Aishwarya Memorial Medal, Kathmandu (2002), "50 Most Influential Women of Nepal," The Boss, Kathmandu (2005), and the "National Award," awarded by the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (2022). Ragini's major series of art from 2000 A.D. to 2012 A.D. include Goddess & Women, Methodology and Reality (1996), Ragini's Odyssey (1999-2000), The Sun Never Dies, Buddha Lights & Truth Shines (2001–2005), Sound of Love (2005–2006), People's Power (2006–2007), Time Wheel (2004–2007), Love in the Air (2008–2009), and Nature Speaks in 2011–2012 (Upadhyay, R., Personal Communication, February 2, 2024, & Upadhyay, pp. 144–152).

In Ragini's important art series, religious iconic images deeply rooted within the Hindu tradition play a vital role in her works. According to Rajesh Kumar Vyas, "Ragini art works are a reflection of the experiences of a woman's life in the symbolic images associated with Kamadhenu, Shakti, and Saraswati. She has lived Nepal's folk traditions and methodological references, along with its contemporary context in the modernity of colors and lines" (Vyas, 2023, p. 23). According to Lain Singh Bangdel, the symbolic representations of Ragini's works are mostly human faces, hands, birds, animals, flowers, and stupas mysteriously (sacred figures associated with Hindu-Buddhist religion) floating around as if in a dream. These recognizable objects emerge and suddenly appear as though they are from the nether regions of our subconscious mind. Indeed, we are all subjected to the same fears, neuroses, dreams, and imaginations. The artist is haunted by those deeply rooted subconscious feelings, but because of her creative instinct, she transforms them into beautiful pictures with harmonious colors and poetic feelings (Bangdel, 1992, p. 35). Olson describes Ragini's work revolves around religious tolerance - she depicts the need for peace, love, and compassion in her works (Olson, 2020).

Methodology

This study follows qualitative research. The photos of the art works have been used as primary sources to evaluate, analyze, interpret, and find out the archetype features in the paintings. Secondary sources like online articles, catalogs, and journals are used to get further information regarding the problem. The symbols of archetype images are interpreted from the perspective of Hindu philosophy. Carl Gustav Jung's theory of "collective unconsciousness" and Joseph Campbell's archetype theory are used as major tools to interpret the paintings.

Archetypes

According to Carl Jung, the human mind contains archetypes, and later the mind presents archetypes in the form of creativity in various ways from the collective unconscious (Jung, 1936, p. 99). According to Joseph Campbell, an archetype is a recurring pattern of images found in a particular religion, culture, or mythology. "The collective unconscious is the storehouse of archetypes that appear recurrently in the course of history whenever creative fantasy is expressed freely. Archetypes give form to the experiences of our ancestors. When we examine primordial images in artworks closely, they suggest typical experiences of our ancestors (Jung, 1992, as cited in Sharma, 2021). Jung suggests that the past has a huge impact on a person's life. The prior attachment of a person reflects on his creativity through his personal unconscious.

In this context, according to Jung, archetypes ascertain the level of individuation and pursue actualization within the framework of a person's surroundings. The past and the surrounding environment have a huge impact on artistic creativity. The prior attachment to a person's head is the archetypal template; later, it reflects on the artist's creativity. For instance, the paintings of Jamini Roy are mostly based on the idea of Bengali folk traditions because his childhood life was surrounded by the local culture of Calcutta, West Bengal. For Roy, the "Bengali folk traditions" become the maternal archetype in his personal unconscious, and later it reflects on his paintings. The following diagram shows the process of creating archetype images:

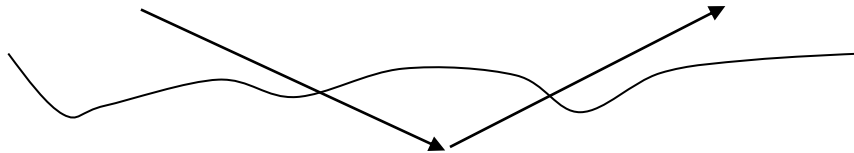


Fig. 1: This diagram shows the interconnection between art and myth.

The diagram shows two different ways of understanding archetypes in creativity (Figure 1). The first, south-east arrow shows the method of myth generated by the culture, society, or religion. The north-east arrow shows the method of artistic creativity, which has a correlation with myth. An artist creates the contextual meaning (shown above a curvy line) of an art work by taking reference from the subtextual allusion (shown below a curvy line). Different artists have different ways of representing their works. However, the artistic legacy is always linked with the past, as shown in the figure. The second way of understanding archetype is that the south-east arrowhead represents our mind (inside), where our prior knowledge is stored, and the north-east arrow represents our action (outside), or the body, where our prior knowledge is expressed in the form of creativity.

