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## **Sacred Space, Spectacle and Being Visible: Exploring the Indra Jatra Festival of Kathmandu**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper, through narratives and enactment of myths and legends that surround around its celebration, aims to study Indra Jatra/Kumari Jatra, a popular street festival in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. It is that time of the year when the Kathmandu Kumari or Royal Kumari also known as living goddess makes three public appearances. It aims to put forward the idea of spectacle and its political use through the appearance of Kumari in Indra Jatra. It provides the various facets of these festivals where different performances of ritual were inserted, appropriated and introduced to accentuate the political milieu at different times. Thinking through this festival, this paper tries to unravel the idea of sacred space as a 'contested space' or 'consented space', domination of spectacle within the sacred space and the politics of being visible within the space questioning Kumari's appearance as a divine or political presence. This paper will attempt to question if we should either look at the festival as a celebration of religious harmony in the valley, that has been seen by many scholars, or is there a need to delve deeper and see the possible ways in which the festival was created to gain power through the process of incorporation and subversion in the long run.

**Keywords:** Kumari, Indra Jatra, Sacred Space, Spectacle, Visibility.

### **Introduction**

Indra, the God of rain, disguised as a stranger, was roaming in the Kathmandu Valley in search of the parijata flower as promised to his mother. He had descended from the heaven with his elephant Pulikishi. As the night approached, the local people grew suspicious of his presence and captured him. Pulkishi, not being able to find his master, ran around the streets frantically searching for him. Indra's mother got worried since her son didn't return on time and so came down to earth looking out for him disguised as Dagini. The local people caught hold of her as well. She asked for her son in return of rain in the Valley. Eventually Indra was released and he ascended back to heaven with his mother. (Mellowship 121-122)

The Indra Jatra festival is basically an enactment of the above myth with many newer characters added on later. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the bright fortnight (*Bhadra*) of the Lunar calendar, the festival starts off with the erection of *Lingo*, a pole brought from the Nala forest after performing the rituals of choosing the perfect tree for the event. It is celebrated with pomp and vigor by both the Hindus and Buddhists of Kathmandu. In this eight day long which is also the biggest street festival the Kathmandu Kumari (the living goddess) makes appearances on the third, fourth and the last day respectively. Kumari or Dyah Meiju (in Newari), also known as the living or virgin goddess, has been worshipped in Nepal as an incarnation of the most powerful Hindu goddess Taleju. She is a pre-pubescent Buddhist girl of the Newar community of Nepal and is selected on the basis of the physical perfection of thirty two lakshans (characteristics) and an auspicious horoscope. Considered to be the embodiment of an extraordinary body she is worshipped as a goddess until she attains puberty, either physiologically or undergoes a symbolic experience of the same. This paper will attempt to question if we should either look at the festival as a celebration of religious harmony in the valley, that has been seen by many scholars, or is there a need to delve deeper and see the possible ways in which the festival was created to gain power through the process of incorporation and subversion in the long run. It is a very significant moment for her devotees who get to see and take her blessings. She is pulled in a chariot along with two smaller chariots of Ganesh and Bhairava in the crowded streets of Kathmandu. The space, therefore, is not a fixed stage but it comprises of the streets through which the chariots are pulled off.

One cannot ignore the political significance this act brought in for the Mallas during that time. The association of Kumari Jatra with the Indra Jatra also meant a bigger support from both the Hindus and the Buddhists, the majority communities in the valley. Indra Jatra becomes a crucial medium to understand the history because of the multiplicity of narratives talking about different times and rules. It can also prove to be fruitful method of looking at how narratives have the capacity to change the course of history and bring forth lesser-known occurrences that had been suppressed under the burden of authentic and false binaries.

My present research has emerged from extensive fieldwork in three cities of Nepal: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan. Intending to facilitate a dialogic discourse between the disciplines of ethnography and performance studies, I have tried to subvert conventional ethnographic studies of the Newar community by evincing how these studies have only perpetuated the existing power structures. In this regard, I have also tried to ascertain how a specifically South Asian “performance” of the problematic still continues to exceed the grasp of theoretical complexes which have originated in the West.

