

## Field Study on the Gopali Folklore and Folklife

### Introduction

As reported in the earlier issue of the Newsletter, Nepali Folklore Society has successfully conducted the field study among two folk groups of Nepal (Gandharvas and Gopalis) under the Folklore and Folklife Study Project. Out of these, the works completed in connection with the study of Gandharvas have already been reported earlier. So, hereby, we are reporting the activities conducted in course of studying the Gopali folk group under the same project. The topics that follow will describe the progress and achievements of the field study on this folk group.

### Preparatory Works

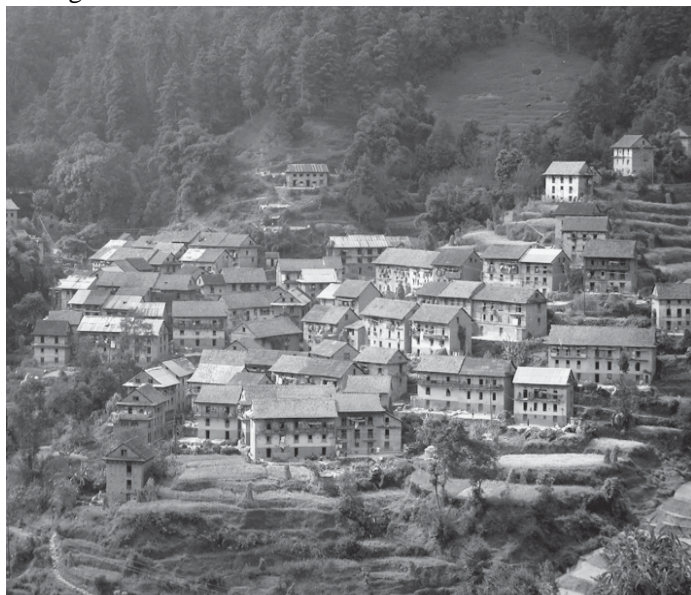
The preparatory works done in connection with the study of Gopali folk group consisted of the preparation of research tools needed for data collection from the field. Accordingly, field sheets, questionnaires, schedules and other tools were prepared. This work was completed in the first week of October 2005, prior to the researchers' departure to the field – i.e. the settlement area of Gopalis.

### Pre-Field Work

In the 4<sup>th</sup> week of September 2005, a preliminary survey of Gopali folk group living in Kunchhal and adjacent villages of Makawanpur district was conducted by a team of experts including Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha and Mr. Ekaram Maharjan. The survey team found that the people belonging to this folk group densely reside in some localities of Bajrabarahi VDC including Kunchhal, Toukhel, Nhulgaun, Gahate, Papung (Tistung) and Sikharkot (Palung) villages of Makawanpur district. From the survey, about 450 households were found residing in and around these localities. Based on the preliminary survey, the team concluded that it would be a meaningful work to study the historical, cultural, linguistic, social and economic aspects of the folk life of Gopalis, a historically important folk group residing in that area for centuries. It was also found that there was a possibility of obtaining several facts about this folk group from field research. Considering these things, the survey team concluded that a detailed study of the Gopali folk group was essential and relevant in studying the Nepali folklore and folklife.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of October 2005, the field researchers surveyed some reference materials on Gopali folk group and obtained the preliminary information on their folklore and folklife. Besides, the project office organized an orientation programme for the researchers whereby they were given the necessary guidelines regarding the methods and procedures and using the instruments and tools (e.g. the digital camera,

audio and video recording, etc.) for data collection in the field. On the occasion, the researchers also shared the experience of field research from the members of the earlier research team who had completed the field-based works among the Gandharvas.



View of Gopali village, Kunchhal

### Field Work

The field researchers stayed in the settlement areas of Gopalis for 3 months (from the 4<sup>th</sup> week of October 2005 to the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of January 2006). The team comprises four researchers: Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha (Team Coordinator,

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folklore), Dr. Rudra Laxmi Shrestha (language), Mr. Ekaram Maharjhan (culture) and Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary (anthropology). Their work of data collection was divided into four main areas of folklore and folklife study, whereby Mr. Shrestha, Dr. Shrestha, Mr. Maharjhan and Mr. Chaudhary collected the relevant information in the areas of folk literature and performing arts, folk language and folk communication, material folk culture and folk heritage, and socio-cultural folklife and folkways respectively.

In the meantime, the project team leader Prof. Tulasi Diwasa visited the field work area (Kunchhal and the surrounding villages of Bajrabarahi VDC, Makawanpur district) from 21st to 25th December 2005, with the cameraman Mr. Siddhartha Kumar Shakya, for the purpose of facilitating the field researchers as well as for video recording the relevant aspects of Gopali folklore and folklife. On the occasion, Prof. Diwasa attended a Gopali folk cultural programme as the Chief Guest, which was organized by the local Nispaksha Gopali Yuba Club (a local Gopali youth club, working in association with NFS) in Kunchhal village on 21st December. Mr. Chandra Bahadur Gopali had presided over the function, where people of the Gopali folk group from Kunchhal, Papung, Tistung and Gahate villages were present. The Gopalis had performed their folk dances, folk songs, religious songs and traditional dramas in the programme, using various folk and modern musical instruments and wearing their folk dresses during the performance. Among some of the good performances, a dance in the song based on the story of King Kam Singh and his minister Chandra Singh is worth mentioning. Playing the harmonium, Dr. Rudra Laxmi Shrestha, a member of the research team, had also presented a Bhajan (religious song) on the occasion. The club had organized the programme at the request of the field researchers; and this became the opportunity for the researchers to record the required information related to the traditional Gopali culture.



Traditional *Lakhe* dance performed in the cultural programme

### Problems and Rapport Building

Although the researchers did not feel major difficulties during their stay for data collection in the field, they faced some problems in the beginning. The informants had a lack of time to spend with the researchers, due to their priority to spend time in agricultural activities during the day time in particular. Sometimes

the researchers could not spend with the informants for the collection of data even in the morning and evening hours.

In the beginning, the local informants did not believe the researchers and hesitated to cooperate fully. However, the researchers succeeded in building up a good rapport with them later on; so the informants became more helpful and began to cooperate in giving the necessary information.



An old Gopali woman in the kitchen, Kunchhal

### Post-Field Work

After the completion of data collection from the field, the researchers came back and submitted their study report to the project office. The office has preserved all the collected information in the form of digital audio/video recordings and photographs. Thus, the information has been documented; and the researchers are finalizing the works of transcribing, analyzing and interpreting the data, which will be published in the form of book later.

### Collection and Achievements

The researchers have brought some representative items of Gopali material culture and handed them over to the project office. These items include *Nalu Lhaka* (shoes made of *Nalu*, a typical plant fibre), *Suya Lhaka* (shoes made of straw), *Tagi Dalo* (a container to keep the items of farm products), *Haku Patasi* (black sari worn by women), *Sol Peche* (small container made of Nigalo, a variety of bamboo), *Phirke* (a kitchen utensil mostly used for preparing liquor/beer), *Durunhegun Pha* (a wooden container used for milking the cow), *Chhenguya Mhiche*



Gopali people celebrating *Chunni Shikari Puja*



(leather-made money bag), *Gacha* (shawl made in the handloom), bamboo comb, etc.

Besides these, some historically important items – such as the copies of stone and copper inscriptions (10 in total), and manuscripts (altogether 23) – have also been collected from the field. Out of the collected inscriptions, two are from King Amshuvarma's regime (Sambat 31 and 37); and others belong to Sambat 434, 820, 832, and 920. The most recent one available from the field is of 2004 Bikram Era (around 1947 A.D.).

The collection also includes audio record of oral texts, photographs, and video recordings. The audio recorded oral text is of 144.52 hours in total length, including all the 4 researchers' collections. They have taken 6882 photographs, and made video recording in altogether 12 cassettes (i.e. 12 hours in total length). In addition to the researchers' collection, the project team leader Prof. Tulasi Diwasa and Mr. Siddhartha Kumar Shakya have also video recorded the relevant aspects of Gopali folklore and folklife in altogether 14 cassettes (14 hours in length). These video cassettes contain the record of interviews with the informants, folk cultural performances, information related to the folk group's settlement areas, houses, historically, culturally and religiously important places, and the day-to-day life activities of the people in the folk group. All these collections are preserved in the project office.

To mention more specifically, the information related to the folklore and folklife of Gopalis available in the project office is mentioned below.

### I. Folk Literature and Performing Arts:

#### Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha

Mr. Shrestha has taken altogether 1419 photographs. He has also audio recorded different kinds of oral texts from the informants, with the length of 37.49 hours in total. Moreover, he has also made 6 hours' participatory observation in the field area. The subject matter covered in his collection includes *Dapha*, story, songs, music, personal memories, etc. From his collection, altogether 1 folk narrative, 2 folk tales, 8 folk legends, 1 annotated joke, 2 folk dances, 2 folk dramas, 1 folk poem, 4 children's songs, 4 folk ballads, 12 seasonal folk songs, 12 religious songs, 2 festival songs, 2 ritual songs, 24 other folk songs, 64 proverbs, 5 riddles, names of 18 folk musical instruments, 21 folk games, and 6 short biographies of the Gopali representative experts of performing arts have been recorded and documented.

### II. Folk Language and Folk Communication:

#### Dr. Rudra Laxmi Shrestha

Dr. Shrestha has audio recorded oral texts from several informants with the total length of 13.31 hours, and has taken altogether 375 photographs. She has conducted interviews with different informants, which cover several aspects of Gopali language. From her collection, the project office has documented altogether

109 namelores, 56 onomastics words, 2 children's folk rhymes, 6 folk riddles, 62 proverbs and proverbial expressions, 34 words related to baby talks, 12 words used for greeting and leave taking, 2 nicknames, about 2400 special vocabulary items, 32 curses and taunts, 200 different sentences, 2 slangs, etc.



Gopali *Dapha* (Bhajan), Lashiwa, Kunchhal

### III. Material Folk Culture and Folk Heritage:

#### Mr. Ekaram Maharjan

Altogether 2514 photographs have been taken by Mr. Maharjan. He has audio recorded oral texts from the informants, with the total length of 61.32 hours. The subject matter in his collection includes a wide range of information related to material folk culture and folk heritage – such as folk festivals, folk weapons, folk food, religion, traditional technology and wisdom, folk utensils and furniture, folk beliefs etc. From his collection, altogether 28 folk rituals have been observed and documented. Similarly, 14 folk foods, 47 folk dresses, 40 folk festivals, 3 feasts, 10 names of folk medicine, 27 names of folk gods and goddesses, 12 names of folk religion, 24 folk arts and crafts, 2 folk architectures, 34 names of folk tools and weapons, 1 item of folk furniture, and 87 different types of traditional technology and wisdom etc. have been documented. He has also made a video recording of 9 hours. Besides, his work also includes some participatory observation tours and interviews with 40 people of different age groups.

