

DECONSTRUCTING THE PROTAGONIST IN THE THARU BARKA NAACH

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Abstract

The Mahabharata was originally written in the Sanskrit language by Krishna- Dwaipayana Vyasa. It's one of the popular religious Hindu textures that has been far studied and translated into most of the major languages of the Indian subcontinent. The translated versions have more or less the same kind of story and their interpretations have multiple similarities and differences also. Interestingly, the story of this great epic in the Tharu language is quite different from that of Vyasa's Mahabharata. This research paper attempts to explore the deconstructive perspective of the Tharu Barka Naach (or the big dance), the art version of the Tharu Mahabharata. The story of the Barki Mar (the big war) is sung and danced in the Tharu Barka Naach that is performed by the Tharu People of Nepal during the celebration time of the Dashain festival. Unlike the major versions of the Mahabharata, the Barki Mar does not portray Arjuna, Lord Krishna, or Yudhishthira as the most decisive characters; rather it vividly glorifies Bhima and his courageous works. This is one of the reasons why the Tharu people in the western Nepal worship Bhima as their protector god in the Atwari festival that is celebrated almost a month before Dashain. For the qualitative research the text of the Barki Mar in Tharu language, and another text Mahabharata The Tharu Barka Naach were studied as the primary sources whereas various books, as well as research articles on the Tharu Barka Naach, were studied as the secondary sources; and for the interpretation of the deconstructive approach of the text, various books from different channels have been used. The research concludes that the Tharu Barka Naach has deconstructed the traditional assumption of the protagonist as depicted in the classic versions of the Mahabharata.

Keywords: Barki Mar, Barka Tharu Naach, Buddhism, Deconstruction, Non-violence.

Introduction

The Tharu Barka Naach (the big Tharu dance) is the Tharu lyrical version of Mahabharat that is based on the root story of the Barki Mar, a Tharu language folk epic. The Barka Naach is a performance art version of Dangaura Tharu of Nepal. In this rural folk group dance, "the story is told through the dancing of performers and the singing of the traditional Tharu text by a chorus" (Mayer and Deuel 6). They have to put on the multicolored traditional dresses including jama, phariya, patuka as well as the Tharu female jewelry items like sutiya, kukumka, mala, jhimilya, etc.(Chaudhary interview). The distinct

feature of the traditional- religious dance is that it has to be performed in the fixed number of 31 performers who represent some major characters of the Mahabharata. As the name suggests, The Barki Mar, or the Great War, its description is all around the fightings and striking between the Kauravas and Pandavas. The story focuses on the brave deeds of the second senior brother of Pandavas- Bhima (or Bhenwa/Bhyanwa in Tharu), who has been portrayed as the protector not only for the Pandavas but also for all of them who beg for help with him. Thus, unlike the other language version of the Mahabharata, the story of Barki Mar deconstructs the concept and role of the protagonist, and Bhima is shown as the most powerful savior of the Tharu version of the Mahabharata- the Tharu Barka Naach. The Barki Mar, as Gopal Dahit describes, is such a great Tharu folk version of the Mahabharata that embodies six out of nine savors or pleasures of aesthetic emotions- heroism, compassion, wonder, terror, tranquility, and anger (433). Since the Tharu Barka Naach is based on the Barki Mar, these all savors are found both in its performance and on its leading character Bhima.

The classic versions of the Mahabharata describe that the patriarch of the Kuru family Bhisma, who had vowed to remain unmarried throughout his life and not to enthrone but to act as the caretaker for the nation and the kings, divided the kingdom in two, one half (Hastinapura) for the Kauravas and the other (Khandavaprstha- later known as Indraprastha) for Pandavas; but this solution was not successful as Duryodhana soon began scheming to destroy the Pandavas. His first deadly plan of killing Bhima by poisoning was thwarted. "The Karuarava's hatred, fed by Duryodhana's obsession, grew and grew: they plotted to burn Pandavas alive in the house made of wax and at this point, the Tharu Barka Naach begins" (Mayer and Deuel 14). This is the point where the plot of the Barka Naach, a part of Barki Mar starts. The Tharu language word Barki Mar means "the big war" in English referring to the most devastating war of the Dwapar Yuga between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The Mahabharata focuses on the interrelated families of these two clans and their struggle for control of the land of Bharat (Mark). The Pandavas got victorious in the war; and in their victory, the Tharu Barka Naach is performed as a devotional puja or worshiping honoring the Pandavas for establishing the dharma or virtue for the well-being of the entire humanity. The Tharu people started dancing jubilantly, performed the story of the Mahabharata in the lyrical form under the story of the Barki Mar.