Archetype Symbols in Ragini's Paintings

Ragini recurrently uses various symbols such as Bell, Kumari, Kali, Cow, Tulsi, Shiva Linga, Saraswati, Shiva, Buddha, Stupa, Lotus, Temples, and Garuda in her paintings, these recurrent archetype symbols are associated with the Hinduism. According to Hinduism, each character has its unique symbolic significance described as below:

| Archetype Motif | Definition |
|-----------------|---|
| Ghanta | Ghanta literally means a ritual bell; the bell is used in Hindu ritual practices. Also, almost all Hindu temples have at least one solid brass bell hanging near the entrance of the temple. Usually, a bell is made of five dhatus, namely copper, silver, gold, zinc, and iron, to represent five elements of the universe, such as air, water, fire, earth, and space. The body of the bell symbolizes infinity, and the tongue of the bell represents the goddess of wisdom and knowledge, Saraswati. The tradition of Ghanta puja dates back to ancient times. |
| Goddess Kumari | Goddess Kumari is well known as a living goddess worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists in Kathmandu Valley. The literal meaning of Kumari is virgin. Kumari Puja symbolizes power, purity, and prosperity. Kumari Puja was started in the 17th century by the last king of the Malla |



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| | dynasty, Jaya Prakash Malla. |
| Kali | The literal meaning of Kali is “She Who is Black” or “She Who is Death.” She is the goddess of time, doomsday, and death, or the black goddess (the feminine form of Sanskrit <i>Kali</i> , “time-doomsday-death” or “black”) in Hinduism. Her roots date back to before the Pre-Aryan Period. |
| Kamadhenu | Kamadhenu is the sacred divine anthropomorphic imagery in Hinduism. This literally means a celestial cow. A normal cow is strongly associated with God Krishna, as he was a friend and protector of cows in his youth. Also, cow is associated with God Indra, closely associated with Kamadhenu (the wish-granting cow), which signifies sustenance and nourishment. In Nepal, the cow is a national animal. It represents mother earth. |
| Garuda | Garuda is the vehicle (Bahana) of god Vishnu. According to Hinduism, it symbolizes martial prowess, speed, and violent force. |
| Shiva Linga | Shiva Linga is one of the most iconic symbols in Hinduism and is made of stone. It refers to a visual preminent symbolic sign or symbol that symbolizes Tri-Murti (Rudra, Bishnu, and Bahrma), and it is used in Hindu ritual practices. There are different types of shiva lingas in Nepal, such as simple, one-face, four-face, and five faces. All types of linga represent Shiva's different aspects. The roots of the Shiva Linga structure and puja date back to the Indus Valley civilization. |
| Saraswati | Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge, art, music, and speech in Hinduism. She is the consort of the god Brahma. |
| Shiva | Shiva is a god of destruction and transformation in Hinduism. He is one of the members of Tri-Deva, along with Brahma and Vishnu. It represents self-awareness, self-awakening, and self-control. |
| Buddha | A founder of Buddhism, he is known as the 9th reincarnation of Vishnu in Hinduism. He lived around 563–483 BCE. One of his most notable teachings is the "Eightfold Path": right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness. |
| Stupa | Stupas are sacred places for Buddhist pilgrims. Created in a hemispherical structure. The entire structure of the Stupa represents Buddha. Syembhunath and Baudhanath are some of the few examples of stupas in the Kathmandu valley. |
| Padma | Padma is a lotus flower in Sanskrit. It is a sacred flower in Hinduism and is mainly associated with Vishnu, Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Buddha. It symbolizes fortune, purity, prosperity, fertility, beauty, and enlightenment. |
| Temples | Temples are the sacred building or site for ritual activities in Hinduism. In Nepal, pagoda or chhatra (roof) style architecture is known as typical style temples of Hindu gods and goddesses. For example, Pashupatinath, Chagunaryan, Krishna Mandir, Patan, and Taleju temples are some of the |

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| | archetypal examples in Hindu tradition. All the temples represent holy and spiritual places. |
| Tulasi | Tulasi is a sacred plant in Hinduism. According to Hindu mythology, Tulasi is regarded as the incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi. It symbolizes divine feminine energy, wealth, and prosperity. |