### IV. Socio-Cultural Folklife and Folkways:

#### Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary

Mr. Chaudhary has taken altogether 2574 photographs; and he has audio recorded the oral text with the total length of 32 hours, by interviewing several informants. The coverage of subject matter in his collection includes several things related to the folklife and folkways of Gopalis. He has collected information on the indigenous institutions, folk rituals, etc. His collection mainly includes the information related to source of income, method of harvesting, rites of the passage, beliefs, folk festivals, customs and livelihood, division of labour, gender issues, decision making procedure, family structure, kinship system, religious beliefs, etc. Spending more than 585 hours with the informants in the field and making several participatory

observations, he has also produced a video record of the relevant information with the total length of 3 hours.

### Concluding Remarks

In a nutshell, the study has been a highly encouraging step towards the in-depth exploration of Nepali folklore, as part of the continuation of the Folklore and Folklife Study Project, running in the initiation of Nepali Folklore Society. The researchers have made a very significant attempt to explore the folklore and folklife of Gopalis, one of the



A traditional 3-storey Gopali house

historically important folk groups of Nepal, which was not studied in detail from the folkloristic and folklife perspective so far. The findings of the study will be highly relevant for the purpose of disseminating the folkloristic traditions, culture and different folklife practices found among Gopalis.

After the people in the folk group were in contact with the researchers during the field study, they have developed awareness regarding the importance of their own folk cultural heritage; and they are willing to disseminate such information to the people outside their community as well.



An old Gopali couple with their grandchildren on the lap

## Exploration of the Dynamics of Creative Sensibility in Folklore and Modern Poetry

### Second International Folklore Congress, Kathmandu 2003<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Since its establishment in 1995, Nepali Folklore Society (NFS) has made a significant contribution towards the promotion of folklore and folklife studies in the country. During this span of time, the Society has made contacts with several institutions and scholars working in the area of folklore and folklife both within the country and abroad. In the process of establishing a wider forum for the study and dissemination of folklore, the Society has organized the first and second international folklore congresses in 2001 and 2003 respectively. Out of these two events, the proceedings of the First International Folklore Congress held in 2001 have already been reported in the earlier issue of the Newsletter. Now, we are reporting the proceedings of the Second International Folklore Congress organized on May 30-June 1, 2003 in Kathmandu.

<sup>1</sup> Since we are reporting the event of 2003; the official positions of the distinguished personalities mentioned here refer to their respective positions then.

#### Supports

NFS had got support from some institutions/ agencies for making the congress successful. In this connection, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture became the pivot for the congress, while Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) had taken up the role of promoter. The main venue of the 3-day events was NTB hall. Other institutions including Royal Nepal Academy, Tribhuvan University, and Nepal-India B.P. Koirala Foundation were the sponsors. Moreover, Sanskrit Samsthan, NCCF, Nepal Chamber of Commerce, Hotel Association of Nepal, Nepal Association of Travel Agents, Sajha Prakashan, Mandala Book Point, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, ACROSS magazine and Shashi's Holiday had also supported the event in a number of ways.

#### The Participants

There were registered participants from foreign countries as well as from Nepal. Some special invitees had also attended some sessions. Besides, there were students, volunteers, media representatives and other interested persons. In total, more than 125 participants from around 15 countries including Nepal had attended the three-day events of the congress; and about 65 working papers were presented on the occasion.

#### Highlights

The congress had focused the exploration of the dynamics of creative sensibility reflected in the modern poetry through the use of symbolism, structuralism and metaphorical and metonymic forms of folklore. The Congress had aimed at bringing the creative dimensions of folklore to the foreground and providing



insights into the creative elements in cultural studies. In all the congress sessions, poets had recited poems and scholars had presented their papers which reflected on modern creative sensibility. "Exploration of the Dynamics of Creative Sensibility in Folklore and Modern Poetry" was the broad theme of the congress; and it was divided into these sub-themes: 1) Folklore, modernism and poetic expression, 2) Folklore, literature and performing arts, 3) Oral poetry, epics and ballads, 4) Oral and written traditions, 5) Folklore, gender and power, 6) Folklore, cultural studies and folk practices, 7) Nepali folklore, and 8) Folklore, multiculturalism and expression of identity. These sub-themes became the focus of the eight 'congress sessions', which were additional to the 'inaugural' and 'valedictory' sessions, as described below.



Hon. Prime Minister Mr. Lokendra Bahadur Chand, inaugurating the congress

### Sessions

#### The Inaugural Session

The Inaugural Session was held at the Birendra International Convention Centre on May 30, 2003, from 9 to 11 A.M. The function was chaired by Mr. Mohan Koirala, the Vice Chancellor of Royal Nepal Academy. Giving a welcome speech to the attendants, Prof. Abhi Subedi highlighted the aims of organizing the congress, and said that the event could create awareness among the Nepali scholars and thus work as the source of creative strength. He pointed out that the *Mantra* of the congress was folklore and poetry, in which folklorists and poets of international arena were invited. He further explained how the culture of orality and literacy gives the power of expression.

The Chief Guest of the session Rt. Honourable Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand inaugurated the congress by lighting the lamp. In the inaugural address, Mr. Chand remarked that the event was taking place at a time when Nepalese scholars were trying to open up more avenues of research on folklore along with the scholars of other countries. He congratulated NFS for organizing the congress, and expressed the confidence that the programme would

successfully provide the participants with the opportunity for sharing each other's cultural and academic experiences on folklore and its reflection on literature. Mr. Chand also pointed out the need to take the congress as an important occasion to come up with certain concrete ideas about giving folklore studies a new dynamism. He further mentioned that folklore studies could be given an important place in the university programme, since it touches upon many areas of academic concern including culture, practices, beliefs etc. and reflects our common perspectives to look at the world. Mr. Chand, who is also a literary figure of Nepal, also recited his poem entitled "Faith".



Chief Guest, distinguished guests and other dignitaries

Mr. Kuber Prasad Sharma, Honourable Minister of Culture, Civil Aviation and Tourism, was a Special Guest on the occasion. Addressing the audience, Minister Sharma wished the success of the congress; and he stressed the fact that in Nepalese context folklore as a literature of experience is very popular and powerful phenomenon in the social process. On the occasion, Prof. Dr. Govinda Prasad Sharma, Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University, had also delivered his speech as the Guest of Honour. He had stressed that, from the folk songs that he said he enjoyed most to the serious studies about the subject, every domain of folklore needs serious attention from scholars working both inside and outside the university.



Congress participants and the audience in the inaugural session

Delivering the presidential address, NFS President Prof. Tulasi Diwasa expressed his happiness to meet again some of his old friends as the congress participants. He mentioned that the love for folklore and desire to work with the scholars from different parts of the world had encouraged NFS to organize the congress with the co-operation of scholars, government leaders, social institutions and individuals. Prof. Diwasa also said that folklore has always been the energy of creative writings and creative modes of expression. He particularly stressed on the diversity of Nepali folk culture in the multilingual and multicultural national context, and pointed out the need for promoting a systematic study of folk traditions for the purpose of enhancing the unity among people and fostering a healthy sense of nationalism. He also expressed the hope that the congress would be helpful to make the native scholars aware of the theoretical and methodological issues related to the promotion and preservation of folklore in the context of a multilingual country like Nepal.

NFS General Secretary Prof. C.M. Bandhu, delivering the Vote of Thanks, expressed a heart-felt gratitude to the distinguished guests including the Prime Minister, Minister and other dignitaries, the promoter, sponsors, supporters, and the native and foreign participants including Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana and other scholars, for giving their valuable time to attend the congress. He also emphasized the importance of the oral modes of folklore and the need to introduce Nepalese folklore to the outer world.

### Congress Sessions

After the inaugural session, the second session began at the Birendra International Convention Centre seminar hall. The theme of the session was **Folklore, Modernism and Poetic Expression**; and the Keynote Speaker Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana (India) chaired the session. Delivering her keynote presentation entitled "Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Studies of Folklore and Creative Imagination", Dr. Vatsyayana said that the essence of folklore studies should be sought in the tangible and culturally powerful metaphors like Kailash, Mansarovar or the Himalayan heights, which reflect the nature of the terrains of culture and folklore that people in this region have traversed over millennia. In the session, Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi (Nepal) presented the paper entitled "Folk in Modern Nepali Poetry: A Matrix of Creative Experience". Similarly, Dr. Germain Droogenboodt (Spain) presented on "Elements of Nature in Modern International Poetry", while Dr. Giribala Mohanty (India) delivered the presentation on "Use of Folklore in Contemporary Oriya Poetry". Dr. Gunadasa S. Amarasekhara (a poet and critic from Sri Lanka) read out his paper on "Use of Folk Poetry in Expressing Modern Sensibility". Continuing the keynote address, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana stressed on the need to look at any mode of study from the point of view of critical discourse theory. She said that the main feature of the folk and classical domains of study is the fluidity of the subject. Speaking about the plurality of identities in society, she said that this characteristic has been the main source of energy for folklore studies in the South Asian region including Nepal. The session ended with poem recitation by Dr. Sonja Servoma (Finland), Dr. Germain Droogenboodt (Spain), Prof. Tulasi Diwasa and Prof. Abhi Subedi (both from Nepal).



Dr. Buhneiman (USA), Dr. Servoma (Finland) and Prof. Diwasa (Nepal)

The third session, bearing the theme **Folklore, Literature and Performing Arts**, started at the auditorium of Nepal Tourism Board; and it was chaired by Dr. Dulal Chaudhari (India). Six speakers had delivered their presentations in the session. Dr. Arun Gupto (Nepal) presented the paper entitled "River as Stage: Perception of Folk in Poetry", in which he showed the link between textuality, performance and the power of space in folklore symbolism. Dr. Ram Dayal Rakesh (Nepal) presented his paper on "The Morphology of Maithili Folktales"; Mr. Shiva Rijal (Nepal) spoke on "Folk as Performative Power in Theatre"; and Prof. Dr. B.M. Dahal (Nepal) delivered his presentation on "Study of Nepali Proverbs". Dr. Sanjib Sarcar and Dr. Srabani Chakraborty (India) jointly presented their paper on "Creative Expression of People in Folksongs and Music"; while Mr. Raj Kumar Gandharva (Nepal) presented the paper entitled "Singing of the *Karkha*". In the end of the session, poems were recited by Prof. Dr. Ganga Prasad Vimal and Dr. Giribala Mohanty (both from India).