Unlike the classical versions of the Mahabharata, the lyrical and performative Tharu Barka Naach concentrates on the violent conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas who finally went for the deadly war on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The performance of the Barka Naach consists of 31 performers out of which 26 performers are males and 5 are females performers. Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, and Sahadev are represented by 5 performers each. 5 female characters play the part of Draupadi whereas Nakul is represented by 3 performers, and Bhisma, Dronacharya, Mahadeva (or Krishana) is represented by 1

performer each. ("Complete Documentary of BARKA NACH @ A Rare Archive of Dangaura Tharu," 00:10:02 - 00:11:34). The dance performance of the Barka Naach ritually begins after the Tharu people have observed Hareri Puja and it has to be finished before yet another great festival Diwali or Tihar" (S. Chaudhary interview). All major Tharu festivals and ritual events fall between the harya gurai and dhurya gurai rituals (Dalzell 79). The Barka Naach is one of the most significant cultural as well as artistic rituals of Dangaura Tharus. They believe that the performance of the traditional dance ensures them good health, plentiful harvest as well as good fortune (Meyer and Duel 2). The devotional Barka Naach is performed and sung in different segments; but before the performance starts, they have to pay respect to their gods and ask for permission. If the dance has to be performed for some specific purpose other than in its ritual time, the Tharu Guruwas need to please their deities by worshipping and seek permission mandatorily. "The body of the songs is placed between the opening prayer (Samrauri) and the closing prayers (Swarga Arohan). The opening and closing puja are mandatory parts of the performance" (Meyer and Duel 7). Only then the performance begins. The opening song is called Samrauti in which the dancers show their respects to the gods. The first song is Lakhagirak Paidhar which narrates how the Kauravas try to burn the Pandavas alive. Jatiyak Paidhar is the next song that describes the scene of Bhim's fight with a demon called Danu. The third song known as Rau Bedhak Paidhar presents Draupadi's Swayambara. Similarly, Pasawarak Paidhar is the fourth song that narrates how the Pandavas lose everything in the game of dice played with the Kauravas, The fifth song Banabasak Paidhar gives details of the life of the Pandavas in exile for 12 years. The sixth song is Gharbasak Paidhar that narrates the Pandavas and Draupadi's journey towards the house of king Bairath. The seventh song called Hathiyak Paidhar that describes king Bairath allowing the Pandavas in disguise to stay in his palace; the eighth song Kichaka Paidhar describes how Bhima killed Kichaka, whereas the ninth song Susharmak Paidhar describes the cattle stealing war, the tenth song Barki Marak Paidhar presents the ultimate battle between the Kauravas and Pandavas at Kurukshetra where the latter defeat the earlier. The next short song is Mansandhak Paidhar that presents the regret of the loss caused in the war. The Tharu Barka Naach ends with an epilogue Swarg Arohan describing the Pandavas' journey to heaven.

The Tharu folk epic vividly presents Bhima as a most powerful leading warrior that always thinks of good for others. Researcher in Tharu language and literature Shushil Chaudhary mentions that the Barki Mar has given more importance to Bhima rather than Lord Krishna, and his dear fellow Arjuna. The Tharu version of the Mahabharata or the Barki Mar does not tell the entire long story that starts with the King Bharata; rather the story of the Tharu language Mahabharata is centered on the fierce duel especially between the Pandavas and Kauravas in different places and occasions. This is the only reason why the folk epic bears the name the Barki Mar meaning the Great War. Comparatively the story revolves around the heroic actions of Bhima, whom the Tharu people call Bhenwa or

Bhyanwa in the lyrical songs of the Barka Tharu Naach. The performative song portrays Bhima as the strongest as well as a mightier character, who goes on proving himself skilled, powerful, and wise as well.

Methodology

The performance of the Tharu Barka Naach is based on the lyrical songs of the Barki Mar, the Tharu version of the Mahabharata. That is why while applying the deconstructive approach of study in the Tharu Barka Naach the texts of both the Tharu Barka Naach and the Barki Mar available in Tharu and English language were used as the primary sources of the analysis for the qualitative research. As the secondary sources of the data analysis, some other classical versions of the Mahabharata were used for this research work. The secondary sources of data analysis also included various research articles published both online and offline on the Mahabharata. Since the tradition of Tharu Barka Naach belongs to the Tharu language, religion, and culture, the researchers, writers, artists, and people who have watched the performance were interviewed in Banke, Bardia, and Dang district of Lumbini Province of Nepal. This research work could be taken as a source of future research focusing on the characterization of Bhima in particular and the rest of the Pandavas in general for the simple reason that research works on the Tharu version of the Mahabharata have not been made in sufficient numbers. People interested in the story and interpretations of the great Hindu epic the Mahabharat may find it useful in knowing the Tharu people's portrayal of Bhima whom they worship as a deity too.

