



Reflections | NITFest 2019



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NITFest 2019
Reflections

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Reflections

NITFest 2019

Table of Contents

	Prelude
1	Backstage
9	Onstage
69	Montage
85	Reflections
99	Dialogue In Between
115	Media Coverage
117	Supporters' Statement
118	Festival Crew

Prelude

Nepal International Theatre Festival (NITFest 2019) has become a milestone experience for the contemporary theatre artists and the groups in the history of Nepali theatre. It was not an easy task but we challenged ourselves and decided to do it facing all the possible snags. After the successful completion of the festival, we think it has taken a humble step to strengthen the theatre community nationally and internationally. And I anticipate it has widened the space to work in a new dimension at the same time.

The glorious success of NITFest is the result of the focused hard work of hundreds of contemporary dedicated theatre persons. Their collective thought and intensive effort will be remembered for long in the context of the NITFest first edition. The help and advice of theatre geniuses will also be well remembered. The long experiences, knowledge, skill, practices, and perspective on the theatre of the theatre geniuses have made the strong base of the contemporary Nepali theatre. And stepping on their contribution we the recent generation of the theatre were able to weave a dream to uplift the contemporary theatre practice. NITFest was a tiny example of that endeavor.

The other idea to organize NITFest was to leap the traditional practice and the perspective we experienced in our long theatre journey. A new dimension is always needed in life and theatre. So, we thought to do an interaction with international theatre person

and their works. This would help us, the Nepali theatre persons to find a new dimension and explore a new horizon in theatre. We hoped organizing such an event would lead us to implement a widened and meaningful thought in theatre practice.

Now, after the experience of organizing successfully the NITFest event I can confidently express myself, it has made us more serious and responsible for our work, and our deserved skill has been transformed to the next good level. We collected the needful energy, we collected deep relation, solidarity, and trust in theatre groups, artists and theatre technicians. As our theme was 'Theatre for Social Transformation: an Artistic Voyage' NITFest taught us to search and weave the story which has got the socio-political-cultural value, through the theatre. It has taught us to express our unique expressions and find useful answers. And it has created a broader network to connect not only with theatre persons but with public as well.

I express my soulful gratitude to all of them who participated in NITFest as participants, theatre groups national and international, organizations, audiences, media houses/persons, well-wishers, technicians, photographers, and major financial supporter GIZ-ZFD.

Long live the theatre and the solidarity in theatre.

Rajan Khatiwada

Festival Director

Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019

Backstage



Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal has a long history of performance and artistic activities initiated by either local people or by rulers in respective times. However, theatre was only regarded as a means of entertainment. It took a long time to reinvent itself as a means of expression for the common people. It saw many political and social movements along with its development. Many artists, theatre practitioners, and activists took it forward despite the various challenges.

After the People's Movement of 1990, as the right of speech was established, different independent theatre groups emerged and started exploring the scope and styles of theatre in Nepal. Aarohan Gurukul (Estd. 1982) started regular shows and opened its drama school in Kathmandu in 2002. It brought new horizons to Nepali theatre by initiating much collaboration in the form of artistic exchange, international theatre festivals, discussions, and regular shows.

The theatre space of Gurukul was shut down in 2012. But many young theatre artists started to find new and alternative spaces for theatre activities. Gurukul collaborated with Mandala Theatre-Nepal's team to organize the third edition of the Kathmandu International Theatre Festival in 2012.



After this festival, organizing of the international theatre festival almost stopped in Nepal. Although many of the Nepali theatre artists were going abroad to study, practice and collaborate with international artists, and platforms, it was not sufficient to create an impact among the audience and theatre fraternity at the same time. So, Mandala was planning for an international theatre event. The dream came true after six years in 2018 when Mandala Theatre Nepal decided to host again an international theatre festival. In the ongoing journey of theatre in Nepal, the team of Mandala has been committed to finding new directions and ideas to strengthen the spirit of theatre. Following the idea, Mandala organized a play-making workshop for young Nepali theatre directors and directresses and initiated their collaboration to respond collectively upon the contemporary social-political issues.

Through the month's long process of selecting stories and creating scenes, the workshop participants also interviewed family members of enforced disappeared people and prepared a joint performance named 'Khabar Harayeko Chitthi' (The Letter Without Any Message). The play was performed at Pokhara Theatre and later at Mandala Theatre on 30th August 2018 to mark the international day against enforced disappearance. The performance was hugely admired and widely received for its effort to respond collectively to sensitive issues through theatre art.

Later, after the successful workshop, Mandala Theatre Nepal planned to expand up to the international theatre festival level so that stories from other countries dealing with similar contemporary socio-political incidents could be witnessed and understood. It was a timely initiative as Nepal was going through a lot of social, economic and political transformations over the last decade. An artistic approach was needed to see and understand the transformation and to look for the possibilities and find a direction to contribute to the transforming process.



Looking for solidarity, Mandala's team decided to invite contemporary theatre groups from Kathmandu, to put the hand together to host the event. Many theatre groups and individuals agreed to associate. A joint meeting was held among the other theatre groups in Kathmandu. Actors' Studio, Katha Ghera, One World Theatre, Shilpee Theatre, Theatre Mall and Theatre Village stood together to move further with the common goal.

The first official meeting for this festival was held at Shilpee Theatre in July 2018. Active theatre artists in Kathmandu gathered several times and planned in detail to organize the festival in effective ways. Roles were distributed and responsibilities were created based on need. Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019 (NITFest) became a joint family of 150 Nepalese artists holding different responsibilities.

Rajan Khatiwada (founder and creative director of Mandala) took the responsibility of Festival Director and Som Nath Khanal (actor/director) was chosen as the Coordinator for the festival. A group of Mentors had



been decided to support and supervise the preparation and implementation process. Mentors of NITFest 2019 were Anup Baral (director/actor), Ashmina Ranjit (fine artist), Bimal Subedi (director/actor), Michael Thonhauser (artist and peace advisor, GIZ-ZFD) and Viplob Pratik (poet/lyricist and novelist). The team settled the date for the festival from 25th February to 4th March 2019.





“We felt that we should learn not only from our routine practices among ourselves but also from the international practitioners. Our theatre practice might differ from that of others from different parts of the world; similarly, our issues might be different and our creativity unique. So we felt the need to organize an international theatre festival which will benefit all the participants and theatre practitioners,” says Rajan Khatiwada, the director of the festival.

A press meeting was organized in November 2018 to announce the festival and to invite applications for participation. Active theatre artists, play-making workshop participants, owners of currently running theatre

halls and theatre groups in Kathmandu were gathered several times and planned in detail. Undoubtedly NITFest 2019 became the first collaborative work of the representative theatre groups in Nepal. It was going to be a great example of the event of such a level. While the Kathmandu’s theater circle was preparing the festival in Kathmandu, the other theatre groups from different cities of Nepal were also welcomed to participate and organize the festival in their local theatre. Hence the preparation for the parallel theatre festival was also set for Biratnagar (Aarohan Gurukul), Janakpur (Rajarshi Janak Auditorium) and Pokhara (Gandharva Theatre).

ISSUING THE THEME

After making the first draft plan for NITFest 2019, the organizing team discussed the suitable theme for festival and they decided to announce a theme for NITFest 2019 as “Theatre For Social Transformation: An Artistic Voyage.”

The theme carries a deeper meaning and acknowledges the socio-political transformation that many countries have been going through, worldwide. The ever-evolving phenomenon is that every time a new

thing is born; it creates reverberation to the existing one.. The theatre captured this essence and focused on the role of art and culture to establish communication among different cultures. Art has always become an important tool for social intervention. So the theme was a strong metaphor for every society. For Anup Baral, one of the mentors of NITFest 2019, it is ‘mediator for every transformation in society.’ Ashmina Ranjit added, “Art is and can be the biggest tool through which we can transform the mindset of the people. So, art and artist are like ink in water; they can change the mindset as ink changes the color of the water.”

PLAY SELECTION PROCESS

The declaration of the festival through the website spread too fast, within a month the festival bureau received 135 entries. Each play dealt with their national or international issues. It was a tough task to select from the best. Each play was precious and impressive, but the time limit of the festival guided the selection committee to select only the reasonable number of plays. The organizers took into consideration several aspects to select required plays according to the date and time out of the total entries received. These selected play included aesthetic value that the dramas have, director's objective, performance quality on stage, the play's motto, presentation of the main idea as reflected in the performance, production value of the play, the context behind the designing of the play, the narration of the play, and the narrative technique of the play. It was also selected based on the design of the play and the most important of all, keeping in mind their propinquity with the theme of social transformation.

Finally, 30 play from 9 different countries made into the final list. And, the preparation for the festival accelerated. The festival was incorporating not only the play performance but also dialogues, workshops, and discussions related to the theatre field. The other allied programs and events also needed a separate team to work on.

The play selection committee comprised five persons, all of whom stayed together to discuss the merits of each of the plays in the span of 15 days, they watched the videos together and discussed why a particular play was better than others, be it in terms

of narration, design, storytelling, acting, or socially oriented content.

At one point, the jury had to put a restriction on the number of plays they would select on a specific theme, for instance, gender-based discrimination, which was a repetitive topic in many plays. Even when they considered plays on social transformation, since it is a broad and diverse topic, it incorporates various aspects such as, gender issues, migrants' issues, issues of indigenous people living in different parts of the society, and the impact of war.

For the mentors to watch all the 135 plays received was no mean feat. Viplob Pratik, who watched all the plays, says the selection process was quite difficult because some of the plays that had good content were not up to the mark in terms of performance and vice versa. Since it was the festival of international level, keeping up that level was a demanding task. "Choosing the play having the identity of Nepali theatre was challenging," Pratik remembers.

Most of the plays chosen for the festival had a physical body as the major device of expression. On being asked why, festival director Khatiwada said, "If we see the tradition of our practice, we can find that the plays are more text-oriented and verbal based. Songs and dances are regarded to be the medium of storytelling. But if we see the present scenario, physically expressing seems to be more promising." He stressed on selecting the diverse varieties of plays having unique storytelling and presentation.

The organizers feel there are a few more things they need to learn from the inaugural edition of the festival and rectify for the next. It would have been much better if they could have made an advance announcement of at least six months so that international theatre groups would get ample time to search for sponsors to fund their travel. Also, if time were



by their side, the organizers themselves would have been able to collect more funds to be able to bear the expenses of the international groups.

Khatiwada is in favor of making some amendments on the selection criteria for the next festival in 2021. He says he wants to focus more on uniqueness in the narrative, actor's performance rather than the director's control over the play, and a bit of control in the number of crews in the act. Similarly, he feels contemporizing classics is important and is crucial for selection.

