

Sunil's Art Exhibition And Book Release
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The exhibition of the paintings depicting the rare ancestral dance of the ethnic Poon Magar of the Dhawalagiri Area, and of course the release of the books on the history of Magar and their culture have impressed me very much because these events have been possible only because of the republic the Nepalis have been enjoying since 2008 otherwise such things would be never allowed, as a small group of the highly privileged folks called Bahun and Thakuris could never tolerate even a little bit rise of the ethnic people and even of other Brahmins and Chhetris. So, this clique had the monopoly on the rule and the law of land. They enforced their language, religion and culture on all ethnic groups repressing the ethnic languages, culture and religion. All these things have been the history, now.

Arts are the reflection of the social cultural life of humans. An art Sunil has created on canvas is the graphic presentation of the cultural life of the Poon Magar. His paintings would make the ancestral dance of the Poon Magar community ever lasting. Globalization on one hand and the international assaults on the Nepali culture on other hand would lead the very rich cultural lives of the ethnic communities to extinction if the ethnic folks don't preserve them in one way or another. In this case, Sunil's paintings would surely contribute to the preservation of our culture. Certainly, other ethnic communities need to follow the suit.

I think that the ancestral dance of the Poon Magar is not only the so beautiful cultural life but also the spiritual life because they invoke the spirits of their ancestors before performing the dance, and they perform the dances probably as exactly their forefathers did in the past. So, watching the dance so well performed and preserved, I could imagine how sophisticated culture the Magars had developed in the past millennium.

I have the email invitation to the opening of the Art Exhibition and Book Release program the Lok Warta Parishad, Nepal is going to hold at Sarvanam Theater in Kathmandu on October 4, 2018. I have heard of Sarvanam group but not of the theater of the same name, as we rarely go to the theater in Kathmandu not to mention the movies. So, I have no idea of the location of the theater. I have to make a call to the Artist Sunil Ranjit to find out the exact location of the theater.

The location is tentatively at the Dillibazar-Bansghari next to the Immigration Office of Nepal Government. So, it won't be hard to find it. Then, the problem is parking a vehicle, as elsewhere in the world, Kathmandu has the problem of parking vehicles because of a number of vehicles increasing in the multiple numbers every year surely indicating the economic development after Nepal became a republic. However, not far from the theater is a suitable area for parking our small car.

The program is at one o'clock afternoon. So, we have to start one hour before in view of the possible traffic jam on the way even though the program might not start at the exact time. My spouse started off wearing the usual makeup, as every woman needed to follow the rituals of getting smart. I have to wear only a half shirt and the trousers and of course sock and shoes.

Before leaving the house, we have to make sure that everything is in order, and nothing could go wrong at home in our absence. We have to check the small oil lamp if it is still burning sometimes it does, then we need to put it off so that any sudden

wind would not blow it up, or would not cause any burning of anything even though such chance is certainly rare. Then, we have to check whether the electric heater is switch off or not and surely the gas stove, too even though it is fitted with an instrument with security of not releasing the gas.

Then, we have to lock every room, and conceal the bunch of the keys under a bed. Finally, we have to lock the main entrance to the house so that we could safely go out of the house for some hours otherwise some uninvited and unwanted guests might enter, and do whatever they like.

We have an open garage where the old car resides most of the time, as we rarely go out to enjoy the heat and dust of the Kathmandu Streets. So, the poor car remains unused most of the days of a week. Only then when some relatives invite us to such a function or to a dinner or something else, we take the car out.

I am the one who has to drive the car, as our spouses rarely want to drive. They are well off sitting behind the motorbikes, or on a car letting the husbands drive for them.

So, I inserted the ignition key, and switched on the car engine. Sometimes, the old engine refuses to start at the first attempt. However, this time it did not happen, and the car engine started off without any hitch. I ran the engine for at least a minute to heat it up so that it would not stop on the way at the low speed.

My spouse was standing at the corrugated sheet gate to open up for me to drive out. I had to drive back to get out of the gate. She was holding one of the doors of the gate to make me easy to get out. She locked the gate from inside, and then came out of the small gate, and locked it again to make sure that no living beings except for birds and insect get into the premises of our house in our absence.