Review of Literature

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines deconstruction as a critical method of looking at the meanings, metaphysical constructs, and hierarchical opposition that always remain unstable due to their dependence on ultimately arbitrary signifiers. "The theory of deconstruction pioneered by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida is a form of textual analysis that usually combines the theoretical revision and it unmask the hidden conceptual or theoretical privilege" (Mautner 93).

The classical version of the Hindu epic by Krishan- Dwaipayana Vyasa and its various interpretations made so far seem to have focused primarily on either Lord Krishna or Arjuna, one of the Pandavas as the central leading character who have also been portrayed as the determining character in the entire story of the Mahabharata. This notion is a set belief according to the story, and its interpretations by most of the authors. The readers of the Mahabharata also seem to have evaluated the characters more or less in the same way. But the Tharu version of the Mahabharata i.e. the Tharu Barka Naach as sung in the Barki Mar has vividly gone against long- believed notion by presenting Bhima as a leading protagonist who has performed many heroic deeds in the story of the Tharu Mahabharata. The roles that Bhima has performed signify that he has challenged the traditional belief of the people who evaluate him only as a physically strong but intellectual weak character. The performance of

the Barka Tharu Naach shows Bhima as the most favored Pandava character, who has proved himself on various occasions. This is how he breaks the traditional assumptions and evaluations of the people about himself. As the traditional beliefs on truth, identity, and certainty are questioned per the theory of deconstruction; so it naturally tries to demonstrate the way meanings differ about any text produced. Thus, the presentation of Bhima as the hero in the text of the Tharu Barka Naach is a deconstructive approach. Many Indian regional stories of the Mahabharata have deconstructed the classically described role of Bhima. A regional version of the Mahabharat from Western Orissa of India also presents him as a principal character around which the cultural aspects are interwoven multidimensionally, "Bhima is a folk hero in Indian traditions" (Mishra 1) too.

M.H. Abrams in A Glossary of Literary Terms explains deconstruction as a critical analytical theory that questions the practice and assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to set the limitations, unity, and the determinate meaning of a literary text. Derrida believes that we must always say more, and other, than we intend to say (55-56). Thus he develops the concept against what we call logo centric which always prioritizes the center only. That is why the deconstructive approach of criticism works by searching the other possible meanings that might have been made redundant for a long time. The Tharu Barka Naach is a rural folk art version of the story of the Mahabharata. The performance of the story with dance and songs itself is an act of breaking the tradition that would simply include acting with the dialogues to tell the stories. The Barka Naach show opens with Samrauti the opening songs in which the dances pray to their gods and beg permission to carry out the dance. Here, not only the songs speak of the beginning of the show but their worshipping rituals also speak up many things about The Barka Naach, Tharus' deities, and the Pandavas too.

In The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms, Childs and Fowler describe the realist representation as an illusion of presence because many critical issues are open to a deconstructive approach. Derrida's way of thinking radically revises what a reader expects to do with a text (50). Cogitating on the above view, the depiction of either lord Krishna or Arjuna could be an illusion in the sense that there are many other characters also who have equally played the most decisive as well as leading roles in different times and places. Bhima is one of the less-discussed characters in the classical versions of the Mahabharata, but the Tharu version and many other Indian regional versions have urged the readers to revise their views about the characterization of not only the Pandavas but also of the Kauravas. In an Indian mythical epic called Bhimasedi, Bhima is described through the lyrical form of the epic that presents him as a cultural hero of the Konds (Mishra 5). The Tharu Barka Naach and the Indian regional epic Bhimasedi both have shown Bhima as the central decisive character of the story. A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms by Chris Baldick also describes deconstruction as an approach that is skeptical as far as the

coherent meaning of the language is concerned (60), and many skeptical meanings and other characterizations are possible in the stories of the Mahabharata.