Analysis of the Paintings



Fig. 2: Ragini Upadhyay, Lockdown Patience, Mixed Media and Water Color on Paper, 44x25cm, 2020

Ragini's "Lockdown Patience" (Fig. 2) is one of the most powerful emblematic works of the COVID era in 2020. The sign of hands, the Corona virus, and a clock represent contemporary time by juxtaposing the primordial symbols with them, such as Padma (the lotus), Garuda (Vishnu's vehicle), and the peacock. In this work, the primordial colorful symbols associated with Hinduism occupy a larger space than the contemporary motifs she



Fig. 3: Ragini Upadhyay, Time Wheel Pakistan III, 47x24cm, Collage on Etching, 2007

"Time Wheel Pakistan III" (Fig. 3) and "Time Wheel V" (Fig. 4) are some of the greatest examples of how she represents the same symbol differently. "Time Wheel Pakistan III" was created during an art workshop at the Institute of Art and Design, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Although this work was created in Pakistan, there is no significant reflection of the archetype imageries based on Pakistan's cultural and religious symbols; rather, viewers may see the deeply rooted imageries within Nepali familiar symbols, such as temples, Padma, Ghanti (bell), and Garuda.

The artist has used several archetype characters in "Divided Nepal" (Fig. 5), such as cow, Kumari, temple, Stupa and lion. The painting is subjugated by the anthropomorphic cow-shaped figure in the center of the painting.



Fig. 5: Ragini Upadhyay, Divided Nepal, Acrylic on Canvas, 95x79cm, 2009

The cow is a holy symbol in Hinduism. The artist depicts a pregnant cow as a metaphor for Nepal, and the lines and snakes shown around the cow represent the politicians of Nepal. Ragini has created several works depicting the image of a cow. "Gaijatra Nepal 1" (Fig. 6) represents a similar method and connotations; some of the reflections of archetype images are Kumari, cow, and temple. According to Ujjwala Maharjan, the Gai (cow), symbolizing Nepal as the enduring mother



Fig. 4: Ragini Upadhyay, Time Wheel V, 54x18cm, Collage on Etching, 2005

nation, but beset by lions with snakes with snake-like tongues and tails, symbolizing the so-called rulers of the nation, and the Goddess Kumari, temples, and chaityas, symbolizing the cultural dignity of our country, make up most of her paintings (Maharjan, 2010, pp. 121–122). Ragini Upadhyay states about the work as below:

The "Divided Nepal" symbolizes the political confusion and selfishness among politicians has resulted in divisiveness among the Nepalese people. The pregnant cow, represented in the picture, symbolizes the future of Nepal. Fire and the technology necessary for electricity brings no light, and the future of light itself has been consumed by darkness. The lion is shown holding the legs of the divided cow - the divided country, and represents the lust for power. The broken Buddha Stupa shows that peace is in question.



Fig. 6: Ragini Upadhyay, Gajatra Nepal, Acrylic on Canvas, 95x79cm, 2009

The expression of the living goddess, depicted in the top left corner, shows surprise and sadness as she witnesses how this situation impacts upon the culture and the country as a whole (Upadhyay, 2019, p.148).

This particular series of works (Figs. 7 and 8) is one of the latest series by Ragini Upadhyay, which represents sadness and happiness or love and hate. In "Blossom of My



Fig. 7: Ragini Upadhyay, Blossom of My Pregnancy, Acrylic on Canvas, 101x76cm, 2019



Fig. 8: Ragini Upadhyay, Kali, Acrylic on Canvas, 70x100cm, 2019

Pregnancy"(Fig. 7), Ragini transforms her breasts into a white lotus and her womb into sacred water; these symbols represent her devotion to her daughter. According to Jayaraj Kumar Roy Danuwar, "the breasts become as delicate and gentle as a lotus during pregnancy. Each component of the body becomes a flowering lotus with a range of feelings and colors. The baby's link to the mother's uterus, vagina, and vulva produces an overwhelming softness and love-filled experience (Danuwar, 2023)". Similarly, her work "Kali" (Fig. 8) is the iconographic figure of "Kali," which has been deviated by creating a self-portrait.

