

Paradox in Physical Distancing : Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Rato Matsyendranatha Chariot Festival in Kathmandu Valley

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Rato Matsyendranatha Chariot festival is one of the major Newari festivals in Kathmandu valley. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic Government of Nepal has declared the lockdown and implemented the protocol of “Physical distancing” by which the Rato Matsyendranatha Chariot festival, have first postponed and later rescheduled just for fulfilling the ritual formalities in this year. This study explores the paradoxes in physical distancing compliance over the celebration of the Rato Matsyendranatha festival in the Newari community during COVID-19. I used an exploratory ethnographic framework of qualitative research design by taking nine respondents and conducted an in-depth interview. I found that in the Newar community the protocol of physical distancing has created the contradictory and paradoxical situation that people have to decide whether health should have prioritized or the continuation of cultural tradition has to be assured. On the one hand, if they have chosen the option of “physical distancing” by ignoring and

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dropping the Chariot then it has to lead them towards the discontinuity of culture and tradition. On the other hand, if they have ignored the option of "physical distancing" by focusing on the continuity of cultural tradition then it has to lead them toward the health risks of a pandemic. Thus, though the protocol of "physical distancing" and "celebration of the festival" is paradoxical but essential preconditions to save the life of individual Newars.

[**Keywords** : Paradox, Physical distancing, COVID-19, Pandemic, Rato Matsyendranatha]

1. Introduction

A pandemic can be defined as an outburst of the disease that spreads a global level. It is more than an epidemic in the sense that it has more effect on many people and takes more lives. World Health Organization (WHO, 2020a) states about the newly originated pandemic as :

In January 2020 a previously unknown Coronavirus was identified in Wuhan province of China. The group of conditions related to infection by this new virus is named as 'Coronavirus Disease 2019' (COVID-19). Moreover, it is also declared to be a pandemic when it became apparent that the illness was severe and that it was spreading quickly around the globe. ("Director-General's media briefing", para 4)

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses which causes illnesses as a form of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases. Among them, a COVID-19 newly identified one that has not been identified in humans hitherto (Physiopedia, 2020). Though, the source of this newly identified COVID-19 is yet to be completely determined, but investigations are continuing to identify the zoonotic source to the pandemic (Public Health England, 2020). In addition, the current information is indicating that transmission of human-to-human is possible. Moreover, Public Health England (2020) pointed out that "the routes of transmission of COVID-19 remains unclear at present, but evidence from other Coronaviruses and respiratory diseases indicates that the disease may spread through large respiratory droplets and direct or indirect contact with infected secretions" ("Guidance COVID-19", para 2).

The socio-economic impact of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic has received significant public attention all over the world. During the pandemic, the WHO and other public health experts have

suggested several precautionary measures related to personal and public health to reduce the outbreak and control the virus. One of such major and globally established protocol is physical distancing. O'Brien (2020) defines physical distancing as the following :

While not new the term 'social/physical distancing' was barely known before 2020. It was promoted by the WHO in 2008 as a public health measure to prevent transmission of influenza, and in various forms, it can be identified in reference distancing is more likely to have been associated with stigma, negative connotations, and something to be avoided (para 1).

Similarly, physical distancing, according to WHO (2020a), describes "a set of non-pharmaceutical measures that are taken to prevent the spread of an infectious disease by maintaining a physical distance between people and reducing the number of times people come into close contact with each other" ("Director-General's media briefing", para 3). At the same time, many governments around the world including Nepal have imposed lockdowns, stay-at-home, and curfews on its citizens in order to implement a strict execution of the physical distancing protocol and minimize the spread of the virus.

The rapidly growing worldwide COVID-19 pandemic crisis continues to have a stern effect on socio-cultural celebrations including festivals. Festivals are a socio-cultural phenomenon that occurs in every human societies and cultures. Moreover, the festival has taken as "a sacred or profane time of celebration, marked by special observances" (Getz & Page, 2016 : 67). They are performed in different locations, times, and in virtual spaces, too. They are in different types from food festivals, dance, and music to a combination of art forms, ranging from the smallest community to wide-scale music festivals with lots of participants.