Aggression and the physical strength equal to the power of ten thousand elephants is what the classical versions of the Mahabharata have spent in describing Bhima, but this average portrayal of him is challenged as we go through the lyrics of the Tharu Barka Naach. He's the Tharus' most favored brother due to his kind occasional help to the ancestors of the Tharus. Bhima has been described as giving shelter to the Tharu King Dangi Sharan, who once followed a beautiful horse in the jungle, the horse changed back into a beautiful woman at the sunset. She was nobody but dancer Urvashi cursed by sage Durvasha. The King brought her to his palace. Indra from heaven asked Dangi Sharan to return her but he denied doing so. Lord Krishna also ordered the king for the same. Then overwhelmed with fear king Dangi Sharan asked Duryodhan for shelter but he refused. The King then went to the mighty Bhim, who gave him refuge and the others kept silent (Meyer and Deuel 4). This act of kindness by Bhima to the Tharu King Dangi Sharan of Dang Valey made him, with the rest of the Pandavas, close to the Tharu people. They respect and worship them. Tharus' love, attachment, and respect for Bhima, in particular, is noticed in the entire story of the Tharu Barka Naach.

The performance of the Barka Naach begins with the opening song called Samrauti where the dancers hail the gods and seek their permission for it. The action in the song starts from Lakhagirak Paidhar where it is shown how Duryodhana plans to kill all the Pandavas in the special house of wax or lac made for burning the Pandavas alive. But they become able to get notice of the treachery and manage a safe escape. The heroism of the second Pandava Bhim is clearly observed in this song of dance performance. Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deul have translated the Tharu song in English in the book Mahabharata the Tharu Barka Naach like this: With his left arm Bhima saves his brothers; And with his right arm, he pulls the pillar out. Pulling the pillar out, they enter the tunnel. Pulling the pillar out, they escape underground"(23). As described in this part of the story the wisdom of Yudhishtira does not seem to have worked, nor has one of the best archers Arjun, done anything to save their lives, but it's only Bhima who takes the whole responsibility of saving them all. He manages to take them out through the tunnel. Bhim is presented as a solo protagonist in this scene where his younger brother Sahadev supports him with his intelligence in astrology. Bhima has been shown as being ridiculed for his physical structure and love for food in the classical Mahabharata (Kallimani 585), but his giant body and physical strength and courage make him a savior who is distinct and from the rest of his brothers. M.T. Vasudevan Nair in his 1984 Meghalayan novel Randamoonzhan Second Turn has presented Bhima as strongly as the Tharu version of the Mahabharata. In this novel Nair retells the Mahabharata glorifying the second Pandava as a realistic hero:

It becomes evident as one travels through the world of the Mahabharata that Bhima is just not a character with a double chin, protruding stomach, and a huge mace, but one to whom his strength was both a curse and a burden. A staunch warrior, who did not need to hide his passions, hopes, and disappointments, a simple man, who was not bound by philosophy or Aryan laws. His purity of character is evident in several places in his relation with Draupadi (179).

On their way to Jaitapur after escaping the burning house of wax, in the second song of Jatiyak Paidhar of the Barka Naach performance the wisdom and courage of Bhima are presented vividly as he makes Danu, a demon swallow him unchewed arguing that the demon was his uncle by relation. Danu eats him up without using his teeth, but Bhima was wise enough to hide a knife in his pocket. He cuts the demon's liver, lungs, blocks his rectum and mouth, and emerges out alive, and proves him a wise and courageous character. Mahabharata the Tharu Barka Naach by Meyer and Deuel describes how Bhima killed the demon: "Bhim cuts Danu's liver and bocks the rectum. He cuts the lungs and blocks the giant's mouth. Ripping open his stomach, Bhim emerges; Striking out on his left foot, Bhim heads for home". (27)

Similarly in the next song of the Tharu folk epic, 'Bhima occupies the central position'(Zacharias 339) in the Rau Bedhak Paidhar in which the princess selects Bhima as her husband at the swayambara. Presenting Bhima as the one who wins Draupadi's hand for marriage is the juxtaposition of the classical Mahabharata that shows Arjuna as the winner in the competition. Physically strong Bhima is also described as equally good in the archery to kill the rau bird that was hanged on the wall. The target to be met for the victory in the swayambara as described in the classic Mahabharata is not the rau bird but a fish. Out of fifteen hundred competitors invited there, it's only Bhima who hits the target right and presents himself as the capable hero of the event. Meyer and Duel explain the Bhima's success through this song:

Looking at the rau bird's reflection in the water,
 Bhim shoots his arrow and hits the rau bird.
 Overcome with joy at his success, Bhim stands motionless,
 And Princess Draupadi also stands up.
 When Princess Draupadi hears that she will be married to Bhima,
 She climbs into his chariot; gently escorting her, Bhima holds her arm
 And proclaims, "Now Princess Draupadi is mine!" (40)

In the same part of the performance, Bhima getting elated on his success walks quickly to their mother Kunti whom he tells that he has found "a fruit" and seeks permission

to eat it alone (42). But she commands the fruit to be divided equally among his brothers. This shocks Bhima and in the heroic spirit, he makes a strong objection to her command and warns her to tear her belly out and slap across the face if she was not their mother. After knowing what the fruit was, Kunti regrets but nothing could be undone. None of his brothers speak against the mother's command except the second Pandava.