On the way, we have to pick up two senior ladies. Both of them happen to be the mother and sister of Artist Sunil Ranjit whose paintings we are going to see on the first day of the opening of the exhibition.

We drove through the narrow serpentine lane carefully so that we would not have any head-on collision with a car coming from the opposition direction. The lane is so narrow even a motorbike coming from the opposite direction has had hard time to pass. We have to stop and take the car as close as possible to the boundary wall of any house to let a bike pass.

Those two gorgeous ladies have been waiting for us. We greeted each other with our hands clasped in the tradition of our forefathers and mothers. After they got into the car, we drove again in the remaining narrow serpentine lane, and ultimately came out to the wide street, and joined the mainstream of the Kathmandu traffic.

Motor bikers have almost free to move on the streets as if they have the monopoly on driving in Kathmandu. So, I have to be vigilant not to hit or not get hit by any of the motorbikes going from the left and right. I always let them go first. Not surprisingly, the poor motor bikers meet with the street accidents almost every day.

Poor Kathmandu traffic police have to control the traffic, and guide the vehicles smoothly so that the traffic would not be stuck because of the swarming motorbikes. Traffic police have to be on duty on the dusty streets on the sunny or rainy days. It

is hard to believe how they perform the duty when we have to close our car windows to avoid the dust kicked up by the vehicles.

Fortunately, we did not have to face the traffic jam. Anyway, we moved slowly but steadily and ultimately we reached the destination Dillibazar-Bansghari. One of the two gorgeous ladies put a call to Sunil to understand the exact location of the theater. He gave the direction just to the west of large peepal tree acting like a traffic police. Then, we need to park our car. We passed the traffic tree and going down to a little bit found an open space enough for parking our small car. That was a great relief that we had a parking space so easily. Now, we have to walk to the theater.

We came back to the traffic tree, and standing next to it saw the billboard of Sarvanam Theater. That brought us to find the entrance to the theater. A narrow lane confused us but it did not take long time to find the correct passage to the theater. We have to step downstairs to get to the main entrance to the theater, as the theater is built on the back of a high ground.

One of the lovely ladies welcomed us with her clasped hands. She happened to be one of the authors of the books to be released. Soon, Sunil, his spouse and finally his son were all together at the narrow corridor of the theater. A small hall had been hosting the women and men Magar dance troupe in their traditional attire and jewelry. I was tempted to take the pictures of those guys but I could not dare to do so not knowing their culture and tradition.

We have still some time before the exhibition would be opened. Then, it is almost one o'clock. Sunil asked his spouse, "How far they have been." They mean the parents of the Sunil's spouse. Her father is a veteran artist known to the world of the artists for creating extraordinary paintings costing millions of Nepalese rupees. He along with another famous artist was to open the exhibition jointly.

Sunil's spouse answered, "Maharajgunj." Maharajgunj happened to be the residence area of her father. It caused me to chuckle. Within fifteen minutes of the time to open up the show, Uttam Nepali real name is Uttam Karmacharya showed up walking with the support of his spouse, and Shashi Shah: another contemporary of Uttam Nepali followed. The small audience rose up with applause.

Uttam Nepali and Shashi Shad led up to the door, which is closed, by a stretch of a red ribbon. They are going to cut the ribbon to officially open up the Art Show. A nicely dressed up Magar lady with a tray of a pair of scissors, came up to the senior artists of Nepal.

Both Uttam Nepali and Shashi Shah jointly held the scissors, and cut off the ribbon sending it flying down and opening the exhibition of the Sunil's paintings. Everybody waiting for the show followed the two veteran artists of Nepal.

About 20 paintings depicted the various stages of the ancestral dance of the ethnic Magar of the Dhawalagiri region. These paintings portrayed not only the glorious culture of Magar: one of the most cultured ethnic groups of Nepal but also of the entire nation, and Artist Sunil Ranjit has practically captured almost all the distinguish features of the ancestral dance.

The exhibition would remain opened up until October 8, 2018. No entrance fee is asked for. Art lovers could go there and enjoy the beauty of the Magar ancestral dance on canvas.