Some people indicated about the plays showcased in the festival lacked dialogue-based plays. Whereas others admired the play selection as well. Responding to these mixed comments, Khatiwada insisted on the deliberate attempt of having plays that would invite the audience to think about the performance and make their interpretations rather than just receiving what

other traditional plays offer in the form of a message. "We wanted our audiences to taste the different practices and modes of storytelling which are happening in the other world. It would expand our horizon to look into things from different perspectives," he insisted. He believes that the audience liked the play 'Jokhana' because it consists of more text and fine visual which is the traditional format of Nepali plays. Meanwhile, they also loved the non-conventional narrative technique of 'I am not Here' because it dragged them out of their comfort zone and invited their active participation in the drama itself. "Different people have different perceptions and ways of expressing things," Khatiwada said. "Things differ also because of cultural and social background. That is why people may not always understand and appreciate every play. But society, to be inclusive, should always be able to understand others."

Onstage



personalities for their long-standing contribution to develop theatre scenario in Nepal. He praised the effort done by the theatre festival organizers team by organizing the festival of such standard in Nepal.

The PM was hopeful by this festival, which would open space to exchange the drama experience, skills, feelings, heights, ways of expression among the different countries. He also showed his awareness of the growing struggle of Nepali theatre over some time and promised to all the audiences that the government will encourage the theatre movements in Nepal.

He further emphasized the continuous effort from writers, artists, and government for the overall development of the art field in Nepal. 'Theatre is not only about passing time and entertainment. Beyond that it has a social awakening, it is that torchlight that shows the path. Hence it is both the mirror and the torchlight of the society,' he stated. He concluded by saying, 'This government is the government of artist, and the Prime Minister is an art lover.'

THE NITFest OPENING

The festival opened its curtain on 25th February 2019. The honorable Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli was invited as the chief guest. The guest row was full of politicians and diplomats. Education, Science and Technology Minister Girirajmani Pokharel and Civil Aviation, Tourism and Culture Minister Late Rabindra Adhikari attended the opening ceremony as special guests.

The Honorable Prime Minister felicitated Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi (100) in that row, and 11 senior theatre

The festival had been kicked off with a pre-opening performance by a group of Nepalese and US theatre students at Mandala Theatre. Students from Mandala had prepared a joint production on theme of cultural heritage preservation inviting students from Regional Centre of Arts in USA. The production was a part of Mandala's exchange program with USA based art-link organization Creative Connections and was funded by US Department of States.

The opening ceremony was followed by different artistic, cultural performances by various artists and cultural groups.



WHO MADE INTO THE FINAL LIST

Black and White (India)

Kishori (Nepal)

Private Confessions (Macedonia)

Bhoko Ghar (Nepal)

The Job (India)

Chapter Confession: My Father is a Murderer (Nepal)

Champawati (India)

To Be (Denmark)

Manganaa (Nepal)

Memory Yard (Nepal)

I am not Here (India)

Ta Rehave (Afghanistan)

Inside outside (Norway)

Roop Aroop (India)

In Transit (India)

Hip Hop Copellia (Nepal)

Gaida Times (Nepal)

Jokhana (Nepal)

Paanch (Nepal)

Aaran (Nepal)

Ek Mulaquat Manto Se (India)

Head to Head (India)

Helen (India)

Desaparecidos#43 (Italy)

Nidravathwam (India)

Mokshada (Nepal)

Garbha Chhita (Nepal)

Art (Nepal)

Black and White (India)

Black and White try to define the real situation of a conflicted society. The play deals with the dividing factors in a society under certain political and social circumstances.

The play travels around a peaceful community disrupted by different impetus coming from various directions. In such a tense situation, a person from a dominant class emerges and manipulates the situation which misleads common people to get divided into groups.

The actors and actresses used their bodies as major devices to express tense psychophysical situation. It seems - using self-body and expression as a prop gives freedom for improvisation and spontaneity. It also supported them to understand themselves in the situation together and keep audiences get connected with their emotions.

Group: Akhoka

Director: Victor Thoudan

Contact: victordionysis@gmail.com

**Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)
Gandharva Theatre (Pokhara)**



Kishori (Nepal)

'Kishori' is a play which narrates the stereotyped concept of women's physicality. The play raises violence against women as a major social problem.

In the play, a still body of a young girl is transported to different places for the mere purpose of physical consumption.

This play also questions the existence of women in society, though women's rights and freedom have been the major subject of discussion in today's global society.

Group: Lok Sanchar

Director: Priyanka Jha

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**Venue: Kausi Theater (Kathmandu) and
Rajarshi Janak Auditorium (Janakpur)**



Private Confessions (Macedonia)

Private Confessions portrayed the image of a traditional community and showed the confrontation with one's history, past, and identity.

In the play, a character is convinced to confess her extramarital affair with a priest. Her truthfulness and loyalty towards relationship was tested in different notion. In such scenario layers of truth comes out which differ from one personality to another depending on their psychological state.

The play was rich in its use of multimedia and other modern devices in its storytelling.

Group: Macedonian National Theater

Director: Nina Nikolkj

Contact: nikolikj.nina@gmail.com

**Venue: Shilpee Theater (Kathmandu) and
Gandharva Theater (Pokhara)**



Bhoko Ghar (Nepal)

'Why our political changes couldn't reform our social and economic situation?' this question bangs into the mind of audiences when they finish watching the play 'Bhoko Ghar'.

The play, written 30 years ago still resembles the dilemma and suffering of Nepali society. Even though the drama was categorized in the visual category, its dialogues were capable of taking the viewers to a televised experience.

Group: Theater Mall

Director: Kedar Shrestha

Contact: theatermallnepal@gmail.com

Venue Performed: Theater Mall (Kathmandu)



The Job (India)

'The Job' was a devised performance with clowning and physical comedy at its center. Story of individuals, preparing for the job interview was narrated using nonverbal and gibberish language.

In the play, four job aspirants try to outdo and follow each other in a hilarious set of events. 'The Job' also depicts underlying comment on the competitive culture of present times. The objective of 'The Job' seems to get people to come away with some deep understanding of life circle and also reflect upon our urban lifestyle.

Group: Five Senses Theatre

Director: Hardik Shah

Contact: inquiry@fivesensestheatre.com

Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)



Chapter Confession: My Father is a Murderer (Nepal)

'Chapter Confession: My Father is a Murderer' is a play that explored human complexities in relationships. It was a narrative play where a newly appointed inspector general of police from Nepal narrates her relationship with her father and her twin brother.

In the play, it seems that the relationships of central character with males contribute to shaping who she is in the present day.

Group: Freelancer

Director: Patrika Ghimire

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**Venue: Kausi Theater (Kathmandu) and
Gandharva Theatre (Pokhara)**



Champawati (India)

Champawati was the play about gender-based violence. The play roams around the social and psychological experiences of a woman whose body was severely damaged by the obscene of male desire.

In the play, she questions the society about her existence. She asks 'why do you treat me like this in such an inhumane manner?' Though being left out of her community, she has to offer her life to save her husband.

Another woman, chained at home, starts to break away. She is up against the injustice of male power-structure played at home. The familiar quarter does out an unfamiliar tale of courage and struggle.

Group: RITWIK

Director: Biplab Dey

Contact: ritwik1980@gmail.com

**Venue: Shilpee Theater (Kathmandu) and
Aarohan Gurukul (Biratnagar)**



To Be (Denmark)

To Be is a joyful and imaginative performance about human rights. This is a non-verbal performance designed for everyone above 6 years old. The message is preceded in a funny and inventive object.

In 'To be' an artist works at his table, where figures and objects emerge from the most unexpected materials. Mostly, the different kinds of tiny brushes. The play starts with joy and suddenly jumps into the conflict which leads play to be sorrowful.

In the play, moments of comic and serious situations intimately interacted with digital music and illustrations.

Group: Passepartout Theatre

Director: Jacques Seferian Matthiessen

Contact: ptp.jsm@gmail.com

Venue: Theatre Mall (Kathmandu)



Mangena (Nepal)

'Mangena' portrayed the beauty of Limbu culture and the revolutionary aspects of women's struggle for freedom.

Story of this play is based on the original culture and tradition of the Limbu community from eastern Nepal. It depicts different kinds of accidents that people face in their daily life presenting necessities and struggles of an individual to save the soul of the entire society. It is a story about love crossing the limits of caste and social status, of growing up in a cultural community with some repressive habits, about following desires more and more 'holding the head high'.

Group: Chulachuli Theatre

Director: Chetan Anghupo

Contact: chulachulitheatre@gmail.com

Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)



Memory Yard (Nepal)

'Memory Yard' is about a yard of imprisoned memories of everyday life entangled inside these transformational confusions. When searching for the meaning of life, the characters sometimes get lost, sometimes get visible and when they explore life's lifelessness they emphasize the silence and celebrate it.

Is the course of the human race inevitable? Why always the unfulfilled dreams dissipate somewhere? This absurd play is an exploration of contemporary human existential questions.

Group: Garden Theatre

Director: Che Shankar

Contact: gardentheatrenepal.arts@gmail.com

**Venue: Kausi Theatre (Kathmandu)
Aarohan Gurukul (Biratnagar) and
Gandharva Theatre (Pokhara)**



I am not Here (India)

'I am not Here' is the play that searches for the identity of a girl, performed mostly using nonverbal body movements.

The play starts with two female performers in a boxing ring. In the ring, the characters show the journey of women's writing that has been censored until today. Their breath, body, and voice were used to narrate the story. Transformation of two women into men unfolds the condition before and after the action takes place on stage. Along with each passing steps, they become brutal to one another.

This play talks about language and also about silence. It meditates on several binary oppositions of the society and its construct.

Group: The lost post initiative

Director: Deepika Arwind

Contact: deepikaarwind@gmail.com

Venue: Shilpee Theatre (Kathmandu)



Ta Rehaye (Afghanistan)

'Ta Rehaye' means 'Towards Freedom'. This is a play based on a true Afghan story which symbolizes the power of love and humanity. This play seems to convey the message that everyone is capable of love regardless of their ethnicity, tribe, color, and religion.

This play also tries to bring unity between different tribes of Afghanistan. It is sometimes forgotten that even the members of Taliban are the people of Afghanistan and not all of them willingly joined the Taliban. Many did so because they had no other choice.

Thus with focus on all these issues, in a nutshell, this play also aims to promote respect for differences.

Group: Parwaz Theatre Group

Director: Sayed Edris Fakhri

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**Venue: Theatre Mall (Kathmandu)
Shilpee Theatre (Kathmandu)
Rajarshi Janak Auditorium (Janakpur)
Aarohan Gurukul (Biratnagar)**



Inside Outside (Norway)

'Inside Outside' is a play which invited audiences for their active participation. Audiences of this play walked barefoot being blindfolded in the set of play. Actors and actresses were blindfolded too. This play was an attempt to explore the time, space and atmosphere through the five senses.

This was a non-verbal experiment performance that revolves around the civil war in Nepal which lasts for 10 years. The play doesn't seem to be in search of equilibrium but the exploration of different binary elements struggling for that imagined reality of equilibrium.