The most crooked game of dice between the Pandavas and Kauravas takes place in the Pashawak Paidhar of the Tharu Barka Naach. In the Tharu version, Duryodhana himself gambles against Yudhishthira with continual advice from his uncle Sakuni(43) whereas, in the classic version, Sakuni plays the dice for Duryodhana. Before the starting of the game of dice, Duryodhan manages to send Bhima accompanied by Dushashana to fetch water with a pail with a hole in its bottom because Duryodhana knew that Bhima would not let the wrong thing happen in front of his eyes (E. Chaudhary 47). The game is played in the absence of Bhima in the Tharu version of the Mahabharata. When he returns, he finds that Yudhishthira has lost everything he owns- including their bride Draupadi too. As per the condition of the game the Pandavas have to live in the jungle for twelve years and one more year of incognito. None of the Pandavas can speak anything against whatever is happening wrong; nor can any respected elder members in the assembly of Hastinapura stop the misdeeds taking place there. But it is Bhima who breaks the silence, gets enraged, and threatens the Kauravas that they would be punished. Bhima demonstrates his hero-like character in these lines of Pashawak Paidhar where he clarifies that he is against any kinds of gambling and tricking in the name of some games:

Bhim finally returns from fetching water.
 Angry, he grabs King Duryodhan and heaves him aside.
 And he grabs Dushasan and throws him aside too.
 "You have tricked us into losing!"
 I will throw your crooked dice onto the ground
 And smash them with my battle club. (51)

The Banbasak Paidhar of the Tharu Barka Naach is comparatively more focused on the responsible works of Bhima in collecting the fruits for all of them from the first year of the exile to its end. The Tharu version of the Mahabharata does not seem to have any importance to the struggles of Arjuna for possessing the heavenly weapons from the gods. This is how this part of the epic has already dismantled itself from the classical forms of the Mahabharata (Mambrol); Bhima's concerns have been presented in such a way that he is demonstrated like a Derridean protagonist. Bhim is not only engaged in searching and assembling the edible things in the jungle but he is equally worried about what to be eaten so that they would not get physically weak to be victorious in the war that was bound to take place soon (Meyer and Duel 57).

After living in the jungle for twelve years, the Pandavas accompanied by Draupadi reside incognito in the palace of King Bairath. This period has been described by the Tharu version of Mahabharata as Gharbasak Paidhar. The Pandavas including Draupadi disguise themselves and the King allows them to work and stay in his house. But the King compels Bhim to fight an elephant assuring them that if Ballava (the new name taken by Bhima in disguise) is killed he will give him amrit or nectar of the gods to return to his life. Ballava fights against a drunken elephant named Bhauranand which is defeated by the mighty Ballava who had the power of ten thousand elephants. He proclaims his heroic triumph over the elephant: "I have killed the elephant Bhaurananda ! If you don't believe me, ask my friends. The water of the ocean may run dry, But I hold the moon and sun gods in my hand" (Meyer and Deuel 69). The all-time favorite of the Tharu people Bhima is not willing to fight with the elephant for the fear that his real identity might be revealed, but he had to take part in the fight with the elephant because King Bairatha wanted so. Bhim's victory made him a favorite of the king too unlike the classical version of the Mahabharata that put Bhim away from the King who just plays the game of dice with Yudhishthira known as Kanka in the disguise.

Another significant act of Bhima's heroism is shown in the episode of Kichaka Paidhar of the Tharu Barka Naach. Kichaka, the Commander-in-Chief of the King of Matsya, has been described as one of the Maharathis or the big fighter, but he is ill-charactered who falls in love with Draupadi, although one-sided. The king can take no action against him due to the fear of his physical power. Quite opposite to the classical Mahabharata, the Tharu epic presents Kichaka's feeling of love for Draupadi in a beautiful manner. Despite the clear expression of detest from Draupadi, Kichaka continues showing his love to her. He says: "The peacocks dance to mate in the month of November, Just like my heart has fallen in love" (73). It's only Bhima who can challenge and defeat him, the ferocious war between them takes place and finally, Bhima gets victorious. He knocks Kichaka down to the ground with his feet and breaks ten of his ribs, tears off both of his arms to kill Kichaka (74). The murder of Kichaka remains unknown for fourteen days. After that, the Kauravas get notice of it, and finding Bairath's army crippled, team up with Susharma, the king of Trigarta to capture Bairath's wealth. But Arjuna as Brihannala goes to the battlefield and defeats the Kauravas in the Susharmak Paidhar of the epic.

