

## Folklore and Folklife of Tharus: Exploration through Field Research

### Introduction

The study of the sixth folk group – the Tharus on various aspects related to the people and the culture is also completed as the project is continuing with Finnish support under local cooperation. Five studies under the Folklore and Folklife Study Project have already completed on Gandharva, Gopali, Aathpahariya Rai, Danuwar and Meches folk groups and reported in the earlier issues of the Newsletter (volume 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). This issues focusses on field research activities of Tharus. It concentrates on research methodology, achievements and success criterias. The following topics include the description of the processes and the activities carried on the field study along with its achievements.

### Preparatory Works

The works of purchasing some equipments and preparing the research tools are the starting points for the field research as preparatory works. Therefore, the equipments necessary for field research were purchased, including the digital voice recorder, rewritable CDs, DVCs (digital video cassettes) etc. Besides, field sheets, questionnaires and schedules were also prepared, prior to the beginning of the field-based activities.

### Pre-field Work

The Project Team Leader Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, requested local resident Dr. Govind Archarya to visit the field and collected all the necessary information of Tharu folk group of Dang and Deukhuri valleys in Dang district prior to the research team's departure. When he submitted the preliminary field report, the members of the society decided to send the sixth group to the field, and the group was sent to Dang on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

A team of four researchers was appointed for Tharu Study Project, agreement was made with them, and MOU and TOR were signed. The composition of the research team was as follows: 1. Dr. Govind Archarya (team coordinator) 2. Mr.

Ashok Tharu 3. Mr. Bir Bahadur Khadka and 4. Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary.

The basic information and the skills to operate the essential equipments and tools like digital camera, digital-audio recorder and video cameras were provided to the researchers from April 1-12, 2007. The researchers also operated the equipments as a practice. They also collected some reference materials related to the folk group and were involved in the orientation whereby they were given the necessary guidelines for field work on 6<sup>th</sup> April. Besides, an interaction programme was organized in the



*A view of tharu village, Bhaiskorma*

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project office to share the experience between them and the earlier field researchers who had completed their field work. Prof. Dr. C. M. Bandhu (coordinator, first research group), Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha (coordinator, second research group) and Mr. Amrit Yonjon (coordinator, third research group) shared their experiences of working in the field in course of data collection on behalf of the earlier research teams. The project team leader Prof. Tulasi Diwasa and Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi were present in the programme where Prof. Diwasa also provided necessary guidelines for the researchers regarding the field study.

### Field Work in Deupur, Palanse and Adjacent Areas of Dang

The field researchers collected data on Tharu folklore and folklife during three months (from April 14th to July 16th, 2007) in the settlement areas of the Tharu folk group in and around Deupur and Palanse VDCs in Dang district which cover various aspects of the folk group. The work of data collection was divided into four different areas of Tharu folklore and folklife. The subject areas are as follows: 1) Tharu folk language and folk communication, 2) Tharu material folk culture and folk heritage, 3) Tharu folk literature and performing arts, and 4) Tharu socio-cultural folklife and folkways. Mr. Bir Bahadur Khadka, Mr. Ashok Tharu, Dr. Govind Archarya (Team Coordinator) and Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary collected the relevant information in their areas respectively.

The researchers sent altogether six reports fortnightly to the project office, Bhatbhateny, Kathmandu during their stay in the field which cover their activities, collections and achievements. The methodologies that the researchers have followed to get the relevant information were visit to the key informants of the folk group, interview them and audio record the speech, take the photographs, and video-recordings of the several aspects of their life, community, culture, language etc.



*Beautiful Tharu village scene near studying center, Palase*

The researchers also used the field notes and questionnaires for collection of the data. During their fieldwork, the researchers visited almost each and every corner of the Tharu folk group settlement area. The Tharu people cooperated them a lot during their field visits and data collection.

Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, the project coordinator, along with the video-cameraman Mr. Siddhartha Kumar Shakya and Eeva Majjala and Karina Kurin, representative from the Embassy of Finland also visited and inquired the achievement and problems of the research work and gave guidelines to the researchers on the 30th June 2007.



*Kamaiya camp Kapase Bagya, Ghorahi*

### Problems and Rapport Building

As in the other field studies conducted under the FOFO Study Project, the researchers had to face the uneasy situation regarding ethical issues, i.e., to prove themselves honest for getting community's belief and support for the study. This is because, according to some of the community leaders as they have explained their past experience, some experts visited the Tharu settlement areas, consulted them and collected materials; but neither they made clear about the purpose of their "studies" nor they informed them about the research findings. Some of the community members told that some researchers even did distrustful acts like taking valuable documents from the villagers but not returning them back. Thus, they were reluctant to cooperate with the research team.

However, the researchers assured that there will not be any distrustful activities; they convinced the community saying that they will disseminate whatever they find during the research; and requested for their co-operation. Finally they were successful in in convincing the community about their honesty.

## Post-field Work

The researchers submitted their field study survey report after completing the work of data collection from the field in the third week of July 2007. The information collected from the fieldwork area are documented in the office, mostly in the form of digital audio/video recordings and photographs. Some items representing Tharu material folk culture, collected from the field research, are also preserved in the office. The researchers had finished transcription, analysis and interpretation of the data and prepared the detailed report. All the researchers had finished their report writing and submitted to the project office.

## Collections and Achievements

The researchers completed data collection on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007. The work of data collection from the folk group had been divided among four researchers covering the four main areas of folklore and folklife study. The progress of their work is reported here briefly.

The researchers have brought some items representing the Tharu material culture. These items include: *Jhopaha berra* (head band used by bride for the first time to carry water pot), *Lahanga* (traditional cloth), *Kurtha* (traditional kurtha), *Dhakya* (grass basket), *Pilhu* (musical instrument made from mud), *Basya* (flute), *Cholya-Gonya* (traditional cloth), *Delwa* (especially decorated basket used in auspicious occasion), *Machya* (wooden sitting tool), *Gondri* (mat), *Tekui-Doktha* (cotton thread making traditional tool), *Pauwa* (wooden slipper), *Siratta-Berra* (head band to carry weighty things), *Byana* (fan), *Barharni* (jhadu) etc.

