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# Exploring the Indigenous Aesthetics in Shamanic Ethno Dance Performances

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### Abstract

This paper explores the indigenous aesthetics in shamanic ethno-dance performances like *Sorathi*, *Ghātu*, and *Krishna Charitra* observed by Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Baram, Darai, and Dura in mid-west of Nepal. These dance performances are the cultural aesthetics of indigenous literature that reflect indigenous groups' sociocultural and mythological backgrounds. They observe these shamanic ethno folk dances, as the shaman practices, with the belief in faith healing, good harvest, and protection from evil spirits. They believe in shamanic treatments for controlling and curing several ills. The ways *the dance masters* invoke the aura of these dance performances by chanting to make the dancers perform the dances are artistic and classical. The melodious songs and artistic dance performances are the beauties of indigenous aesthetics. The entire narrative songs of these dances themselves are chanting. The songs are a kind of mantra that hypnotises the dancers. The study focuses on why indigenous people are backwards despite their topmost performing arts in music and literature. They are backward and backgrounded because of their carefree nature, character, and superstitious beliefs. Some patients die negligibly during shamanic treatment processes. The study attempts to minimize such superstitious belief systems among the indigenous people and make them aware. The beauty of these dance performances is a cultural spectrum of indigenous literary prospects. It has the universal implication that the world is not yet free from shamanic practice. The study employs Thomas Michael's shamanism and Freud's psychoanalysis theories to analyse these dance performances.

*Keywords:* chanting, aura, indigenous aesthetics, shamanic ethno dance

### Introduction

This paper explores the indigenous aesthetics and shamanic reading of the *Sorathi*, *Ghātu*, and *Krishna Charitra* ethno-dance performances. These folk or ethno dances are the icons of indigenous literature. *This*

*practice is followed mainly by indigenous Nepali tribes like Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Dura, Darai, Baram, and Aryal Kshetri. They observe these folk ethno dances, the shaman practice, with the belief in faith healing, good harvest, and protection from evil spirits. Mainly, Gurung and Magar observe all three dances, whereas Dura, Darai, and Tamang observe only Ghaṭu. In all three performances, chanting, incantation, and invocation are common characteristics of shamanic practice. The villagers expect “to receive a blessing from the deities . . . such as sufficient rain for their crops” (Shepherd 259). In Majhitar of Nuwakot district of Nepal, Aryal people observe this cultural activity expecting timely rainfall for their crops and faith-healing purposes. They believe that precipitation takes place after they perform this cultural activity. It is a kind of prayer to the deities.*

Although the study discusses the three cultural activities, it focuses on the *Ghaṭu* folk ethno-dance. There are two major legendary characters in this ethno-dance. They are King Pasramu and Queen Yemphawati, who died young. Their relatives are supposed to have been observing this cultural activity to remember the royal couple’s bravery and heroism. The *Ghaṭu* villagers expect a blessing from them for a good harvest. The deities, here, means the dead souls of the royal couple, the king and his consort.

*It is not only in Nepal; the shamanic traditions are followed globally, especially in Tibet. “In Tibetan culture, the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and space—are considered the substance of all things and processes” (Rinpoche 1). Similarly, indigenous peoples of Nepal observe these shamanic ethno-dance performances as the worshipping of nature in which these five elements exist. Most Nepali indigenous peoples follow shamanism for certain benefits. They claim that they benefitted. So, “Shamanism rests on the belief that the universe consists of seen and unseen dimensions, that spirit forces animate it, and that suffering is a result of disharmony or negative interactions between humans and their social and natural environment” (Sumegi 5). This shows that there should be harmonious relations between humans and their social and natural environment, respectively. Indigenous peoples observe these cultural activities to maintain the harmonious relations between mundane and spiritual worlds. Shamanism often involves rituals and ceremonies that incorporate artistic expressions.*