The classic Mahabharata presents only Arjuna at Virata Yuddha fighting against a huge army of the Kauravas. He defeats them alone. But the Tharu version of the same segment brings Bhima also to fight against Susharma. Bhima beats him in the duel. He begs Bhima to spare his life. Bhim spares his life to show his greatness as a chhatriya warrior but punishes him with a curse that he would earn his living by selling iron tools and needles to

get a lowly caste of a blacksmith (Meyer and Duel 101). This is how the Tharu version of the Mahabharata is found presenting the second Pandava Bhima as the protagonist.

Results/Findings

The reading of the art version of Tharu Mahabharata the Tharu Barka Naach which is based on the folktale of the Barki Mar, one of the Tharu folk epic, is possible from many critical perspectives. This research paper found that the Tharu version of the Mahabharata is different as far as the presentation of the characters, their roles, and plots are concerned, despite that there several similarities in the story of both of the versions. The researcher found that the classical version of the Mahabharata has focused on different characters in different occasions and places that have made the epic the longest epic of the world literature, but in the case of the Tharu Mahabharata, the story is comparatively shorter and it has highlighted on only a few characters including five Pandavas. Lord Krishna is the one who has been presented as leading the entire Mahabharata in its classical version. Arjuna has been at the center of all kinds of the fight in it but the Tharu version has kept Bhima at the center as the real central protagonist who uses not only his giant body to protect himself and his brothers but he also possesses the intellectual power. The researcher found that Tharu people worship him as their helper, savior, and deity also including the rest of his brothers. The performance of the Tharu Barka Naach, at present, has been a matter of cultural, social, historic, and religious performance that holds the capacity to exhibit the way of life of the Tharu people (Koirala 20).

The research paper came up with the idea that the performance of the Tharu Barka Naach has dismantled the classical notion of heroism in the Mahabharata where Lord Krishna proclaims himself the one who controls everything that takes place on the earth. The Barka Naach does spend much time describing the philosophical preaching of the lord, rather it introduces Bhima, the favorite hero for the Tharu folk as the protagonist of the folk epic. The concept of portraying others as the protagonist except for Lord Krishna or Arjuna is similar in many regional Indian versions of the Mahabharata including that of the Meghalayan version. The research paper discovered that the Tharu version of the Mahabharata is not only a legendary story but it embodies many more aspects like culture, rituals, and traditions, social, political, geographical, spiritual, and psychological issues of the Tharu people. The applying of the deconstructive theory in identifying the protagonist of the Tharu Mahabharata has also found that the protagonist for one person or community necessarily won't be the same for other kinds of people and community. The performance of the Tharu Barka Naach is a demonstration that the classic version of the Mahabharata has already dismantled itself by presenting Bhima as a deconstructive protagonist of the epic (Miller). The research paper has concluded that the concept of what we call a protagonist is not always fixed.

Discussion

The performance of group dance with songs in the Tharu Barka Naach has spoken a lot on various angles and issues of the Tharu people's beliefs and concept on their deities, culture, socio-political lives from the ancient time of king Dangi Sharan to the present. The notion of the critical theory of deconstruction also gives plenty of space for creating new heroes in the text by presenting them as distinct from traditionally established protagonists. Looking at the Tharu version of the Mahabharata from the viewpoint of the performance theory and deconstructive theory, it is vividly seen that the text has introduced the second Pandava Bhima as the protagonist of the Tharu Mahabharata or the Tharu Barka Naach where he has been presented doing the most heroic works more than the rest of the Pandavas and even Lord Krishna has done. The performance of the story has enlivened the Tharus' great folk epic; its performance has also offered new dimensions of interpretations and analysis as far as the old- aged evaluations of the Mahabharata and its characters are concerned. The connotative meaning of the story of the Barka Naach has expanded to a larger extent with its performance among the public for the simple reason that the attraction of enactment by various characters naturally add up new ethos as well as pathos appeals to the spectators. Performance is related to the art that embodies the power to heighten the text and its story to a prestigious place. Richard Schechner (1934) in his book *Performance Theory* describes the relation of performance art and life. He says that making art is the process of transformation in which raw experience is changed into palatable forms and the transformation is just a representation (30). The story of the Barki Mar is evidently an art version made and performed by the Dangarura Tharu people, who have spread in the plains of Dang, Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchapur districts of Nepal. As the story is performed in the Barka Naach or dance, it naturally goes into the process of transformation or change, and the meanings and metaphors that could be derived from it go beyond the expected or assumed meanings of the epic itself, although the amount of representation remains more or less the same. Performance of the Big Dance includes all the activities that take place among the audience and the performer (Koirala 19), this process creates the platforms for the possibilities of the multiplicity of the meanings as well as new perspectives of analysis; even though the leading role of Bhima as described in the Barki Mar remains the same in the performance of the Barka Naach too.