The field researchers have completed video-recordings of the relevant information in altogether 14 DVC cassettes for 14 hours in total length. Besides, altogether 3,010 pictures and 104:39:37 hours' long audio materials have been collected. In addition to that the project team leader Prof. Tulasi Diwasa and Cameraman Mr. Siddhartha Kumar Sakya have also visited the area and video-recorded the relevant aspects of Tharu folklore and folklife, with the length of 12 hours in total, 375 photographs and 5:50:53 hours audio recordings.



Beautiful traditional basket Sirhatta Berra (head band), Hekuli

The data collected by the individual researchers of the research team in their respective areas as mentioned above are reported below.

## I. Folk Language and Folk Communication: Mr. Bir Bahadur Khadka

Mr. Khadka spent 1209 hours with the informants in the field, and has taken 360 photos depicting the folklore and folklife of Tharus. He has recorded **sound bytes of total 109 oral texts with the total length of 47:25:29 hours**. Moreover, he has also 6 hours long video-recording of the relevant information. This collection includes materials on phonology, morphology, syntax, communication, multilingualism, language attitude and use, baby talk, dialect study, etc. In total, 130 texts, 105 proverbs/proverbial expressions, 8 folk tales, more than 2000 vocabularies, 20 nicknames, 50 onomatopoeic words, 15 curses/taunts, 10 folk jokes and 90 special vocabulary items have been collected.



Language Resource person- Sundar Ram Tharu

## II. Folk literature and performing arts: Dr. Govind Archarya

Dr. Archarya has taken 398 pictures, and has recorded **sound bytes of different 179 oral texts, with the length of 5:43:00 hours in total**. The collection involves folk songs, folk tales, performing arts, narratives, myths, memoirs, folk music,



Tharus performing Lattha dance

musical instruments, etc. He has collected 5 folk tales, 1 memoir, 4 folk ballads, 16 folk songs, 10 seasonal/festival songs, 3 ritual songs, 5 folk epics and 115 folk sayings, and descriptions about 9 folk dances, 9 folk musical instruments, 12 folk games and entertainments.

### III. Material folk culture and folk heritage: Mr. Ashok Tharu

Mr. Tharu has taken altogether 1318 photos and has audio-recorded oral texts with the total length of 15:11:25 hours. The subject matter covered in the collection includes the descriptions of rites and rituals, folk foods, folk clothes and ornaments, folk medicine, folk feasts and festivals, folk art and crafts, gods and goddesses, traditional technology and wisdom etc. From his collection, 7 folk rituals, 25 folk food items, 29 folk clothes, 23 folk gods/goddesses, 34 folk arts/crafts, 7 folk architectures, 35 folk medicines, 12 folk weapons, 5 folk furniture items, and 7 different forms of traditional technology/wisdom have been documented.



*Home deties, Sisniya*

### IV. Socio-cultural folklife and folkways: Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary

Mr. Chaudhary has taken 934 photos, and has audio-recorded different oral texts, with the length of 36:19:43 hours in total. He has also video-recorded relevant information with a total length of 8 hours. The subject matter covered in the collection includes: folk life and daily activities, indigenous institutions, folk beliefs, customs and livelihood, division of labour, gender issues, kinship system, religious beliefs, gods and goddesses, change and continuity, rites of the passage, decision making procedures etc.



*Villagers gathering to mend water cannel, Hekuli*

### Concluding Remarks

As a whole, the researchers have completed the field research successfully among the Tharu folk group. The research, similar to the previous researches, has two very important consequences at this stage. Firstly, various aspects of the folklore and folk life have been explored and the information have been collected which will be the useful resources for outsiders to understand the community and to know about their rich cultural heritage. Secondly, the community members become *self* aware in preserving and promoting their language, culture, folk ways, folk traditions and other several aspects of their own cultural heritages. Such awareness among the community members lead them towards enthusiasm and *to take an* initiative role in organizing programs to promote their cultural heritages and uplift and empower the community so that the community can stand in its own and identify in terms of its own cultural heritages. The lesson learned from this research activity is that the researchers should work together with the community members; let the community member feel that the research is done for them, they should be involved, and the outcomes are for their use; help the people in empowering themselves; be honest to the community; and finally present the report semi-scholarly so that it could be used by both the scholars and the community members.

It has become very successful and fruitful field visit in terms of qualitative as well as quantitative point of view because the research team has collected lots of information and materials on Tharu folk group during the three months stay at Deupur and Palanse. They get invaluable support from the community during the field visit and they have had many opportunities to witness the social and cultural performances, and captured them in audio and audio-visual forms.



## Use of Folk Poetry in expressing a modern sensibility- A Shi Lankan Experience

- Gunadasa Amarasekara

The topic I have selected may seem rather paradoxical. How could folk poetry which expresses the traditional 'peasant sensibility' be used to express a modern sensibility; convey thoughts and emotions of a modern society which is far removed from the traditional peasant society. But if we examine the works of our modern poets in Sri Lanka, and their attempt to express a modern sensibility, this apparent paradoxical nature turns out to be rather baseless. Such a view I believe is a result of superficial observations made on this matter by those unaware of the craft and function of the poet; the alchemy that goes into the production of poetry.