Group: Oslo National Academy of Arts

Director: Ramhari Dhakal

Contacts: ramharithetna@gmail.com

**Venue: Mandala Theater's Classroom
(Kathmandu)**



Roop Aroop (India)

Roop Aroop has the popular performing tradition of “NAJTANKI” as its backdrop. Till a few years ago (and in some parts even today) men adorn the female persona who is passed on from generation to generation. However, towards the middle of the previous century, women set foot on this stage. Most of them from the “BEDIN” community who are singers and dancers by caste and birth. They perform in festivals and occasions like marriage the stage was a distant dream, it meant dignity as a performer. The man may exit but the popular female persona that continues to persist.

Group: Unicorn Actors Studio

Director: Tripurari Sharma

Contact: tripurari56@gmail.com

Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)



In Transit (India)

In Transit was a non-verbal dance-theatre performance. It examined the representation of systemic and subjective movement in contemporary culture looking female bodies in transit at different points of the city.

The performance looks at the intensity of the movements and movements we experience on the streets. It senses the physicality in strong and soft tones. It is the journey of constant searching and uncovering that exhibits everything we see around and what we carry within us that we cannot forget.

Group: International Association for Performing Arts and Research (IAPAR)

Director: Aditi Venkateshwaran

Contact: iapar.contact@gmail.com

Venue: Kausi Theatre (Kathmandu) and Gandharva Theatre (Pokhara)



Hip Hop Copellia (Nepal)

Hip Hop Copellia is a non-verbal theater execution exhibited by Solis Performing Arts and coordinated by Alize Biannic. It was a comic, fiery and intriguing show with interlude with regards to the center of the show. That is the reason it was intriguing to watch the first and second acts in various set. It was a move dramatization with artful dance and hip jump curve.

This move dramatization conveying an account of a specialist, Dr. Coppelius who has made a real existence size doll. It is similar to such an extent that Paul, a city youth, gets beguiled by it and sets aside his heart's actual want, Sophie. She gives him his indiscretion by dressing as the doll, professing to make it wake up and at last sparing Paul from a less than ideal end on account of the innovator.

Group: Solis Performing Arts

Director: Alize Biannic

Contact: solisperformingarts@gmail.com

Venue: Shilpee Theatre (Kathmandu)



Gaida Times (Nepal)

Whom to trust and why? 'Gaida times' is a youthful rhino's journey to get back his dad's horn taken by obscure poachers. Adjusted from the account of Buddhisagar and coordinated by Sijan Dahal, this play attempted to show the universe of creatures from the human's viewpoint.

The play raises some important questions regarding the human's relationship with nature and their contradictory actions. It is an animal's perspective that's been depicted in the play where animals invite humans to act sensibly in order to maintain peace and harmony among each other.

Group: Kadam Theatre

Director: Sijan Dahal

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**Venue: Theatre Mall (Kathmandu)
Aarohan Gurukul (Biratnagar)
Gandharva Theatre (Pokhara)**



Jokhana (Nepal)

Jokhana is a Nepali dramatization which introduced contextual story of Maoist movement faced by a community in eastern village of Nepal. This play is a story about a lady whose spouse has been lost during the ten years armed-conflict.

Jokhana demonstrates the impact of war on the everyday citizens of Eastern Nepal. It also puts reflective question on the superstitious tradition followed by a certain group of people.

Group: Freelancer

Director: Kiran Chamling Rai

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Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)



Paanch (Nepal)

'Paanch' was physical theatre performance by five men on the stage. In the play those five body gradually starts searching different expressions. They seem not telling any stories, but exploring what's happening at that particular moment.

This improvisational performance was one of the recent experimentation practiced in context of Nepali theatre society.

Group: Katha Ghera

Director: Sudam CK

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Venue: Kausi Theatre (Kathmandu)



Aaran (Nepal)

Aaran is the story of a rebellious father and hardship faced by his daughter from a so called lower caste family of Solukhumbu who happens to marry a boy from upper caste and struggles to adjust in the society.

Her father Kailo works in a furnace utensils. Because his daughter suffers from her inter-caste marriage and bears the unbearable hatred, he himself revolts against society.

Group: Sagarmatha Natya Samuha

Director: Youbaraj Sharma "YURAK"

Contact: sagarmathatheatre@gmail.com

**Venue: Theatre Mall (Kathmandu)
Shilpee Theatre (Kathmandu)**



Ek Mulaquat Manto Se (India)

Ek Mulaquat Manto Se, directed by Ashwath Bhatt explores metaphorically the life of an author and others during partition between India and Pakistan.

This play meets Sahadat Hasan Manto, one of the most influential Indo-Pakistani writer who wrote mostly partition stories and essays, and let audiences see his life and explore things through his eyes. His life dwells around his childhood, family and friends, facing persecution, self-ridicule, depression, being broke, helplessness, drinking, Hindi cinema, satire, irony, hypocrisy, sadness, strife, and moral decay. The performance is based on his written articles that explore the life he spent and the society he lived in including the social changes he witnessed at the time of India's partition. They are as he used to call, mirrors of the society because he writes what he sees. The interacting monologue form applied in the play also brought the audience closer.

Group: Actors Cult & Theatre Garage Project

Director: Ashwath Bhatt

Contact: actorscult@gmail.com

Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)



Head to Head (India)

Head to Head is a play which had all the big fat actors on stage. The body of actors on stage was used as an important device for this performance to break the stereotype that says fat actors cannot act. Head to Head through a unique devised theatre performance, searches the answer of existential questions like where does identity lie: head or body? Or both? “The actors and actresses” with large bodies deal with this quandary on a daily basis. By using sections of the iconic Kannada play by Girish Karnad, it interrogates identity and archetypes, and the much-vaunted mind-body (dis)connection. It also examines the body of politics and politics of the body that characters themselves encounter during their own work as individuals and as a community. The crew chooses their body to place at the center of creative process, making our research and development a physical engagement with idea, themes, and speech.

Group: The Big Fat Company

Director: Shabari Rao

Contact: anuhr@untitledarts.org

Venue: Kausi Theatre (Kathmandu)



Helen (India)

'The Story of my Life' by Helen Keller is an autobiography that recounts Helen's experiences as she adjusts to the world as a blind and deaf person. As the play is made out of this, the ingredient of it also got mixed in Helen's performance.

Helen is about the moment that we all dream: when we tear up unexpectedly because something we have just seen or heard ignites our deepest desire for accomplishment. This play is often mistaken for the story of Helen Keller. The play begins the story by describing Helen her earliest memories of sights and sounds and her memory of contracting the illness that resulted in her deafness and blindness.

Group: Wings Theatre

Director: Kismat Bano

Contact: ksmatbano@gmail.com

**Venue: Theatre Mall (Kathmandu) and
Rajarshi Janak Auditorium (Janakpur)**



Desaparecidos#43 (Italy)

The theatre performance 'Desaparecidos#43' was of a touching civic engagement, created through the same innovative working method; converting interviews, facts, and information into poignant physical actions, images, and emotions for the audience. The play itself deals with the still existing issue of enforced disappearance. It's an artistic example of the international influence of mass media and globalization and how they can sensitize the public opinion and help to ask for justice.

Group: Instabili Vanganti

Director: Anna Dora Dorno

Contact: organizzazione@instabillivaganti.com

**Venue: Mandala Theatre (Kathmandu)
Aarohan Gurukul(Biratnagar)**



Nidravathwam (India)

Nidravathawam was based on religious Hindu book Ramayana's part where Kumbhakarna and Lakshman, brothers each to the two protagonists of the Ramayana, are connected by boons that dramatically alter their cycle of sleep and wakefulness. Kumbhakarna along his brothers, Ravana and Vibhishana performed a major Yagya and penance for Lord Bramha. When the time came for asking boon from Bramha, his tongue was tied by goddess Saraswati (acting on Indra's request). So instead of asking Nirdevatam (annihilation of the Devas) he asked for Nidravathwam (sleep) and his request was granted.

Laxmana, on the other hand, was allowed to give up his sleep completely and bequeath it to his wife, Urmila, for the fourteen years of his exile. In the course of time, both boons seem to acquire the dimensions of a curse, as they each have an uncomfortable outcome.

**Group: Adishakti Laboratory for Theatre
Arts Research**

Director: Nimmy Raphel

Contact: adishaktiprogram@gmail.com

Venue: Kausi Theatre (Kathmandu)



Mokshada (Nepal)

Mokshada, a dance drama explores the lives of Pan-chakanyas (five virgins mentioned in Hindu mythology) from the perspective of contemporary time. These five virgins are known as Ahilya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara, and Mandodari. All of them were married but even after having physical contact with more than one man, they are called virgins. According to Shastra (Holy Scriptures), even taking their names will eliminate all sins and lead to the way of salvation. Mokshada is the disagreement of the characterization of these five women done in 'Shastra'. This dance drama can be claimed as the voice of today's women' struggle to find their existence or can be the unheard voice of these five protagonists and their rights.

Group: Aesthetic Dance Studio

Director: Namrata KC

Contact: aestheticdancestudio@gmail.com

Venue: Shilpee Theatre (Kathmandu)



Garbha Chhita (Nepal)

The play Garbha Chhita put lights on those traditional aspects of Karnali, which we all can feel like the biggest obstacles to social transformation. Garbha Chhita is a tradition in Karnali where parents fix the marriage of children who are still in their mother's wombs. Such marriages happen without the consent of the bride and groom destroy many lives. This is one such story, where Pampha and Mansoor are engaged to each other before they are born. Pampha is in love with her lowcast household helper but gets married to the son of her father's best friend Mansoor. Her lover Chaure is unable to elope with her, burdened by social pressure of caste, family, tradition, etc. In the end, Pampha leaves her husband's home with her lover's child in her womb. This scene might be the most powerful scene of the entire play that depicts the revolution of the women in fighting against the social norms and traditions.

Group: Karnali Arts Centre

Director: Hira Bijuli Nepali

Contact: karnaliarts@gmail.com

**Venue: Theatre Mall (Kathmandu)
Rajarshi Janak Auditorium (Janakpur)**



Art (Nepal)

'Art' is based on the award-winning play by Yasmina Reza. The play looks behind the masks of human behavior which not only represents the invisible but rather it makes visible. Three young men, friends, 'brothers' - as they like to say in Nepal - are representatives for our urban Kathmandu society. All three are entrepreneurs, who want to reach the 'top', be recognized in society as 'somebody special' and competing for each other. One of them invests in art. He goes for the expensive works of well-known and modern artists. Besides being a good investor, he hopes these works of art are likely to raise his own market value, help him impress and meet the people 'that count'. Yet his latest purchase destroys the friendship of the three men forever. They struggle the fight. Long suppressed anger, fear, disappointments and insults reveal the complexities of their relationship. This play is the critique of urban lifestyle that is so habitual to fake things purposefully.

Group: Studio 7

Director: Sabine Lehmann

Contact: info@hotelvajra.com

Venue: Naga Theatre (Kathmandu)



Montage



The festival was the mosaic of not only different forms of theatrical performances but it also mixed poetry, workshops, sculptures, paintings, photos, panel discussions, and musical performances in its schedule as allied events.