### **Indra Jatra and Kumari Jatra**

It is said that this festival was started by King Gunakamadeva in around 10<sup>th</sup> century and it was only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Jaya Prakasha Malla, the last of the Malla kings,

Kumari Jatra was also associated (Mellowship 119). One cannot ignore the political significance this act brought in for the Mallas during that time. The association of Kumari Jatra with the Indra Jatra also meant a bigger support from both the Hindus and the Buddhists, the majority communities in the valley. Indra Jatra becomes a crucial medium to understand the history because of the multiplicity of narratives talking about different times and rules. The importance of an event depends a lot on the content and the significance it holds among the public/ spectator. Indra Jatra, on its own, would not have been this big an event if the Kumari Jatra had not been associated with it. Towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century Jaya Prakasha Malla (1736-1768), the last Malla king of Kathmandu, had to face the animosity of the neighboring Malla kings who had their eyes on the valley. He had anticipated the unseen danger that was to befall if he did not take an immediate action. The political situation of that time was not in favor of the king. On one hand, he lived under a constant fear of being replaced by his brothers and on the other hand there was another danger of being annexed by the army of Pritvinarayan Shah's army who had been trying to invade the valley since a long time. It was during this time that Malla brought the then Kumari of Kathmandu out of her community and established Kumari *Chen* (Kumari Palace) for her. He was very much aware of the religious sentiments of people and so he provided the channel through which they could exercise their beliefs. In 1760 he built a chariot for Kumari and he invented the Kumari Jatra in 1760 and officiated it through which history would remember him. It became an indispensable part of Indra Jatra festival in such a way that Kumari Jatra became the centre of attraction in the name of Indra Jatra. The Kumari Jatra played a very crucial role in order to establish his territory and gain favor in the eyes of his subjects. It was his way of claiming that space where he could perform the role of both a devotee and the king of the valley.

### **Sacred Space and the discourse of Consent/Contest**

David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal have noted that the definition of sacred can be broadly categorized into two parts: substantial and situational: where the former stresses on the 'experiential qualities' that can be associated with the sacred, the latter talks more about the creation of the sacred through 'human labor of consecration' in producing that space dominated by two ways: appropriation through power and exclusion through purity (Chidester and Linenthal). They argue:

The most significant aspects of sacred space are not categories, such as heaven, earth and hell, but hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession (p.17).

I take a departure here and argue that the concept of sacred space goes beyond the dualistic character of situational and substantial. It has rather taken an eclectic shape exhibiting its performative side with a vibrant political color. The ramification of being invisible can go to the extent of being lost and forgotten. The visibility that a public worship receives is far greater than

a private form of worship. It not only brings to surface the invisible part of worship, but it also demonstrates the real location of the power and who has the power to exercise power.

As Ernest Renan calls nation is a daily plebiscite, so is this act of creating the sacredness of the space and the politics of being visible on a daily basis. The annual necessity of moving out from the interior of temple to the streets and public Squares as per strategy of sacred time frame opens many layers of social hierarchy and power dynamics deeply embedded in the social and political structures. I term it as performative strategy in the sense that these festivals never clashed with each other. In order to build or establish the hierarchy of a certain section be it the society, the community or the state, one of the most important strategy would be to claim or create a space either through contestation or consent. I would like to argue that the creation of the public space for public worship was not for a unified and egalitarian form of worship, but to draw the line between the state and the people through a refined hegemonic process; sacralisation of not only the space, but also the relationship between the state and the divinities where the patron during monarchy and now the government head became Kumari's first worshipper in public. There is always a possibility of using a performative space in 'unintended ways' as Erica Fisher-Lichte asserts (2008:108). In this case more than the worship, the presence of Kumari becomes the symbol of empowering the already powerful ones and ritualizing the hierarchy time and again. The legitimate ownership of a space and the act of sacralising it through appropriation, inclusion or exclusion not only gives visibility but also political leverage and social control in the hands of few. A public worship can be seen as a public demonstration of power; be it the power of being the torchbearers of a rich cultural heritage or the power of being the forerunner of the political system of the state. It is not surprising to see the political community of Nepal not missing out any opportunity to be seen in these festivals. They do not take part in the procession but only during the inauguration or conclusion of the events. A moving space can be performative, no doubt, but a fixed space gives more control and the sense of territorialisation is dense; no matter whether they take part in the procession or not but they are always considered the first worshipper of the deities making their position more pronounced.

The question of a sacred space takes a crucial turn when the dialogic and dialectic relationship between the secular and religion comes to forefront. This asks us to think if the secular space is overtaken by the religious space or if there is still a possibility of an alternative space that does not make people a part of this 'sacredness' by default, but by choice.