To use poetry as a vehicle to convey thoughts and emotions of a modern urban society has been a main concern of our poets during the last century. Almost all of them have grappled with this problem. In terms of this pursuit they could be grouped into four categories. The first category of scholarly poets belonging to an older generation who attempted this task looked up to our classical literature which had ceased to evolve after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Our classical literature which had an unbroken record of evolution over centuries came to an abrupt end with our coming under foreign rule in the seventeenth century. Colonial rule and the cultural imperialism that came along with it made it impossible for that classical literature to survive any longer. The indigenous literati disappeared and was replaced by an English educated literati who tended to look down upon the indigenous literature and culture. The first generation of poets who attempted to express a modern sensibility looked for a poetic tradition in that classical literature which had ceased to evolve after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. What they picked up for a tradition was a fossilized past, an archaic language and worn out poetic forms. Little did they realize that a literary tradition does not reside within the main stream once it gets stagnant but seeks new paths, new tributaries for its continuance. Once such path is the folk literature of the people. What happens in this instance could be looked upon as tradition going back to where it originated, from where the literati took it over to express their more complex more sophisticated thoughts and emotions. This relationship between the literati and the folk is a feature we see through out our literature over the centuries. The first generation of our poets never realized this, and took over a fossilized poetic diction which was incapable of expressing a modern sensibility.

It was the failure of this first generation of scholarly poets that brought about the emergence of a new group of younger poets called 'Colombo Poets' in the middle of the last century. They were less informed and also less aware of the classical literature. They had a nodding acquaintance of the English poets, Tennyson Shelly and Wordsworth whom they had read as school children. They attempted to express a modern sensibility through a people diction was 'invented' by them. They never realized the necessity of a poetic tradition. The poetic diction they 'invented' was forged out of new journalistic

language of the newspapers, and new fictional works based on the western novel. They invented new metaphors, images and symbols to which the Sinhala reader could not respond.

With the newly invented language what they could do was to present a prosaic picture of the modern world them, and not a poetic interpretation of that world. That prosaic picture was so often a sentimental one and at best reflected a yearning to escape from the realities of the modern world. Being unaware of a poetic tradition it is not surprising that they could not grapple with a what they experienced and make poetry out of them. The novelty of their poetry did not last for more than two decade or so.

These poets were replaced in the sixties by another group of young poets centered round peradeniyz University. They were well versed in western literature. They knew not only Shelly and Wordsworth but practitioners of most recent forms of poetry as free verse

- TS Eliot, Ezra Pound and Baudelaire were their gurus. They assumed that the failure of the Colombo poets was due to their sticking to a traditional poetic form and if that could be replaced by a kind of free verse then one would be able to express a modern sensibility. They too completely ignored the need for a poetic tradition. The language they invented, the images and the metaphors they created were almost unintelligible to the average.

Sinhala reader, and to understand these, sometimes one had to go to Eliot or Baudelaire. The result of this new free verse movement was to wean away the reader from the enjoyment of poetry. The attempt to present a modern sensibility through their poetry has in fact caused death of poetry and weaned the reader away from poetry.

The fourth category of poets who have attempted to present a modern sensibility through their work could be distinguished from the above three groups by their search for a poetic tradition. They have realized the importance of a poetic tradition and the fact that any new sensibility had to have recourse to a tradition for its expression. They have gone to folk poetry for discovering this tradition. They believe that with the disappearance of our poetic tradition from the main stream of the classical literature of the seventeenth century, it has continued its survival through folk poetry. They believe a new poetic diction could be forged to present a modern sensibility through elements of folk poetry.

Their work can be seen as the most successful attempt at expressing a modern sensibility. As a poet I myself have chosen this path and used elements in folk poetry to present a modern sensibility.

The achievement of these poets who have sought inspiration from folk poetry in creating a modern sensibility may come as a surprise to you but I think understand our existential process as Asians living in this part of the world it should not surprise us. I believe we Asians live in two worlds- the modern and the traditional. The modern world we live in today is one imposed on us by the Western world. We have not grown with it like the Westerner. It never became a part of our intellectual, emotional growing process. It has been imposed on us and as such it is emotionally and spiritually an

alien world for us Asians. Emotionally and spiritually we live in our traditional folk world, it is through reference to that traditional inner world that we make sense of the modern world around us and respond to it. In such a context is it not natural that a poet who wants to express a modern sensibility should attempt it on the basis of a folk foundation recreated to suit modern times? In a way what the poet does is to take us from the known to the unknown; make modernity intelligible through our traditional world, so that we could respond to it.

## Contemporary Folklore: From Academic Domain to Public Sphere

- Mahendra Kumar Mishra

“ In 1989, we conducted a seminar on Gond folklore in a Gond village. Eighty Gond traditional leaders attended the meeting. Government sanctioned three thousand rupees to our organisation to conduct the seminar. But while attending the seminar, eighty Gond leaders contributed their share in form of rice, money and labour. Their contention was that the meeting is on us and for us. So we can't sit with out contribution.

In the seminar ten scholars, who had studied the papers on Gond folklore and had the discussion with the audience had the scope to rethink about their authenticity of studying of Gond folklore. The senior Gond leaders experienced with their ethnic knowledge explained the purpose and meaning of folklore items interpreted by the scholars. It was found that the scholars were more fascinated with their preconceived ideas of viewing folklore from their scholastic point of view.

The scholars were from the discipline of literature, sociology, economics and history. They collected the stories, songs, and proverbs. They also studied Gond religion and performance. Their collection and interpretation of data were mainly based on the theories and concepts they had acquired from their discipline. But the Gond leaders were not so. They were rich in their traditional knowledge.

When they interpreted the items, the Gond leaders did not accept the findings and while the discourse was going on, the scholars felt that they are still to learn from the Gond culture.

Interestingly, this was a major breakthrough in the mindset of the scholars who were limited in their understanding of Gond culture.

In stead it was found that many items of folklore the Gonds use have different meaning and purpose than the scholastic purpose.”

Parghania Lambodar Majhi, the Gond singers expressed that their patron or clan masters do even not know their esoteric knowledge. So the scholars meeting will also not serve the purpose of getting all esoteric knowledge. Another threat to the Gond genealogists that if their knowledge is transferred to the scholars who will respect them as the borrower of esoteric Gond knowledge.”

(Seminar on tribal culture, 1989, ASGP)

Folklore is defined as the body of knowledge, mode of thought and kind of art (Amos: 1975:5). Its existence is validated in its social context. It is termed as verbal art or expression. Collective representation, collective creation and sharing in a group of people with common interest and common identity signify the importance of folklore.

