



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**PERFORMITIVITY AND GENDER DYNAMISM IN MARRIAGE RATEULI:
A CASE FOR ACHHAM**

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Marriage *rateuli* in Achham is remarkable for its typical performance of *deuda* dance and songs of mixed emotions among women during the night of marriage day at groom's home. Among its four stages of performance, the stage of *deuda khel* and real *rateuli* embody the real and traditional convention of *rateuli* performance with a distinctive performance of a humorous female character called *dyangsyas* than other two stages—*dio mano* and *balokhelaune*. The customary performance of marriage *rateuli* has been modified with the inclusion of male and female. The influence of other culture, technology, commercialization of *deuda* and growing women education becomes the factor for gender dynamism in *rateuli*. This article tries to find out the effect of gender dynamism over traditional norms of *rateuli* performance. The method for the study is qualitative based field work and theoretical underpinning applying both primary and secondary sources of data. The paper is significant for upbringing and globalizing *rateuli* with its dynamic mode of performance.

Keywords: *Marriage rateuli, Dyangsyas, Gender dynamism and Performance.*

Words and Meanings:

1. **Rateuli** : Romantic dance and performance by women in the very night of marriage at groom's home
2. **Deuda** : Song commonly sung by the people of Far-western part of Nepal
3. **Deuda khel** : A kind of dance in Far-west region of Nepal that is played in circle with *deuda* songs
4. **Dyangsyas** : Humorous and sensuous female character performing *rateuli* dance putting on male dress
5. **Dio mano** : Rice (half kg.) and oil lamp for offering to the groom's house at the night of *rateuli*
6. **Balokhelaune**: Playing doll at the dawn before the arrival of bride from her parent's home

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**INTRODUCTION**

Achham district represents a hub of Far-western region of Nepal for varieties of *deuda* and *rateuli* performances. Marriage *rateuli* in Achham is an occasion for women to perform *deuda khel* (dance) with *deuda* songs especially in the marriage night when the bridegroom and his marriage Procession go to bring bride. But today it has become a site of performativity and gender dynamism. It represents both traditional convention of performance with *deuda* dance and song among women and dynamic or modified performance with *deuda* and non-*deuda* dance and song among females, males, women, men, girls and boys. Now, as Prof, Dr. Joshi, "the commercialization of *deuda* Songs, *rateuli* dance, their ongoing visualization, and the impact of western culture" (Joshi,2011: 51) has sensitized the women on their primitive mode of *rateuli* performance of marriage ceremony in this district. In the very night of a marriage, the women, girls and small children enjoy the spacious and recreational *rateuli* with the performance of *deuda khel*.

The originality and traditional convention of *rateuli* begins with *dio mano* and ends with the good wish expressing performance of *balo khelaune*. The stages of *deuda khel* and real *rateuli* which comprise the emotive and glamorous *deuda khel* in the leadership of a humorous female character called *dayangsyā* are the real and performative attraction of marriage *rateuli* in Achham. The role of the humorous character, is to evoke and satire the prevailing patriarchy where the *rateuli* women live.

But today, the phrase the traditional mode of performing marriage *rateuli* in this district has been modifying due to the influence of the non-*deuda* dance, songs and the participation of men and women. The commercializing and visualizing strategy of *deuda khel* and songs have also encouraged and popularized the issue of gender dynamism in the performance of marriage *rateuli*. In this sense, the traditional performance of marriage *rateuli* is in the liminal phase.

In this scenario, the study attempts to explore the traditional *rateuli* Performance issuing out the influence of gender dynamism at present as

with the application of field survey and theoretical bases for qualitative analysis.

METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This article is based on field and theoretical study employing qualitative research design. The collection of data and information were carried out in 2019 from the ten different places— Patakot, Chaurpati, Thuwa, Lungra, Payal, Kalimati, Bajkot, Mangalsen, Binayak, Nada—of Achham district of Far Western region. Overall, two and half week's long time had taken to collect information. The selection of data covered marriage *rateuli* there. The Primary and secondary data and sources are considered equal importance for this research work. The secondary data have collected through the published and unpublished literature, whereas, the primary data have come into collection through the field survey. During field work, interview, questionnaire and general observation techniques have been applied.

MARRIAGE RATEULI AND PERFORMATIVITY: THE CONCEPT

Marriage ceremony in Achham district becomes a remarkable and identifying site for wonderful *rateuli* and peculiar performance among women of different typicality— married, unmarried, old, young and women from the family and relatives and from the neighbourhood. When the bridegroom with his marriage processors leaves towards the home of the bride for marriage ritual, the women in the family and relatives become more responsible to organize *rateuli* dance in the very night. All the women around neighbourhood are invited offering them clove and/or *supari* (the betel nut). It is simply known as *ratyadi ko niuto* (an invitation for the *rateuli* dance). The invitation to women confirms the *rateuli* performativity at the home of bridegroom. In this sense, marriage *rateuli* means *deuda khel* which is performed by women at bridegroom's home in the very night of the marriage day and performativity means an "utterance or performance that constitutes some acts or activities" (web).

Marriage *rauteuli* in Achham district commonly consists of four stages— (i) stage of *dio manu* (ii) stage of *deuda khel* (*deuda* dance) (iii) stage of real *rateuli* and (iv) stage of *Balo Khelaune* (Interview with Mrs.



Manti Joshi, Sita Koli and *hudke* (caste of *Damai* Gore Nagarji). All these stages embody their unique features of performance. These stages entail brief performative information as below:

(i) Stage of *dio manu*

The invited women after their dinner go to the bridegroom's home with a *manu* (half kg.) of rice and money, see the mother of the bridegroom, offer the things into the basket containing *dio* (oil-lamp) and wish for her son's beautiful bride and successful marriage. The mother or other responsible women of the family, offer *laaun/puri*, (small, delicious and round chapati which is cooked in mustard oil) *babar*, (delicious Achhami dish) and *kasar* (sweet and tasty flour of fried rice) to the invited women as *sagun*. *Sagun* (tasty food *kasar*) initiates and energizes the women to sing *magal*. "*Magal* (wish expressing *deuda* songs) sets an appropriate atmosphere for *deuda khel* (*deuda* dance)" (Interview with Navaraj Rimal). Hence, *dio Manu* cements all the women for *rateuli* performance.

(ii) Stage of *deuda khel* (dance)

This is the most remarkable stage which ties up all the invited women to perform *deuda* dance/*khel* with *deuda* songs. They dance in a circle making a collective grip to their hands and arranging and balancing their feet which is called *paital hannu* in general. Some of them wear men's clothes. The more interesting and odd character in the dance is *dyangsyas* (humorous character) who puts on quite uneven clothes of men and romanticizes the performers chasing the small boys and girls with the expression of vulgar and emotional language. The songs for the performance in this stage are not so odd and vulgar though. Such as- (*bayulo baiga bayuli layuna samdhi jiu ka ghara, logne manchhe baigya janta kai ko mannu dara. Bwari hoijau laxmi jasi pailai beta choro, sukh mili jau baddi tamlaai niko hoi jau khoro.*) [The groom has gone to bring his bride to in-law's home. All the men have gone to marriage and no matter to be feared. May the bride be like a goddess and beget a baby son as her first child! And, may you get happiness and be lucky!] (My interview and translation with Sita Koli). All enjoy *Rateuli* with the flavor of *deuda* dance because as professor Joshi, "Dance" becomes "a full- fledged performance

inherently accompanies *deuda* making" (Joshi 3). In this stage, general *deuda* songs are performed through *khel* and there is the presence of women, girls, boys, children, old men and so on. The atmosphere of *deuda* dance is normal and entertaining.