Indigenous communities around the world practice shamanism with a particular purpose. These shamanic ethno-dance performances, like *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra*, often showcase unique indigenous aesthetics deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the above-mentioned indigenous groups in Nepal. All these three dance performances are the performing arts of indigenous people who have gained their dancing arts from nature, not from any institutions paying tuition fees. Nature itself is the teacher of the indigenous peoples. Most indigenous people gain knowledge from nature and their self. The term 'self' is significant among indigenous peoples. "To begin with, the word "self" is one of the translations of 'nafs,' which can denote soul, spirit, mind, life, animate being, living creature, person, individual, self, personal identity or nature" (Anwar 3). Most indigenous people depend on indigenous knowledge as indigenous aesthetics gained from their soul, spirit, mind, and life experiences. The assigned teachers do not teach them. They get the knowledge from their self-practice. They are self-intuition people. So, the aesthetics of indigenous knowledge is always worthwhile.

The indigenous peoples practice several costumes on certain occasions, like Lohsar. These costumes are often adorned with feathers, animal bones, shells, colourful fabrics, and traditional ornaments that hold cultural significance. The costumes not only serve a decorative purpose but also help to connect the performer with the spiritual realms and ancestral power. The way they decorate these costumes reflects indigenous aesthetics. Most indigenous people are supposed to have been granted the blessing of nature. They are always very close to nature. Most props used in the *Sorathi*, *Ghātu*, and *Krishna Charitra* performances are wood from trees and plants. They use some feathers, bones, and shells of the animals. They are all close to nature. The narrative songs of these dance performances are all about nature and its activities. The way the dance masters sing songs is also close to nature, and the ways the dancers dance are how the rivers move and how the branches of the trees sway, which we find in these ethno-dance performances. As "Prakriti grants the blessings of nature as a gift; she has consequently to be honoured and wooed" (Prakash 167). Therefore, why do these ethnic groups observe the performances as nature worshipping? The power centre of the indigenous peoples is nature. They believe that nature is all in all. Because "Nature moves everything and creates this movement through differences in

temperature and potential” (Schauberger 87). For indigenous people, nature is a teacher, healer, culture, literature, and whatnot, as it is indigenous aesthetics.

Indigenous aesthetics often encompass specific sacred colours and patterns that hold symbolic meanings within the community. Gurungs and Magars use white and yellow colours. By the end of the performances, they put white or yellow colour rice mixed in water or curd on their foreheads. Some of them use red colour, which is called *tika* in Nepali. The clothing, body paint, or props used during shamanic dance performances may reflect these colours and patterns. Each colour and design is chosen based on its association with particular spirits, deities, or natural elements relevant to the ritual or ceremony. Indigenous aesthetics in shamanic dance performances often emphasise a close connection with nature. This can be seen using raw materials like leaves, flowers, and wood in costumes or props. The dance movements may also mimic the natural world, symbolising the movements of animals, flowing rivers, or swaying trees, embodying a deep reverence for the natural environment. This is what we find in the *Ghātu and Krishna Charitra dance performances*. *The slow movements of the dancers in trance mode indicate the movements of animals, flowing rivers, swaying trees, and so on. There are several meanings except this.* These Shamanic dance performances often incorporate symbolic gestures and movements with spiritual significance. These movements may represent animals, spirits, natural elements, or significant cultural events and stories.

Whatever kind of performances the indigenous peoples observe, they aim to give pleasure to the audience or readers. The beauty of performing arts by indigenous people is unquestionable in many respects. The audience and readers quickly get attracted to such indigenous performances. As a poet’s “first aim is to give the reader a peculiar kind of pleasure” (Blamires 292), the aim of indigenous cultural activities like *Sorathi, Ghatu, and Krishna Charitra* is to give the audience and readers a peculiar kind of pleasure. In this regard, Freud’s pleasure principle works well. These indigenous aesthetics as *Ghātu, Sorathi, and Krishna Charitra*, are often accompanied by specific traditional music, songs, chants, or double-ended drums. These rhythms and melodies of music are deeply ingrained in cultural and spiritual practices, and they play a crucial role in creating an

immersive and transformative experience for the performers and audience alike. In the performances, “songs, pictures, personalities, and natural objects are all forces which can produce pleasurable sensations” (Blamires 290).