In the history of folklore study, there have been a lot of efforts to establish folklore as an independent discipline. Of course folklore study was initiated and shaped by scholars of many disciplines like history, anthropology, linguistics, literature and many others. Since last thirty years, folklore in India has attracted many a scholars to define folklore as they see and observe.

The distance between the definition “lore of the folk” to public space and civil society is a long way to define folklore. It has stretched out from folklore to folk life ranging from academic domain to public sphere.

### Folklore in academic domain:

Folklore, during these days, is appeared with many a new theoretical models. Universities/ Institutions promoting folklore as a discipline have their objective of establishing folklore as a curriculum followed by teaching, research and publication. But this effort is one-dimensional.

The folk them selves do not study folklore. The people who need folklore as an object of their study have institutionalised folklore as a subject. This has created a demarcation of folk and non-folk. The non-folk have many interest and objectives to study it.

- The reasons may be to understand the culture of the people to bring cultural harmony.
- It may be also possible to compare one culture with the other, or to understand the social dynamics and role of folklore in retaining the social rules, customs and tradition.
- Some study folklore to create a national identity and utilise them for political gain
- Some to revise their social protest against the ruling class,
- Some to rule them,
- Or some to promote them in their development.

When an object of folklore is studied it is studied with many a dimensions. Understanding the use of an item of folklore by the group or a community with definite purpose and meaning in their socio-cultural context is the basic interest of a folklorist. But besides it, the current theories and methods fascinate the scholars to see folklore from theoretical point of view. And we know no theory or method is complete to understand the completeness of folklore.

Instead the scholar's option and purpose of adopting certain theory or method to use the data for some experiment lead to some theoretical limitations. The gap is two fold.

One is the gap of folk and non-folk. In verbal art the gap is very low and have direct communication. But in static art, there is a gap between the creator and the consumer.

Another gap is the folklore data and the understanding of the data by the folklorist. The language and its meaning in a given context is more meaningful in understanding the data

and if the folklorist is unknown of their language and culture, folklore may lose meaning while interpreting the data. The scholar perceives the data from his own point of view. The training and orientation of the scholar regulate the study.

Educated scholars armed with current theories and methods of folklore research are fascinated to put their analytical model taking the item of folklore. According to Amos, "ethnic genres are cultural modes of communication and analytical categories are model for the organisation of texts" (Amos; 1980:38) This dichotomy is predominant, due to the gap of the folk and folklorist.

In Indian context, scholars like us are very much tempted to write paper on folklore using the models like structural analysis, performance context, discourse of oral and written, deconstruction, and post modernism. The scope and limitations of using the theories are always a debatable and one dimensional in terms of analysing the data. Use of an item of folklore by the community is different from the using of a scholar, in two different context.

### **Learning from the folk:**

In addition to using the theories, it may be more authentic to learn from the performers/ respondent why and how they use folklore in particular society. Role of folklorist is also not a one-way communication that the respondent will narrate and the scholar will record it. In stead the folklorist should learn to analyse the data from the respondent's interpretation since they have created it and used it with purpose and meaning.

It means the interpretation of folklore by the folk and his objective of using as an item of folklore in the community or the group is more important. In this interpretation, the folk and the folklorists should share the knowledge. Even the perception of the folklorist in understanding the data from his theoretical point of view also should be open to the respondent, so that the creator of folklore can get a new meaning of folklore.

Unfortunately in rural Indian and tribal India, some item of folklore is no more available. Educated and semi-literate people consider folklore as the forgotten matter of their past generation, may be individual or community based. For instance in Orissa, 70 % Saora people have converted and their folklore is no more available with the younger generations. The old Saora people recollect the memory when asked by some body that is interested in folklore.

Unfortunately, the academic domain of folklore is yet to share their valuable findings with the people who created it. Now there is a trend to give back the knowledge of the people, which have been collected, of course with a new meaning, that is to interpret with the creator of folklore.

### **Non- author folk and author folklorist:**

Then comes the question of authorship. In fact the folk is non-author and the folklorist is interpreter of the item to take the local knowledge to a wider scholarship. This combines the local with global and the role of a folklorist is more important to offer the unheard voices of the unknown or undiscovered many.

Folklore as the intellectual property created by the folk has non-authorship when the folklorists own it. How much

we really understand the totality of folklore in comparison to the creators of folklore? When we collect folklore, edit it, and publish it the authorship of the folk is neglected, and the folklorist becomes important. Again the publisher becomes another authority by writing on the body of the book that no part of this book is photocopied or translated etc.

Thus folklore in universities and colleges have become a discipline since last 30 years and have witnessed a considerable changes. People writing modern poetry or modern literary criticism is now taking much interest in post modernism or deconstruction theories. It is not understood why at all we would immediately adopt a new model to understand our own culture. It appears to us that scholars are more conscious about looking the subject through the theory lens, and not the data. At least, the data itself has its own function for which it is created.

The shift of folklore from oral to written, from performance to the textualisation, somewhere, loses its originality. It also loses its context. Folklore data, like the birds and animals in the zoo, becomes the object of study in the library than to share in the community in which it is originated. Therefore the division of folk and nonfolk and folklorist needs redefinition.

The best of folklore is to understand the best with in the people. African people say, when an old man in our village is passed away, a rich library is lost in our village. How much have we been able to enrich ourselves with the people's knowledge? This needs re-examination.

Another area of ethics in academic domain is that, we, as the academicians, isolated from the folk themselves, and creates a world of hierarchy in the study in which either it is confined to some folklorists or the folk have nothing to do with it.

### **Folklore in public sphere**

First of all folklore is a social and cultural necessity used by the people, then it became a subject of study in the institutions and universities. Folklore is dynamic, both verbal and static. The social group and the performers/ interest groups reshape the static and performing arts according to the needs of the people.