The paintings are terrific in the mood and color. However, they have no captions that would have helped the laypersons to understand the paintings as well as the dance poses without thinking much. The paintings for the layperson like me are of the hybrid of the real world and the abstract art. The artists must have different word for it but I am writing for myself and for the persons like me.

What next, is to go upstairs climbing one narrow step after another. The real theater hall is there. Maybe, it could hold slightly more than one hundred persons probably not more. The first row has the seats too narrow even for the Nepalis and could be made comfortable for the audience.

Here the two books are going to be released, and then the Magar dancers will perform the ancestral dance. One book is titled "History of Ethnic Magar" another is "Jhankri". The authors of both the books are the Magar scholars. The author of the "Jhankri" is a woman scholar. They are bringing the Magar history and culture to the world audience taking the opportunity given by the political change from the monarchy to the republic.

About fifteen cushioned chairs are arranged in a semi circle on the stage ground for the distinguished guests and speakers. In front of those chairs, a small table covered with a printed satin cloth and a number of books on it is there. Next to the table, a traditional Nepali oil lamp called 'panos' with a wick has been waiting for lighting as the opening of the book release ceremony.

A presenter came over to the dais, tested the mike (microphone), and then started what he is going to do. Then, he called upon one distinguish guest after another to take one chair after another. The first name he called is of Shahi Shah, and requested him to preside over the ceremony. He walked slowly and steadily, then of Uttam Nepali who needed a support, and the presenter went on name calling until all the chairs are filled up. Two men offered a bouquet to every one of the distinguish guests.

Once, everybody is seated on the right position, the presenter first requested Shahi Shah to come forward, and light the wick on the oil lamp as an opening ceremony.

Even with the Nepali standard, Shashi Shah is a bit short, dressed up in a yellow bright long shirt called *kurta*, and white rousers under the *kurta*, and over the *kurta* he wore an outer sleeveless coat of brilliant color, and also wore the baseball cap of the same color but of a different print. He wore thin white beard on his chin, and spectacles on the eyes. He has been quite old and hard to listen because of the old age, according to one of the speakers at the function.

Shah was seeking a means of lighting. Usually, another oil lamp called *Sukunda* is kept standby with a burning wick. However, there is a box of match. He lighted a matchstick and then the wick on the "*Panos*": an oil lamp, and opened up the book release ceremony. He had to put the burning matchstick on the '*panos*'

Everybody in the audience clapped in honor of Shashi Shah opening up the book release ceremony.

Then, the presenter requested one speaker after another to speak about the books in concise and to the point not taking too much time. Speakers brilliantly kept up the time scale and spoke to the point, and presented the brief history of Nepal, about the history of ethnic Magar, and about "Jhankri."

The first speaker talking about the different ethnic group said that he would have been a Nevah if his ancestors had come to Nepal during the Malla period; however, the rulers had put the Nevah on the third place of the four Hindu castes because most of the Nevahs by profession were the traders; however, the Nevah community is not an ethnic group but a language group means anybody speaking the Nevah language is a Nevah.

One of the speakers said that Father Stiller did the research on the history of Nepal, Father Lock on the Nepal Buddhism, and Father Miller on "Dhami and Jhankri." Father Stiller and Father Lock are with Jesus while Father Miller is still with us. The scholar said that some of the ethnic "Jhankris" so perfect that they could do miracles joining a stick cut into two pieces, they could hit the target with an arrow without using a bow and so on but "Jhankris" needed to strictly follow the rituals of purification, dedicated to the spirits, and then they could invoke the spirits that came without fail.

Finally, came the turn of the art critic to speak about the paintings of Sunil Ranjit. He praised the skills of Sunil in correct drawing; so, Sunil could create the correct distorted paintings, which could be disastrous if they were not done precisely. He appreciated the Sunil's artwork, and his efforts on bringing the ancestral dance of ethnic Magar to the attention of the world audience.

Artist Sunil Ranjit himself got the chance to speak about his art and to tell why he chose the Magar ancestral dance as his topic to paint. He said that an artist born and brought up in Kathmandu had the choice of millions of subject matters to paint; even a single Indra Jatra could provide any artist with the subject matters for lifelong painting. So, he went on in search of any other topics other than available in Kathmandu.