In a real sense, there is no direct connection between man and god, but these indigenous people think there is always a link between them. They think deities bless them if they make them happy through their performances. The farmers always expect timely rain for farming, so they expect it from the *Ghātu* god. This study focuses on these research questions. What makes the dancers in *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* go into trance and dance? How does the aura possess the dancers in these performances? Is shamanism practical for faith healing and other blessings? The narrative songs and melodious music make the dancers go into a trance mode and dance. Moreover, when all the dancers start forgetting who they are but enacting the like characters of *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra*, the aura gradually possesses them. These indigenous peoples also take shamanism practical for faith healing and other blessings.

Mostly the dancers’ psychology makes them go into a trance. They believe in gods in an obsessed way. That is their psychology. The aura possesses them when the chanting (wordings) and melodious music reverberate in the air and capture their “self.” Then the dancers go into a trance. Shamanism is practical as many people are benefitted, too. So, many people follow this practice in many countries. It is not only the underdeveloped countries and indigenous people; many developed and nonindigenous countries have also been following shamanism. There are some accidental cases of deaths of patients during the treatment process that seem futile. Otherwise, shamanic practice is not too disadvantageous. Therefore, this practice is still in existence.

*Ghātu* practitioners observe this cultural activity to solace the royal couple’s dead souls every year in the springtime. They take shamanic vows because “vows are commonly for good health, relief from debt, prosperity, good agricultural yields, to be blessed with a child, protected from evil spirits” (John 207). Some childless couples hope to be blessed with a child if they pray to *Ghātu* god. The observance of *Ghātu* is supposed to solace the royal couple’s dead

souls. Their dead souls are supposed to be hovering on the earth, and this harms all the people. Some become ill, and some may die, too. “The villagers believe that the deposed souls of the king and the queen are supposed to go on hovering. This hovering is supposed to be harmful to those who are their relatives” (Gurung 17) and other people in that village. To protect from this, the villagers observe *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* annually so that the dead souls become happy and do not bother anyone. This is the Nepali cultural belief system and indigenous aesthetic beauty.

Most *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* followers depend on shamanic practices for their general treatments because this is cheaper and easier than medical treatments. Some ills are also treated, whether it is a coincidence or a natural effect of shaman practice. This allures the indigenous people. So, the indigenous people go on observing it with positive thinking. So, positive thinking is the most essential thing in these cultural activities. All the *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* observers invoke the aura by chanting and incantation. These are the characteristics of all kinds of shamanic practices. The entire narrative song of *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* is chanting or incantation. It is a shamanic system in that an entire team of dancers must be possessed by the *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* auras for the performance. “When the gurus start chanting and invoking the *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* gods, the dancers start feeling a possession. The audience realises the possession when dancers’ eyes get closed” (Gurung 90). Not only this, but the dancers start behaving abnormally. They start quivering like a witch doctor. They change their activities as well. This makes the audience think that they are possessed. According to shamanism theorists, possession means gods to man, or gods come down to man’s body and possess. Chanting means singing, and this singing gradually “creates a trance-like atmosphere and initiates the dancers into a subconscious state” (7). The dance masters cannot predict after how many rounds of singing the dancers get possessed. Some dancers are easily possessed, and some are not. There is no guarantee of possessing the dancing girls. Sometimes, “the aura does not possess some girls or any girls” (160). This happens too in *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra*. If the aura does not possess the dancing girls or dancers, there will be no performance that year. However, it has not

been so. The dance masters go on singing until all the dancers are possessed. When the aura possesses all the dancers, some start behaving abnormally as they have entered the spiritual world from this mundane world. This process is called shamanism. The gods or aura possess the dancers as they are psychologically affected. This process is called possession. The former is a journey from man to god, and the latter is from god to man. All the dancers do not look like general humans now. They are in a trance state. They do not communicate with anyone because they are no more humans for the time being. The gurus sing in a sentimental tone after all the dancers get possessed by the aura. The possession is because of their psychology. The tone is lovely and audible because of the singing arts. This is the aesthetic beauty of the indigenous performance.