There are different studies which showed about what motivates people to attend and celebrate festivals are escape from everyday life, socialization, and family togetherness (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Jepson et al., 2019). Moreover, these festivals reinforce and renew social belongingness, where the human need for "frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with others" (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013 : 214) can be satiated and where socio-cultural capital can be developed and sustained (Wilks, 2011; Quinn & Wilks, 2013). Festivals are occasions where the participants' utopian ideals for society are explored but at the same time "festivity" as a social

phenomenon answers the human need for continuity that reaffirms the structure and order of society (Small, 1998; Newbold & Jordan, 2016). Therefore, the same argument, perceptions and functions do apply to Newari festival of *Rato Matsyendranatha* Chariot, too.

Obviously, *Rato Matsyendranatha* is one the major Newari festivals which is celebrated by the unique Newar community in Nepal. According to Nepali (1965), though, the origin of Newars is a controversial issue but they are the people of diverse origins as their traditions revealed. Moreover, Nepali (1965) further clarified that “the term Newar is applied to designate several former ethnic groups ...a homogeneous community with common traditions of language and other social heritage” (p. 18).

As a preventive measure, the government of Nepal had enforced first time a nation-wide lockdown from 24 March 2020 to 21 July 2020, restricting people’s movement in order to break the chain of the COVID-19 transmission. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown all major festivals of Newari community in Kathmandu valley including the chariot procession of the *Seto Matsyendranatha*, *Bisket Jatra*, *Bajrayogini*, *Tongue Piercing*, *Sindur festival*, and *Rato Matsyendranatha* have either been rescheduled, canceled or postponed.

Since COVID-19, however, the concept of “physical distancing” has become a mainstream protocol, associated with safety and the protection of the individual than for each individual, physical distancing has become a social obligation and a health imperative. In fact, this became a strange and unusual situation. The idea of maintaining the distance between people of the same community, society, and surrounding seems unusual and antithetical to the notion of a social and cultural bond. Social and cultural relationships are loci to maintain order and equilibrium in every society, but it is rare to imagine maintaining such relationships without the freedom to negotiate the space between individuals. The COVID-19 precautions even do not permit a heartening touch or a handshake which is more or less related to the ways of cultural expressions.

My argument here is on the fact that though the call for physical distancing is regarded as a good one and promises to be one of the most effective non-pharmaceutical ways to control the spread of the virus, there are many cultural paradoxes that the physical distancing compliance is likely to cause to the people and their communal

norms of life. The provisions of “physical distancing” compliance in the name of COVID-19 itself seems to be contradictory and absurd. They are not only incompatible in terms of the celebration of festivals but also paradoxical, too.

So, the purpose of this study is to explore the paradoxes in physical distancing compliance over the celebration of *Rato Matsyendranatha* festival in the Newari community during COVID-19. It discusses particularly on how, in the face of Newari communal norms regarding the celebration of this festival, the strict observance of physical distancing may affect people’s sense of being/personhood. Thus, the key research question of the study is, how has created paradoxes over the celebration of Rato Matsyendranatha festival in the Newari community in recognition of adhering to the COVID-19 physical distancing?

2. The Anthropology of Epidemics and Pandemics

Medical Anthropology in general and Anthropology of Epidemics in particular focus on the relationship between anthropology and epidemics or pandemics. The anthropology of epidemics explained “epidemics” as total social phenomena. Moreover, it has focused on processes and events which encompass and exercise a transformational impact on social life (Kelly, Keck & Lynteris, 2019). Anthropologists have a sophisticated history with the study of epidemics and their control. During the imperial expansion, disease outbreaks had created the obstacle and instrument to create the context and justification for policies of segregation, resettlement, quarantine, and population surveillance (Arnold, 1993; Hoppe, 2003). Many historical experiences show that epidemic and pandemic threats contour our contemporary political rationalities and social realities. Moreover, emerging and re-emerging infections routinely expose the weakness of our collective systems of disease surveillance and control, fueling anxieties of future, and increasingly catastrophic, pandemics (Caduff, 2015).

Similarly, Keck, Kelly, and Lynteris (2019) further stated that “epidemics are the dark side of modernization, medical, and political progress...represent the impossibility of securing the body politic in an ever-more interconnected, technologically advanced, and globalized world” (p. 14). Similarly, the term “pandemic” has been applied to disease outbreaks only since the 19th century at that time

where there was not any uniformity in thinking about how diseases spread in a given community (Harrison, 2016). Responding to, and preparing for, the inevitable and yet unpredictable emergence of new epidemics and pandemics has become a prolific terrain for imagining in the long run of humanity.