### **From tradition to modernity:**

For instance, the rural girls of Western Orissa used to play and sing Dalkhai (leaf eater dance) associated with rituals. It was a sacred dance during Aswina (October). But now a days, the dance, music and song form is adopted by the educated women and this has become a popular medium of self-exposure to the wider world. Unfortunately, the creator of Dalkhai dance staying in the villages have deprived of this opportunity.

Ghumra a war dance of Goddess Durga is now performed to invite the Ministers and VIPs. The changing role of performing arts, and static arts have no doubt popularised the folklore irrespective of rural and urban.

### **Love for traditional art and its consumerism:**

The Saora wall painting "Id -tal" is widespread in many parts of the State, and its marketability has amazingly attracted the textiles and the businessmen to prepare sharees and T-shirts adopting the Saora "Id tal" motifs.

This aspect has created a consumerism and the Ur art form is moulded. No matter how a folklorist is worried about its 'Ur' form either to retain its originality in documentation, but in public sphere, folk art, craft and folk textile has become more demanding.

Therefore while redefining the folklore from public sphere, it is necessary to understand the manifold aspects of collective creativity, both ideological and material, and to know why and how the art forms are transformed from one model to the other and to understand the changing shape of the art.

### Scope for Public sphere acceptance:

In social sphere, folklore as the vehicle of protest, identity, group solidarity, and as the agent of other development schemes like environmental education, primary education, rural handicrafts, textile, recipe, eco-tourism, sustainable development of natural and cultural resources invites the academicians to rethink and redefine folklore from a wider dimension.

### Ethnography of the Artists:

The folklorists are of opinion to safeguard the folk arts by making it useful producing in form of household materials both for aesthetics and durable. Further the ethnography of the folk artists, their sustenance in life and creativity are also some of the concern of folklore research. So it is a shift from the folk art and craft to the ethnography of artists and their involvement in perpetuating the art creatively. This again affirms the creator's identity, recognition, and intellectual property rights. This questions the traditional definition of folk arts and craft and to redefine it.

### Ethnic Folklore as the vehicle of politics:

Use of folklore in respective castes is another areas of concern in Indian situation. Each and every caste / tribe have their own caste genealogies or origin myth/ legend/ heroic epics. People maintain their ethnic identity through using creation myth and caste genealogies. This leads to caste unity and the knowledge of the past helps the present. Caste group uses the caste glory for their political gain. Culture unites the caste group in recapturing the political power and caste hierarchy. The caste symbol is the culture hero of the past. In present context, modern political leaders also play a prominent role in unifying the caste identity through which they achieve political power. The Yadav Samaj in Bihar and Orissa, Gond mahasabha in Chhatisgarh and kalahandi, Kondh Samaj in Kondhmal in Orissa, Munda and Santali samaj in Jharkhand have tried to revitalise their group identity through caste myths. They also revise their religious belief. The rituals and festivals play a political role than cultural at times. Kaivarta Geeta - of the fisher folk written by poet Achyutananda Das in 16<sup>th</sup> century regained its relevance since last 30 years. When some castes in British India were demanding their caste hierarchy, demanded to redefine their caste hierarchy in the fold of scheduled caste or scheduled tribe referring their caste myths and narratives.

Varna and Jati form the foundation of ethnic folklore. Family and clan, kinship and society are regulated through Jati

system. Each Jati try to identify oneself with some Aryan God, sage, or kings belong to solar and lunar dynasty.

Each caste tries to establish their ancient origin from remote past. Indian village is designed with the distribution of space associated with caste settlement. Diversities of Kulachar-clan based customs, and then lokachar- the customs obeyed by the group of people with co-existence in the village or locality signifies the cultural pluralism and commonality. The existence of friend caste and enemy caste is also another aspect of caste folklore.

Maintaining ones own racial purity, living in togetherness, sharing common beliefs and culture by many castes, diversities of customs, practices, beliefs and practices are some of the unique aspects in defining the nature of folklore. To understand the independent development of folklore in each caste and tribe in Indian social context, we have to see the four pillar of culture that is: Kulachara, lokachara, Deshachara and Sistachara, representing the cultural foundation of Indian society.

### Folklore in changing context: Globalisation verses local culture

When UN and WIPO advocates for intellectual property rights and to safeguard folklore considering it as the intangible heritage, World Bank advocates for cultural and sustainable development, and propagate the marketing of cultural artefacts available in the society so that the real creators of the folk art can get better market price for his production.

Thus when the academicians see folklore as the foundation of cultural expression of human creativity, world bank see folklore and material culture from business point of view and it neglects the aesthetic value of the art form. When local culture and traditional knowledge is in terrible threat of vanishing from the society, consumerism of art and craft creating a market for the society isolate the heritage of the art from the cultural context and makes a market of cultural materials. This dichotomy of culture with socio-cultural roots in one hand and de-linking the cultural entity for market economy raises many questions.

Lets consider the following:

Kikri - Fiddle is considered as the abode of supreme Gond God Budha Deo.

Whether production of 1000 fiddles is necessary by killing 1000 iguana and covering the iguana skin over the fiddle for cultural marketing in stead of some money is justified in terms of violating the animal rights or value the heritage of fiddle associated with the caste genealogies of the Gonds.

Similarly many art forms are de-linked from the heritage.

### Future Shock

Globalisation and mono-cultural invasion from far west has grabbed the local culture and language, and wish to create a melting pot in the developing countries. But the economists like Joseph Stiglitz a noble prize winner in economics in 2000, question this. He considers that, *Globalisation has undermined traditional rural society* which is a "threat to cultural identity and values." The price replaced the values, and market replaced



the community. *It is not only in developing countries, but also even in Europe the democracy is undermined and cultures eroded.*

### Relevance of written literature:

Ancient written literature is losing ground from the modern societies. Except the sacred texts, the kavya, Shastras, and many more scriptures have no relevance in present time. Disciplines like language and literature is lacking student enrolment in Universities.