Once, Sunil happened to be the village of the ethnic Magars in the Dhawalagiri region. By chance, he got an opportunity for watching the Magar ancestral dance. He went on saying that some of the folks in the audience got possessed with the spirits and stated trembling. He was amazed with the ancestral dance of Magars and so he chose it as a subject matter for his paintings.

Sunil also has said that he has the plan on holding similar exhibitions of the paintings in New Delhi, India, Beijing in China and so on for taking the arts and culture of the ethnic Magar to the world audience. He did not say whether he would take the dance troupe with him or not. However, he could take the video recordings of the dance to show at the exhibitions.

Finally, came Dr Min Shris Magar: the author of the book titled "History of Magar" to speak why he chose to write the history of the ethnic Magar. He said that throughout his academic career, he did not come across any history book written on the history of any ethnic folks. So, he chose to write the history about his own ethnic Magar ancestors.

After the opening up of the art show and the release of the books, the turn is of the dance troupe to present the ancestral dance. Women wore brilliant ethnic attire and jewelry, and men too the ethnic dress. Men wore a piece of white cloth tied up as a cross on their chest making a pocket on their back probably a backpack in the modern term. The leader of the dance troupe wore a red shirt, and a white turban on top of the black cap. Probably, he was the senior most among the members of the dance troupe.

Women stood in the last row; men stood in front of them; among them, one man held a pair of small cymbals; two men with 'madals' fastened to their waist each stood on both the ends of the men's row and the main leader of the dance troupe stood in the men's row. Two men with the bigger drums called "madal" tied up at their waists stood before the men's row, and two men dressed up as women faced the two men with madals.

A woman brought a large wicker tray full of offerings and burning incense. She took two burning incense sticks from the tray, and passed them on to the leader of the dance troupe.

Then, the leader of the troupe started singing a hymn to the ancestors. The two men in the women's attire hold down the larger madals tied up to waist of the two men while the leader sang and the women and men behind the leader gave an accompaniment.

After the initial prayer song, the leader started off singing a song for the dance. The two men wearing the women attire released their hands and started dancing to the tune of the madals. Then, the two men with madals at their waist also played the madals and the two men impersonating women danced. After the first few dances then the two men with madals also started dancing playing the madals.

Women and men singers provided the background singing; one man played the small cymbals, and the two men with smaller madals played the madals, too. The two men with madals and two men dressed up as women danced together. The leader of the troupe sang song for the dancers to perform; the women and men provided the background singing.

Once, a piece of the dance is done then the dancers huddled up to the leader or conductor probably to know which piece of the ancestral dance they are going to present. Then, men and women sang; madal bearers called madalay played the madals and dance, too. Two men bearing the madals and two men dressed up as women danced in a circle.

Thus, they danced a number of times to the tune of madals and a pair of cymbals, and songs of men and women. The dances were colorful and entertaining. After the dance performance was done, we came down to the exhibition hall.

At the end of the event, snacks and tea are served. I bought the History of Ethnic Magar, and Jhankri at NPR 300. Magar Hong Kong Association published the history book, and Indigenous Ethnic Development National Academy of Nepal Government the Jhankri. Both the books are valuable to preserve the history and the culture of the ethnic Magars, and surely to immortalize our unique culture.



A group picture of the ancestral Magar dancers
 Guruba or Leader of the troupe is in a red shirt among the madalay
 They wore a white cloth as a cross on their chest with a pocket on their back
 (backpack in the modern language)



Devika Gharti Magar/ThahaKhabar

A wicker tray full of offerings including an oil lamp to ancestors kept at the center of the Stage



Releasing the books



Shashi Shah opening the book release ceremony lighting a wick on an oil lamp, and Uttam Nepali watching it



An audience watching the book release and the ancestral Magar dance



Preparing for the dance two men dressed up as men holding down the madals



Dancing the ancestral Magar dance



Men and women (men dressed up as women) dancing the ancestral Magar dance



A Sunil's painting of the ancestral Magar dance immortalizing the culture



Playing the madal and dancing the ancestral Magar dance in excitement

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