Moreover, as some way of the constitution of social life that has been cast anew by recent conceptions of virality, information, and communication, epidemics necessitate not simply the study of the disease itself and also the way it affects social relations, but also the study of its modes of anticipation, visualization, fictionalization, and materialization. The study of epidemics become a very rich field of anthropological study not only due to the multi-layered ethnographic opportunities raised by such phenomena, but also primarily the methodological, epistemological, and broader theoretical challenges they pose for the discipline (Kelly et al., 2019).

3. A Brief History of Major Pandemics

It is regarded that pandemics and epidemics are the disease outbreaks that become globalize as a result of the spread of human-to-human infection. There have been many noteworthy disease outbreaks and pandemics recorded in history. Among them, First Plague Pandemic (541-747), Second Plague Pandemic (1346-1844), The Black Death (1346-1353), Influenza Pandemic (1781-1782), First Cholera Pandemic (1817-1824), Second Cholera Pandemic (1827-1835), Third Cholera Pandemic (1839-1856), Fourth Cholera Pandemic (1863-1875), Fifth Cholera Pandemic, 1881-1896, Influenza Pandemic (1889-1890), Third Plague Pandemic (1894-?), Sixth Cholera Pandemic (1899-1923), Influenza Pandemic, 1918-1919, Seventh Cholera Pandemic (1961-Present), AIDS Pandemic and Epidemic (1981-present day), H1N1 Swine Flu Pandemic (2009- 2010), West African Ebola Epidemic (2014-2016), Zika Virus Epidemic (2015-present day), and COVID-19 (11 March 2020- Present day) were the notable ones (Hays, 2005; WHO, 2020a). There are many examples in history, the most recent COVID-19 pandemic, declared as such by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020.

4. COVID-19 Pandemic in Nepal

The COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal is a part of the global pandemic of COVID-19 caused by SARS-CoV-2. The first case was

confirmed in Nepal on 23 January 2020. The positive case was a 31-year-old student, who had returned to Nepal from Wuhan on 9 January (Shrestha et al., 2020). It was also the first recorded case of COVID-19 in South Asia (New Delhi Television Limited [NDTV], 2020). Whereas, between January and March, Nepal took steps to prevent a global outbreak of the disease while preparing for it by acquiring necessary supplies, equipment, and medicine, upgrading health infrastructure, training medical personnel, and spreading public awareness. However, the first case of local transmission was confirmed on 4 April in Kailali District. Consequently, the first death occurred on 14 May. Therefore, a country-wide lockdown came into effect on 24 March 2020 and ended on 21 July 2020 (Pradhan, 2020).

The Government of Nepal (GoN, 2020) cancelled all its global promotional activities related to Visit Nepal Year 2020 in light of the pandemic. Moreover, Nepal's economy is predicted to be harshly affected by the pandemic because of its impact on foreign employment, tourism, manufacturing, construction, and trade. The World Bank has warned that the pandemic could push about one-third of the country's population below the International Poverty Line (COVID-19 could push nearly one-third of Nepal's population below the poverty line, 2020).

5. Rato Matsyendranatha Jatra

Newari festivals fall into two major categories. In the first, participation is inter-caste, based on locality or settlement solidarity. The main festivals of the Kathmandu valley come under this category. The other category consists of Hindu calendar festivals as are confined either to the members of the households or kin group. The first group of festivals includes mainly *Bhairava* or *Bhairavi jatras*, *Gathe Mangal*, *Gai Jatra*, *Varna Jatra*, *Indra Jatra*, *Kumari Jatra*, *Matsyendranatha ratha* festival, *Narain Jatra*, *Ganesh Jatra*, *Bhimsen Jatra*, and *Krishna Jatra* (Nepali, 1965). *Rato Matsyendranatha* is one of the most famous and perhaps most spectacular festivals in Kathmandu Valley. It starts when Lord *Matsyendranatha's* towering, the huge chariot is hauled through the narrow streets of Patan town, just across the river from Kathmandu. Moreover, *Rato* or *Red Matsyendranatha* of Patan is distinguished from *Seto* or *White Matsyendranatha* of Kathmandu by the colour of his features, but many believe they represent the same god. Many people call him *Karunamaya*, the compassionate God of Mercy. In fact, Buddhists

identify him as Padma Pani, the fourth of the five Buddhas. Because he created and watched over the universe, protecting and teaching the gods themselves, he came to be called Lokeswar.