The fourth session had the theme **Oral Poetry, Epics and Ballads**. Prof. Dr. Kamal Prakash Malla (Nepal) had chaired the session, in which Prof. Dr. Tej Ratna Kansakar (Nepal) delivered his presentation entitled "Strategies of Narrative Discourse in Newari Folk Poetry"; Dr. Kailash Pattanaik (India) presented on "Ballad Singing Tradition of Orrisa"; and Mr. Gopal Thakur (Nepal) talked about "Shobha Nayak Banjara: A Bhojpuri Oral Poetry of Love". After these presentations, poems were recited by Dr. Gunadasa S. Amarasekhara (Sri Lanka) and Bairagi Kaila (Nepal).

The theme of the fifth session was **Oral and Written Traditions**, which started at 9.30 A.M. on the second day; and it was chaired by Dr. Gunadasa S. Amarasekhara from Sri Lanka. Delivering the presentation entitled "When Folk Culture Meets Print Culture: some thoughts on the commercialisation, transformation and propagation of traditional genres in Nepal", Dr. Rhoderick Chalmers (U.K.) explained how the Nepali writers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had accomplished the task of transforming the folk culture into the print culture, citing several examples based on his research findings. Other presentations in the session were: "The Study of Lokabharan in Modern South Asian Poetry" by



Prof. Dr. Biplab Chakraborty (India), "The Conserving of Folk Memory through Ethnographic Translation" by Dr. Govinda Raj Bhattarai (Nepal), "Folk Aspects in Tara Shankar Bandhyopadhyaya's Novel and Poetry" by Dr. Nishit Mukherjee (India), "Yeti in Nepali Folklore" by Mr. Keshar Lal (Nepal), "Folk Legends and Festivals in the Context of *Matsyendranath*" by Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi (Nepal), and "Folklore and Literature with Special Reference to *Asarko Pandhra*" by Dr. Manfred Treu (Germany). The session ended with a poem recitation by Dr. Germain Droogenboodt (Spain) and Dr. Manorama B. Mahapatra (India).

Dr. Sonja Servoma (Finland) had chaired the sixth session with the theme **Folklore, Gender and Power**. The speakers delivering their presentations in the session were: Dr. Rohini Paranawithana (Sri Lanka) who spoke on "Sinhalese Literature and Folklore", Prof. Dr. Madhav P. Pokharel (Nepal) on "Women in Nepali Folk Songs", Dr. Sangita Raymajhi (Nepal) on "Exclusive Poetry of Pain and Hope: Women's Teej Songs", Ms. Ratna Rashid (India) on "KUP: A Unique Folk Art form of Bengali Muslim Women Domain of South Eastern Asia", Dr. Gajab Kumari Timilsina (Nepal) on "The Hobalo Songs of Western Nepal", and Dr. Manorama B. Mahapatra (India) on "Feminism in Orissan Folk Literature and Folk Songs". The focus of the last two papers was to show how women have created their own niche in the cultural texture of society. In the end, there was a poetry performance by Dr. Gunadasa S. Amarasekhara (Sri Lanka) and Mr. Shashi Bhandari (Nepal).

The seventh session, held at Royal Nepal Academy, was chaired by Dr. Germain Droogenboodt (Spain). The theme was **Folklore, Cultural Studies and Folk Practices**; and the session started after a brief welcome speech by Dr. Tulasi Bhattarai, Member Secretary of Royal Nepal Academy. In the session, Prof. Dr. Gundrun Buhneman (USA) spoke on "Tantrik Forms of Ganesh in Hindu Iconography". Similarly, Ms. Mariana Kropf (Switzerland) presented on "Poetry as Action: A Study into Hymns to the Navagraha in Local Ritual Traditions", Dr. Dulal Chaudhari (India) on "Virgin Worship in Bengal and Nepal", Dr. Mohammad Hazi Salleh (Malaysia) on "The Pantun: A Folk Form for All and All Seasons", Prof. Dr. Prem Khatry (Nepal) on "The Death Rituals of the Danuwar", and Mr. Min Bahadur Shakya (Nepal) on "Swayambhu Legends: Source of Buddhist Culture and Oral Tradition". The session ended with poetry performance by Prof. Dr. Ganga Prasad Vimal (India) and Mr. Madhav Ghimire (Nepal).

The eighth session was on Nepali Folklore; and it was chaired by Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi (the eminent Nepali folk culture expert). In the session, the octogenarian Nepali poet Madhav Ghimire was present as a Special Guest. All the papers presented in the session were in Nepali medium. The papers were entitled "The Legend of Dipa Rajawar" by Mr. Badri Prasad Sharma (Kanchanpur), "On the Poetic Forms of Nepali Proverbs" by Mr. Shiva Prasad Paudyal (Nawalparasi), "Teej Songs" by Mr. Kusumakar Neupane (Parbat), "The Pheri System and Mantra" by Mr. Krishna Neupane (Syangja), "Limbu Folk Deities" by Mr. Bairagi Kaila (Jhapa), "Oral Epic Bharat" by Mr. Ram Sharan Darnal (Kathmandu), "Masta Worship" by Mr. Jaya Raj Panta (Doti), "Sabai: A Form of Nepali Oral Narrative" by Dr. Motilal

Parajuli (Kaski), "Folk Elements and Images in Modern Nepali Poetry" by Mr. Bhagawat Acharya (Kapilvastu), "Female Participation in Nepali Folk Song Performances" by Mr. Pashupati N. Timilsina (Lamjung), and "Poetic Form of Nepali Folk Riddles" by Mr. Kapil Lamichhane (Rupandehi). These papers cover a wide range of the living dimensions of Nepali folklore. Their strength lay in the fact that they were the sorts of field-based studies carried out by the scholars. In their presentations, it seemed the scholars created an ambience of the living folk traditions of diverse nature found in the different parts of the country.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana released the book entitled *Three Plays* written by Prof. Abhi Subedi and translated into English by Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi amidst a colourful function at Dwarika's Hotel in the evening. Releasing the book, Dr. Vatsyayana said that she was in the home of very nice hosts and was drawn by her association with Nepali experts and the warm invitation and insistence of NFS president Prof. Diwasa in particular. Speaking on the subject matter discussed in the papers presented in the congress, she said doors are not closed for men and women to enter into each other's world of feelings and ideologies; and thus a mutual respect is possible, which alone is the thrust of the new critical feminist discourses. On the occasion, several speakers spoke about the plays and their contexts. The programme was jointly organized by Mandala Book Point, Ratna Pustak, and *Across* magazine, as part of the Congress and in the honour of the participants. Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, NFS President, shed light on how the performance of a play like *Fire in the Monastery* by Prof. Subedi had employed strong folk elements. He thanked the organizers for hosting a dinner and the book release programme in honour of the Folklore Congress Participants. On the occasion, speaking about the context of the plays, Prof. Subedi said that the writing was about the common experience of pain and hope. Dr. Rayamajhi said that she had taken up the work of translation after she saw women's picture dramatized in the book in an effective way. Mr. Madhav Lal Maharjan of Mandala Book Point had also spoken on the occasion on behalf of the organizers. Mr. Ram Krishna Duwal's group had presented traditional Newar songs in the end, and Salil Subedi had played the Australian aborigine's wooden musical horn didgeridoo. Several persons including theatre artists, scholars, publishers, journalists, and literary writers were also present on the occasion.

The third day of the congress started with the ninth session, which had the theme **Folklore, Multiculturalism and Expression of Identity**. Dr. Gundrun Buhneman (from USA) had chaired the session. The paper presenters were: Dr. Sonja Servoma (Finland) who spoke on "Sounds of Nature in Poetics: A Transcultural Approach", Prof. Dr. Ranjeet S. Bajwa (India) on "Semiotics of Architecture: Ethno-Poetry as Anthropological Self Description of the Human Mind", Dr. S.K. Makbul Islam (India) on "Cultural Identity and Integration: A Theoretical Appreciation", Mr. Tejeshwar Babu Gwanga (Nepal) on "Newari Folk Culture: Interpretation of Forms and Symbols", Mr. Abdur Rashid Chowdhary (India) on "Folk Elements in Poetry", Mr. Bhim Narayan Regmi



Keynote presentation of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana (India), with Prof. Subedi (Nepal) and Dr. Droogenboodt (Spain)

(Nepal) on “Hair in Nepalese Society, Language and Literature” and Mr. Amrit Yonjan (Nepal) on “Tamba Kaiten: A Popular Traditional Genre in Tamang”. The session ended with poem recitation by Dr. Mohammad Hazi Salleh (Malaysia) and Prof. Tulasi Diwasa (Nepal).

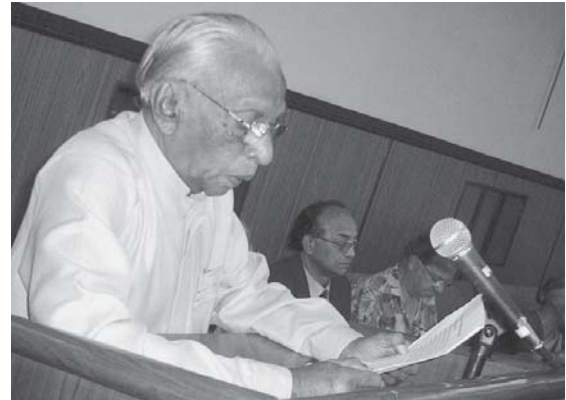
### Valedictory Session

Marking the end of the congress, the valedictory session was held under the chairmanship of NFS President Prof. Tulasi Diwasa on June 1, 2003. The participants from various countries presented their views and remarks on the occasion. Those expressing their views were: Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana (India), Dr. Sonja Servoma (Finland), Prof. Dr. Gundrun Buhneman (USA), Dr. Germain Droogenboodt (Spain), Dr. Abed Rahman Yusuf (Malaysia), Dr. Gunadasa S. Amarasekhara (Sri Lanka), Dr. Ranjit Shah and Dr. Ranjit Singh Bajwa (India), and Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi (Nepal). Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana praised the Nepalese cultural heritage as well as the people working in the field of folklore and folk culture in the country. She remarked that her pilgrimage to the country was highly fruitful. Dr. Ranjit Shah from Sahitya Akademi (India) handed some materials published from the academy over to NFS president.

Stressing the need to consider culture as a part of national development, Mrs. Riddhi Baba Pradhan, Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Civil Aviation and Tourism, appreciated the Society for successfully organizing the event. She mentioned that Nepal had already planned for the preservation and promotion of the tangible and intangible culture as part of its endeavour for national development. Prof. Abhi Subedi, as the master of ceremony, expressed gratefulness to all those involved in making the event successful. Prof. C.M. Bandhu added that the congress became a successful event after the participation of eminent scholars and delegates from different countries including India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, UK, USA, Spain, Finland, Switzerland, Germany and Italy. He also thanked the promoter, sponsors and supporters for their contribution in making the congress a success.