After the possessing performance, “the gurus stop singing and chanting when the aura possesses the dancers. This makes the dancers stop crying and quivering. The gurus sprinkle the water on them as they have been qualified to dance for three years” (Gurung 161). All the dance masters and the dancers take a rest for some time. They drink water, have some fruit, and go to the toilet. The performance is entirely based on shamanic presentation. Though medical science can never be ignored, shaman practice still occurs in developed and developing countries.

### **Methodology**

The study employed the shamanism theory and Freud’s psychoanalysis theory which deals with the relation between shamanism and possession and the psychology of the dancers in the *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* ethno dance performances. In addition, document analysis theory has also been adopted for the analysis of available documents on shamanism and indigenous aesthetics. This paper is qualitative research in nature. The researcher has interviewed and talked to the resource people like *dance masters*, former dancers, and some scholars for primary data. The researcher has consulted the available book chapters, journal articles, and magazines for secondary data. The website is another source material. The researcher’s observation is the primary source for the analysis. Therefore, this research paper combines primary and

secondary data and the researcher's experiences and observations, as it is empirical.

The *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* represent the shamanic practice integral to indigenous and non-indigenous people in Eastern and Western countries. The shamanism theory deals with the separation between shamanism and possession. "Here shamanism (in Eliade's sense) and spirit possession are treated as antithetical processes. The first is an ascent of man to the gods: the second the descent of the gods on man" (Lewis 44). In *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* the dancers ascend to the gods with the help of gurus chanting. This process is called shamanism. When the gods descend to dancing girls or dancers with the help of the same chanting, this is called possession. "Modern shamanism theory has not been content to maintain the strict separation between shamanism and possession, although it has continued to produce various definitions of shamanism built upon various conceptions of ecstasy and trance that are not limited to soul flight; possession is regularly seen as a typical element of the shamanic séance" (Michael 678). Shamanism has been defined in different ways.

The dead soul is supposed to have possessed a person, and there is a connection between the material world and the spiritual world or man and spirit. The tribal peoples like Gurung, Magar and others practice shamanism and possession as it is their aesthetic beauty. These indigenous groups gain different types of visual and performing arts knowledge and are transformed into better lifestyles. "We have yet to fully gauge the impact of such aesthetic transformations on tribal peoples and societies just as we have yet to fully gauge the impact of such transformations on western peoples and societies" (Herman 32). There is a difference between indigenous and Western aesthetics. Western aesthetics depend on technology, whereas indigenous aesthetics depend on their local understandings. The source of indigenous aesthetics can be historical, religious, conceptual, generational, tribal, or cosmological.

## Discussion and Results

This section of the study explores the indigenous aesthetics in shamanic ethno-dance performances like *Sorathi*, *Ghātu*, and *Krishna Charitra* observed by Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Baram, Darai, and



Dura in mid-west of Nepal. The study discusses some significant results in detail. The focus is on how shamanism existed among indigenous peoples as their aesthetics from time immemorial. Shamanism is the integral relationship between living and dead. The indigenous peoples practice shamanism for some faith-healing treatments and other blessings. Shamanism is easy, cheap, and effective for indigenous peoples. This makes them follow shamanism. “In ancient Greece, the continued existence of the dead depended upon the continuing remembrance of the living” (Buckland 10). This trend is worldwide. The dead were not supposed to be dead. It was dependent upon the continuing remembrance of the living. The relatives always remember the dead, and the dead are alive as long as their relatives remember them. Remembering the dead is a practice of indigenous aesthetics.