The *Rato Matsyendranatha Jatra* is a unique festival celebrated in devotion to the lord of the rain and harvest in the Kathmandu valley. It is one of the most ancient *jatra* in Kathmandu valley. Throughout this festival, the Chariot will be pulled and the Bhoto displaying *Jatra* is organized as a concluding part. It is celebrated in Kathmandu valley, but the popularity is increasing and it has become a *Jatra* of all the devotees and people around the globe.

6. Methodology

The topic of this study is related to exploring the paradoxes of physical distancing and its impacts over the celebration of the *Rato Matsyendranatha* festival in the Newari community during COVID-19. For digging out the knowledge about the research problem, I used the design of study depending on the ontological stand that there are multiple realities and epistemological stand of the subjective or qualitative way of generating knowledge from the research field. So, this study followed an exploratory ethnographic framework of qualitative research design. In addition, I used the "Thick description" to explore the festivals and ways of life of people. I took *Rato Matsyendranatha* festival and followed the purposive sampling procedure for the selection of participants in this study. Thus, in this study, I took 9 participants for ethnographic data collection.

Similarly, in this study, the data is collected using both primary and secondary sources. The primary data is collected through an in-depth interview. This study used a key informant informal in-depth interview as a data collection technique. Finally, In this study, I analyzed all the collected data thematically through three stages viz. reading the field descriptive notes and identifying the relevant themes/concepts; including relevant materials under relevant themes (by coalescing or separating them as appropriate); and developing generalizations.

7. Data Presentation and Findings

Rato Matsyendranatha is one of the most famous and perhaps most spectacular festivals in Kathmandu valley. Due to the

COVID-19 pandemic Government of Nepal on 14 April 2020 has declared the lockdown and implemented the protocol of “Physical distancing” by which *Rato Matsyendranatha* Chariot festival have disturbed, postponed, and finally rescheduled just for fulfilling the ritual formalities in this year.

On the behalf of government’s decision, Lalitpur District Administration Office has directed to the stakeholders of *Rato Matsyendranatha* Chariot festival to postpone this year’s festival until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The festival organizers have decided to celebrate the festival after the government eased the lockdown. The festival is thought to be the longest chariot festival in Kathmandu valley to appease the rain and grain God *Rato Matsyendranatha*. The government’s decision to the postponement of the festival has saddened many devotees. One informant, who is also the lead chariot maker, said :

I still have a great devotion and respect in *Matsyendranatha*. The lockdown that has imposed by the government and duri kayam garnuparne niyam (the protocol of physical distancing) has troubled me. This creates such a fateful circumstance that I cannot pray the god for better food and grains in such a difficult time.

This is the annual chariot festival during which thousands of individuals participate to celebrate it. But, with the fear of COVID-19 pandemic gripping the whole valley, the festival, which falls in April, has postponed twice, once in April and then in June. As another 49 years old informant, a local resident of Lalitpur, put it :

It’s a very sad thing that it is the second time the *Rato Matsyendranatha* Chariot festival is being cancelled. Previously, it was postponed on April 10, while the country was still under lockdown. The festival was later reorganized when the lockdown was relaxed. I feel that it is still uncertainty regarding the carrying on of the festival. If the Coronavirus cases had not increased this way in the Kathmandu valley, it would have started the *raath yatra* (Chariot procession) of the god of *Matsyendranatha*.

Lalitpur District Administration has third time asked the stakeholders to suspend all work related to the *Matsyendranatha* on July 7, 2020 due to the rising of COVID-19 cases in the Kathmandu valley. But, the members of the Newar community believed that the

festival would go on as the country returns to usual with the lockdown officially over. With this conviction all the preparation related to the Chariot has completed but at the eleventh hour the festival is unlikely to be postponed again. In the informal interview one of the respondents, who is one of the eldest gurjus (priests) revealed his belief that if the *Matsyendranatha* Chariot festival is not observed on time then it will coincide with other major festivals, and this could bring disaster for the whole nation. He further said :

Major Nepali festival, Dashain is coming soon, and before that, we need to bring the deity to Bungamati for other specific cultural rituals, at that place the deity is housed for the whole year after the festival is completed. The rituals that are essential to be performed need to take place whatever the Chariot does not witness people's participation. If that is not to happen we are going to have another famine because this festival ensures rain and good harvest. And, that situation may be even worse than COVID-19 pandemic.