The congress ended with the remarks of the chairman of the session Prof. Diwasa, who spoke on the concept of folklore and briefly presented the new trends and theories emerged in

folklore studies. He emphasized the need to focus on the pragmatic aspect of folklore studies as well, in order to make them effective and to arouse the people’s motivation towards it. He also thanked all the participants, hoping to meet at the next congress.



Dr. G. S. Amarasekhara (Sri Lanka), delivering his presentation

### Folk Songs/ Dance Performances and Visits

Sanskritik Samsthan (a cultural institution under the Ministry of Culture) had organized the performances of some selected items of Nepali folk dances and songs. Members of Gandharva Art and Culture Organization had performed auspicious songs during the inaugural session. Besides, visits of temples and important places were also arranged for the foreign guest participants.

### Achievements

The congress was successful in bringing several eminent scholars and poets, from within and outside the country, together to discuss the important topics in the domain of folklore studies. The participation of experts particularly from India, Finland, USA, UK, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Malaysia and Sri Lanka was very much inspiring. After the success of the congress, Nepalese scholars have been encouraged further to explore new avenues of study; and they have acquired new insights in the study of folklore. Besides, the congress has also successfully given a glimpse of Nepal’s rich cultural heritage to the foreign guests, and has provided opportunities to the Nepalese scholars for having a direct discourse with the eminent international folklore scholars and literary figures. It has also opened new possibilities of collaboration to promote and facilitate folklore studies at the national, regional and international levels. The congress also repeated and strongly recommended the proposal of the First International Folklore Congress (2001) that South Asian Centre for Folklore Studies should be established in Nepal.

### Comments and Observations

The participants have appreciated the event for its success in providing a great opportunity for them to share on several dimensions of folklife and its reflection in literature. It became a wonderful opportunity for Nepalese experts to learn from foreign scholars. In the same way, after their participation in the congress, the



foreign participants have expressed their happiness for having the opportunity to be acquainted with the Nepali scholarship on folklore, folklife and literature.

The Kathmandu Post, a leading daily newspaper published in Nepal, has called the congress events as 'august gathering', which attempted to "communicate, preserve and evaluate the impacts of folklore on contemporary art, literature and lifestyles."

In her response after participating in the congress, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana has reported – "The conference was exciting and I enjoyed listening to the presentation of the young scholars, particularly the Nepalese scholars. I learnt a great deal..... I was greatly impressed with the level of scholarship of many delegates, especially from the Nepali Folklore Society. The President and Vice-President of the Society have indeed trained a generation of young scholars who displayed a very incisive mind."

The participants benefited a lot from Dr. Vatsyayana's ideas on folklore in particular. As Shiva Rijal has commented, the ideas presented by the 'remarkable

scholar' Dr Vatsyayana were highly impressive; and the congress was successful to develop new insights in the area of folklore.

Following the remarks of Prof. Abhi Subedi, the congress succeeded in bringing the 'creative power' found in the folk culture into the foreground by means of the various papers presented and discussed during the congress.

In the words of Bishnu Pratap Shah, the congress was really "an event of international dimension and scholastic importance"; which contributed a lot towards international, intercultural and inter-religious understanding; and it was well organized and well attended "both in terms of number and quality of participants." He has congratulated Prof. Tulasi Diwasa and his energetic colleagues of NFS for organizing the congress in the right time when the world is passing through the process of globalization which will not be stable without cultural understanding and social tolerance; and only the interactions of the kind that took place in the congress can promote such qualities among people living in different parts of the world.



Dr. Vatsyayana, Dr. Vimal and Dr. Shah (all from India)



Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi (centre) with Prof. Subedi and Dr. Droogenboodt

## Second Folklore Congress:

### A Bird's Eye View<sup>1</sup>

• Bishnu Pratap Shah

While Kathmandu was agog with political turmoil, an event of international dimension and scholastic importance was taking place in the city last week – the Second International Folklore Congress, attended by many scholars devoted to culture, literature, folklore etc. from different countries of the East as well as the West, under the aegis of Nepal. Eminent poets, writers and scholars from India, Malaysia, the UK, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, the USA and Japan including renowned scholar Kapila Vatsyayana and famous poet Indra Bahadur Rai from India and seasoned GS Amarasekhara from Sri Lanka attended the congress. Nepal, the host country,

was represented by a large contingent of prominent scholars and writers including learned Satya Mohan Joshi, noted literary critic and dramatist Abhi Subedi, prominent folklore scholar C.M. Bandhu, academicians Ram Dayal Rakesh and Bairagi Kaila, linguist Prof. B.M. Dahal, poet and writer Tejeshwor Babu Gongga and many other prominent and promising scholars and litterateurs.

The words 'folk' and 'lore' as understood in everyday language denote common people and particular body of tradition handed down from generation to generation respectively. Anthropologically, folklore can be defined as the common orally transmitted traditions, myths, festivals, songs, beliefs and superstitions, arts and crafts and stories of the people; and it has historical, ethnological and sociological components. Its origin normally cannot be traced back to particular author or date and the mode of transmitting is basically oral. Though folklore is characteristic of geography, culture and history etc., it has universal character also. One can find in all folklores human trauma and tribulation, emotion and ecstasy, bravery and treachery, striving for survival, comfort and perfection expressed in different forms. Nepal is

<sup>1</sup> First published in *The Kathmandu Post* (Sunday Post) – June 8, 2003

rich in folklores with universal, regional and local appeals and traits. At the same time, Nepal is a multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural country and is in the process of democratically integrating into a nation in the real sense of the term. As every ethnic, cultural or religious group within the state will try to blossom fully and subordinates itself to nationhood, the studies, interactive deliberations and understanding of folklores of different geographical areas, religions, ethnicities and cultures assume importance in this context. Interests of scholars in the study of folklores after the advent of democracy are growing and their contributions in this field are laudable. It will promote mutual understanding, appreciation and tolerance at the community level and lead to integration at the national level. The significance of the international symposium of the kind held last week has its own importance. It promotes international peace and brotherhood by contributing to the international, intercultural and inter-religious understanding. South Asia, in spite of basic unity of values, has diversity of religions, ethnicities and cultures, and has witnessed communal riots, political strife, military conflicts and acrimonious diplomacy in recent times. The world, on the other hand, is moving towards globalization – politically, economically and technologically. The foundation of this globalization, however, will not be stable without a cultural understanding and social tolerance. Thus the importance of interactions such as second international folklore congress, in this context, is very great since Nepal has a rich treasure of folklore and the choice of venue is appropriate. The Nepali Folklore Society, in general, and Prof. Tulasi Diwasa and his energetic colleagues, in particular, deserve congratulation.

The congress was divided into 8 working sessions in addition to the inaugural and valedictory ones. Each working session had a separate chairperson. The first working session had noted scholar Kapila Vatsyayana as its chairperson and keynote speaker. Her erudite presentation on theoretical and methodological issues in the studies of folklore and creative imagination was heard in rapture. Elucidating on continuous interactions between what is called folk and classical, complementary and reinforcing each other, Dr. Vatsyayana highlighted the complex issues of methodology in critical studies of folklore.

The presentation by Prof. Abhi Subedi on folk elements in modern Nepali poetry dealt illustratively on creative use of folklore metaphors, language and other methods in Nepali poetry. The presentation by Tejeshwor Babu Gongga and Veteran scholar Satya Mohan Joshi were in the realm of tangible symbols of culture such as Bhaktapur and Rato Machhindranath. One could wish that they were done in the backdrop of Bhaktapur city and chariot of Machhindranath. The themes of other sessions were: i) folklore, literature, performing arts, ii) oral poetry,

epics and ballads, iii) oral and written traditions, iv) folklore, gender and power, v) folklore, cultural studies and folk practices, and vi) folklore, multiculturalism and expression of identity. A separate session on Nepali was also held with veteran scholar Satya Mohan Joshi on the chair and eminent poet Madhav Ghimire as special guest. The themes mentioned above will provide the readers with insight into what was deliberated in the congress. Eminent speakers in each session presented scholarly oral or written presentation on different subjects within the given themes. President of the Nepali Folklore Society and chairperson of the valedictory session, irresistible and dynamic Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, in the last address of the congress, and in his thunderous voice and stirring appeal asked all the scholars and researchers in the field to dedicate their efforts to the common people. When Dr. Vatsyayana began her valedictory address by bowing her head and paying tribute to nonagenarian scholar Joshi, the audience was moved. The community of Nepali participants felt that they themselves had been honoured. It was also a moment of glory of the veteran scholar. Dr. Abhi Subedi was engaging in comparing and added luster to the valedictory session.

Such an important scholastic event was only marginally reported in the media of the capital, perhaps obsessed with politics and politicians as they are. They could have roped in many eminent scholars from abroad for interviews and provided Nepali readers with their stimulating perspectives and views. The conference was well organized and was well attended both in terms of number and quality of participants. A short background profile of speakers in the otherwise slick and glossy brochure would have enlightened participants about the background and authority of the speakers. Arrangement in future to circulate papers or its gist on the subject spoken will be appreciable.<sup>2</sup>



Dr. Mohammad H. Salleh, Dr. Abed R. Ysuf, and Mrs. Ysuf (Malaysia)

<sup>2</sup> Appreciating the author's feedback, NFS wants to clarify that the papers' abstracts were printed in the congress programme schedule and circulated among the participants.



# Women's Pain and Power in Folksongs<sup>1</sup>

• Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi

A few observations made by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana at the Second Folklore Congress still reverberate in my mind. Among them are certain issues that were addressed at the second international folklore congress organised by the Nepali Folklore Society in Kathmandu, and others that are gaining at least some space in the socio-cultural discourses in South Asia in general and Nepal in particular. One such subject was woman's space in the creative texture of the culture of a society. On these three days of the Congress held from May 30-June 1, various issues of culture and folklore were discussed and argued about – modernism and poetic expressions, literature and performing arts, oral poetry, epics and ballads, and gender and power in folklore. So in the midst of all these themes, women's issues related to folklore became a topic in its own right. These days everywhere subjects related to the studies of women's issues come up with certain force never experienced before. But each time the question that comes to my mind is why do women as a subject have to come up in a seminar that chooses for its main topic a subject that is broadly applicable to everybody and everything? Kapila Vatsyayana in her closing remarks at the valedictory session said that today's need was to create an ambiance of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. Now, would this non-inclusiveness mean an exclusive gesture for the people who promote women's issues in the system of folklore studies? Do the various folklore forms give space to women? What I mean is, do women feature in folktales, ritual practices, folk dramas, performances, folk songs and folk ballads? The answer to this is, yes, they do.