(iii) Stage of real *rateuli*:

This stage is the groundbreaking stage of *rateuli* performance which consists of an amalgamation of emotive cum vulgar *deuda* songs and performances with the peculiar, humorous, glamorous and caricaturing performance of male representing woman character called *dyangsyas*. *Dyangsyas* has put on very odd, old, tattered, and laughter-cracking clothes of a male and performs accordingly. According to the actor Navraj Rimal, "The humorous performance of *dyangsyas* satirizes the sexiest nature of men of the society in *gajatra* (humorous festival observed by Newar people in Nepal) style" (Interview with Navraj Rimal). She chases the women, girls, boys and others who teases and provokes her. The songs are also of humorous or glamorous type- *Tero rayo mero sassi ekaudai peluli, tei jaireko kya manuli bhakundo kheluli* (we will love each other in an inseparable way; we will jointly dispose all the obstacles that may come to our love), *Baikan mera madhesa chhan ma ghara tharyay ki, mauka ei ho bokeya hunya jatkala haryay ki* (I am thirsty of love for my husband is in Madhesh, now is the chance to bear the role of he-goat (husband/male) for I am still not being a mother) [My interview and translation with Sarada Dhungana (Timilsina)] and so on. Hence, this stage accumulates such romanticizing performance of the male representing character *dyangsyas* or *bungchya*.

(iv) Stage of *balo khelaune*:

This is the final stage of *Rateuli* Performance which is performed in the early morning of the marriage arriving day at bridegroom's home. This stage invites the lucky dawn and good omen in the house of bridegroom. The cool, healthier and gentle breeze of the early morning befits for *balo Khelaune* (playing with a doll and singing). *Balo* means a baby which is invited to be begotten from the bride through *deuda* songs. The mother of the bridegroom and other women sing *magal* (songs which are supposed to



bring fortune or good luck in the home) during *balo khelaune* time. The initiation of *balo khelaune* starts with the dialogic song as–

Mother-in-law (Bridegroom's mother): *Tero balo bauwa kati masya?*

Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): *Mero balo bauwa ekai masya.*

Mother-in-law (Bridegroom's mother): *Tero balo bauwa kati masya?*

Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): *Mero balo bauwa dui masya.*

[Mother-in-law (Bridegroom's mother): What is your pregnant period, daughter-in-law?

Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): One month has passed, mother-in-law.

Mother-in-law (Bridegroom's mother): What is your pregnant period, daughter-in-law?

Daughter-in-law (a woman representing the bride): Two months have passed, mother-in-law.] (My interview and translation with Gomadevi Pandey, Mandhari Saud and Jalu Adhikari).

The conversational song during *balo khelaune* ends with the question and its answer meeting the number ten [10]. The "ten" signals the tenth month which is the time for begetting a baby. Within *balo khelaune*, there is another sub-stage known as *Magal* which is performed by songs of summoning good luck and romance in the bride groom's house.

The *magal* songs are "romantic in feature and are presumed to invite good omen to the marriage house" (My interview interview with Tek Bahadur Shahi) because of its special romantic rhythmic instruction given to the marriage processors by the mother of the bridegroom and her co-singer. As noted during interview with the midwife and an old woman of Patakot, Achham, Mrs. Manti Joshi, these songs are sung/performed as *magal*:

Aao aao janti singari. Pathari aao, balaka janti jao. Aama khuwaunni dudh bhat, bajao panchya baja. Sara sara jantya pailo. Byaulo pathari dolima chadhao. Agi laga hudkya patar pachhi laga janti. Bicha lao doli. Jao jao baba bayuli ghara. Bayuli layao

panchai baja thoki, layo mera ghara. Padhyaraka pati mani sita ki dui baini, paniko kalas dinni, pela dahi chamal sita lagai dinni. Jao jao baba bayuli ghara.