The above-mentioned indigenous groups observe these tribal festivals, *Ghātu* and *Krishna Charitra*, in memory of the dead souls or to memorise the dead. “Both the ancient Greeks and the Romans made contact with their dead through the agencies of their priests” (Buckland 10). Here, the agencies are the *Ghātu* gurus or dance masters through whom the dead are supposed to contact the living. “There are so many reasons for spirits to want to contact us, never mind the reasons we may have for wanting to contact them” (12). The spirits should have been willing to contact the living for maybe love.

Similarly, the living also want to contact them for the same because they cannot forget them. There is a culture that observation time of *Ghātu* is the springtime every year. Likewise, “[i]f you have your séance every Wednesday (let’s say) at 9:00 p.m., then the spirit will get used to the fact that this is the best time to make contact” (Buckland 26). For a week, Wednesday has been the day to contact the spirits. Contacting another day may not be meaningful. This shows that man can habituate the spirits, too. “The apparatus was invented in 1853 by a Frenchman and was quickly adopted by Spiritualists around the world. It is applied to a small moving platform used to communicate with spirits” (52). What technic, apparatus, or props are used by the agency first is followed by other spiritualists. For instance, every *Ghātu* dancer wears the headgear while dancing. So do the *Krishna Charitra* and *Sorathi* dancers. This headgear or turban-wearing system is followed by other *Ghātu*

practitioners' dancing. Wearing a turban is an indigenous aesthetic. Buckland clarifies that the "Spirit World is a real world, just as real to spirits functioning through their spirit bodies as the physical world is to us who function through our physical bodies" (16). Treating the spirit world as a real world is indigenous knowledge. Though the spirit world is unseen, it is there that all ordinary people cannot realize. This world is like the physical world. Only what science defines is not the world; the world has other definitions, too, as it is indigenous aesthetics.

What is a shaman in the real sense? Different people have different views on it. A shaman seems to have been personified as below:

A shaman (a see-er) is a person who journeys to nonordinary realities in an altered state of consciousness at his or her own will and brings back knowledge that can affect physical or mental changes in this realm for healing or knowledge. Shamans reach these realms in various ways – by chanting, drumming, dancing, and consuming hallucinogenic brews. (Beery 24)

There is no lab-tested truth about shamanism. It is a blind belief system. So, a shaman is supposed to go into the spiritual world, which ordinary people cannot do, and bring back knowledge or healing to the people living here on the earth. There is an agency like a priest or gurus through whom the general humans connect with the spirit world. For this, they chant, drum, dance, and consume hallucinogenic brews to reach the realms of spirit. Then they come up with the knowledge of spirits and use it for several purposes like faith healing. The *Ghaṭu*, *Sorathi*, and *Krishna Charitra* sites could thus be seen as a kind of guide to shaman practice. It is an ongoing practice even in the age of science and technology. Narrative songs and music are the products of indigenous knowledge.

The performers make the dead souls of the royal couple happy by singing in musical tones with the music of double-ended drums and by sacrificing the animals and hens or chicks. Besides these, they use different props that differ from village to village as "shamanism and spirit possession are separate phenomena" (Lewis 49). However, people think that they are similar. It shows it is a kind of meeting point between the material and spiritual worlds. All the indigenous peoples possess these arts as indigenous aesthetics.

By mistake, some people lose their lives in the treatment processes, but “spirit possession and shamanism have also been viewed as pre-scientific psychotherapy (Lewis 172), which medical science also entertains. Shamanic treatment is a kind of psychotherapy. The study shows that shamanism is a psychological treatment because “the more meaningful equivalence is that psychiatry, and especially psychoanalysis, as Jung, would perhaps have admitted much more freely than most Freudians would care to, represent limited and imperfect forms of shamanism” (Lewis 178). Medical treatment also entertains psychological treatment.

