

Rehearsing for Life

This work examines the production and performance of theatrical activities aimed at bringing about social change in both development and political intervention in Nepal. If everyday social problems can be both represented and challenged through drama-based performances, then what differentiates street theatre performed in planned development from street theatre performed within social and political movements? This multi-sited ethnography attempts to answer this question by following the works of Aarohan Theatre – a Kathmandu-based professional company, performing both *loktantrik natak* (theatre for democracy) in the context of the 2005–06 popular movement, and *kachahari natak* (forum theatre) for development projects. The analysis then extends to the forum theatre produced by one of Aarohan's partner groups, the Kamlari Natak Samuha – a Tharu grass-roots activist organization based in Deukhuri Valley (West Nepal) campaigning against indentured child labour. The book explores how Maoist cultural troupes moving out of the People's War into the peace process used cultural programmes as a tool to enroll their audience into the changing political project.

Employing a critical perspective and considering theatre as a mode of socio-cultural practice embedded in the wider socio-political reality, the book looks at the groups' organizational structures, the artists' identities and professional aspirations in a context where lack of State support for arts turned development aid into a crucial source of livelihood for theatre artists.

What emerges is an account of what it means to perform theatre and live by theatre. This study explores the challenges of being a professional artist engaged in activism, the pressures felt by Maoist cultural activists to 'professionalize' their productions when performing in the capital after the end of the war, and closely analyzes how a group of theatre workers who are committed to transforming a stigmatized passion into a respectable and glamorous job in contemporary Nepal.

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Theatre for Social Change in Nepal

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For my parents, Aldo and Adriana

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