The sole motive behind doing that was to include and welcome different forms of art to speak for the social transformation. These activities were organized at multiple venues along with the theatre performances.



POETRY RECITATION

On March 1, Poetry Performance by Nepali Poets was organized at Junkiri Theatre at the premise of Mandala Theatre Nepal. Acclaimed poets from Nepal such as Chandrabir Tumbapo, Hangyug Agyat, Jiten Pandhak, Nabin Pyasi, Naresh Kangmang, Rajan Mukarung, Samarpan Shree, Shakuntala Joshi, Swapnil Smriti, Upendra Subba, and Viplob Pratik recited their poems on the free themes of identity, ethnicity and social transformation. The event was done in collaboration with poets and was coordinated by Rajan Mukarung.

Similarly, on March 2, Poetry Pottery program was organized at Kirtipur Theatre, Theatre Mall in coordination by Kedar Shrestha. Different theatre artists from different theatre groups of Kathmandu recited their poems. The program was notable because of the expressive poems that the theatre artists presented.



WORKSHOPS

Workshops and training on different genres and styles of theatre have been conducted during the festival. Around 70 Nepali theatre artists got the opportunity to learn and to strengthen their skills from guests from different countries. NITFest 2019 had collaborated with Alliance Francaise Kathmandu to host workshop sessions during the festival. All the workshops were coordinated by Vijaya Karki.



Before the opening ceremony, on Feb 24 and 25, Constanza Bitthof from Argentina conducted three hours long workshop on Dance & Physical Theatre each day at Alliance Francaise Kathmandu. Nepali theatre artists from above 15 years of age participated and learned from her experience.

With the logistic support of Alliance Francaise Kathmandu, a puppetry workshop was conducted from February 26 to 27 at Alliance Francaise Kathmandu. The workshop was facilitated by Frédéric Simon from France. The workshop was wrapped up with a public show at Mandala Theatre's classroom in Anamnagar.

Anna Dora Dorno & Nicola Pianzola from Italy conducted a one day workshop titled 'OpenCall#43'. The workshop was themed on the enforced disappearance of the 43 Mexican students from Ayotzinapa at Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. The workshop, in a way, brought the new generation of Nepali theatre practitioners and audiences after the civil war to the conflict zone experience of another part of the world. It shared empathy among the participants.

Ashwath Bhatt, famous actor and director from India gave a 3 hours long workshop on 'Find Your Clown' on March 4 at Alliance Francaise Kathmandu.





Supported by the British Council, a workshop focusing on disability inclusion in theatre arts was organized after the festival. Exploring Approaches to Access and Inclusion (Disability and Theatre Arts Workshop) was conducted at the British Council on March 5 and 9. Inviting representatives from different disability-related organizations and theatre organizations in Nepal, the workshop discussed the issue of theatre venues not being wheelchair friendly, despite the theatre

performances happening throughout the year. It also empowered the idea of including people with disabilities in theatre productions to expand the scope of both the theatre sector and people with disabilities. For the workshop, British Council had invited Glasgow based theatre company Birds of Paradise to Kathmandu to facilitate sessions on making arts—specifically performing arts—accessible to disabled people.

OPEN-AIR EVENTS

As part of the Theatre Festival, many notable performances were staged in different open-air venues of the festival.

Actors Studio's play 'Rape Machine' was performed during the inauguration of the Nepal International Theatre Festival on February 25. The play portrayed the plight of Nepalese girls who are insecure inside the structure of society. The central character is a girl who is frequently tortured and blamed just because she is a female. The play was staged at the time when several rape cases were hitting the newspaper headlines, most notably was of 13 years old Nirmala Panta's Rape Case, which has been yet unresolved despite the pressure from civil society and activists all over Nepal. 'Exhibition of Masks and Sculptures' by theatre artist Shakti Rai showcased the mask and sculptures he had prepared at the Mandala theatre premises starting from February 26 – March 4.

'Folk Music, A Musical Performance' was organized on February 26 at Junkuri, Mandala's Mobile Theatre Bus at festival premise in Anamnagar Kathmandu. Artists Praksah Gandharva, Biwan Rasaili and Ashish Shahi gave the beat of Nepali Folk Music.

'Cultural Dance Performances: Kauda and Ghatu' was organized as an open-air performance on February 26 at Junkiri Theatre Bus, Mandala Theatre Nepal, Anamnagar. Paschimanchal Cultural Group in the choreography of Deep Gurung had performed with the contribution of artists Laxmi Gurung, Parwati Gurung, Sumitra Gurung, & Babita Gurung.

On 26 February Students of Shilpee Theatre presented an Installation Art Performance at Gothale Theatre, Shilpee, Battisputali, Theatre premises.

On 28 February Anita Bartolami from Germany did a Puppetry Show at Gothale Theatre, Shilpee. Similarly on March 1, Shilpee Theatre hosted Shiva Grings from Germany for his Clown Performances.

Udumbara Evening (Musical Performance) was organized on March 2 at Junkiri Theatre Bus, Mandala Theatre Nepal. Artists Shreeti Pradhan, Mannu Shahi, and Birat Basnet gave their soulful performances.

Nepal Improvisation Troupe presented the Improvisation Performance on March 3 at Junkiri Theatre Bus, Mandala Theatre Nepal. The performance was directed by Muneeb Ur Rehman from Pakistan and performed by Nepalese theatre artists.

Y Stand Dance School did Open Dance Performance- Nepali Freestyle on March 4 at Junkiri Theatre Bus, Mandala Theatre Nepal. The performance was choreographed by Deependra Shahi Thakuri.

A drama book 'Jiudo Aakash' written by Chandra Prasad Pandey was launched through an outdoor event on 3rd March 2019 during the festival. The drama book was based on the life struggles of a third gender activist and had been staged successfully in different parts of Nepal and India before. The play was appreciated for its portrayal of the marginalized characters in a respectful way.

Everyday panel discussion on different topics of theatre was another attraction of NITFest 2019. The panel discussions were mainly organized in Mandala's mobile theatre bus every evening after the play performance. 3-panel discussions were decentralized to 3 different venues as the topics of discussions were the primary focal point of those venues. 42 artists, scholars and critics were directly involved in the



discussions as moderators and speakers whereas hundreds of theatre lovers and audiences participated in each discussion.

Daily discussion on every play performed earlier day with directors, crew, panelists, and audiences were hosted at Shilpee Theatre from 27th February – 4th March 2019. 'Discussion with Director' invited directors and directresses of the specific play together with different external speakers to talk upon narratives, crafts, and styles of their performances. Further, they talked about the socio-political relevance of their play in local and global contexts.









THEATRE VENUE INAUGURATION

A new theatre venue in Kathmandu was inaugurated on the second day of the festival. Theatre Mall, one of the festival organizers, got their new theatre auditorium inaugurated by Mr. Ramesh Maharjan, Mayor of Kirtipur Municipality at Kirtipur, Kathmandu with a ceremony. Theatre Mall had lost its venue at

Kathmandu Mall 2 years ago as the landlord refused to renew their contract. After the long struggle to get a new venue, the team had succeeded to get support from Rara Hill School in Kirtipur where they were allowed to renovate the auditorium and run it for at least 10 years free of cost. The venue inauguration ceremony was attended by festival organizers, artists, scholars, and theatre lovers.



AWARD TO YOUNG THEATRE ENTHUSIAST

During the festival, “NITFest Unique Idea Innovation Award” was established to award and to encourage young enthusiasts contributing to the Nepali Theatre directly or indirectly. The award aimed at recognizing persons who are the proponents of outstanding innovative ideas that are expected to bring about substantial improvements in the areas of writing, directing, producing, teaching, learning, research, community services, theatre art management and administrative affair in response to Nepalese Theatre. A total of 16 ideas were applied for this award. A ‘Jury’, consisting of Festival Mentors, Director and Coordinator evaluated the award on the basis of award guidelines. 3 of the applicants were called for an interview. Chomu Sherpa ‘Khushi’ won the award for her visionary proposal to work with people with disability through theatre. Sherpa herself is a person with partial physical disability and working in theatre from Jhapa of eastern Nepal. Her idea conceived to provide a theatre workshop for people with disabilities and to make a production. As the award was offering a minimum of one distinguished award to applicant who has suggested creative ideas that have the potential to bring about substantial improvements not only in theatre but also in relation with the society, expecting that the idea will provide opportunity for one of the marginalized community in Nepal, the jury decided to award Sherpa for her idea. Sherpa was awarded with 100,000.00/- (NPR One Lakh).



PHOTO EXHIBITION: THEATRE THROUGH LENS

On February of 2017, a team of Mandala Theatre-Nepal went to National School of Drama (NSD) at New Delhi to perform the drama "Sunkeshari". It became a golden opportunity not only for Nepali theatre artists but also for its supporters such as journalists and photographers to experience an international arena of theatre practices. Among the delegates was a photographer - Nabin Babu Gurung who took the opportunity to the next level by his unique idea of organizing a theatre-photo exhibition in Nepal where the photos of different plays can be displayed.

His idea of the theatre photo exhibition got realized in Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019. The exhibition took place at all four venues of Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019. Around 200 photos were collected through an open call and displayed during the festival.

"I had a lot of photo collections from stills of drama. I was happy to showcase all of my collections from my archives in the exhibition along with other photographers who captured these moments at different times. I believe that the photo exhibition not only benefits the photographers but also the theatres as the photographs motivate the visitor to watch the drama in theatre. These photographs received wide acclaim from international visitors as well." Gurung shared this experience. The exhibition displayed photographs from various photographers.

Rajan Kafle, an esteemed photographer of Nepal also shared similar views, "Nepal International Theatre Festival was a great stage to show our photographs from our reels among wide audiences. Nothing feels much better than receiving accolades from visitors for the photo. Their reviews and comments added more value to the photo." He further added, "Such exhibition

act as a bridge between audience and theatre. The photos illustrate the story of drama. In other words, the trailer is to film, as photo exhibition is to drama."

The exhibition brought the photographs of Deependra Bajracharya, Bikash Rauniyar, Keshav Thapa, Bijeta Maharjan, Narayan Maharjan, Rajan Kafle, Nabin Babu Gurung among eight photographers in one stage.

Photo Journalist Bijeta Maharjan said she was impressed with the idea of using such an exhibition in the festival to display the photographs which generally appear in the newspapers only.

The photographs displayed in the Festival were selected by Festival Mentors. The idea of an exhibition in the International Theatre Festival added a flavor to the art and performance of the Nepali theatre.



WHOM WE MISSED

NITFest received enormous amount of love from it's well wishers but some unforeseen incidents left us incomplete for we missed some of our attendants and portions of the festival.

Honorable Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture Rabindra Adhikari died an untimely death in a helicopter crash during the third day of the festival. Adhikari not only had been a supporter and well-wisher of the theatre fraternity but also had attended the inauguration ceremony of festival together with Prime Minister and Education Minister. Not only the NITFest team, but the whole world got shocked by the terrible news. NITFest had issued a letter of condolence on this demise and had stopped outdoor performance activities for two days.