According to shamanism, *dancers of Ghātu, Sorathi and Krishna Charitra are shamans*. Sunkashi Gurung, one of the former dancers, tells her dream experience. She sees this dream in her trance mode. She is a shaman in this respect. As she goes into the trance means, she ascends to the gods. She also shares her next adventure. Once when she was in India for two years, she felt awkward experiences. She felt something crawling on her body and had a hang and headache. It would happen every year at the time of *Ghātu* performance in Nepal. However, when she would light the incense and request the *Ghātu* aura to go to Nepal, where the version is taking place, she would feel fresh to some extent (personal talk with the Sunkashi Gurung), which is a mysterious thing. This mystery is a beauty of indigenous aesthetics.

Another incredible thing about the indigenous aesthetics and this tribal festival is that the former dancers must be very careful during the performance. The *Ghātu* aura possesses the former dancers when they overhear the chanting. Overhearing the recorded *Ghātu* songs also captures the former dancers without fail. This happens in *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra*. This is because of perception and a person’s psychological impacts. The following is dreadful evidence of how the aura captured the former dancers during the performance:

In Rashtriya Nachghar – National Concert Hall – opposite Tourism Board Nepal in 2005, the former dancers, who were present as the audience, were possessed by *Ghātu* aura. The announcer had warned of such possible happening to the former dancers, if any, but they did not care about the announcement. When the *Ghātu* music started, two of them started quivering, and the audience stirred up to run away from

the hall. The programme organiser suspended the performance for some time and convinced the audience not to leave the hall, as the audiences were afraid of adversity. (Gurung 142)

There were house-packed audiences in the hall, and they were very curious to see the *Ghātu* performance as it was a supernatural activity. It was not only the *Ghātu* performance; there were other programs. This performance was about ten/to fifteen minutes. The former dancers were possessed as soon as they heard the *Ghātu* music. There are many unbelievable things we find in the *Ghātu* performance. *Believing in spirits and artistic presentation is the indigenous aesthetics.*

Moreover, Rupesh Karmacharya, from Chitwan, shares his life experience. He was willing to take a photograph of the *Ghātu* performance. The dancers were on the floor for the performance. “When *Barkat* was thrown in front of them, they instantly fell into a trance, closed their eyes, and started to swing their body rhythmically. (I was ready with my camera to snap this moment, but I was stunned momentarily and completely forgot to take the photo.)” (Karmacharya n. p.). The dance masters had warned the audience to be alert but not to be afraid because there would be a kind of magic. Karmacharya still does not know whether it is magical realism. Presenting magical realism is another indigenous aesthetic. Likewise, Laxman Bhatta, English faculty of Ratna Rajya Laxmi campus, T. U. shared his experience of not being able to video record the temple activities that were going on inside it. So, the existence of shamanism can never be ignored or neglected.

These are the surprising activities of shamanism. This shamanism is practised for several purposes, as said above. One primary purpose of performing *Ghātu*, *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra* is faith healing though there are others. The healing process of allopathic treatment and shamanic treatment differs. Comparatively, shamanic treatment is riskier than medicinal treatment. Some patients lose their lives during shamanic treatments because some shaman practitioners treat them inhumanely. Dipak Sapkota has twitted such an inhuman treatment process that is too pathetic (Shamanic treatment n. p.). The patient loses her life during the treatment process. Hundreds of people have passed negative comments on it. The patient, who looks like a thirteen or fourteen-

year-old girl, is dead. In the age of ultramodern science and technology, some people face death because of superstitious beliefs. According to the comments posted by Dipak Sapkota, the witch doctor is Christian. Whosoever she is, this is the extreme torture of shamanic treatments. This short video clip sensitises the people, but it is happening in many corners of the world. Therefore, this paper makes the indigenous people aware of such conservative thoughts.

However, the treatment process in *Ghātu* performance is not inhumane and deadly. The girls who participate in the performance are supposed to cure their ills. For example, “Sapana Gurung from Tanahu claims that her heart problem has been dramatically minimized after participating in the dance, although it has not been fully cured” (Gurung 22). However, the gurus do not perform any treatment activities for the dancing girls or individuals. After the *Ghātu* performance, the ills of dancing girls and the villagers are supposed to have been treated. This performativity is something beyond this Twitter video clip. This cultural activity has a broad horizon of treatments, entertainment, and artistic presentations of indigenous aesthetics.