Woman does occupy the principal space in all these forms including the visual ones. In fact, the most intensive visual picture of a character when it appears in the folklore, is that of a woman. She is the princess, who either lives in the palace or lives in a cursed state, as a monkey girl – *Bandarni Maiya* living in the hollow of a tree, for example, or as an animal or a bird waiting to be revived into the original human form with the magic stroke of a strong prince or a handsome young man turning up one day driven by a desire to adventure, which only he is capable of, being a man and a prince at that. Or this woman of the folklore exists in visual forms of painting as a girl carrying the pitcher of water, or playing with the rural god or a lover, a game of hide and seek. Or this girl sits by the riverside as if lost in a state of utopia, waiting for her love to return.

In all these contexts, the girl is at the centre, and yet she is not her own agent. She is not an active voice, but a passive one. "Once upon a time there was a prince who loved a girl...." Thus the story of the girl goes. She is either

loved, rescued, looked at, liked, painted and made to dance to the music of the male artists, in most of the folk stories as far as my knowledge goes. She is not the looker but the one who is looked at; she is not the one who takes initiatives but is made to take initiative by the agency, the male lover, benevolent or demon.

So when I decided to write a paper to be presented at the folklore congress about the exclusiveness of the *Teej* songs in Nepal, I was consciously and knowingly looking into the expressions of passivity. I saw in the *Teej* songs the struggle of a woman trying to find a space for herself – space which she could call her own. I wanted to see how through the *Teej* songs a woman raises her head out of her little nest and begins to sing her little songs, which for once she can call her own. Therefore, here she becomes an active agent; she becomes the subject of her own presentation. In her own presentation, ironically, she becomes the author of her subjectivity because in the songs, rituals or dances, her identity becomes the theme and she becomes the author of this oral, exclusive drama. She becomes an entity in the long story of suffering. Her private existence becomes a point where different paths converge. She bears the brunt of the society's male-centric prejudices. She is denied any access to the domains of power and expression. She lives with her angst. She becomes an existential persona. She finds her way out. She sings. When she sings, she utilizes the limited space, the assigned places to perform. She chooses a small audience to see her performance. She is her own performer. In this process, she becomes extremely creative, because she always is, but is denied the chance to express it. Marital condition is her banishment, her next *Avatar* (incarnation) in the continuum of existence. She makes songs and sings.

This unique phenomenon is not exclusive to women in Nepal. We find many universal examples. *Teej* songs constitute such rebellion. The repertoire of these songs may be limited, but every time they are sung or performed, they acquire new power because her suffering is a continuum. Every year she sings standing by the roadside and with friends, she is declaring her liberation; she is narrating her folk epic, her folk ballad. *Teej* songs, as I find them, are combinations of pain, rebellion and desire for being treated as equal, as human beings. Women to come out on these days singing have made a tacit agreement with the male folks. She says to her man, "It is for you, you see, that I am fasting and singing, you silly!" But when she is on her own, she sings out this power of pain. She declares her rebellion. She is torn between two worlds – one to which she belongs physically and the other one she is attached to psychologically. Her identity, therefore, is amorphous. And she is constantly in search of a locus and grappling to get a foothold from where she can speak confidently, but she cannot. Her songs, therefore, express that alterity and the wrenching pain that comes with it.

Thus a reading into these folk songs we get to understand the source, nature, the sharing and presentation of the pain of our women. So these mute hegemonized

<sup>1</sup> First published in *The Kathmandu Post*, June 3, 2003

forms of folklore with women as principal elements should be the focus of study, and this to women, academics or not is a productive subject.

The above was one part of my discourse that I presented at the Folklore Congress. But there other very interesting papers on the subject of women's songs were presented by my colleague Gajab Kumari Timilsina and by a linguist Madhav Pokhrel. I found the papers about songs expressing women's subjectivity presented by some Indian women scholars very interesting.

## Folklore and Folklife of Gopalis in Kunchhal and the Neighbouring Villages

### Introducing the Folk Group

Nepal is recognized as the flower orchard of several castes and ethnicities of people living in the geographically diverse areas of the country. There are several castes, ethnic groups and sub-groups of people in Nepalese society. Among them, one is the Gopali ethnic group, which is also known as 'Gwala' or 'Gwal'. It has been said that Nepal was named after the earlier name (*Nep*) of this ethnic group. There are some similarities between this folk group and the Newar community living in Kathmandu valley and other parts of the country.

Gopalis consider themselves as the ancient ethnic group. They believe that their ancestors were the *Gwalas* who came to Shonitpur (Thankot, Kathmandu) from Dwarika during *Dwapar Yug* (a mythical period in the ancient time) with Lord Krishna, for the purpose of killing the demon King Banasur. Gopalis call themselves the descendants of *Nandagopali* and *Krishnagopali*, but there is no evidence yet to support the claims they make about their ancestors. However, historians have said that there is some truth in the Gopalis' belief on this matter.

According to the legend, Krishna's son Praddumna had married Prabhavati, the daughter of Banasur. Later, Krishna went back to Dwarika after establishing the Gwalas' kingdom in Kathmandu valley. The Gwalas ruled over the kingdom for a long period in the valley. They followed the tradition of worshipping the cow. It is found that they had ruled over the valley for 9 generations of kings, prior to the arrival of the Mahispal and Kirant kings in the kingdom.

As some historians have explained, the Gopal kings belonged to the sub-group of *Nep* ethnic group, and *Par* was the name of the sub-group who used to live taming buffaloes. Both *Nep* and *Par* (also called *Mahispal*) ethnic groups were interested in taming animals (cows and buffaloes respectively), so they wanted to reside near the forest areas because pasture land was essential to keep their domestic animals. So, they resided in the localities where there was jungle in the hillside above and plain land on the foot of the hills – like the places of Tistung, Palung, Thankot, Balambu, Kisipidhi, Kirtipur, etc.

In this connection, some information is mentioned in the inscription found in Toukhel, Chitlang VDC ward no. 6 (Makawanpur district), which was established by Amshubarma in sambat 37. According to the inscription, king Amshubarma had given some land to the local people to transfer the village

To come back to my original point, even in the folkloristic forms, woman's representation should be looked at with a sense of detachment. To achieve a sense of detachment for a woman may be difficult, but whether woman or man, a folklore scholar's task is to look into the values of the society as reflected into the mirror of the folklore. Kapila Vatsyayana, though she does not seem to approve of making woman's subjectivity as the only focus, did agree with the fact that search for power through texts is a very important method of study, and to me *Teej* songs constitute that power.

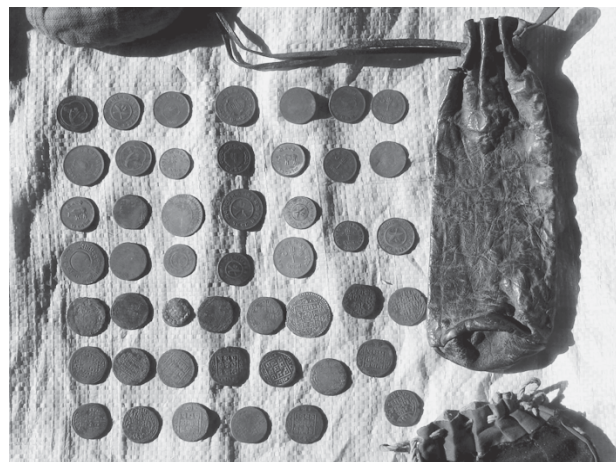


A group photo of Gopali Guthi members

from one locality to another because there was the scarcity of land to keep the domestic animals in the village. From this evidence, we can say that Gopalis were living by taming domestic animals including cows and buffaloes. Explaining this inscription, historians have said that the typical ethnic group residing in the localities of Chitlang such as Toukhel, Nhulgaun, Kunchhal etc. are the *Gwalas* or Gopalis.

In this way, we can notice the presence of Gopali folk group from the ancient time to the beginning of human settlement in Kathmandu valley and the Lichchhavi Era. Nowadays, they are residing in some localities of Kathmandu valley and in some villages of Makawanpur district.

It seems Gopalis had entered the northern part of Makawanpur district from Kathmandu valley and from Simaraungad, which lies on the south.



Ancient coins and traditional leather money bags of Gopalis



### Settlement Area

In Kathmandu valley, Gopalis are residing as the indigenous residents in the places like Thankot, Machchhegaun, Kirtipur etc. In the northern part of Makawanpur district, they are found in Bajrabarahi, Chitlang and Daman VDCs. The localities of their permanent residence include Kunchhal, Gahate, Kulgaun and Papung of Bajrabarahi VDC, Toukhel and Nhulgaun of Chitlang VDC and Shikharkot of Daman VDC.

In the villages of Toukhel and Nhulgaun (Chitlang VDC), Gopalis have settled for a long period. The inscription of sambat 37 found in Toukhel is the evidence of this. According to Ratna Bahadur Gopali (48) of Toukhel, nowadays 80 households are living in this village (as of 2062-7-24 B.S.). They came to this village migrating from Naukhande, a neighbouring village.

In Papung village of Bajrabarahi VDC ward no. 1 (*Kothanani Tol*), 60 households of Gopali ethnic group are living nowadays. Similarly, in Gahate (ward no. 5 of the same VDC), there are 29 Gopali households; and 7 households are found in Kulgaun (ward no. 7 of the VDC). Kunchhal village lies in ward no. 6 of Bajrabarahi VDC, which is an old settlement area of Gopalis; and the entire village is their settlement. 'Kunchhal' was named after the Gopali word 'kuncha', which means 'the corner place', since this village lies in the cornerside of a hill. There are more than 200 Gopali households in Kunchhal; and most of the villagers are Gopalis. The total population of Gopalis living in this village is 1228.

In Daman VDC, a small Gopali village is Shikharkot, having 76 households.

### Gopali Language

The language of Gopalis is similar to Newari. However, it differs from the standard Newari in accent, vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structure, word formation etc. Besides, the influence of localization is found in the language, and there is also a mixture of some Nepali and Tamang words in it. The language is spoken with a long tune, and it is difficult to understand for the Newari speakers. If there are outsider Newari speakers listening to the conversation of Gopalis, the outsiders simply remain the observers, without understanding anything.

There are some differences in the language from one village to another as well. The Gopali language spoken in Kunchhal is not intelligible for non-Gopalis. It is not well-intelligible even for the Gopalis who reside in the villages other than Kunchhal. Pure Gopali is spoken in this village. This must be because only the speakers of this language reside in the village and there is very rare chance for the Gopalis to be mixed with the speakers of other languages.

Gopali language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan language family. It is spoken for communication but its script is not developed so far; so it is limited only to oral communication, having no development of written literature.

The Gopalis of Kunchhal village call their language *Gwaa Bhay* or *Newaa Bhay* and the language spoken by the Shrestha community of Kathmandu, Patan and Saraswati Bajar (of Bajrabarahi VDC) as *Syasya Bhay*.