One of the selected international plays, Mattbring from Bangladesh had been scheduled to stage at Biratnagar, Janakpur and Kathmandu. The play crew, which had been traveling via road and had to cross Indian border to get into Nepal, couldn't reach Nepal. However, they got their visa for Nepal, Indian authority didn't provide them the transit visa in the last hour. After traveling a whole day from Jessore, Bangladesh to the Indian border they were informed that their request to get transit visa had been denied. Nepali theatre lovers and media responded against this issue through different articles, post-shares, etc.



Reflections



DECENTRALIZING THE THEATRE ACTIVITIES

As the country was going through a new federal system, when the theatre festival was organized, all the three-level elections had already been over and new governments were formed up to the local level. The first elected Prime Minister after the new federal system was the chief guest of the opening day of the theatre festival itself. New local and provincial level were formed that changed the administrative structure of the entire country. Kathmandu, which was the capital city of the nation before, now was not the sole center as 7 provinces had got 7 cities like the capital of their own. Hence, the festival had 3 other co-hosting theatre groups from Province 1, Province 2 and Gandaki Province ; apart from Province 3 where Kathmandu belongs.

Before the theatre festival started, there was some collaboration between different theatre groups from Kathmandu to other provincial and local levels. Some of the plays traveled to Kathmandu to perform whereas some traveled from Kathmandu to these places. There were some exchanges of skills and experiences through various workshops. Playback theatre groups from Kathmandu were traveling out of the valley on the theatre basis. All these activities helped to decentralize the theatre in Nepal and therefore these plays from different provinces of Nepal made into the theatre. Also, there were some musical performances, which brought the community dance and folk songs on the stage of Kathmandu.

It clarified that there are stories yet to be told from the remotes, which need to be shown in Kathmandu, the capital city. The quality of the plays from outside Kathmandu valley led the organizers to believe that NITFest has become a mirror for both Kathmandu and other regions. The development of the theatre industry is possible only through the union of artists and actors and actresses from various parts of Nepal.



FESTIVAL OUTSIDE THE VALLEY: AN EXTENSION

Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019 was expanded to three different cities from different provinces as they hosted the event on the parallel basis. The local theatre group hosted the festival simultaneously. Some of the international plays performed in Kathmandu also traveled to these venues. This practice of co-hosting was also essential for the theme of the festival because Nepal is practicing a new federal system and the festival was organized on the theme of social transformation. Here is the short glimpse of plays and activities that were done in these different cities.



Sushila Koirala Theatre, Aarohan Gurukul, Hathkhola Biratnagar hosted DESAPARECIDOS#43 (Italy) on March 1, Champabati (India) on March 2, Love and Life (Srilanka) on March 3, Ta Rehay (To Freedom) on March 6 & Gaida Times on March 7.

Gandharwa Theatre (Pokhara Theatre) of Pokhara hosted Black and White (India) on February 28, Private Confession (Macedonia) on March 1, Chapter Confession: My father is a murderer (Nepal) on March 2, Gaida Times (Nepal) on March 3, In Transit (India) on March 4, and Memory Yard (Nepal) on March 5.

Janakpur doesn't have a permanent theatre space. But despite that, some theatre enthusiasts wanted to take this festival to their place. Janakpur is rich in culture and traditions. Rajarshi Janak City Hall (Chamber of Commerce Hall) hosted Ta Rehay (To Freedom) of Afghanistan & Local production Kishori (Nepal) on March 4, and Helen (India) on the 6th of March.

The international plays staged on the local theatre door brought new vibration to the theatre groups and drama enthusiasts. Families believed that their children could reach such a stage in other different countries if they pursue their interest in drama. The local theatre artists also saw the horizon that they could fly into. This co-hosting strategy not only enriched these venues but also gave new theatre space to the national and international performers as well. (Had it been organized only in Kathmandu, many of the foreign performers would never know the diversity of Nepali geography, culture, and traditions.) As the country is already in the new federal system, events of such a strategy should flourish in the coming days as well. This is how we can generate cooperation and inclusiveness among all the theatre groups, artists, and enthusiasts of Nepal.

As the news of opening new theatre groups and theatres in different parts of Nepal, we would want to see this cooperation reaching to all 7 provinces surpassing 4 of this time.





BODY: A LANGUAGE ITSELF

'In Transit, Paanch and Head to Head- these plays are complementary to each other', Ashmina Ranjit, one of the Festival Mentors opined during an interaction in 'Discussion with the Directors' session of NITFest 2019. Her statement sums a lot about how the body and its expression had become one of the major themes of this theatre festival. Many international plays had used body as the major source of their expression. However, Nepal has a short history of physical and experimental theatre work in comparison to conventional spoken-plays, some of the young directors and directresses had attempted to tell their stories either using body as a language or as a content. In the debate also, this issue took the major step. This has been one of the major learning tools for the Nepali theatre practitioners and we can see many attempts on embodiment and bodily expression in upcoming days.

In Transit, one of the plays from India, had used body not only to show the story but also to portray the experience of women in transit. In the same interaction session, talking about the process of the play, its directress Aditi Venkateshwaran said that was a performance done by the dancer's body, not by the actor's mind. She reinforced the play more as a question raised by a dancer through her experience. And body was essential in the play because it was their personal experience. They were free to develop their own vocabulary of performance. She said 'City is in their body. In every moment are reacting against the happenings of the city. The body doesn't remain the same in the evening as it was in the morning. And every reaction is different. It keeps changing. It keeps moving between different transits. It is always in motion, hence

the performance was also like the wave of the sea. It is like a clock sequence, hence there were some clock moves in the play.”

Sudam CK’s play Paanch (Nepal) also explored the bodily experience of Nepali society. 5 characters metaphorically presented as 5 elements of the body, go through the bodily experience and encounter with each other. The improvised performance was the first of this kind staged from a Nepali director in Nepal. For CK, the play is a mixture of emotions that he himself and characters discovered during the process of the play.

Shabari Rao’s play Head to Head (India) presented ‘plus sized’ actors and actresses on stage and told the story as their experience. As mentioned in their play detail, the play examined the body of politics and the politics of body that characters themselves encounter during their own work as individuals and as a community. Talking about the process of the play one of its’ actresses, Anuradha said that they wanted to tell the message that fat actors can also perform on stage. They wanted to question the boundary between beauty and stereotype made around it.

Deepika Arwind’s ‘I am Not Here’ (India) also presented the struggle of women from kitchen to professional life through the setting of a boxing ring where two women perform using their body. Their breath, body, and voice are used as a narrating device. With each passing step, they become brutal to each other, that in a way resembles the brutality of the society against women. ‘Not enough’ is one of the most repeated words that is used in the play when one of the characters is presented as dog bound in chain and doing extreme attempts of doing something, only to listen ‘not enough’ from the master.

Two plays from Nepal - Kishori and Mokshada had a resistance against patriarchy as it tries to objectify the female body.





WOMEN IN THEATRE

Like other areas, no doubt - Nepali theatre has a male-dominated history. From the script to the production, usually, it used to be male who took the lead in narration and directing. Even when plays were staged around violence or inequality of women, it was males who assumed leadership and created relevant narratives from their own perspective. It resulted that there are very few female icons who got the opportunity to inspire newer generations. However, there have been some improvements and the theatre fraternity of Nepal is taking a lead to establish a gender-balanced society.

There had been some attempts to create a space for recognition, visibility, appreciation, and empowerment so that women and men can reflect together on their oppressions, exchange ideas and encourage each other in the fight for women's rights. Some recent

theatre activities have been supporting female artists and activists by opening up spaces for collaborative learning and sharing to strengthen their professional skills.

With the slogan "Theatre for Social Transformation: An Artistic Voyage," NITFest 2019, was determined to strengthen the idea. The festival team was also formed including both male and female artists and activists to make the team balanced and efficient. Out of 30 selected plays, 13 plays were directed by directresses from Nepal and other countries. Interestingly, the selection was done without creating any reservation and reviewed through submitted videos. Most of the plays by directresses were provoking the issues of gender equalities in different forms and styles. Also, the list of recognized senior theatre artists consisted of an equal number of female theatre practitioners.

To appreciate women's involvement and contribution and to explore their challenges, a separate panel discussion titled "Women in Theatre" was organized at Kausi Theatre in Teku, Kathmandu, on March 3, 2019.

Directresses from India and Nepal participated in the panel. The Indian participants were Shabari Rao, Nimmy Raphael, and Kismat Bano. The Nepali participants were Looniva Tuladhar and Srijana Adhikari. The discussion was moderated by Akanchha Karki, founder of Kausi Theatre. The participants discussed their involvement and struggle as women in theatre.

WAR AND MEMORY

The festival saw the collage of dramas that presented the war and memory as the major themes. They explored different characters that in a way went through the war and its impact in their life. Hence their motivation and the activities they portrayed depends on their subjective experience of the war.

Black and White, depicted the communal unrest in a village in India which was caused by the external factor and that brought the fragmentation among the villagers. By showing the folk moves and dances it portrayed the message that the impact of war reached the very ground level.

Chapter Confession: My Father is a Murderer directed by Patrika Ghimire presented a female Police Inspector-in-General and her interaction with other

characters that come back and forth with the impact of war and memory caused by 10 years long Maoist insurgency in Nepal.

In Ram Hari Dhakal's Inside Outside, there were three rooms that brought people back to wartime blindfolded. In the second one there was a mirror and in the last one the audience walked through the deadheads without even knowing it. This was a powerful metaphor to convey the message that we in fact came through walking above thousands of dead bodies in the war. We should not forget it. If not by eyes, we should always try to remember the things that happened. If we forget, we might commit the same mistake again. This was the message of the play. Why does he want that? It was asked to the director and he said he wanted the people to experience the terror of war through different senses because that was the real story on stage. He wanted to take the audience back there. But it was never a good experience for the audience.





The play *Ta Rehaye* brought the Afghanistan's horrific story of war on the stage. It told the story of a soldier and his lover, who coming from enemy tribes, are placed in a shelter where they can't escape. The director Sayed Edris Fakhri was asked during the 'Discussion with Directors' why he wanted to tell the story of war in his play. He answered, he wanted to tell the story that is happening right now in Afghanistan and he had to say it for different purposes. According to him, the people at Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, do not realise



the fact that Afghanistan still has been affected by the war and terrorism. It is because Kabul doesn't have to face the terror of war like the other parts of Afghanistan.

Kiran Chamling's *Jokhana* featured the story of an ethnic community where a person is disappeared in insurgency. Talking about the process of the play, Kiran said, he wanted to tell the story of a character who was hit by the war. He wanted to show the impact of war at the bottom of society. In the play the families are waiting for their husband and father to return. This wait for him is symbolic as it resembles the long wait of Nepali people for peace and prosperity.