Distinguished American Professor Emeritus of Folklore, of Anthropology, and of Communication and Culture Richard Bauman (1940) has described how performance can affect the various issues in the human lives in his book *Story Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narratives*: "The structure of social roles, relations, and interactions; the oral literary texts and its meaning; and structure of the event itself are all emergent in performance"(4). In these lines what Bauman wants to focus on is that the performance is not only for demonstration of the story on stage through certain characters, but it appeals to many things: it speaks of the social roles that are depicted in the

performance and their relations and interactions with the spectators in direct or indirect ways. The oral/written text and its meanings are given new perspectives after the story goes in the performance. Keeping this opinion of Bauman in mind, if Bhima and his role is analyzed, it gets evident that love, trust, and respect from the Tharu folk shows that he makes an important place in their social, cultural, agricultural, and spiritual life also. Bhim's help to the then Tharu King Dangi Sharan of Dang Valley laid a foundation for this historical, religious relationship. The offering of bread- cooked without turning the other side, in the Tharu festival of Barka Atwari justifies this intimacy, love, and adoration each year in the Nepali month of Bhadra.

In the Introduction section of their book, Mahabharata the Tharu Barka Naach Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deuel compare the story of the Tharu Mahabharata to be similar to the Greek epic The Odyssey:

In the last song of the odyssey, Ulysses returns to his palace in disguise to find his wife Penelope surrounded by suitors. She is ready to wed whichever archer can successfully shoot an arrow through five ringlets to the target, but no one is able even to string the bow. Finally, Ulysses steps up, string the bow, hits the target, and reveals himself" (6).

The hitting of a fish as the target for marrying Draupadi in the swayambara is described in the classic Mahabharata but in the Tharu version, a rau bird has to be hit successfully for getting Draupadi's hand. Suitors can string the bow but not unable to hit the eye of the bird and cast aside the bow and arrows in disgust. Moreover, it is Bhima, not Arjuna, who succeeds. The Tharu version of Mahabharata presents lots of love and admiration as well as an attachment with Bhima throughout the epic. The classic version presents Arjuna as the winner by hitting the target. This shift of heroism from Arjuna to Bhima is an example of 'Tharu people's attachment to Bhima for whom they have more affection' (6). They want to see him getting victorious in all the combats.

Victoria Marie Dalzell in her Ph.D. thesis entitled Freedom, Margins, and Music: Musical Discourses of Tharu Ethnicity in Nepal describes the Tharu music and dances "as the focal points of the open-ended process of shaping a Tharu cultural identity where meaning is created as these forms are practiced and experienced" (69). The performance of the Tharu Barka Naach, in which different picturization of the Pandava brothers could be noticed, presents the Tharus' view on the mighty and decisive as well as witty the second Pandava- Bhima, who was not only wise and strong but he had a very good sense of humor too: The Tharu Barka Naach, the art version of the Daugaura Tharu Mahabharata's Rau Bedhak Paidhar mentions that before hitting the target, Bhim tries to slow down the speed of the fast circling bird by drawing its attention towards him; for which he acts like a comedian

by making sounds from his armpits and buttocks (E. Chaudhary 39). This part of Tharu's Mahabharata presents Bhima as a versatile hero who is equally good in the case of acting too. Regarding the possibilities of discoveries of meaning through performative art, Dalzell says that Tharu folk genres as shared cultural practices don't give any fixed meaning, rather new meanings are constituted in and through the performances (78). In the story of the Barki Mar and the performance of Tharu Barka Naach, it can be argued that Bhima is the only Pandava brother who established all of them as the deities for the Tharu people. They worship the Pandavas as Bhuihyar, which means the gods of the land. Due to Bhima's protective assistance to the Tharus in the past, "the Tharu men fast in honor of the five Pandavas, considered as the princes of the land and its first farmers"(Krauskopff 1989:116, qtd. in Meyer and Deuel 5). Making space for five Pandavas in the hearts of the Tharu people, and getting worshiped by them once a year seems to have been possible only because of the protagonistic role that Bhima played for the Tharus.