### **Spectacle and its Domination**

Indra Jatra exhibits end number of performances that starts from the Basantapur (royal compound) premises and spreads out towards the streets of Kathmandu. Each and every performance in the festival is accompanied by individual narratives and sometimes merged with other narratives justifying their appearance. One such interesting narrative is the interlinking of

Bhairava and Kumari to the Indra narrative. It can be seen as a good example that allows one to see the inclusion of these deities to the festival and create a spectacle out of their performance. There is a corollary to the Indra myth that when Dagini came down to earth in search of Indra, she was accompanied by Bhairava. Being left behind, Bhairava was challenged by a demon that emerged victorious. In that hour of crisis, Bhairava called for help and it was Kumari who came and slaughtered the demon with her prowess. It is from that day onwards Bhairava never comes out of his abode without the attendants who guard him all the time (Toffin 78). It is a gradual process of various narratives intermixing to validate a festival where people from both the religion can be equal partakers. Thus Indra Jatra becomes a site of re-enactment of narratives that have the ability to survive on their own and yet they come up together in the form of an eight day long festival with an aim to exhibit its power to entrance the public/spectator.

A very important quality of the festival is that there have been many kinds of changes but the changes are in terms of ritual and performances. For instance, the parade of the Prithvinarayan's army of music band is a clear example of addition post-1768 invasion. Not only that, the giant head mask of Swet Bhairava was a later addition during the rule of Rana Bahadur Shah in 1795(Toffin 78). As regard this Gerard Toffin writes, "In doing so, they were searching to legitimate their power in the eyes of the Newar local population and reinforce the various sacra attached to their throne (75)." This indicates the fear of opposition from the public. The ruling sides have attempted to maintain the interest of the public by letting the ritual practices in the same order however, they have also tried to accommodate in many performances wherever they can, giving it a performative color and meaning. Referring to the British monarchy, David Cannadine writes how meaning is altered not by the rituals and ceremonies but by the way it is performed. It is a gradual meaning-making process which is always on the move. He writes, "And so depending both on the nature of the performance and the context within which it is set, the 'meaning' of what is ostensibly the same ceremony might fundamentally alter (106)." The fluid nature of this process makes the confluence of the narratives possible and hence produce the desired effect on the participants of the festival: performers and spectators alike.

Indra Jatra has not only empowered the royal patrons, it has also seen the roles being changed from the royalty to the government heads after the abolition of monarchy in 2008, when the king's duties remain unattended. It becomes crucial to observe who performs the role of the king in the whole performance of Kumari worship. Will there be any room for the king or would it be erased altogether giving rise to newer traditions? When Gyanendra became the king of Nepal, post the gruesome and mysterious royal massacre of King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah and his entire family, he made every effort to please the people by emerging out of Kumari Chen with a *tika* (a paste of rice, curd and vermilion) on his forehead, a sign of the newly appointed Kumari's approval.<sup>1</sup> In the Indra Jatra of 2007, the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had entered the Kumari Chen, declaring that doing so he was breaking the tradition of the kings bringing victory to the people (Tree 336). Also the Maoist party did declare that it would wipe out all the institutions associated with the royalty. However, when Maoist government came to

power in 2008, a flag was hoisted at the Kumari Chen for some time which read ‘The Communist Party salutes Kumari’(Letizia36),and the first thing the president Ram BaranYadav did was go to Kumari Chen and receive Kumari’s blessing as a sign of her approval(Shimkhada, 2008). Would it be right to call it an act of stepping into the king’s shoes? As the actors take on new garbs, it becomes crucial to look if they are going to perform a politically-driven role and leave the tantric initiation done by the previous kings to the good care of the priest.

### **Claiming and Appropriation of the Political and Cultural Space**

We can either look at the festival as a celebration of religious harmony in the valley or else we need to delve deeper and see the possible ways in which the festival was created through the process of incorporation and subversion in the long run. One cannot rule out the politics of sanskritization that this festival had to go through. It was known as Ye Yan<sup>ii</sup> festival of Newar community before being renamed as Indra Jatra Festival after the Shah invasion in 1768 by Gorkha King Prithvinarayan Shah. As John Mellowhip writes, “Converting Ye Yan to a composite Parbatia/ Newar festival for the whole of Nepal meant sanskritizing many aspects of Ye Yan ritual(119)”. Nepal did go through a massive transformation post 1768: the first one being the unification of Nepal. Shah unified many districts and princely states under one name Nepal i.e. the Kathmandu centric Nepal.