Other plays like *Memory Yard* by Che Shanker, '*Desaparecidos#43*' (43 disappeared) by Anna Dora Dorno, and artist Nicolo Piyanjolale also depicted the social, psychological and emotional effects caused by the war.

DANCE AS/IN A THEATRE

Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019 saw the use of dance as a theatrical tool most often. Sometimes it was linked with the physical body and sometimes alone. And with the expanding use of it in the recent time, we can see that dance will be coming to theatre more often than before.

The opening play of the festival *Black & White* from India has used traditional dance form of Manipur into the play. From the build-up to the climax and resolution, different ethnic dance steps and martial arts were used. Because it was about the unrest happened in the peaceful society of Manipur, the dance steps resembled the way of life of the people. Why it was necessary to tell it by using the traditional dance form? Director Victor Thoudam replied, 'Because I grew up observing these things happening in real life. Hence, they came naturally to me as a way of expression.' Though the story was told from that expression, he says, 'the story belongs to all other people who can relate.'



Mokshada (Nepal) directed by Namrata KC staged the modern interpretation of the story of five virgins known as Panchakanya in Hindu belief from the modern eye by using the dance form. KC herself is a professional Kathak Dancer and has already done a couple of dance-drama productions in Nepal and India before. The performance was a pure mixture of dance, drama, and music. How does it feel to be the theatre directress coming from the dance background? She says, 'I really don't see any difference in that. I am doing theatre-like others are doing and as it is the stage to tell the story, I just have taken dance as a way of expression.' The drama went through the process where the actresses coming from different dance form expertise chose the characters out of 5 Virgins and worked on their own. According to KC, she as a directress was just trying to link their search into the performance.

Hip Hop Coppella directed by Alize Biannic also was a dance performance though the play had the traditional storyline. In the 'Discussion with Director' session, directress Biannic said 'I used this because I wanted actors and dancers to understand each other.'

Music was used to touch the sensation of the audience.' She agrees that there could be a problem for the audience to understand the dance moves, but that can be improved. 'We had applied some repeated shots so that people would get the story,' she explained.

In Transit's director, Aditi Venkateshwaran also used dance and physical moves in her play. She was asked the same question in the 'Discussion with Directors' session, where she replied 'we all five people on stage are dancers, therefore, it is the experience done by dancer's body, not by the actor's mind. Had it been later, the play would have been completely different.' There were many movements in the play to deliver the everyday movement of women happening in different transits in the city. How does she move? How does she get in touch with people? How does she pass someone by? The performance answered all these questions.

As stated earlier, many of the plays featuring in the Festival had physical and dance performances. Namrata, Alize, and Aditi, all coming from the dance background and now had reached the theatre stage, which was not welcomed by many people in the past

and even today. Namrata, including the rest, believes in the mixture of expression because theatre is not only about verbal dialogues. People are free to use their expression to tell the stories. She is wondering more how the conventional theatre practices had used dance only as an element but not as a separate narrative. 'Especially in a country like ours, there has been a lot of dance forms that we can use to narrate stories on stage. The local fraternity should think and motivate newcomers to use dance not only as a mere element but as a whole performance style' she says.

Alize insisted on telling that a story can also be expressed through dance movements. Hence it is not theatre or actor's voice that only does things. For her, action does more speaking than the words. Hence the debate should not be an issue because both are finding ways to tell the stories.

This relationship is confusing and challenging for Aditi too, because it has both acceptance and non-acceptance with it. Some say dance, some say theatre. She says- 'It feels for me like no man's land.' She came from a very rigid learning method of dancing. It was very difficult for her to deconstruct her own storytelling. Her move is welcomed more or less by drama but not by the dance sector itself. She agrees with Alize on the thought that dancer doesn't act is not true.

Shabari used to be the dancer hence she was aware of embodiment. Identity, mind, and body are connected with her. For her body shapes the identity a lot. Identity is located in the body. And as an actress, she thinks, one is reminded time and again how his/her body looks. They wanted this reminder to be over. She also questions the division one creates between theatre and physical theatre. 'Theatre is a theatre in itself. Why we need classifications?' she concludes her opinion, 'Some do it through texts and others do it through the body.'



SHARING THE CIRCLE

NITFest 2019 enabled cultural exchange among the issues like female suffering, war and memory, and other thematic issues on which basis the plays were chosen. The festival brought different cultures, pains, suffering and theatrical treatments of different countries into the form of dramatic art. Moreover, plays shared the common emotions and experiences in different presentations. It not only gave the implication that things happening here are similar things happening elsewhere but also spread empathy among the audiences.

Some theatre productions supported breaking stereotypes and single stories about certain communities. Many people in Nepal and abroad have this impression about Afghanistan that there is only war happening all over the country. The director of Ta Rehaye from Afghanistan Sayed Edris Fakhri shared during after-play interaction that this issue had motivated them to bring the play to Nepal. Gunjan Dixit, one of the festival cell members, reminds the days the festival team had worked hard to support the visa process for the Afghan team. 'Nepal is regarded as an open country especially because of its tourism identity. I felt very bad when I realized that Nepal has a completely different and complicated process for Afghan citizens to get the visa' she said.

'Ta Rehaye' had presented the war story. However, as told by the director, though war has destroyed everything, they also have things to share proudly. He said, 'We have a theatre group in Kabul. There is the theatre department at Kabul University and the pass

outs from there are working independently coming outside.' He himself had graduated from there. There are more than 10 private theatre groups and the number is increasing as theatre groups are expanding in other provinces as well. No one would know this, had their team not traveled to Nepal.

But again in their performance, every Nepali can see themselves suffering because we also went through the 10 years-long insurgency. Like the 'Desaparecidos#43' presented the story of enforced disappeared Mexicans, Nepali play Jokhana brought the story of disappeared person in Nepal. No matter what the reason would be, who to blame, both brought the story of common people who suffered.


The festival became a platform to the local theatre groups of Nepal from the mountainous region of Nepal to the Terai plains, all the plays carried the different cultural settings that enabled people to learn from each other's culture. The Sagarmatha Theatre Group of Solukhumbu started performing from 2072 by organizing a theatre workshop at their own place. The social issues that they saw from their childhood came into their mind while designing the play for the festival. Hence the play Aaran was possible. It captured an issue of untouchability in Nepali society. The culture of the mountainous region came to Kathmandu and presented itself. Meanwhile, Kishori, coming from Terai Nepal told the story of a girl from the southern part of Nepal. Garbha Chhita brought the story of Karnali that presented a woman's fight against the discriminatory norms of society. Likewise Champabati presented the story of snake charmers who suffer from the upper-class people in the rural areas of India.

All these plays, being mixed with the cultural voice, theme, and taste of their local culture presented the characters who are progressive and always looking for social change. This is a wonderful achievement that this theatre festival has brought.



Dialogue In Between





The impact of the festival is hard to measure in absolute terms. But the range of thematic areas it covered with the different forms, we can surely say that it brought new vibration in the Nepali Theatre arena that is mixed with ambition, collaboration, dream, struggle, and exchange.

The theatre festival supported Nepali theatre groups coming together in a shared platform to explore their aesthetic expressions and solidarities for relevant socio-political issues. It has helped to initiate dialogue amongst theatre communities in Nepal regarding their vision. It has boosted the theatre artists and communities in working on process of peace building and non-violent conflict transformation through the staging of relevant plays, productions and dialogue sessions.

Similarly, the festival has motivated local theatre groups and artists to preserve their indigenous culture through artistic theatre work.

Not only the theatre community but also the general public who were interested in the drama made the most out of their opportunities watching the different plays traveling from 9 different countries. They saw new subjects, new forms and new ways to deal with in the theatre stage. This matches with the view of Bimal Subedi, one of the festival Mentors, who says, 'In creativity, the changes don't appear instantly. It can be seen in our upcoming works.'

Last but not the least, the festival has helped building national and international networks, and strengthening the synergy of organizations and cultural exchange related to different forms of theatre.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The NITFest 2019 had discussion sessions on the very essential topics that were to be discussed in the theatre arena of Nepal. It was organized as part of the festival. It was a great opportunity to look at the past and evaluate it until today to page a better way for the future. Teb panel discussion sessions were scheduled and they discussed the role, scope, and motive of the theatre. Also, the equality and inclusion issues like women in theatre, disability in theatre were discussed. It also brought history and present together and saw what could be done.

Walking through the Edge of Nepali Theatre discussion moderated by author Rajan Mukarung had actors and actresses such as Sirjana Subba, Najir Husen, Prawin



Khatiwada, and Sarita Sah at the panel. As the motif of this discussion was to analyze the tendency of Nepali theatre towards marginal voices, they discussed on responsibilities, challenges and opportunities for theatre and artists in raising different voices. Whose stories are most available? How stereotypes are being nurtured or challenged? The panelists coming from different ethnic communities expressed their thoughts through the experience of their theatrical journey.

From the Ecuador of Cinema and Drama discussion raised and discussed on the issues like how does art uplift common people in social phenomenon? As there are many artists going from theatre background to film industry of Nepal and have been succeeding getting name and fame, their work in films had up-raised expectations towards Nepali theatre. In such situation what would be their responsibilities and what are the challenges? The discussion was centred on these questions. With the moderation of journalist and filmmaker Phulman Bal, the session had actors and actresses such as Bipin Karki, Menuka Pradhan and Buddhi Tamang on the panel who have reached to the peak of Nepali film after spending a long time in the theatre.

Looking Out, Looking Within was a one-on-one talk session with Anup Baral, one of the milestones in modern Nepali theatre. The session traced the history of modern Nepali theatre from his perspectives of relation with the society, challenges, compromises, and ways ahead. Moderator Pashupati Rai, who is the student of panelist Anup Baral also asked him questions on the relationship between theatre teacher and students and the teaching methodologies.

Children in Theatre: Sharing Experiences, Expanding Knowledge session explored questions like why theatre is important for children/students?, Which type of story we are doing with children? Which type of story, character, and theme should we choose? How these activities are supporting/disturbing mainstream theatre? Etc. It also showed its concern





on the target groups and questions if Nepali theatre is supporting or enforcing them. Moderator Kedar Shrestha sat together with panelists Aruna Karki, Tanka Chaulagain, Suman Kuikel and drilled the challenges and opportunities for the children in Nepali theatre. Meanwhile, it also discussed the impacts of the children related activities in Nepali theatre and its role in the social transformation of the society.

How Nepali drama is written? How it should be written? Who will write? session concentrated on the guidelines to write drama in Nepali. In the context of Nepal, where very few writers are approaching to be dramatists, the session went through the lack of original plays written in Nepal and the void of who should write it. Kumar Nagarkoti, Khagendra Lamichhane, and Yubaraj Ghimire, where the last two are also theatre directors, discussed through the guidelines to write a play, sustainability of the

playwright and impacts of the written dramas for the transformation of the society. It also touched the issue of translation and adaptation that Nepali theatre directors are using in absence of original plays written in Nepali. The session was moderated by poet and critic Shakuntala Joshi.