[Come all the persons being the member of the marriage procession and go to bring a bride for the bridegroom. The mother of the bridegroom will feed delicious food to us and her milk to the bridegroom; play the *panche baja*. Move ahead the marriage processors. Decorate the bridegroom and mount him into *doli*. Lead the musician (*hudkya*) and dancing girl (*patar*) and follow them you all marriage processors. Keep the *doli* (means of carrying bride and bridegroom/palanquin) in the centre. Go and keep on going, you all "dear", to the bride's home. Come with the bride playing *panchai baja* (Nepali national musical instruments). Bring her to my home. Two sisters of Sita (goddess) will offer you a mug full of water at the tap yard and Sita will offer key (*tika*) with the mélange of curd, rice and yellow colour on your (marriage processor's) forehead. Go and keep on going, you all "dear", to the bride's home.] (My interview and translation with Manti Joshi).

Marriage *Rateuli* in this district is, thus, performed with a mixture of emotions among *rateuli* women playing and chanting varieties of *deuda* dance and songs.

GENDER DYNAMISM IN RATEULI PERFORMANCE

Gender dynamism is the terms which constitute "gender—the fact of being male or female: issues of class, race and gender and dynamism—energy and enthusiasm to make new things happen or to make things succeed" (Oxford Dictionary, 2005) in a particular situation. To interpret the etymological meaning of the terms in a more substantive way, gender dynamism refers to the dynamic or changeable relationship and interactions between and among girls, boys, women and men and formed by socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Gender dynamism can "reinforce or challenge exiting norms and values"



(Web). To concretize the aforesaid references, it seems better to refer Tek Bahadur Shahi's claim as, "gender dynamism in *rateuli* performance refers the modification or change in relationship between and among girls, boys, women and men in *rateuli* performance" by challenging the existing norms and values of the patriarchal society (My interview with Tek Bahadur Shahi, the teacher from Nada Achham). In a very plain sense, gender dynamism in *rateuli* performance means changing or modifying its traditional convention with an equal and fair participation of both male and female performers.

Today, this sort of ritual of *rateuli* dance during marriage ceremony in Achham district has been modifying with the influence of modern cultural era and the participation of both male and female in the performance is rapidly growing. Cathrine Bell says, "The notion of ritual is constructed in the image of the concerns of a particular era and ongoing time" (Bell, 2009: 12). Similarly, the convention of "*magal* and *balo khelaune*" that happens at the dawn of the next day also performs with different cultural effect. Its typicality and originality has been modified. This shows the step of "anti-ritualism and hybridization" (Ron Eyreman, 2006: 52) of a particular culture and ritual. Nowadays, we see hybridity in the participation of *rateuli* dance. It is equally performed among male and female. *deuda*, *dohari*, *pop* and other songs are also played to perform. "The humorous role of *dyangsyas* is going towards modification and new sort of item dances with quite modern clothes are performed especially by young performers of both sexes and genders" (Interview with Bishnu Joshi— a member Chaurpati Rural Municipality, Achham).

Hence, the ritualization of *Rateuli* dance, there, influences with other culture. "There is fluctuating relationship between efficacy and entertainment among gender dynamism over time" (Schner, 2003: 215). The cultural conventions of performing marriage *rateuli* among women with *deuda khel*, *balo khelaune*, *magal* and so on in their proper stages are becoming contingent. The system of *rateuli* dance at night time has been affecting due to the practice of one day marriage. "Today, globalization and gender dynamism go side by side."

(Victor, 2008: 15) And one can interpret with Victor that the visualization of *rateuli* by even the members of different culture has made the dance dynamic. The Dance is getting its more recreational charm with modern, pop, *lok dohari* and Hindi songs as well.

The rigidity in *rateuli* is slowly converting into flexibility giving more room to entertainment and gender dynamism. The entertaining fluctuation of it is in a liminal phase in Achham because the modern *rateuli* dance has not become completely new and modified and left all its traditional features. But the high fluctuation between them has proceeded forward. Therefore, the old convention of performing marriage *rateui* has become dynamic due to the ongoing involvement of both sexes.