One significant characteristic of colloquial Gopali language is vowel sound deletion in the syllable sequence. In most of the Gopali words, the phonological feature of medial vowel deletion is noticed in pronunciation. As a result, instead of pronouncing the original two-syllabic words as it is, the words become monosyllabic in utterance, after deleting the vowel in the initial syllable. For example, *khuche* (dog) becomes *khche* (/u/ is deleted).



Handwritten old manuscripts

### Food and Dressing

In the morning, Gopalis eat their traditional food *Dhindo* (made of flour) with pumpkin curry, milk etc. In the evening, they have rice, vegetables, *Gundruk* (fermented mustard leaves), *Sinabali* (fermented radish) etc. They eat *Mali* (made of flour), curd, roasted corn, *Thon* (home-made beer) etc. in the afternoon. They also eat *Bajee* (beaten rice), peas and beans, buffalo meat etc. and drink alcohol in the feasts and festivals.

Gopalis have their own traditional dresses. The women wear *Haku Patasi* (black home-made sari), *Putulan* (a kind of blouse), white home-made *Jani* (also called *Patuka*, which is worn round the waist), and *Gacha* (shawl). Similarly, the traditional items of Gopali male dress are: *Khesa tupuli* (cap made of *khesa*, a kind of thread), *Tapalan* (home-made garment like Nepali *Daura*), *Jani* (white waist-cloth), etc. They also wear *Suruwal*, *Istakot* and shoes. Gopalis used to wear the shoes made of straw materials or *Nalu* (a plant fibre), and the women used to wear beads made of silver coins. But nowadays the use of these traditional items is gradually reducing.

### Village, Gods and Festivals

Gopalis are rich in their folklore and folk culture. They have their own identity reflected in their customs, festivals, *Jatra*, folk gods-goddesses, etc. They like to live at a place making the houses very close to each other, so their houses in the village are very much concentrated, and mostly the houses are joined to each other. There are narrow pathways in the Gopali settlements. There are taps, inns, wells and worshipping places or temples in the village; and there is *Lachhi* (square-shaped platform for social and cultural performances) in the centre.

Ganesh, Bhimsen and Mahadeva are the gods compulsorily worshipped by Gopalis. Gaikeshwar, Champakeshar, Unmukteshwar, Pandukeshwar etc. are the main forms of Mahadeva worshipped by Gopalis. Similarly, they also worship the folk gods/goddesses *Chuni*, *Satkanya* and *Panchkanya*. Basically, all Gopalis follow local Hinduism, but nowadays some of them have begun to follow other religions as well.

Several festivals observed by Gopalis are similar to those celebrated in the Newar community. They celebrate *Gathemangal*, *Byanjankegu*, *Gai Jatra*, *Jugan Charha*, *Yanya Punhi*, *Dashain*,

*Tihar, Kwayalapunhi, Bala Chaturdashi, Thinla Punhi, Maghe Sankranti, Chaite Dashain, Sithinakhaa, Jharigwa*, etc. and several other local *Jatras*.



Gopali cultural programme

### Family and Kinship

There are two types of Gopali families living in Kunchhal village: joint family and nuclear family. Usually, a nuclear family splits from the joint family after the son's marriage, whereby the members of the split family (including the husband, wife and child/children) prepare their own food on a separate oven, though it may be in the same house. But even after separation, they help each other in the agricultural activities of *Bola* or *Parma* – the indigenous system of exchanging labour work.

Two types of kinship systems are mostly observed. The first one is consanguine kinship – which includes the blood-related family members, i.e. father, mother, son, daughter, grandfather/mother/son/daughter. The second type is affine kinship – including the kin-related family members, e.g. maternal uncle/aunt, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, etc. The roles of different kins in the rituals like *Maha Puja*, *Bhai Tika*, *Chhewar*, *Beyanki*, *Leratei*, marriage etc. show their social unity in this folk group. Kins play a very important role in *Bola* too, because most of the *Bolas* are from the kinship.

### Guthi and Bola System

*Guthi* plays the role of a powerful social institution among Gopalis. This is the final authority to take decision on the important matters of socio-cultural activities to be held. Generally, membership of *Guthi* is not allowed for women; so they do not participate in the decision making procedures in *Guthi*. Usually, there is no gender discrimination in Gopali society. However, since *Guthi* members enjoy a greater socio-cultural status and prestige than others, it has assigned a better position for males than females in an indirect way, by restricting its membership only among the males.

The *Guthi*'s activities are different from one locality to another. *Guthi* organizes some important rituals for uniting the people of Gopali folk group. It organizes *Chunni Shikari Puja* three times a year, one month long *Dapha Bhajan* in *Kartik*, *Kumari Puja* and *Gokeshwor Puja* on the day of *Shree Panchami*, *Bhosala Puja* in *Baishakh* etc.

*Guthi* has five main *Naikes* (the supreme or head of the village) from five main *Toles* (small section of the settlement) and five *Thakalis* (the oldest male person in the village) from five *Toles*. Besides, there are three *Bahidars* from the three main *Toles* and the *Chhimies* (*Guthi* members) in the *Guthi*.

*Bola* is a unique type of exchange labour system in



Gopali *Guthi Bhoj* (feast)

agricultural activities. This is the foundation of Gopali society. Without this, no one can complete the agricultural works from plantation to harvesting. It is not confined to agricultural works but also found in the construction of houses, making canals, feasts, *Dapha Palo Bhoj* (feast arranged by the singing groups in turn), etc. By doing this, they don't take money or grains but they must participate in a feast organized by the host family after completing the particular work.



Agricultural activities of Gopalis in *Bola* System

### Life Cycle Rituals

Although Gopali folk rituals are found similar to those followed by the Newar community, there are differences between the two. For example, while the ritual of *Ihi* (girl's marriage to *Bel*, a wild fruit) and *Bara* (a ritual of keeping the girl in isolation after *Ihi*) are customary in Newari culture, Gopalis do not observe these rituals. Instead of *Bara*, they have the tradition of fasting for 5 days and giving *Gunyu-cholo* (a set of traditional lady's dress) to the girl.

Some typical rituals observed by the Gopalis are described below.

***Macha Byanki*:** After the birth of child, Gopalis have the practice of observing *Sutak* (period of ceremonial uncleanness) for 4 days. They invite *Derima* (a lady having special duty to fulfil on this occasion). Generally, women deliver the baby on the first floor of the house. The woman sleeps on paddy straw. The ritual for purifying the woman after the 4-days of uncleanness is called *Macha Byanki*. To perform this ritual, the baby is exposed to the



sunlight and kept on a bundle of the straw which was used for delivering the baby. After taking the bundle of straw out, it is kept at a place safely, and *Derima* scratches the bundle with an arrow. Then food items are put in a leaf plate which is kept on the bundle.

**Bhusha Khaya** (hair cutting): The hair cutting ritual is performed between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year of the male child's age. After hair cutting, some Gopalis, though not all, also perform the ritual of *Bratabandha* or *Kaitapuja*. The boy's sisters, paternal aunt and maternal uncle have special duty on this occasion. Maternal uncle usually cuts the hair and the boy's paternal aunt collects the hair in a brass plate and then takes it to the stream nearby to dispose it and let it flow with water. Gopalis do not cut their boy's hair prior to this ritual; and even if it is cut before, the hair should be kept safely and should be taken to the water in the stream on this occasion.



A Gopali couple observing *Leratei* marriage ritual

**Bya** (marriage): In the past, Gopalis had the tradition of child marriage. But nowadays, it is no longer in practice. However, the youngsters are considered ready for marriage after the age of 13-14 years. Even these days, there are events of marriage between the girls and boys of 15-16 years. There are several instances of love marriage in this age.

There are two types of marriage among Gopalis: arranged marriage and love marriage. In the case of love marriage, the boy and girl go away from their family and stay in the house of the boy's relatives for some time. In such cases, the boy's party has to organize *Leratei* (a special ritual-cum-feast), with the consent of the girl's parents, to make the marriage socially acceptable.

**Si** (death ritual): Gopalis have a *Singuthi* (an indigenous organization like 'trust') to manage the death ritual. In Kunchhal village, altogether 105 households are involved in the *Singuthi*. In the funeral ritual, all the members of *Singuthi* go to the funeral procession with a piece of firewood. Death ritual consists of several works, which the members of *Singuthi* have to perform. In the case of their denial to perform, they should pay the fine. After the death of a senior person, the family members should mourn for 13 days, and thereafter they are considered purified. In the past, Gopalis used to invite a Newar pundit for performing this ritual, but nowadays the Aryan pundit is invited. Generally, Gopalis wear white dress for 6 months after the death of their mother and for 1 year after the death of father. This period is called *Barkhi*.

### Indigenous Technology and Wisdom

Some of the important indigenous technologies found among Gopalis include: drainage for irrigation, *Pani Ghatta*

(stone-made flour mill running through water power), using the oxen-pulled ploughs, etc. But nowadays, the tractor has also been introduced among Gopalis as modern technology.

To mention the folk knowledge, the Gopalis seem to be expert in making *Sinabali* by pressing the radish in the deep hole under the ground, making *Gundruk* keeping the mustard leaves in the heat of manure, making *Chana* after cutting the radish, making liquor, etc. The indigenous skill of cloth making using the handloom is also found among them.

Gopalis have the tradition of treating the illness by shamans and traditional healers. In Kunchhal, people have the belief that the god/goddesses *Panchkanya* and *Satkanya* play role in making people ill; and only the shaman can treat the illness. In the case of injury in the external body parts, they apply the liquid of *Banmara* (a typical wild herbal plant) in the wound.



A hole for making *Sinabali* (fermented radish)

### Folk Art and Architecture

Gopalis used to have three-storey houses. Such houses are still found in Shikharkot. There are four-storey houses in Kunchhal, Gahate, Papung and Kulgaun. In Papung and Toukhel, the houses are made of bricks; but in Gahate, Kulgaun and Shikharkot, the houses are stone-made. In Kunchhal, the houses are of mixed type.

In Papung, altogether 33 houses were destroyed due to fire in 2033 B.S. (around 1976); and there are lots of differences in the style of houses constructed before the event and thereafter. The traditional house buildings are totally changed after their renovation. Nowadays, Gopalis have followed the modern style of house construction – e.g. making cemented houses, constructing the cemented pillars, etc. Traditional houses have the carvings in the wood, but the modern ones do not have such type of art.



Gopali women and children preparing *Bajee* (beaten rice)

### Economic Life and Livelihood

Although most of the Gopalis are living on agriculture and animal husbandry, some are involved in other occupations as well. Their economic life and livelihood can be described in the points given below.

**Agriculture and animal husbandry:** Most of the Gopali families are depending fully on their agricultural land for their survival as well as for economic activities. They have two types of land: a) *Boon* (plain terraces), where they grow paddy, potatoes, cabbage, chilly, maize etc.; and b) *Keu* or *Bari* (slope terraces), in which they grow radish, millet, corn, horse-bean, and other vegetables.