Moreover, *Ghātu* dance is a mythico-cultural performance based on myths and legends. So are the *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra*. “Milton uses myth for what it is, the imaginative projection of all man’s deepest hopes and fears” (Daiches 439). Whatever the legend or myth is there, chanting affects the dancers. Every cultural activity seems to have sustained in society because of its positive impacts. Every man has hopes for good results and fears of bad. This is the universal implication. The Indigenous peoples observe these cultural activities with incantation and invocation to minimise their doubts and suspicions and to have a better life. The beginning of *Ghātu*, *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra* is an incantation to summon the god. The belief “begins with the love of God and includes hope and sometimes even faith” (Shuger 121) as the practitioners love god. The dance masters chant the songs repeatedly to make the dancers dance. “The chanting usually became highly emotional and was mirrored in bodily gestures” (Ibrahim 93). The effect of chanting is realised even by the audience. They see that the dancers’ “eyes are closed, images can be seen in the heart. The god who dwells in the heart makes this possible” (Parish 153). By the end of the *Ghātu* performance, the

dancing girls' eyes get closed for two days or so. This is because "[c]hanting and repeating a mantra creates a sound vibration that generates an energy circuit throughout the body" (Gurung 189).

The dance masters sing the song playing the double-ended drums in a slow rhythm that helps the dancers to be hypnotised. The hypnotised state occurs in the dancing girls when "the music and song reverberate in the air, which ultimately captures the self of the performing girls" (8). Thus, the trance mode of the dancers is mandatory. This is how the performers get possessed by the *auras*. The chanting, drumming and melodious singing arts of the gurus help the dancers enter trance mode. This trance mode is a shaman's journey from a man to a god. So, the beauty of shamanism is the beauty of indigenous aesthetics.

All three ethno-dance performances are entirely based on shamanic presentations. Chanting and invoking the gods like Deuchuli, Barchuli, Himculi, or Gangachuli are mandatory in the performance's beginning, middle, or end. 'Chuli' means peak, on which the *Ghātu* god is supposed to have seated. 'Him' means snow; 'Ganga' means river; 'Bar' means banyan tree; and 'Deu' means god. It begins with the following chanting:

*Lipana ho ré bhaiya lipana horé*  
*Mali gaiko gobarlé lipailā . . .*  
*Kali gaiko gobarlé lipailā.*  
*Satai mulko panilé lipailā.* (Thapa 25-6)  
 Smear oh brother! Smear!  
 With the dung of black cow, smear!  
 With the dung of spotted cow, smear!  
 With the water from seven sources, smear. [Translation mine]

This is how chanting and incantation function in *Ghātu*, *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra*, respectively. The dance masters sing these verses of the song repeatedly until or unless the dancers get possessed. Similarly, the Balun, a non-ethno dance performance, is performed by the Khasa-Brahman community. As in the *Ghātu*, *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra*, the chanting sends the performer into a trance. In this religious, shamanic performance, any young man or age-old man enacts Hanuman, the monkey, through hypnotism. The audience cannot acknowledge the old or young person in the performance. The performer forgets his identity and starts acting like a monkey as the

dancers enact the queens in *Ghātu*. Lalbihari Mishra presents this phrase that sends the dancer into a trance in *Balun* dance:

*Ādou Rāma tapodipodipa banāra, hatwa mrigé kanchanam  
Vaidéhi haranam jatāyu maranam, sugriva sabhasanam  
... yétadibha Ramayanam.* (335)

Ram was exiled, a deer was killed,  
Sita was kidnapped, and the eagle was killed  
Ram made Sugriv, the monkey his friend  
... This is what Ramayana is. [Translation mine].