Indra Jatra showcases a movement from the *Newari* elements to a more of brahminical intentions fully supported by the Shah rule from the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not only did the Shah dynasty replace the Malla dynasty, they also attempted to erase the presence of Malla history in the festival itself. For instance, a white horse of Malla dynasty’s tutelary deity Taleju used to attend the beginning of the festival. However, when Shah Dynasty came to power, there did come a white horse for sure, but not as Taleju’s horse but as Shah King’s horse (Toffin77). Toffin writes that it was the Shah rule and the dominance of Parbatiya elite who supported the rule that was reshaping the rituals. The employment of Brahmin priests in most of the rituals itself questions the very essence of the festival when it was actually a Newar festival and not a pure Hindu festival. The more the festival went far from the community, the more it lost its previous touch and got assimilated in a different look with basic structure remaining the same; the skeleton of the past remains as a vague memory.

The parallelism between Indra and the King is unmistakable in many instances during Indra Jatra which asks us to think if it was invented to empower the King, create a certain aura amongst his subjects and also legitimate his position as par with the God. Toffin gives a very good example of the festival during the reign of Pratapa Malla when the location of the festival had to be shifted due to his inability to be present in Kathmandu(Toffin87). His presence is important just like Indra’s presence and also it is only the King who is eligible to observe the festival in true sense of the term. Even the post-Malla rule, the Shah Kings were considered as the incarnation of Vishnu and during the festival the ten *avatars* (incarnations)of Vishnu is being played out in front of the former royal palace, Hanuman Dhoka. This identification with gods is

not an uncommon phenomenon and in case of Nepal as well it gets projected in a very interesting manner.

One important point to discuss here is how the formation of various groups in the 2000 year old Newar community is influenced by the Hindu caste system to a great extent. The concept of caste had penetrated into the community giving rise to categorization of duties in the social sphere. The Indra Jatra is a suitable example where various roles and duties are assigned to the members of the community according to their caste. For instance, Kumari belongs to the Shakya caste, the Buddhist priests belong to the Vajracharya and Shakya caste, Majipa Lakhey belongs to the Ranjitkar caste, and the people pulling the chariot belong to the Jyapu caste and so on. The division of labor is made in such a way that the priestly caste like Vajracharya and Shakya perform the less-laborious roles whereas cloth dyeing caste like Ranjitkar have to wear masks and costumes as heavy as 15 kg. This hierarchy of caste is also an effect of sanskritization in the valley with the advent of dynasties like Mallas and Shahs who followed Hindu deities and supported the inclusion of Indian Brahmins in their courtly affairs.

### **The Politics of Being Seen in the Scene**

Mikhail Bakhtin in his work on 15<sup>th</sup> century French Renaissance writer Rabelais discovers that the carnival space is a homogenous space shading off all the barriers of 'caste, property, profession and age' (p.10). Referring to the official feast as a 'consecration of inequality', carnival projects a contrast picture of an egalitarian approach (Ibid.). The carnivalesque traits became a part and parcel of not only the social life but also religious and political life where it was completely 'independent of Church and State but tolerated by them' (Ibid.). Thus, the carnivalesque flavor penetrated into every aspect of society making its presence felt, thereby forming a homogenous identity through the suspension of hierarchy, purely as a feast of 'becoming, change and renewal' (Ibid.). In the context of public worship and the processions taken under study, my approach towards this theory of Bakhtin provides a critique to this carnival model where the festival space is not necessarily subverting the power but reinforcing and somewhere contributing to the authority. In the case of Indra Jatra/ Kumari Jatra, the strong sense of hierarchy comes out in open: one community fighting for its hijacked identity, one religion using its appropriation skills, and above all, the ruling section solidifying its hold over the population through the manufacturing of the lineage of gods and goddesses.