ANALYSIS: PERFORMITIVITY AND GENDER DYNAMISM IN MARRIAGE RATEULI

Marriage *rateuli* as a ritual performance can be connected as "reutilization" which attempts to correct the implication of "universality, naturalness, and an intrinsic structure" that have accrued to the term ritual (Roy, 1999: 37). *Rateuli* performance at marriage ceremony in Achham has its own naturalness and quite intrinsic and rhythmic structure in relaying the typical cultural message among all Achhami women. Bishnu Joshi, the member of Chaurpati Rural Municipality says that "the hidden pathos, emotions and confined feelings of gender discrimination among women are released through marriage *rateuli*" (My interview with Bishnu Joshi). It also lets women inhale breathes of complete freedom. The long-run ritualistic role taken by the women during *rateuli* performance is not only for their cultural repetition but also for the "obligatory adoption of rooted patriarchy" (My interview with Nabraj Rimal, the ex-president of Khaptad Sanskritik Pariawar) there. So the participation of both male and female performers has increased erasing the biased and rigid stain of *rateuli* culture.

The solidarity, easy acceptance, and adjustment of women in the dance show the similar "semantic framework", place and cultural atmosphere with a similar geographical relationship. Such features evoke the purity of *rateuli* dance and their unique cultural semantic framework and its revision. We can bridge it with Catherine Bell's



opinion as: "Ritual acts must be understood within a semantic framework whereby the significance of an action is depended upon its place and relationship within a context of all other ways of acting: what it echoes, what it inverts, what it alludes to, what it denies"(Bell, 2009: 220).

If we critically observe the role of the *dayngsya* woman performing in the second stage of *rauteli*, we may get the vivid and rooted image of male dominance and their ill and emotional behavior upon women kind there. This may be an irony to male kinds to stop such immoral and unsociable activities and to provide equality and freedom to women. As Emile Durkheim has written in her article "The Elementary Forms of Religious life", "religion and ritual in patriarchy are biased to women and it is religious and ritual performance through which women expose their intrinsic wills" (Emile, 1961: 67). Similarly, James Fernandez in his "The mission of metaphor in expressive culture" opines that "cultures are not women friendly in a male dominated society and the cultural performance of women, there, unmask such dominance" (James, 1974: 34). Both Emile Durkheim and James Fernandez try to express in feministic tone and indirectly connote not to let women feel such discriminating culture because both man and woman are the equal component of the society where they share their cultural homogeneity.

So *rateuli* dance of marriage has been exposing the common intrinsic emotions, pathos and long-run discriminatory feelings of general women of patriarchy Achhami society. The role of *dyangsyas* woman in male dress and the growing participation of male characters in *rateuli* dance with different sort of songs foregrounds the angle of anti-patriarchy step and gender dynamism.

CONCLUSION

Marriage *rateuli* in Achham expresses and performs the women's mixed emotions via typical sorts of *deuda khel* and song as with the incorporation of its four stages: stage of *dio mano*, stage of *deuda khel*, stage of real *rateuli* and stage of *balo khelaune*. But now, the old tradition of performing marriage *rateuli* has been dynamic and modified with the inclusion of male and female performers due to the influence of other culture, technology, commercialization and

visualization of *deuda* dance and song and rapidly increasing women education. Though the original performance of marriage *rateuli* in Achham is in the verge of extinction, the recent and growing trend of gender dynamism in it has tried to equalize women as men issuing and challenging the long existed womanish ideology of the patriarchal society. Therefore, marriage *rateuli* in Achham has become a site of performativity and gender dynamism today. The importance of the study becomes to publicize, globalize and maintain cultural readership of the present marriage ritual and *rateuli* performance of Achham district with the aim of binding the nation and showing the indefinable cultural possessions of Far-west Nepal.

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