This phrase entices the dancers to go into a trance, and they forget their selves. After the performance, there is a reverse chanting to release the dancer from the Hanuman aura into normal condition. If he is not released, another phrase is also sung as necessary. There is no other verse except this which is the last one to release the dancer:

*Ādou Dévaki déva Gopi griha varajanam,  
Maya Putan sāranam Kanshakshé dhanagouravadi hananam,  
Shrikrishna lila mritam.* (336)

In the house of Vasudev-Devaki, Shrikrishna was born

Devil Maya and Putanakha were burnt down  
Heredity and property of Kangsa were delved down  
The story of Krishna was put down. [Translation mine]

After singing this counter rhythm of Krishna's story, the dancer returns to normal. This entire thing shows a strong imprint of shamanism and the link between the *Ghātu*, *Sorathi*, *Krishna Charitra*, and *Balun* practitioners. The chanting is common in all these performances. There are different ways of presentation. Whatever ways there are, many societies follow shamanism for several reasons. "Some would go into states of possession by the goddess (Kali *bhava*) or other deities, induced by chanting tantric *bija* mantras or singing hymns to the *devi*" (McDaniel 165). Similarly, the dancers also go into states of possession of the auras induced by chanting tantric mantras of the narrative songs of these ethno-dance performances. However, *Balun* is observed by non-ethnic people, Kasha-Brahman. Anyway, they also follow shamanism. After possessing the aura, the dancers forget themselves and act like legendary characters in the performances.

A shamanic presentation entirely guides these supernatural performances that dance masters cannot control though they seem to hold it. They know how to sing and what to sing, but they do not know how long after the impact upon the dancers takes place. The dance masters begin the performances by singing the narrative songs repeatedly. After how many rounds of their singing, the dancers get possessed by the aura is unpredictable. They also do not know how much time chanting the tranced dancers get released.

### Conclusion

This research paper, likely to offer insight into a changing belief system of shamanic treatments, was carried out to explore the indigenous aesthetics in shamanic ethno-dance performances, *Ghaṭu*, *Sorathi* and *Krishna Charitra*. The study concluded that the dancers' psychology makes them go into trance and dance. The effect of music, chanting with wordings, and melodic singing arts of dance masters help them get possessed by the auras. The continuous music or any sound or chanting can capture the individual's self. Shamanism was and is still beneficial for many people regarding faith healing and other blessings as it benefits them. The study found that some patients died during treatment, and it is not good to entirely depend on it. The *Ghaṭu* practitioners claimed that the *Ghaṭu aura* cured some of their ills, and they had good harvests and protection from evil spirits. The main concern of this paper was to make the indigenous people aware of such superstitions so that they should acknowledge that it is not the ultimate treatment solution. Although medical treatment is not hundred per cent safe, this is the last solution. The literary beauty of performing art of this *Ghaṭu* trance dance is worth having. For simple treatments, one can depend on shamanic treatment, but it is risky to rely on it entirely. The literature shows that indigenous people's dancing and singing arts are always unquestionable. Although it is a local cultural activity, it has several universal implications.

The study employed Thomas Michel's shamanism theory and psychoanalysis theory to analyse *Ghaṭu's* performance. In addition, document analysis theory also analysed this site. By reading this article, it is not only the indigenous people who will become aware of having the naive belief in superstitious shamanic practices; other



people who have been following the shaman practice will also be mindful of such risky activities. Moreover, scholars and researchers will find this article crucial for several reasons. The study suggested that the indigenous people do not entirely depend on this shaman practice. The Twitter video tells us that the patient lost her life because of the demonic way of the treatment process. Many people might have been losing their lives in the same way. The study attempted to control such over a superstitious belief system. Some people can follow this shamanic practice for minor ills, but it is risky to believe this treatment process even for fatal diseases. Overall, indigenous aesthetics in shamanic dance performances are rich in symbolism, spirituality, and cultural significance. They serve to honour and connect with ancestral traditions, commune with the divine, and reinforce the cultural identity and values of the indigenous community. These aesthetics testify to indigenous cultures' resilience, richness, and ongoing contribution to the performing arts world.

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