The emergence of 'being seen' is not a new phenomenon and not even restricted to one region or culture. It is a universal human tendency because the sense of identity, empowerment and voice is deeply rooted to it. Daniella Berti discusses the 'privileged framework' where politics combines with ritual and religious activities in the Kullu Dussehra, a week long annual festival in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh where the king (also a local BJP MP) gains political visibility in the event of god Raghuraj's meeting with the local deities (p.107). She argues, "With the end of the kingdoms, these ritual contexts, far from being abandoned, have been integrated and reinterpreted by the new democratic state" (Ibid.). Not only that, even the

royal patronage was deliberated on the local deities in order to gain visibility and hence legitimacy into the local ritual sphere (Berti 2011,126). The ramification of being invisible can go to the extent of being lost and forgotten. The visibility that a public worship receives is far greater than a private form of worship. It not only brings to surface the invisible part of worship, but it also demonstrates the real location of the power and who has the power to exercise power. Chantal Saint-Blancat and Adriano Cancellieri write about an annual Filipino religious ritual in the form of a procession in the streets of Padua, Italy. Filipinos are a minority group in Padua and this procession transforms the streets into a sacred space for the duration of that event. What the authors try to stress here is that a public religious ritual is not only a process of a community of one faith coming together as one identity, but it is a “clear quest for public visibility to ‘take place’ and ‘make place’” (p.646). In this identitarian quest we should not take it for granted that each and every individual is in the same plain and hence the same visibility will be achieved uniformly.

There is an unstated hierarchy starting from the lowest to the highest strata and this becomes prominent in the public form of worship; hierarchy in a social, religious and political sphere. Firstly, the caste-based work attributed to the people of the Newar community during the festivals, where the most laborious works are given to the lower or untouchable caste whereas the higher or the priestly caste engage in attending the deities or the supervisory works which highlights another form of hierarchy at a social level. One important point to discuss here is how the formation of various groups in the 2000-year-old *Newar* community is influenced by the Hindu caste system to a great extent. Michael Allen observes:

Newar society is today, and has been for at least seven hundred years, organized on a classic Hindu caste basis. By this I mean that the total community is divided into a large number of hereditary groups, each of which is endogamous, associated with one of more traditional occupations, and the members of which relate to the members of other like groups by reference to notions of relative purity (Allen 2000,166).

Caste is penetrated into the idea of community which gives rise to categorization of duties in the social sphere. The relation between visibility and caste identity is the amount of visibility differed according to the caste. It was not just the duties that are divided, but also the probability of being visible; the visibility in the periphery and the centre. The Indra Jatra is a suitable example where various roles and duties are assigned to the members of the community according to their caste. For instance, Kumari belongs to the Shakya or Vajracharyacaste, the Buddhist priests belong to the Vajracharya and Shakya caste, Majipa Lakhey belongs to the Ranjitkar caste, the sweepers of the road belong to Dyahla caste, the traditional musicians to the Khadgi caste, the people pulling the chariot mainly belong to the Jyapu caste, the Manandhar caste pulling the poles, and so on and so forth. The division of labor is made in such a way that the priestly caste like Vajracharya and Shakya perform the less-laborious roles whereas cloth dyeing caste like Ranjitkar have to wear masks and costumes as heavy as 15 kg. Ram Ranjitkar, a

Majipa Lakhey performer says that Lakhey's job is to lead the Kumari's path and has to run for hours bare footed, dancing in sync with the drum beats (The Nation, 2014). However, also it has to be noted here that the concept of labor cannot be the only yardstick to measure the practice of caste within the socio-politico-religio-cultural sphere.

Secondly, the hierarchy of Brahmin priests replacing or taking part in the public worship along with the Newar priest on the same platform, identifying the king with Hindu god and appropriating them in the religious rituals is another form of hierarchy in terms of religious level. We see a gradual movement or an attempt to replicate the royal Hindu structure of the Mallas and the Shahs by Newar community either to show their loyalty or to be included within the royal sphere. Although the Brahmans were given the highest status in Licchavi period also, however, from the Malla rule onwards, they were not only reserved for the king and those closest to him, even the high-ranking Newari Shresthas of Lalitpur (Patan) started to include them as their principle domestic priests while the Buddhist priests were kept for tantric rituals (*diksa-guru*) only (Gellner 766). Post Shah Invasion, the Shresthas of Kathmandu adopted the same strategy to associate themselves with dominant Parbatiya, the loyals of the Shah rulers (Ibid.767). As a result, the Brahman priests gradually outnumbered the Buddhist priests in the ritual space as the former had the king's favor, although the latter were not totally wiped out from the ritual life of the valley. However, their importance did wane to a considerable degree as the Brahman presence was imposed on the festival rituals as an inevitable part of the worship be it public or private. This increasing participation in the 'negotiated or reinvented'<sup>iii</sup> ritual space, started from Shrestha households and ended with the festivals that were not even Hindu festivals to begin with. In the present context, even the *Guthi* official who is supposed to be a Newar belongs to a Nepalese Brahmin caste and performs the task of displaying the *Bhoto* display during the *Jatra*, whereas the Newari attendants of the deity take care of him throughout the year.