Local language and culture is at the crossroad for the wave of free market and a neo-consumerism has taken place where the human values, culture, heritage is challenged. The humanities study in the Universities is gradually losing its utility in the modern academic and social context, and lots of management schools are sprouted in the universities. A class distinction is visible in the Universities where this feeling is crop up. The shift is a challenge to the present day academicians. Is it true that regional language and literature has no relevance among the forthcoming generations?

But with the changing time, the possibility of safeguarding the folklore has become more methodical, wider, and more demanding. The post-modern (?) era is fascinated with the tribal art, indigenous culture and taking interest in the interest of creator. The gap of folk, non-folk is reducing through sharing of folklore item in aesthetics and consumerism in the public sphere. Similarly the folklorist, reconsider scholarship and authorship from ethical point of view.

To us Indian culture lies in its mainstream traditional society, and unfortunately the modern/ western culture is dominant over both urban and rural societies of India. Cultural invasion and cultural consumerism is a concept to see culture as an object for sale and purchase putting price of it, than value it. The present challenge is to maintain a harmony between the academic domain and public sphere for the survival of cultural studies.

### Relations of folk with the folklorists need revision:

Our relationship with the folk as a folklorist is very limited. Instead of what our Gurus offer us to become a scholar is the vision and insight to delve in to the subject. But as told earlier, who is enriched with traditional knowledge and for what purpose?

When a Guru is enriched with many a weapons of theories and methods with a scholastic purpose to operate and concretise folklore data in to a knowledge base, institutionalising the discipline in universities and institutions, the creator and consumers of folklore sense folklore differently, may be more intensively. *Folklore is a necessity of life, consciously or unconsciously engrained in the experience, rules, and practices in the community with a definite purpose and meaning. The gap of these understanding determines the gap of a folklorist with the folk.*

### Question of Ethics:

The relation of a folk with the folklorist is not permanent. A folklorist is not invited by the folk for his scholarship. The

limited relation of folklorist with the folk cannot help him to understand them. How to reduce the gap and disparity is a major question to day.

In Modern context it is the individual and the group, which create folklore and influence the mass. The forms of folklore are represented with many purposes carrying many meaning than its earlier one.

Folklore in India as an object of collective creation, with its constant transformation and its use in the society has given a new challenge and new opportunity to the folklorists to rethink and redefine folklore.

### Reference:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Amos Dan Ben: 1971    | Towards a definition of folklore in Context       |
| AK Ramanujan: 1986    | Another Harmony<br>Complete works of AK Ramanujan |
| Joseph Stiglitz: 2003 | Globalisation and its Discontent                  |

**E-Background:** Narrative thought is a primary mode of human cognition that underpins key human capabilities such as meaning-making and social-psychological understanding. **Aims:** We sought to further our understanding of the development of narrative thought during adolescence, particularly in terms of the structure and content of narrative interpretations. **Sample:** Participants were 151 grade 4 to grade 12 students from six schools in a major urban centre in Western Canada. They included average and high-average students. **Methods:** A cross-sectional design was used with four age groups: 10, 12, 14 and 17 years. Participants read a short story incorporating two substories and multiple layers of meaning. They then summarized it, described the two main characters, generated story morals and answered multiple choice interpretation questions. Responses were scored for both structural complexity and social-psychological content of narrative thought. Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance were conducted to identify developmental trends. **Results:** A clear developmental pattern in structural complexity was discerned in which students were increasingly able to understand complex multiple layers of meaning within a story. A striking shift in social-psychological thought was also identified as students demonstrated understanding that moved from an intentional focus on immediate and specific mental states to an increasingly interpretive focus on enduring states, character traits and second-order psychological interpretations. **Conclusion:** Significant transformation occurs during adolescence in the structure and content of narrative thought as well as in capacity for the fundamental human endeavour of meaning-making.

(Dear Prof Diwasa.....

I attach herewith the paper entitled Redefining Folklore to be published in the Nepali Folklore and Folklife. This is in connection with your speech that you delivered in SAARC seminar on role of folklore in new social domain.

With best regards  
Mahendra Mishra)

## Tharu Folklore and Folklife: A Close Observation

### Introduction

The attempts have been made to find the meaning of word 'Tharu' which can be a clue towards the knowledge about the origin of Tharu people. Among these, a view suggests that the term Tharu is derived from '*Sthera*' which represents a sect of Buddhists. According to the second view, the word 'Tharu' is derived from the word '*Thara*' of Magar language, which means the plain. The third view suggests that the people who have come from Thar in Rajasthan, India are called Tharu. No view among these has been attested yet, although all of these have equal possibility to be proved true. However, there are other views too.



*A scene of Tharu village, Bhaiskorma*



*Nainu in Bhagwa*

*Old Tharu woman, Palase*

### Settlement and Population

Tharu people are found in the southern belt of Nepal called Terai from the east through the west and the adjacent valleys and plains between the Chure hilly ranges called inner Terai. Namely Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Udayapur, Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Kapilbastu, Dang, Banke, Surkhet, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur districts of Nepal are the settlement areas of Tharu people.

The total population of Tharu folk group is 15,33,879. Among these, 1,47,323 people live in Dang and Deukhuri valleys. Among 39 Village Development Committees (VDCs) and 2 Municipalities, there is the majority of Tharu folk group except 5 hilly VDCs.

Most of the Tharu people are known in terms of the territory they have occupied or they have migrated from. The Tharus settled from Jhapa to Udayapur districts in the eastern Nepal are known as Purbiya (Eastern) Tharu. The Tharus settled in Chitwan District are known as Chitaunya Tharu. Tharus from Nawalparasi to Kanchanpur Districts are known as Dangwa Tharu. Tharus of Deukhuri are known as Deukharya

Tharu. Tharus in the Sunar area of Banke District are called Solahrya Tharu. Tharus settled in the border of India are called Deshaurhya. Tharus lived in king's land and Rana's hunting areas are known as Rajhatya Tharu. Tharus come from India are known as Rana, Katharya. And, Tharus migrated from Dang Districts and settled in Surkhet, Kapilvastu, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur are called Dangaura. However, there are six clans of Tharu viz. *Madwa, Dahit, Pachhaladanga, Demandaura, Kusumya*. These clans are further divided into many sub-clans.