Gopalis also tame animals keeping them at *Goths* (sheds). They construct the *Goths* in *Keu*, which is usually far from their house.

Basically, all the Gopalis manage their economic activities by using their farm and live-stock products. Despite their limited income, they do not have hand-to-mouth problems.

**School teacher:** Some Gopalis of Kunchhal village are teachers in the local primary schools. In addition to their regular duty of going to school, the teachers are also involved in the farm activities in the morning and evening hours.

**Business:** Some persons are involved in business activities, including:

a) *Collecting and selling farm products:* The vendor collects vegetables, paddy and other products from the villagers at a place and supplies these goods to the cities in gross quantities;

b) *Managing small shops:* The shopkeeper sells the items of daily use – e.g. soap, matchboxes, kerosene, cooking oil, biscuits, sandals, cigarettes, local wine, etc.

**Foreign-wage labourers:** Some people within the age group of 18-30 have gone to the foreign countries for employment. They are employed as labourers in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Malaysia.

**Cottage industries:** Some Gopalis are also involved in the domestic/cottage industries – e.g. weaving looms; producing goods of domestic use such as *Doko* (bamboo-made basket), *Namlo* (long strip for carrying load); and making *Gundruk* (fermented leaves of mustard, radish etc.), *Sinabali* (fermented radish), *Leu Chana* (long slices of radish, which are dried hanging on ceilings etc.), *Lespati* (small pieces of radish dried on the floor), etc. They sell these products going to the city.

But the people involved in making such items do not spend their whole time in these works. As a regular business, they are involved in the farm activities; so they spend only their spare time in producing these goods.

### Folk Literature

Folk literature is defined as the people's literature in which the folk's thought is presented in the folk language in the folk style for the welfare of the folk people. This sort of literature is found among Gopalis as well. They have fewer folk ballads, but their interest in folk songs is remarkable. Particularly due to their religious belief, they give much time in worshipping the folk gods and goddesses, and in singing the religious and devotional songs. They spend the morning and evening hours for worshipping and singing religious songs. The religious song *Gula Dapha* is performed in the month of Shrawan; and *Kwayala Dapha* is performed in Kartik.

They have the tradition of *Hile Naach* ('dancing in the mud') on the occasion of *Saparu* (also called *Gai Jatra*, cow festival) festival every year. There is also the tradition of *Barabarse Naach* (a typical dance programme organized once in every 12 years). *Bade Pyakha* (a dance devoted to goddess Bajrabarahi), and *Swet Vinayak Pyakha* (devoted to god Swet Vinayak) are the religious dances found among Gopalis.

Gopalis sing the ballad based on the biography of King Gopichand and Bharathali. Among the folk songs, the important ones are *Tamimye* (old folk songs), *Baramase Geet*, children's songs, and several other songs related to love and attraction as well as trouble and pain – e.g. *Maya Madhula*, *Juta thwa pir*, etc.

Based on the available data and the relevant materials, Gopali folk literature can be studied by classifying it into: a) folk songs – which include religious songs, seasonal songs, short folk songs, festival songs, children's folk songs, and folk ballads; b) folk tales and legends, c) biography and memories, d) folk proverbs, e) riddles etc.

### Performing Folk Culture

Under the performing folk culture, two dramatic song performances deserve special mention, which are performed on the occasion of *Barabarse Naach*. The dance narrating the story of King Kam Singh and Chandra Singh is performed in Kunchhal. Another dance is the *Barabarse Bajrabarahi* dance, which is performed in the participation of all the local people including the Gopalis of Purano Tistung (Old Tistung). This dance is based on the story of King Satal Singh. In these dances, we can see the mixture of Newari and Nepali languages to some extent. The tradition of such a dramatic song, performed once in every 12 years, is found in Toukhel also.

On the occasion of *Gai Jatra* festival, a folk dance called *Gunla Pyankha* is famous in the villages of Kunchhal, Papung, Toukhel etc. Similarly, *Twak Naach* is a dance performed on the occasion of *Kartik Purnima* (Full Moon Day in the month of Kartik – i.e. around October-November) in Toukhel.

Among the various folk musical instruments found in the Gopali community, some major ones are: *Khin*, *Jhyali*, *Ta*, *Bagu*, *Ponga*, *Bansuri*, *Dha*, *Muhali*, etc.

### Folk Entertainment and Folk Games

Nowadays, Gopali youths play cards and carom board as part of their entertainment. Similarly, among the games played by children, some popular ones are: *Dhyaba* (throwing coins), *Khyapu* (rope skipping), *Gatta* (playing small stone pieces), *Khopi* (gambling with coins), *Bhamcha* or *Katamari*, *Chungi*, *Bheladekini* (kitchen-utensils), *Baghchal*, marbles, hide-and-seek, etc.

### Change and Continuity

Despite having their unique forms of folk tradition, folk culture and values, changes are found particularly among the young generations of Gopalis in the recent years. As a result of modern education and their contact with the people of other communities, the traditional norms and values are gradually changing. Although the old generation is following the practices discussed in this article, the youngsters seem to be less serious towards maintaining them. This trend is noticed in the lack of attraction among boys and girls to the folk songs/dances like *Barabarse Naach* and *Dapha Bhajan*, their reduced membership in *Guthis*, etc. While the folk dress *Haku Patasi* is commonly worn by the women of old age and middle age, it is rare among the young girls. Among the young men also, the traditional dresses are less popular.



Due to the contact of this folk group with the Newar community of Kathmandu valley, some changes are noticed in their way of celebrating the folk festivals and rituals also; and they are slightly modifying their traditional rituals – as in the case of *Kukur Pooja* (worship of the dog) and *Kija Pooja* (worship of the brothers by their sisters) during *Tihar*. Some influences of Brahmin culture are also noticed in their folk practices.

Like in the case of socio-cultural practices, changes are noticed in language use also, resulting into their tendency of mixing the Nepali and some English words in the conversation using Gopali – their mother tongue. In their speech, the influence of Nepali, Tamang and Kathmandu-based Newari accent is noticed. It indicates that, instead of their language being maintained as it is, there are ample possibilities of changes in the coming days.



Gopali female teachers Bishnumaya Gopali and Sunkeshari Gopali

## Some NFS Activities

### August Gathering at Second International Folklore Congress

The second International Folklore Congress kicked off in the capital today, drawing in renowned scholars from Nepal, India, Malaysia, USA, Germany, UK, Bangladesh, Switzerland, France, Italy, and Sri Lanka. The four-day gathering will attempt to communicate, preserve and evaluate the impacts of folklore on contemporary art, literature and lifestyles.

Folklore thrives on oral traditions, be it myths, legends, poetry, or songs. “It, therefore, faces the risk of extinction, if not made known to a large audience,” Satya Mohan Joshi, one of the paper presenters, told *The Kathmandu Post*. The importance of folklore lies in the fact that it brings out the similarity between different civilizations. “It makes us realize that we have common origins,” he added.

While a systematic archive would be the best way to record and thereby preserve folklore, the impact of folklore is distinctly visible in literature and arts. In developing countries, folklore and separate artistic genres have a symbiotic relationship, maintains Dr Kapila Vatsyayana from India.

<sup>1</sup> From *The Kathmandu Post* May 31, 2003

## Conclusion

Gopalis are known as one of the ancient ethnic groups of Nepal. The people of this folk group have their own folklore, folk tradition, folk language, folk rituals, folk religion, folk literature and folk practices. They have maintained some differences from the Newar community in language and culture. They used to be called the *Gwalas* or *Gwals*. Later, they disliked these words and started to use the word *Gopali* for their identity. But nowadays they like to be called themselves *Gwalas* again. They have, thus, begun to think that the word *Gwala* carries a greater value to refer to their ancestors.

• Prepared by: Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha

In association with: Dr. Rudra Laxmi Shrestha, Mr. Ekaram Maharjan and Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary

Translated into English by: Binod Luitel



Gopali farmers ploughing the field

Delivering the keynote today, she argued that there is a relationship between oral and written forms in South Asia.

“There is a phenomenon of poetry not being restricted only to word and sound, but the very nature of the articulation of the sound has an inbuilt visual narrative,” she said, adding, “the performance dimension is intrinsic to the verbal text.”

In Nepal, poetry is most eloquent about modernism of art, said Dr. Abhi Subedi. “The problem with the rejection of tradition in modern poetry as seen in Europe is that it either ignores the multiple layers of experiences or shows that there are not any cultural experiences to be represented by an epic poetry,” he argued, after saying that the objective of folklores in modern Nepali poetry is to reflect Nepali creative anxiety about modernization of culture.

The theater is not free from the effect of folklore. “The origin of theater owes to folklore,” said Shiva Rijal. However, the theatrical tradition in Nepal evolved in dual manner, with Bal Krishna Sama, Gopal Rimal, Vijay Malla, Govinda Gothale and Bhimnidhi Tiwari giving less emphasis to folklore. Folk theater flourished, especially in Kathmandu, Rijal said.

While mass media has stolen most of the consumers of entertainment, storytelling, a popular profession in Maithili cultural life, is facing a tough time. “The joys and sorrows, trials and tribulations, and happenings and miseries of the

common man are truly reflected in the folktales,” said Dr. Ram Dayal Rakesh. “Under the pressure of materialist environment, Maithili folklore is disappearing. The traditional storytellers are gone with the wind.”

To salvage the almost extinct folk practices, it is important to start a folk archive. “The government should initiate efforts in that direction,” said Satya Mohan Joshi. “Rock and Pop are not our culture. Folk is,” he added.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand said that research and in depth study of folklore is very important for historians and students of social studies, as it reflects social evolution and depicts the realities of the society’s traditional practices.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the inauguration programme of the Congress at the Birendra International Convention Centre. On the occasion, he also recited his poem. Mohan Koirala, Vice-Chancellor of Royal Nepal Academy, chaired the inauguration function.

The four-day event is being organized by the Nepali Folklore Society, presided by Professor Tulasi Diwasa.

### **Gopali Folk Cultural Show in Kunchhal**

A Gopali folk cultural programme was organized jointly by Nepali Folklore Society (NFS) and Nispaksha Gopali Yuba Club in Kunchhal village (Bajrabarahi VDC), Makawanpur district, on 21st December 2005. Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, NFS President, had attended the programme as the Chief Guest, along with the members of the Gopali folklore and folklife research team including Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha, Dr. Rudra Laxmi Shrestha, Mr. Ekaram Maharjan, Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary, and the Cameraman Mr. Siddhartha K. Shakya.