There is also an attempt to draw a parallel between Indra and the King. This asks us to think if it was invented to empower the King to create a certain aura amongst his subjects and also legitimate his position as par with the God. Toffin gives an example of the festival during the reign of Pratapa Malla when the location of the festival had to be shifted due to his inability to be present in Kathmandu (Toffin 87). His presence is important just like Indra's presence and also it is only the King who is eligible to observe the festival in true sense of the term. Even the post-Malla rule, the Shah Kings were considered as the incarnation of Vishnu and during the festival the *das avatars* (ten incarnations) of Vishnu is being played out in front of the former royal palace, Hanuman Dhoka. B V Hoek mentions that the honorific of the king is *Sri Panch* i.e. five times lustre and that of the Brahmin is six times lustre *Sri Cha*. He writes:

The divinity of the Brahmin, of course, has always been beyond question in Indian tradition. It is the divinity of the king which is puzzling with its apparent ambivalence and transience (p.152).

This identification with gods is not an uncommon phenomenon and in case of Nepal, its projection is not merely restricted to a metaphorical and metaphysical level, but conflated with the political understanding of the rulers' eligibility to become a god-ruler.

### **Conclusion**

The site of Indra Jatra festival becomes a confluence of many narratives- some holding their position with authority and some confronting with resistance to fight back anonymity. It is a parallel universe where the content of the narrative is more important than its authenticity; where the enactment of those narratives are important than their narration. The festival has brought in not only the people from both the communities together but it has grown out of a small space to a larger accommodating space, taking in various elements like Guru's army, Majipa Lakhey, various professional musical groups, Kumari Jatra, women chariot pullers and so on; one cannot deny the addition of many more characters and rituals which must have been added in the due course of time.

All throughout the performances my eyes kept searching for some hints of Indra after all the festival was named after him. However, apart from the *lingo*, I could hardly find anything substantial. All of the characters were present and had performed their roles. Then I remembered Dagini's promise of rain and it also signified the rain god Indra's presence everywhere inhabiting the space of the Square and the streets equally. Kathmandu experiences mild showers during and after this festival. It was this presence that was felt during the event. This also brings to light another important contribution of climate or weather to the success of an event. Another incident which caught my eye was the significance of torch in a broad daylight that was being carried out when performers like Pulukishi, Lakey and so on made an appearance. It signifies night time where they are trying not to get lost in the streets as they search for the lost Indra. The act is so simple but it brings a totally different view of the space and time being used and the effect is palpable. This is also the only time of the year when giant masks of *Swet* Bhairava (White Bhairava) and *Akash* Bhairava (Sky Bhairava) are displayed in and around the Square. They exhibit the ownership of the space for eight long days and give us a notion of the celestial elements being filled in that empty space of the Square. It becomes a platform to showcase the authority and the golden reign of the kings of yesteryears, the re-establishment of Newarcommunity's rich Kumari culture, the symbolic religious harmony and another victorious effort of performing century's old ritual in a modern era through the traffic prone streets of Kathmandu.

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Fig.1 Kathmandu Kumari during *Kumari Jatra*. Taken in September, 2014.



Fig.2 Akash Bhairav (in blue costume at the backdrop) performing with his two guards (in red costumes) during *Indra Jatra*. Source: Nepal Now.



Fig.3 Majipa Lakhey during *Indra Jatra*. Source: Manohar Ranjit.



Fig.4 King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah and Queen Aiswarya Shah during *Kumari Jatra*. Source: Flickr.



Fig.5 King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and Queen Komal Shah during *Kumari Jatra*. Source: Nepal Pictures.



Fig.6 President Ram Baran Yadav (second from left), Prime Minister Baburam Bhattari (extreme right) and other dignitaries during *Kumari Jatra*. Source: Getty Images.

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<sup>i</sup>Generally the kumari is replaced after the death of a king, but there was a sudden haste to do that. The massacre had taken place in the month of June and the installation took place three months ahead of *Dasain*, which is usually believed to be the most auspicious time.(Tree, 2014:101, 107)

<sup>ii</sup>Ye is an old name for Kathmandu and Yan meant festival.

<sup>iii</sup>The definition of sacredness keeps altering and there is always a need for negotiating and redefine it (Kiong and Kong, 2010:31).