### House Construction and Use

Tharu people choose plain lands at the jungle side or river side for house construction. They like to settle in a group of their own community members, thus the houses are found dense within a small area. The traditional house is constructed in the land with north-south length and east-west width. The wall of the house is built with mud and the roof is thatched with grass. There is a passage called '*piryari*' at the centre inside the house which is used to enter into the rooms around it. The rooms are situated east and west of the passage. The



*Traditional Tharu house, Majgaun*

north-eastern room is used as god's room and north-western room is used as kitchen. 'Chikthi' is hang on the ceiling of the kitchen to put foods and vegetables. The next room situated to the south of the god's room is the bed room of the chief of the house in which no other member of the family can sleep. Southern most room is used to keep domestic animals. The bed rooms vary depending on the number of the family members. However, the traditional houses are disappearing.

### Tharu Language

'Tharu' is the ethnonym for the language spoken by Tharu folk group. Tharu is spoken as a first language and Nepali is spoken as a second language by Tharu people. At the same time other people residing among the Tharu community speak tharu. The language is used in the social and cultural domains of their daily life, such as among the community members, at work places, within the family, at the rites and rituals etc. Tharu language was introduced 3-4 years ago in the formal mother tongue education system on the basis of the textbooks developed by Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, government of Nepal. But, it was stopped later on. It is written in Devanagari script and folk tales, tales of the origin, folk epics, etc. have been published. The language is also used in the media such as magazines, newspapers, and F.M. radios.

Among the Tharu people very few are monolingual, some are bilingual and some are multilingual speakers. Nepali, Hindi, and English are the other languages spoken by these bilingual or multilingual Tharu people. The language shift has not been felt strong yet in the community, though the competence on the language has found gradually decreasing among the young generation. Code mixing and switching is found among the community. Tharu people are found loyal to their language.

Tharu language has 29 consonants and 8 vowels. Nasalization is also contrastive in this language. Tharu has two number (singular-plural) and two gender (feminine-masculine) system. There are nominal classifiers in the language. Ergative, instrumental, accusative, dative, genitive, and locative cases are marked with suffixes in the language. There are three tenses (past, present, and future), and four moods (indicative, interrogative, imperative, and optative) found in the language.



*Aguwa (deputy chief of village) listening folk stories*

Tharu is a S(ubject)-O(bject)-V(erb) language which have interrogation, negation, causativization, and passivization syntactic processes. Subordination and Coordination as clause combining processes found in the language.

### Family, kinship, gender issues and the decision making

Tharu people used to live in joint family traditionally and it is practiced up to now. It is supposed to come into practice because of the agricultural life they live. However, nucleus families are also found now a day as with the occupation is being changed. A girl goes to her husband's house after marriage because the Tharu is a patriarchal community. The chief of



*Hiralal's family at Palase*

the house is called 'gardhurya' who is a male member of the family, and he is the decision maker. There used to be the practice of polygamy in the past. However, this is not practiced these days. The man who lives in the father-in-law's house is supposed to be inferior in the community. As a result, no one likes to stay in his father-in-law's house.

Two types of kinship is found in Tharu community, i.e., established through blood relationship and marriage relationship.



*Female participation in Gaun khane katha (riddle) competition*



## Folk Belief

There are popular folk beliefs about good omen, bad omen, arrival of the guests, raining, evil eyes, death, etc. Nest of pigeon and shallow in the house is taken as a good omen among the Tharu people. If the chicken crow in the night time, the owl owls, the vulture sits at the house, the dog barks unnaturally, a man's left eye and a woman's right eye flickers, the muscle in the body flickers, and an object falls from the hand; the Tharu people believe these events as bad omen. The Tharu folk group believes that the fighting of cocks/hens and crowing of the crow are the signs of arrival of the guests. Black and red cloud in the sky, and wind from the east are believed as the signs of rain while the wind from the west is taken as the sign of no rain. The Tharu people believe that the *Hansli* (a small curved knife with handle) with a piece of their own naval tied on the waist prevents the baby from the evil eyes. Likewise a *hansya* (curved knife with handle) kept with her prevents the new mother from the evil eyes according to their belief.

There are also some taboos among the Tharu community such as one should not touch wife's elder sister and younger brother's wife, a woman should not stay in the *dihurar* (god's room) during the period of delivery, and one should not tell *mantras* (chants) to other people.



Tharu priest making Chunibarya a kind of special bread

## Folk Gods and Goddess, and Folk Religious Ceremonies

There are god and evil powers worshipped by the Tharu community. Some of these are related to Hindu mythology, some others are placed in the local shrines, some are worshipped in some rituals and religious works. Kherabri is the famous saint known as Narada Rishi and Dharmarjwa is the king of justice known as Dharmaraja who is supposed as the determiner of the dead person whether s/he has to go to the hell or heaven in the Hindu mythology. There is an ancestral god called Gurbaba who is supposed to be the first Tharu man. Gurbaba is important in terms of the Tharu's own myth



Village deties house, Marwa, Langadi

of origin. The local shrines are called *thanhawa* where the gods and goddess are placed and worshipped. *Chawahwa* and *Daharchandi* are the husband and wife god and goddess established in the shrine, respectively. *Jogethwa* is the saint god established in the shrine and *Pitornya* or *Pitrain* is the goddess established in the shrine. While a Tharu chief of the family performs some religious ceremony they ask for permission from the god Saunra. They establish and worship the idol of the animals and other creatures in the earth like horse and snake. *Masan* and *churinya* are the spirit of the man and woman who died untimely.