Looking Back at Nepali Theatre from my Last Alphabet session collected the experience sharing of veteran Nepali theatre artist Sunil Pokharel. Pokharel is regarded as one of the milestones to drag the theatre work in Nepal to current scenario. He remained silent for a long time after his theatre centre in Kathmandu collapsed. He has started a new theatre class named 'Gya', which is the last alphabet of Nepali script. In the conversation with poet Viplob Pratik, Pokharel explained how the older generation is looking at a new generation working in Nepali theatre.

Conflict Transformation and Social Change through Participatory Theatre session exchanged some ideas of national and international practices of using participatory theatre methods for social transformation. The panel had Maniram Pokharel, Gunjan Dixit, Gopal Aryal, Sarswati Chaudhary, Renuka Karki and Alain Fressanges (Cambodia) as speakers. Som Nath Khanal and Michael Thonhauser had jointly moderated the session. It included a screening of short video-clips of examples of participatory theatre work in various countries and fields and a participatory way of sharing experiences. It also dogged through how the conflict transformation in a peaceful way can be achieved through the participatory theatre activities like playback theatre and forum theatre. The panelists were the performers doing forum theatre and/or playback theatre or having had experience of it in the conflict-hit areas. It also digs out the process of healing through the participatory theatre. The discussion also tried to find the link between theatre and social transformation.

Disability Inclusion in Theatre Arts session raised serious issues through a casual discussion. Moderated by Sagar Prasai, a disability activist and writer with the



Mairi Taylor (Theatre Director from Scotland), Manish Prasain (Program Manager from National Federation of Disability Nepal) and Dayahang Rai (Actor/Director) at the panel, the discussion welcomed disability rights movement and Nepali theatre fraternity and asked where the effort should be made and how the inclusion can be achieved with the joint effort. The discussion talked about the challenges for the implementation of the included tools in the performativity form of the theatre.

Disability inclusion was tried out on the theatre itself. The sign language translators were employed for the opening ceremony, seminars and some of the performances so that people from the hearing-impaired community won't be left out. There was also given space to the interpreter in the live theatrical performances as well. Appreciating the effort, Bikas Thapa commented saying 'Thank you for giving space to the sign language' in the Facebook live video of the opening ceremony of the Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019.

Women in Theatre discussion session organized at Kausi Theatre, Teku, Kathmandu on March 3 had Akanchha Karki as the moderator and Shabari Rao

(India), Kismat Bano (India), Loonibha Tuladhar and Srijana Adhikari (Nepal). The participants discussed their involvement and struggle as women in theatre.

The discussion was concentrated on the hardships, mentorships, opening the theatre and the environment for the women in the theatre fraternity. It also brought different perspectives from different countries that enriched the comparison and learning experience at the both ends.

Respecting the Backstage Work in Theatre session focused on the importance of craft and technical team in the theatre. People often talk about the dialogue, script, and acting but there is an unsung hero in the backstage of every production without whom the drama would become incomplete. It also brought into limelight the backstage works that everyone should pay respect to because that takes equal effort. The session had Ingi Hopo Koinch Sunuwar as moderator and Ramhari Dhakal, Raj Kumar Pudasaini and Sarita Giri as the panelists.



DISCUSSION WITH DIRECTORS

In the Discussion with Director session, the directors and directresses whose play was performed in the previous day were invited for the discussion on the process, motivation, and politics of the play. It also captured the discussions on behind the play and other important aspects of playmaking. The everyday sessions were moderated by Anup Baral, Shiva Rijal, Shekhar Kharel, Archana Thapa, Ghimire Yuvraj, Akanchha Karki and Sudam CK joined by other artists from the 'Discussion with the Directors' team. They initiated the areas like the relevance of the play in the contemporary time, motives of the forms that the play was performed on, character sketch and other important aspects that make a play effective, etc. Not all the directors and directresses could make into the discussion but here are some of the glimpses of discussions that have happened.

Day 1

On the first day of this session, only the directors of Nepali plays staged on 26th February 2019 could make it possible to attend the discussion. Che Shankar of Memory Yard, Kedar Shrestha of Bhoko Ghar and Priyanka Jha and Sabin Kattel of Kishori had participated as directors. Archana Thapa and Akanchha Karki were present for the dialogue. However, moderators also brought in the issue of play *Private Confessions*, whose director couldn't attend due to the play's additional show in parallel festival. The session discussed on how the play *Private Confessions* portrayed the generation of gender oppression. It also discussed the areas like war is common everywhere. Kedar Shrestha, director of *Bhoko Ghar* focused on the metaphoric sense of the play and explored how hunger has reached areas like commercial, social, economic, gender in a metaphorical way. Priyanka Jha, co-director of *Kishori*, said this is not the story of today, women are

treated like that since yesterday and it will remain forever. This is her effort to put a break in its flow. The moderator Archana Thapa said, though we call ourselves modern women, we are still are confined as just a body flesh.

The discussion soon expended up to the process of presenting such tragic incidents in the stage. Archana Thapa asked if it becomes traumatic. Ghimire Yubaraj, the director of *Shilpee Theatre* said that, to act in a drama, either you have to enter into it or go back to your own life. According to him, it is a path of realization.

Kishori, the play had presented female actors even in place of male characters. Akanchha Karki showed her concern about the required sensitiveness while making of the serious scenes. She emphasized that it is the responsibility of the director to make sure that the audience responds appropriately. She was pointing to the situations where audiences were laughing at the serious things happening at the stage.

"What could be the reason?" asked Archana.

Akanchha replied, "May be because, people don't know how to react to sexuality".

Speakers also opined that it might be because of lack of awareness of these things in the society. "Because many of the males still don't take certain things as a problem" Archana stated, "This is the area theatre can intervene in."

"What yesterday's performances taught then?"

For Anup Baral, a director plays a major role in selecting things from the written text that can be expressed through his/her narrating styles. S/ he should be creative in doing so and he found that perfectly captured in '*Private Confessions*' (Macedonia) directed by Nina Nikolikj. He also appreciated the abstract beginning of *Black & White* (India) by Victor Thoudam but was not impressed the way it lost that height at the later part of the play.

“Does the gender issues raised by the female director make the difference?”

Akanchha in reply said it does. “Male might present that sensibly but sometimes that is not enough. Empathetic treatment is the most important part.” The audience asked similar question to Sabin Kattel, co-director of Kishori. He said, “I might not be able to talk about women’s things in society, but in the theatre stage it is possible. I can understand them.” Anup Baral, finding the connection in this question, got reminded of one of his works on gender issues. “While directing Mahesh Dattani’s play ‘30 Days in September’, though I was not in that suffering myself, I tried to get that emotion through my female characters. My job then is just to elaborate on what I can extract from them.”

Day 2

In the second discussion, writer, journalist Shekhar Kharel moderated the session with Akanchha Karki, Sudam CK, Jacques S. Matthiessen, Patrika Ghimire and Biplab Dey. The discussion began with Patrika’s play ‘Chapter Confession: My Father is a Murderer’. Talking on this, Karki explained that the play questioned the stereotypical aspect of a male child to be a masculine and female child to be feminine. The central character is the senior female police officer, which is a rare sight in the current Nepali police administration. Kharel then asked Patrika, why the reversal of the gender roles? Patrika answered, “I was going back to the society where people still can’t digest the gender reversal. Why don’t they just accept what is happening? Why we should be talking on women being a female inspector, can’t this be normalized this way?”



The discussion then moved forward with the appreciation of 'To Be' (Denmark) directed by Jacques Matthiesen for bringing a new form of narrating a story through puppetry. Sudam CK stated how Nepali theatre is struggling to get the new forms of narratives apart from dialogues. In the play, small objects like brush were used that is universal. He further stated that this play taught us to be more creative in finding the lens to tell the story. Kharel then asked Jacques, why puppets? Why nonverbal? Jacques said he was searching ways to talk about big issues like Human Rights in more simple and human ways so that small children could understand such subjects easily. He feels that making children aware of that is necessary. For him, the process has been exciting though it is still not up to its potential. And the props and puppets are very personal to him because he wanted the subject matter to come closer to him.

The discussion also focused on the meta-fictional ways of presentation employed by To Be, where all the audiences become like audiences. Jacques focused on putting himself at the heart of the imagination and feel what would his reaction when someone puts in

that situation. He put stress on going into the depth of the scene slowly so that it can make more sense.

"Will the audience engagement deliberate?" For Karki, actor/director should wait and see if the society is ready for these things or not.

Talking about the props used in the play is the visual texture of the play that is different from that of the cinema. "How these visual elements are connected to the audience?" Sudam had an answer to this. For him the style of the director matters. The way To Be was staged with only 60 limited audiences; it was so sure of its canvas. In style, it was welcoming the audiences closer.

Kharel then turned to Biplab Dey and asked why the marginalized community's issue was chosen in the play Champabati. Biplab said that he wanted to show the fold elements to the urban community from the story of marginalized people. He wanted to expose the condition where the higher community is treating women as the consumable products.

Day 3

The third discussion had Shiva Rijal as the moderator and Ram Hari Dhakal, director of Inside Outside (Nepal/Norway), Sayed Adris Edris Fakiri, director of Ta Rehaye (Afghanistan), Che Shankar, director of Memory Yard (Nepal) accompanied by Ghimire Yuvraj and Anup Baral. In this session war memory, portrayal and scenographic elements were the major issues discussed.

It began with the play Inside Outside and its scenography. Ram Hari Dhakal presented the play through the senses of the audiences. He made audiences blindfolded and took them into a voyage of war filled zone, a semi reproduction of Nepal's decade-long Maoist Insurgency. "Why so?" He replied, "If I want to focus on other senses, I had to keep the eyes closed." This play was an aberration in a way





to the Nepali theatre because trying to bring human senses deliberately in the play performance was never attempted before. If anyone had done, probably its scale was above that. Eyes were closed so that they would sense other things through their sense organs. They tried touching the things on their way and trying to recognize it without their eyes. Five people recognized the same thing in five different ways. They were connected to their personal experiences. He is happy in his experiment that proved that though the war was one, the experiences were completely different.

Ramhari further shared that he wanted to drag people to see the war from different senses because that was the real story on stage. He wanted to take the audience back there. Meanwhile, Anup Baral would love the play more had there been emphasis given to the character's reaction rather than focusing on the dialogues. Ramhari told that he too wanted to do that. He had asked the audiences to react as if they have seen something strange, but nobody could do that. Awakening their senses was the thing he would consider as a success for now. Allain Freesanges, coming from Cambodia to watch the theatre festival particularly liked the way the play was set. Though he didn't know Nepali, there were dedicated announcements for the English speakers as well. That was welcoming. And on the performance, in all three boxes, he liked the last one because they were walking above the dead heads of the people without knowing that. And this was symbolic.