There are different opinions about the celebration of festival regarding the protocol of "Physical distancing". But, the majority believes that the festival should take place. Similarly, one female participant, a local of Lagankhel, put it :

Among the other things, one of the major reasons why many people are hesitant is because the festival permits a massive gathering of people. Hundreds of people visit to worship the chariot from early morning to the late evening. So, to maintain the physical distancing in such a situation will be difficult and worthless. Despite this unfavourable condition, I hope that the Chariot will takes place this year amid the pandemic.

However, regarding the celebration of festival, some appear to be in no mood to celebrate in this year. One local resident of Lagankhel said :

How is it feasible to celebrate the festival when we are told to maintain physical distancing among the individuals and even not to touch the chariot? Moreover, a major part of the celebration of this festival is inviting all our relatives and feasting with them, but this year, we cannot arrange such large family gathering. Similarly, nowadays the celebration of the *jatra* became very costly and because of the COVID-19 lockdown, my family doesn't have enough cash to celebrate this year.

Moreover, health priority and safety are also the main concerns for postponing the festivals. Due to the fear factor of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are in no mood to celebrate and participate in Chariot. One respondent, a resident of Saugal, does not consider like it is *Matsyendranatha* Chariot festival at all. As he has put it :

In this year, the climate is also wet and gloomy, people gatherings will be limited, jovial crowds might not come out on the streets in celebration mood. Moreover, everybody is worried and terrified of the COVID-19 pandemic in the valley. People are not in a mood to feel joyful and feel like the *jatra* has arrived. My celebrations would be restricted to minimum ritual formalities and that I am not very much looking forward to the chariot festival this year due to the Coronavirus health risks.

There are also quite different arguments among the respondents regarding the celebration of the festival. It reflects the tenuous situation of devotees regarding the postponement of the celebration. A 56-year-old female respondent, a resident of Bungamati, said :

I think that the festival should happen. It doesn't need to take place in the same grand manner it normally does as before. But festivals are important to keep alive in our tradition and faith. In such a difficult situation we have to consider why we celebrate our festivals at first. We celebrate *Rato Matsyendranatha* for the reason that it is believed the lord *Matsyendranatha* helped us to end a years-long drought. Over 1,500 years ago, *Matsyendranatha* saved the entire valley from a tough situation. So, we need our gods now too.

In addition, another respondent has a similar argument about the postponement of the festival. A respondent and also the local priest here put it :

I think it is very essential to keep the festival and rituals going. We do not completely ignore and dropping the rituals by showing the logic of COVID-19 because it might lead us to a point where individuals might think that it is okay not to follow the rituals, do them as their conveniences or completely stop considering its importance, threatening the continuity of cultures and traditions. For this reason, the government also needs to give priority to the cultures even during this time of the pandemic. Whatever that needs to be done, even if it is on a

smaller scale for only the cultural continuation, should be continued.

It is revealed that there is no hitherto historical record of the cancellation of the *Matsyendranatha* festival. So, this has created the dilemma and fear among the people that whether the discontinuity of the festival will result in any kind of mishaps in the community. As one informant puts it :

Some 1450 years ago, when Kathmandu valley was going through a severe drought which ended for 12 years, *Matsyendranatha*, who is believed the god of rain and harvest, was installed and the suffering came to an end. However, now, the festival has been postponed due to the reason of the COVID-19 pandemic but we are not convinced about what the future holds for us. One thing I am very much convinced that, we certainly do not want to go back to the same destiny or see a bigger drought amid this situation where every person is already living in a panic of the pandemic.

In Newar society, people have taken the festivals in general and the *Matsyendranatha jatra* in particular as a symbol to solve the day to day problems of their social life. They have their own myth about the celebration of the *Matsyendranatha jatra*. They have taken the god *Matsyendranatha* as a god of rain and the harvest as being based on their mythic interpretation. A similar argument has also advocated by symbolic and interpretive approaches by taking symbols and processes as a form of myth and ritual, through which “humans assign meanings to these symbols to solve fundamental dilemmas about human social life” (Spencer, 1996 : 535).