As described in the previous chapter, Kali is “She Who is Black” or “She Who is Death.” She is the goddess of time, doomsday, and death, or the black goddess. The painting depicts the Shiva aspects, who have been represented through Trisula, and snake shown in the foreground of the painting. Ragini has expressed her inner negative energy that came after the loss of her daughter. Ragini lost her daughter at the age of 19. Ragini Upadhyay talks about this work, "Kali," in the form of poetry as below:

When did I become Kali? When the clouds of my dreams melted, When the peace of my moon fell to earth, When the blood of my heart dropped on my pallet.

Why did I become Kali? When my placenta became injured, When my Motherhood bled, When the rose of my life disappeared, When I became too tired to carry all the dead skulls of my love at once.

Why did I become Kali?, When the Sun became Fire on my hand, When innocent daughters were raped, When injustice toward women prevailed

When time entered the black of my night, then my brush became the red tongue of Kali, I showed myself as Kali, The night I became KALI (Upadhyay, 2023, p.4).

The transformation of Kali's symbols into highly personalized imageries such as a paintbrush, humerus, Taraju (weighing scale), and screaming tongue shows her disappointment with the God she believes in. However, Ragini still uses Hindu archetype imageries to create her paintings. Ragini states regarding this work, "I am in an angry mood, carrying a weighing scale called "Taraju," which is imbalanced, representing injustice." "God has not done justice to me."



Fig. 9: Ragini Upadhyay, Flow of Endurance III, Acrylic on Canvas, 76 x 99cm, 2011



Fig. 10: Ragini Upadhyay, Message for the Divine I, Acrylic on Canvas, 152 x 121cm, 2011

"Flow of Endurance III" is one of the most iconic paintings of Ragini Upadhyay (Fig. 9). She has created a painting by juxtaposing various cultural symbols and modern technological devices. The Kumari, puja (worship) items, and the sacred fruits and flowers are depicted and framed by a sacred river associated with Hinduism. An anthropomorphic figure is heading towards the Kumari. These are the dominant archetype



imageries: the Kumari is shown to represent the water, or prakriti (nature). How nature has been affected by environmental pollution is the main narrative of this painting. According to Hindu myth, a river represents the goddess Ganga; she is the goddess of purity and humankind. In modern times, the nature of purity and humankind is collapsing day by day with the rise of urbanization and technological development. The painting is painted with different shades of blue and green to depict the character of nature and water. The painting is created by juxtaposing various symbols and surreal ways of painting, which gives a sense of rhythm and movement. "Message for the Divine I" also conveys a similar message (Fig. 10). It depicts Shiva Linga and Leaves of Tulasi, as major archetype imageries in the painting. The sacred Tulsi, worshipped over centuries, still stands divine but struggles to protect herself amid an onslaught of modernity (Raje, 2011, p. 132)".

Regarding the idea of archetype imagery, Dina Bangdel writes about Ragini's works as follows:

Ragini ingeniously plays with the juxtaposition of associated Hindu images and the signifiers of environmental decay. Through the rich hues of greens and blues punctured by brilliant reds and warm browns, the paintings represent these personified form of nature. As the viewers will recognize, each work is layered, deeply symbolic and iconographic, rooted within South Asian identity and familiar symbols... In the fluid forms of river goddesses, whether they are meant to symbolize the sacred waters of Ganga, Yamuna, or Nepal's Bagmati, we find a sense of visual commentary, as the celestial goddesses wear gloves and boots reacting to the pollution and decay within. As characteristic hallmarks of her style, Ragini's richly coded visual narrative in this series very successfully articulates contemporary global realities of Prakriti (Bangdel, 2011, p. 129).

Conclusion

Ragini Upadhyay's art practice shows that the archetype characters in her paintings are deeply rooted in Hindu philosophy and spiritualism; she depicts various mystical, mythical figures, iconography, and anthropomorphic figures associated with Hinduism; she represents them in a self-expressive manner in a surreal way. She does not focus on formalist perspectives in her paintings. The motifs such as Bell, Kumari, Kali, Kamadhenu, Tulsi, Shiva Linga, Shiva, Buddha, Stupa, Lotus, Temples, and Garuda are some of the key primordial symbols presented in her works. All of them are presented in a surreal way, beyond reality, and in binary opposition. For instance, an anthropomorphic figure of a cow has been shown larger than the stupa and temple to focus on the main subject matter of the painting; the stupa and temple are shown in diminutive form. In reality, the structure of a stupa is far bigger than that of a cow, which shows that there is no boundary in creativity to represent the inner feelings and emotions that have been expressed through the collective unconscious in the form of art.

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