Another favor, as one of the folktales, has it, Bhima has been described as doing to the Tharus of Nawalparasi, Nepal long ago is related to the garden of god Kumarvarti. The Tharus living there cleared the land of the god's garden for farming. The god was angered; warned the Tharus to leave the area but they refused right then. So, the god asked Bhima to remove them by flooding the place with the water of the Narayani river. But the kind of the Tharu of that place prayed Bhima not to do so. They promised to worship the god in return. (Meyer and Deuel 5)). Bhima had mercy on them. This act of Bhima shows that he was good at settling disputes too. A protagonist possesses the quality of sorting out the problem peacefully. Professor of Religious Studies at Macalester College in Minnesota, United States also describes Bhima as the most prominent character of the Tharu version of the Mahabharata which he thinks to be a brief retelling of the epic story. About Bhima's heroism, in his book review of Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deuel edited book Mahabharata the Tharu Barka Naach Professor James Laine writes:

The epic story is full of distinctive regional variations. In this brief retelling of the epic story. the most striking feature is the central role of Bhima, who is praised throughout as the greatest of heroes. The celebration of Bhima makes the text a truly martial epic rather than an epic modified by Brahmanic religious concerns, and consequently, neither Arjuna nor Yudhisthira is given prominence (50).

The Dangaura Tharu version of the Mahabharata is one of the regional versions of the South Asian countries. Each of the regional versions has a somehow different twist in the stories of the epic, although the theme of heroism has been shown more or less the same in all the versions. The Tharu version's protagonist is the second Pandava- Bhima who has

been portrayed as the character who is stronger, wiser, more courageous as well as virtuous than all of the characters of the Tharu version of the Mahabharata – the Barka Tharu Naach.

Conclusion

The story of Barki Mar is enacted through the dances of the Tharu Barka Naach. The lyrical story of the Barki Mar and the performance of the Tharu Barka Naach are regarded as the Dangaura Tharu version of the Mahabharata which is different from the classical version of the Mahabharata that was originally dictated by sage Vyasa to his scribe Lord Ganesh. Unlike the classical version, the Tharu version presents the characters and some incidents in a new way. The characterization of the leading characters also differs in the Tharu version of the Mahabharata. The Tharu Barka Naach is the art version of the lyrical story of the Barki Mar that presents the Tharu people's portrayal of the story of the Mahabharata, which is comparatively quite shorter than the classic version. The performance of the Tharu Barka Naach and the story of the Barki Mar challenge the traditional concept of hero in the epic. The performative story of the text vividly presents Bhima as the central character of the story, thus it deconstructs the concept of hero or protagonist in the epic.

Presentation of Bhima as the central character of the text Tharu Barka Naach which is dependent on the story of the Barki Mar, one of the Tharu folk epic. The Barki Mar's story describes Bhima as the protagonist but the performance of this story on the Tharu Barka Naach shows him a strong capable hero who gets victorious in all the difficult times. The heroic actions of Bhima in the Barki Mar get superheroic when they are presented in the art version in the Barka Naach performance because the performance includes bodily knowledge (Henderson 2009 qtd. in Dalzell 90), and it can have more ethos appeal. The same is true in the case portrayal of Bhima in the Barki Mar and the Tharu Barka Naach. He has made a special place in the rituals, culture, life, and hearts of the Tharu people not only for himself but also for the rest of the Pandava brothers, who are worshiped as bhuihyar meaning the lords/caretaker of the land. But Bhima alone is offered the only side cooked bread in the Barka Atwari in which the Tharu men worship Bhima in particular by fasting the whole day. In the story of Tharu Barka Naach Bhima allows himself to be swallowed whole before exploding out of the demon Danu (Laine 50), kills Kichaka, hits the target in Draupadi's swayambara, gives refuge to king Dangi Sharan, protects the Tharus of Nawalparasi, kills Dushasana, and finally defeats Duryodhan to death to finish the eighteen-day long war. These are some of the reasons as described and presented in the Dangaura Tharu version of the Mahabharata the Tharu Barka Naach where Bhima has replaced Arjuna, and Krishna from the role of the protagonist.

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