Adjai (2020) has pointed out that “because of their daily practice of personal space, many Africans are likely to find physical distancing compliance a huge challenge because of the near absence of personal space in their everyday communal life” (p. 2). Similarly, in the case of the Newari community more specifically in terms of the festival celebrating the protocols of physical distancing has become more disturbing and obstacles. In the celebration of the *Matsyendranatha jatra*, hundreds of people have visited to worship the chariot from early morning to the late evening. In such a situation, to maintain physical distancing has become very difficult and worthless. Though a major part of the celebration of this festival has included the invitation of all relatives and having fest and

making family gatherings but it has not been feasible to celebrate the festival by maintaining physical distancing among the individuals and even not touching the chariot.

As the anthropology of epidemics explained “epidemics” as total social phenomena by focusing on processes and events which encompass and exercise a transformational impact on social life (Kelly, Keck & Lynteris, 2019). The protocol of “physical distancing” has created the obstacle for the celebration of *Matsyendranatha jatra*. It has created a troublesome situation for worshipping the god *Matsyendranatha* for better food and grains in such a difficult time. The celebration has been worthless without a massive gathering of people from the early morning to the late evening. Physical distancing has also created the contradictory and paradoxical situation that people have to decide whether health should have prioritized or the continuation of cultural tradition has to assure. In addition, if they have chosen to ignore and dropping the rituals by showing the logic of COVID-19 then it has to lead them towards a point where individuals might think that it is okay not to follow the rituals, do them as their conveniences, or completely stop considering its importance which threatening the continuity of cultures and traditions. Conrad and Barker (2007) have a similar argument that a long-term illness can affect many people by making their world smaller, more defined by the illness than anything else. It is more likely that illness can contribute as a chance for discovery and re-imagining a new self.

Nepali (1965) has also elaborated on the functional significance of Newari festivals for the creation of order, stability, and equilibrium of the Newari society. In the case of *Matsyendranatha jatra*, too, people have the belief that even if it is on a smaller scale for only the cultural continuation, the government needs to give priority to the continuation of *jatra* even during this time of the pandemic. Moreover, they have taken the god of *Matsyendranatha* as the god of the rain and harvest is based on the myth of some 1450 years ago, when Kathmandu valley was going through a severe drought which ended for 12 years. However, now, the festival has been postponed due to the reason of the COVID-19 pandemic they are not convinced about what the future holds for them. One thing they have very much convinced that, they certainly do not want to go back to the same destiny or see a bigger drought amid this situation where every person is already living in a panic of the pandemic.

8. Conclusion

The Government of Nepal has declared the lockdown and implemented the protocol of “Physical distancing” to save the life of individuals from the COVID-19 pandemic by which *Rato Matsyendranatha Jatra*, have postponed this year. Newar society has taken the *Matsyendranatha jatra* as a symbol by which they take the meaning to solve the day to day problems of their social life. They have their own myth about the celebration of the *Matsyendranatha jatra*. They have taken the god *Matsyendranatha* as a god of rain and the harvest as being based on their mythic interpretation. However, now, the festival has been postponed due to the reason for the COVID-19 pandemic but they are not convinced about what the future holds for them. They have had a feeling that even if it is on a smaller scale for only the cultural continuation, the government needs to give priority to the continuation of *jatra* even during this time of the pandemic. In fact, one thing they have very much convinced that, by postponing the festival, they certainly do not want to go back to the same destiny or see a bigger drought amid this situation where every person is already living in a panic of the pandemic.

Similarly, in the Newar community, more specifically in terms of the celebration of *Matsyendranatha jatra* the protocol of physical distancing has become more disturbing and obstacles. During the celebration, hundreds of people have visited to worship the chariot from early morning to the late evening. In such a situation, to maintain physical distancing has become very difficult and worthless. As a part of the festival, the invitation of all relatives and having fest and making family gatherings have not been feasible by maintaining physical distancing among the individuals.

Though the protocols of “physical distancing” and the ethics of festival celebration have the same functions in Newar society, they are even quite incompatible to each other. It has created the contradictory and paradoxical situation that people have to decide whether health should have prioritized or the continuation of cultural tradition has to assure. On the one hand, if they have chosen the option of “physical distancing” by ignoring and dropping the *jatra* by showing the logic of COVID-19 then it has to lead them towards the discontinuity of culture and tradition. On the other hand, if they have ignored the option of “physical distancing” by

focusing on the continuity of cultural tradition then it has to lead them toward the health risks of a pandemic. Thus, though the protocol of “physical distancing” and “celebration of the festival” is paradoxical but essential preconditions to save the life of individual Newars.

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