People of the Gopali folk group from Kunchhal, Papung, Tistung and Gahate villages were present in the programme, where the Gopalis had performed their folk dances, folk songs, modern songs, religious songs (e.g. Lok Bhajan and Ram Bhajan), patriotic songs, traditional dramas etc., using various folk and modern musical instruments (such as Bansuri, Khin or Madal, Jhyali, Ponga, Tabala, Muhali or Sahnai, harmonium etc.) and wearing their folk dresses (including the women’s Haku Patasi) during the performance. Among the several items of cultural show presented on the occasion, a dance performed



Gopali dance-drama based on the story of king Kam Singh

by the young Gopalis in the song based on the story of King Kam Singh and his Minister Chandra Singh was remarkable. The performance of Prakash Gopali’s self-composed song was also noteworthy. Besides, the presentation of Dr. Rudra Laxmi Shrestha, a member of the Gopali folklore and folklife research team, was also highly admirable. She had presented a Bhajan (religious song) playing with the harmonium.

In the programme, when the Chief Guest Prof. Diwasa had delivered a thoughtful and highly inspiring speech, the entire mass of Gopali community present in the programme had cheered up. Emphasizing the importance of studying folk culture, he said that such cultural activities will definitely help to maintain the identity of the country, and will assist a lot towards national development.

A large section of the Gopali folk community, from little children to the adults and old people, had attended the function with great enthusiasm.

The function was announced by Mr. Rup Chandra Gopali, the Chairperson of the club; and Mr. Chandra Bahadur Gopali, the Mul Naike (the folk group’s leader) of the village, had chaired it. The club’s secretary Mr. Nirmal Gopali had given welcome speech to the attendants.

### **Three Plays by Abhi Released<sup>1</sup>**

Kathmandu, June 1. Three Plays written by Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi were released on Saturday amid a musical function attended by participants from the international folklore congress held in Kathmandu.

The plays – “Fire in the Monastery”, “A journey into Thamel” and “The Caretaker’s Sky” – were written in the Nepali language first and were translated by Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi, Lecturer at the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University.

Releasing the plays compiled in a book, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana from India said that Subedi’s works are based on folklore articulating the voices of women – a cry of their silence – in which the author tries to analyze the women psyche.

“Subedi, although a male, is quite successful in depicting the voice of women, their passions, feelings and suffering, articulating them as well as female writers. His capability to look into an era indicating the acute imbalances, as Kalidas and Shakespeare, pens down a thread of inner access talking about life in aristocratic and modern society,” said Vatsyayana.

Commenting on Fire in the Monastery, she said that it is not about physical fire but the inner human psyche and gender issues.

Prof. Tulasi Diwasa said his works attempt to tell something new in the modern context through the folklore tradition of quest for existence. I was fascinated by the woman characters depicted in Subedi’s plays and endeavoured to translate the works by having a feel for the sensitivity of a woman, said Dr. Rayamajhi.

<sup>1</sup> First published in *The Rising Nepal*, June 2, 2003



“However, translating his works was not easy at all. It was difficult to translate the works to explain the culture, and there were problems with the language,” added Rayamajhi.

Violence, bloodshed, insecurity and other hurdles prevailed then in the country. In such a situation, I wanted to pray for the revival of peace and share it, said Dr. Subedi, who created a nun as a character in his works, whose voice is always drowned, to unfold the mystery of power by projecting women in the plays.

The programme was organized at Dwarika's Hotel in honour of the participants of the Second International Folklore Congress, and was sponsored by Mandala Book Point, Ratna Pustak Bhandar and Across Publication. Mr. Madhav Lal Maharjan, the master of ceremony, had also spoken on the occasion.

### Fourth Sarangi Day Observed

The Fourth Sarangi Day was observed in the Royal Nepal Academy, Kathmandu as a joint celebration of Nepali Folklore Society and Gandharva Culture and Art Organization (GCAO) on 6th May 2006. The programme was organized in three sessions: inaugural ceremony, symposium and cultural show. The first and second sessions were chaired by Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, NFS President, where the first session started with the announcement of Dr. Shiva Rijal (Member, NFS Executive Committee).

The Chief Guest Mr. Pauli Mustonen, His Excellency the Finnish Ambassador to Nepal, inaugurated the function playing the Sarangi, along with the Mangal Dhun (the auspicious Sarangi music) performed by Gandharva music players. The chief guest also released the NFS Newsletter ‘Nepali Folklore and Folklife’, published for the first time in Nepal. On the occasion, Mr. Krishna Bahadur Gandharva (Gorkha), Mr. Tirtha Bahadur Gandharva (Tanahun), Mr. Junga Bahadur Gandharva (Dang), Mr. Rubin Gandharva (Gorkha) and Miss Imai Phumiko (Japan) were felicitated for their contribution in the promotion of Gandharva folk culture. Mr. Nara Bahadur Gandharva, GCAO Chairman, had introduced the personalities being honoured. Besides, child folk singers Kalyan Gandharva, Suraj Gandharva and Manju Gautam were given the letter of appreciation for their talent in folk singing.



Paper presentation session, 4<sup>th</sup> Sarangi Day

In his inaugural address, Chief Guest Mr. Pauli Mustonen



Chief Guest His Excellency Pauli Mustonen, delivering inaugural address

appreciated the popular feelings expressed through the Gandharvas' Sarangi music that he had heard in the office of NFS some months ago, and remarked that folk music has been the expression of unity in diversity among the people of Nepal. Prof. Abhi Subedi, delivering the welcome speech, had highlighted the importance of the programme in connection with the extensive survey of the Gandharva Folklore and Folklife just carried out by NFS under the Nepali Folklore and Folklife Study Project. On the occasion, Dalit intellectual Mr. Hira Biswakarma described the pitiable situation of Gandharvas' life and suggested to launch concrete programmes to promote their musical talents so that they can survive playing the Sarangi more comfortably. Special invitee Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi, eminent folk culture expert of Nepal, suggested the Gandharva people to stop the feeling of inferiority among others and come forward in society. He further remarked that the Gandharvas' Sarangi music can present the real cultural identity of Nepal in the world, so this ethnic group can represent the identity of the nation as such. Prof. Chudamani Bandhu, NFS General Secretary, expressed the Vote of Thanks to all the attendants including the Chief Guest, distinguished personalities and all those who contributed to make the event successful. Speaking from the chair, Prof. Diwasa said that, celebrating the Sarangi Day, NFS has attempted not only to discuss on Sarangi as a musical instrument; but more importantly, to discuss about the Gandharva people since this musical instrument has been the identity of Gandharvas. He stressed the need to give more importance to the Sarangi players than to the Sarangi music itself, in order to promote the Gandharvas' folk culture, and to work for creating such an environment in which the Gandharvas' right to live by Sarangi playing is ensured.

In the second session, a symposium was organized with the theme 'Gandharva Folklore and Folklife: Tradition and Changes'. The session began with the announcement of Mr. Jaya Raj Panta (Secretary, NFS Executive Committee), when Prof. Diwasa took the chair, and the distinguished guests as well as the paper presenters were invited to the dais.

Delivering his presentation entitled 'Gandharva Folk Language and Folk Communication', Prof. Chudamani Bandhu elaborated the role played by the Gandharvas in the past to transmit the information from one place to another by means of music and songs, whereby they used to narrate the

contemporary events in their creation and visited different places performing such creations. This was a means of amusement for the public on one hand and a means of communicating the news on the other. Mr. Kusumakar Neupane, presenting the paper entitled 'Gandharva Performing Folk Arts: Continuity and Changes', described three most important forms of Gandharvas' performing arts: music, dance and singing, elaborating what sort of their performances and musical instruments are disappearing and which ones are still surviving. Mr. Ganesh Gandhari spoke on the "Situation of Nepali Gandharvas and the Responsibility of Various Sectors". He described the social, economic, cultural, educational and other aspects of Gandharvas' life, depicting the pitiable situation which they are living in; then he pointed out the need for launching special programmes for uplifting their situation.

After the presentation of papers, Mr. Ganga Prasad Akela, Mr. Ram Sharan Darnal, Dr. Moti Lal Parajuli, Prof. Dr. Yogendra Prasad Yadava and Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi had given their constructive comments and feedbacks on the presentations of Prof. Bandhu, Mr. Neupane and Mr. Gandhari. Speaking from the chair, Prof. Diwasa closed the session, giving thanks to the paper presenters for their successful presentations. He pointed out that, since none of the languages or cultures is 'superior'

or 'inferior', we should work for exploring and promoting all sorts of culture existing in our society, and actions should be launched for the cultural empowerment of people.

The third session was announced by Mr. Sachin Gandharva. The cultural programme started with the Mangal Geet (auspicious song) performed by a group of senior Gandharva singers including Mr. Gopilal Gandhari, Krishna Bahadur Gandharva, Yagya Bahadur Gandharva, Narayan Gandharva and Sura Bahadur Gandharva. On the occasion, Sarangi music performance was presented by Mr. Shyam Sharan Nepali, Ram Krishna Gandharva and his associates (from Samundra Band). Several Nepali folk song singers including Bima Kumari Dura, Khadak Garbujia, Rubin Gandharva, Kamala Chauhan, Raju Pariyar, Navaraj Ghorasaini and Badri Pageni had presented their folk songs. Another attraction of the function was the traditional Nepali Lok Dohori songs, in which the performers from Punhill Dohori Sanjh including Santosh Shrestha, Nara Bahadur Dangi, Prem Aryal, Manu Jug Sali Magar, Manu Rokka Magar, Nisha Lama and Sita Ale had presented their performance.

### About Nepali Folklore Society

Nepali Folklore Society (NFS) is a non-governmental, non-profit making organization registered in Kathmandu; and it is dedicated to folkloristic scholarship in the form of extensive study with special focus on cultural diversities, and the preservation and promotion of folklore and folklife in the country through research, education, dialogues and interactions, dissemination, publication, networking, awareness raising, and various sorts of field-based activities. NFS wants to contribute towards integrated and sustainable national development in several areas – e.g. folk tourism, gender and social development, etc. – by means of the exploration of ground realities in the communities of various folk groups of the country.

Some of the important works conducted by NFS include: International folklore congresses, various talk programmes and symposiums in the participation of nationally and internationally well-known scholars, poetry recitation by well-known poets (from within the nation as well as foreign countries), participation in the folklore congresses and seminars held in the foreign countries, field research under the Nepali Folklore and Folklife Study Project, etc. Right now, the activities of NFS, particularly those being conducted in this project, are running with Finnish support under Local Cooperation.

### Nepali Folklore and Folklife Newsletter

The Newsletter is edited and published semi-annually, by Prof. Tulasi Diwasa on behalf of Nepali Folklore Society, mainly for the purpose of disseminating the activities of the Society. Besides, it also provides a forum for folklorists and the people interested in Nepali folklore and folklife study.

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