Then Shiva Rijal asked Edris on how they found the question and for what motive? In reply, Edris said he wanted to tell the story that is happening right now in Afghanistan. As soon as he read the story, he jumped into the process that took 4 months for him to complete it. The issues that the story covers were happening outside the capital city. And he wanted to tell the people living in capital that these things are still happening somewhere in the country.

For Rajan Khatiwada, watching the story of Afghanistan brought him closer to the issue because Nepal also went through a similar terror of war. He liked the way Edris was searching for love even during the most dangerous time.

Shiva then brought the conversation towards 'I am Not Here' (India) directed by Deepika Arwind. What was the main thing that made a better mark in the performance? Ghimire Yuvraj, with a full praise of Deepika's work, liked the way that plays transfer deep subject matter into a performance. It switched different forms in between the play. Though the set was a boxing ring, the performers never played boxing literally. All of their actions and dialogue becomes metaphoric that attacks traditional male-dominated society with each



round of the play. For him creating that space for the audience to think and interpret scenes in their way was the major success of the play.

Michael asked to Che Shankar director of Memory Yard (Nepal) about some scenes that stuck in his mind. He sometimes saw the shadow in the curtain. That was not clear but that was there. In reply, Che shared his intention to bring the memory that keeps being afresh time and again. And it is also because memories vary between people to a person.

Day 4

In the fourth discussion, directors of Roop Aroop (India), In Transit (India), Hip Hop Copellia (Nepal) and Gaida Times (Nepal) were invited. Aditi Venkateshwaran, director of In Transit (India), Alize Biannic, director of Hip Hop Coppelia and Sijan Dahal, director of Gaida Times joined. Because the director of Roop Aroop Tripurari Sharma could not join the theatre festival, the two actors of the play represented. Shekhar Kharel, journalist and writer moderated the session along with Akanchha Karki and Ghimire Yubaraj.



The discussion began with In Transit. For Akanchha it was perfect performance canvas. The photos taken during the performance were so lively and like-painting when she saw after the performance. And it was, for her, not the story but the experience presented on stage. Then Shekhar asked Aditi about the process of the play. She said that they go in search of the meaning of their work even when they are on stage. It is the process of finding the images happening around. It is the expression of what is happening with every female out in the city. And the search to find different images will go on and on. Shekhar especially liked the synchronization made between characters. There are moving actions going on in the second row when the physical performance is happening on the front row. How did they achieve that? In reply, Aditi said it was a performance done by the dancer's body, not by the actor's mind. This is the question done by a dancer. It was the character's subjective experience.

For Aditi city is in our body. We, in every moment, are reacting against the happenings of the city. The body doesn't remain the same in the evening as it was in the morning. And every reaction is different. It keeps changing. It keeps moving between different transits. It is always in motion, hence the performance was also like the wave of the sea. It is like a clock sequence, hence there were some clock moves in the play.





Then the discussion moved towards *Roop Aroop*. For Shekher it was a meta-theatrical play where the stories were fragmented. It was a story of a man and a woman, but there was no man's land as well. He asked how space was created between them. In reply, the actors said it was an extended version of a two minutes sequence of another play. It is a story of a community of India who used to dance in the streets, later came into stage both personal and public. They wanted to come for their safety. The play was

also about dismantling the so-called truth that made my males as the male character, thinking himself as a female dancer, is teaching the female character how to be like a female.

Ghimire Yubaraj loved the nonverbal storytelling of *Hip Hop Coppelia* through the hip hop dance and other physical movements. The pantomime was also used to establish the communication. Then Kharel asked, why this form? Alize was happily creating a fusion of different dance forms in the play. Though the story was in traditional form, the telling was different. To make people understand the story, repeated moves were used whereas music and miming was used to give intense emotional touch to the story.

Then the discussion moved into a more intense debate on dance vs theatre. Akanchha began the discussion with the opener 'theatre and dance is in blur.' What is the difference? What effect does it produce? Alize insisted on saying story even in dance movement. Hence it is not theatre or actor's voice that only does things. For her action does more speaking than the words. Hence the debate should not be the issue because both are finding ways to tell the stories.

This is confusing and challenging for Aditi too because it has both acceptance and non-acceptance with it. Some say dance, some say theatre. It feels for her like no man's land. She came from a very rigid learning method of dancing. It was very difficult for her to deconstruct her storytelling. Her move is welcomed more or less by theatre but not by dance. She agrees with Alize on the thought that dancer doesn't act is not true.

Sijan Dahal was worried about the lack of humanity and integrity among the human community. So he chose the story of one horn Rhino to satire the human society on how inhuman and indifferent they are becoming with the growing consumerism.

Day 5

Discussion with director's fifth session invited Kiran Chamling, Sudam CK and Youbaraj Sharma 'Yurak' for the conversation moderated by Bimal Subedi, founder-director of Theatre Village along with Ghimire Yubaraj and Ashmina Ranjit.

Bimal Subedi began the discussion from the play Aaran. Youbaraj Sharma gave the background of the play and their theatre group from Sholukhumbu, a mountainous region where the roof of the world Mount Everest stands tall. They began performing the play under Sagarmatha Theatre Group from 2072 by organizing a theatre workshop. The social issues that they saw from their childhood came into their mind while designing the play for the festival. Hence the play Aaran was possible. It captured an issue of untouchability in contemporary society.

Then Bimal went for the play Paanch, which was one of the plays from Nepal which was performed through the body. For him, this play is the border-braking play.

He asked, why the story should be told through 5 male bodies. Sudam explained his desire to work with the body. He wanted to be a dancer and then came into the theater. Though he was acting, he had a deep desire towards the body. When he began, he didn't know what was going to happen. He sat with the 5 actors and start talking. They went on improvising and many things came over time. For him, the play is the mixture of emotions that he and actors discovered during the process of the play. The title Paanch, five in English is the symbol of 5 elements of body. He initially also thought of going with four actors assuming audiences as the fifth actor. "What learning did he get from the play?" Sudam replied, "I initially used to think that working with body means doing acrobatics and intensely physical performance, but now I am convinced that it is about feeling the intensity of the scene and presenting it through the body."

Bimal then moved towards Kiran Chamling. He was with him when he was working at the very beginning of the play in the playmaking workshop happened in Pokhara. Kiran has been successful to tell the text



in the visual form linking it with the cultural and geographical aspects of the play. “How he mixes political, social and cultural aspects?” Kiran said he is always conscious of the balance. He wanted to tell the story of a character who was hit by the war but by doing so he wanted to tell the story of the society as well. Other characters like his wife and son could take that issue in their characters. He wanted to show the impact of war at the bottom of society. In the play, the families are waiting for their husband and father to return. This wait for him is symbolic as it resembles the long wait of Nepali people for peace and prosperity. For him, Jase’s character is change.

Ashmina Ranjit asked Sudam CK on the process of conveying the things to the actors. Sudam replied that he was not forcing anything to come. He wanted to help them in between to find their relevance by themselves. The invisible dialogues came through their mental and emotional moments.

Day 6

The last-panel discussion Sabari Rao and Kismat Bano were present. Yangesh and Ashmita Ranjit moderated it.

Yangesh throws the opener question to Sabari Rao on how the idea came to question the existence of body and mind. Their play presented the big fat actors on stage as the play itself was produced by Big Fat Company. Rao, invited as a director for the play, explained that she used to work as a dancer. She used to work with her body. And their invited was a welcoming thing for her. Anuradha, one of the actors of the play, further explained that they wanted to tell the message that fat actors can also perform on stage. People talk about beauty in the stage. Can a fat guy play Shakespeare’s play? Can a fat lady be the Lady Macbeth? Who defines this boundary of beauty? They wanted to question. They wanted to question the norms of the body.



In their previous experiences, they used to give a side role in the play. The scenes used to be defined according to their body movement. If they could match the timing or not? How much space will they take? These kinds of things used to be asked. They wanted liberty from that. Hence they started their own theatre company including only the big sized actors. They wanted to destroy the stereotypes made upon their body to be over.

Anuradha said though they were conscious of their large bodies at the beginning, it went easy after some time. Now they are proud of their body and they are now confident in their theatre space.

Ghimire Yuvraj also shared how his fat belly was questioned when he was preparing for a king's role. He admits that Nepali theatre is still trying to get over from this silent stereotype. Meanwhile, Ashmina Ranjit, who practices visual art and performing art also shared how she gets confused about whether she is a theatre artist or not.

Shabari used to be the dancer hence she was aware of embodiment. Identity, mind, and body are connected with her. For her body shapes the identity a lot. Identity locates in the body. And as an actor, she thinks, one is reminded time and again how his/her body looks. They wanted this reminder to be over. She also questions the division one creates between theatre and physical theatre. Theatre is a theatre in itself. Why we need classifications? Some do it through texts and others do it through the body. We spoke a bit more from our bodies through this play.

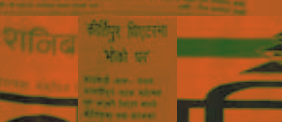
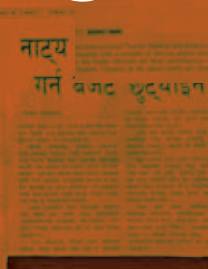
Yangesh then went towards Kismat Bano and asked why she decided to choose the story of Helen. Kismat, coming from the community which was not open to theatre, said she was encouraged by the story of Helen when she read her for the first time in class 4. She found herself like her. And later when she was rejected for the marriage because of her physical appearance, she found herself more close to them.

Helen was blind, she could not speak. She was not blind but she also could not speak when all these injustices were happening against her.





Media Coverage



Many of the national and international media covered NITFest activities with equal importance. Expanding the significance of the happening theatre festival, Kantipur, a leading national daily newspaper of Nepali language wrote an editorial recognizing the theatre festival as a wonderful opportunity to enhance the cultural exchange among different countries and learn from each other. The Kathmandu Post, leading English daily newspaper also published an editorial on importance of such activities in Nepal. Meanwhile, many other media covered the festival from various perspectives. Some called it a renaissance of Nepali theatre, while some published the interviews of the directors themed under the social transformation.



SUPPORTERS' STATEMENT

The Civil Peace Service believes that needed changes can happen over time if transformative methods and approaches are used. Conflicts and tensions cannot always be avoided, but their energies can be transformed into something positive or at least not harming.

GIZ-CPS supported the International Theatre Festival because theatre can be a powerful means to support transformation. It is not too confrontative, but yet a very strong method to encourage everybody's reflection on a personal and even societal or political level. It can encourage changes from the inside, which have the chance to last.

The plays and workshops were of such a great variety and were able to reach a huge audience in Kathmandu and way beyond in three more cities. Many theatre groups from Nepal worked together to make this happen and could build up important networks with international groups. In the end, we believe not only in Nepal, but a whole world without violence.

Verena Hinze

Coordinator

Civil Peace Service (GIZ-ZFD Nepal)

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Anup Neupane
Hena Nagarkoti
Suraj Tamu

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Sujata Maharjan
Usha Bhandari
Nhuja Maharjan

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