There are several folk religious ceremonies celebrated among the Tharu community. Most of the ceremonies are related to health and prosperity, and farm works. *Auli* is a worship performed at the field after the paddy is harvested. *Khenhwa wahainna* is also a worship performed at the yard where the paddy is going to be piled. *Karya dahan* is performed for prosperity while the fire caught the house of the god or the goddess lost from their place. *Ghetauli puja*, *Dhurra lausar*, *Durya gurai*, *Dhuwagar*, and *Harya gurai* are the religious ceremonies performed for the prosperity of the family members, domestic animals, transactions, etc. Some of the worships are performed by the chief of the family while some others are performed by the villagers in a group.



Historical part of Mamthorya temple, Amrai



## Festivals

*Magh*, *Durheri*, *Atwari*, *Ashtimki*, *Hardhawa*, *Dashya*, and *Dewari* are celebrated as the traditional festivals among Tharu community. These festivals are related to the transaction, prosperity, farm work, and the entertainment. *Maghi* is celebrated in the month of Magh (January-February) as a new fiscal year and all the annual transactions are settled. *Dashya* and *Dewari* are the Tharu terms for the great Hindu festivals celebrated nationwide in Nepal in the months of October and November respectively which are performed for the prosperity. *Hardhawa* is celebrated after the farm work is completed. *Durheri* is the festival of colors known as Holi and celebrated in Nepal and India widely basically for the entertainment. *Atwari* and *Astimki* are also celebrated with fasting for the prosperity.



*Dhuriya Gurrai performing together by Desbandya, Ghargurwa and Mahtau*

## Folk food and drinks

Food items made of rice and wheat are the main courses and the drinks made of the fermented grains are the drinks of Tharu traditional food and drinks. Besides, they include fish and shells in their traditional food. The Tharu foods can be classified into ordinary food and special foods which are



*Dhikari is making*



*Preparing local alcohol, Hekuli*

consumed in the daily life and the feasts and festivals, respectively.

*Bhat* (cooked rice) and *darya* (cooked mixture of grinded maize and rice) are the main food items in the daily life of the Tharu people while *roti* (wheat bread) is taken in the evening in summer season. Other items in the ordinary food are *singki* (fermented radish) and *tina* (vegetables) as vegetables, *kapwa* (gruel) and *mar* (soup of the types of beans) as soup. Besides, the *chutney* of the salt and pepper is also a part of the ordinary meal.

Meat, crab, fish, and cell-fish, different types of steamed and oiled food items made of rice flour are the special traditional foods among the Tharu community. Pork is a special item among meat though there is mutton, chicken, and other animal's meat like pigeon and other wild animals and birds. *Dhikri* is made from steamed rice flour and *roti* is different types of oiled rice flour. There is also dried fish as special food item. The special food items are either consumed in feast and festivals or taken to the relatives as present.

*Janr*, *jhwari*, *mad* are made of fermented cooked rice which are the popular traditional alcohol among Tharu community. The alcohol are used in daily life as well as special occasions.

## Folk Dresses and Ornaments

Tharu people use their own traditional dresses which can be classified into the dresses for daily use and the dresses for special use. Tharu mothers prepare special cap for their children which covers ears and protect from cold. This is called *topi*. Tharu men wear *kattu* (a kind of half pants used as under garment), *dagli* (an upper garment made of thick cotton with lace to knot at the front), *pichauri* (a kind of wrapper to cover the upper part of the body which is used in the cold), and *bhegwa* (a kind of wrapper to cover the lower part of the body it functions like sari but the style and colour are different). Tharu female wear *cholya* (an upper garment with lace to knot at the front), *gatya* (a kind of wrapper to cover the upper part of the body which is wrapped from the back and knotted at the front), *gonya* (a kind of wrapper to cover the lower part of the body), *dainahawa jhulwa* (a kind of upper garment like *dagli*), *lahanga* and *lungi* (kinds of wrapper to cover the lower part of the body).



*Bhojiniyas in folk dress, pharya, Palase*

There are some special garments which are used only in folk performing arts especially folk drama and folk dance. *Ghurghut* is used to cover head by the female dancer or the male dancer in women's role while performing folk dance. *Phankani* is used on the front part of the body between the shoulders while *sataki* is a red piece of cloth wrapped around the front lower part of the waist. Both of these are used with *lahanga*.

Tharu women are decorated with different types of ornaments from head to foot. They put *tikali* and *mangya* on their forehead. They use *jhobanha* to tie the hairs at the back. They wear *chhetaur*, *jhimalya*, *jhumkaha winr*, *tap* and *lurki* on their ears, and *nathya*, *phuli*, *phonphi* on their nose. They wear *kansrehi*, *gataiya*, *gurya*, *taunk*, *mala*, *sutya* and *humel* as artistic necklaces. They decorate their arms with rings called *tanrya*, *banka* and *bijayat*, and their wrist with *kankani*, *churya* and *bala*. They wear *mundri* on their fingers (hand). They wear *churwa*, *payanri* on their ankles and *bhichhiya* at the second toe.

However, now days, Tharu people have started using modern fashion like shirt, pants, t-shirt, blouse, kurta, suruwal, etc.



*Beautifully ornamented Tharu girl Triptishikha, Hekuli*

## Folk Medical Treatment

Tharu folk group has different traditional ways of medical treatments. Aches like headache, toothache, stomachache, etc.; animal bites like dog bite, fox bite, snake bite, etc.; wounds; fever, measles; infection in the eyes; allergy; pain; gastric; and other diseases, infections, pains, and wounds are cured with the herbal medicines available in their territory. Fruits, barks, leaves, flowers, roots etc. of the mango, plum, lotus, black pepper, barley, onion, garlic, ginger, banana, etc. are used in the Tharu folk medical treatments.



*Tharu boy worshipping village deities in wedding ceremony*

## Folk Literature

Tharu folk group is rich in terms of its folk literature. There are folk songs, ballades, folk epics, folk tales, proverbs, and riddles as the parts of life of the Tharu community. Tharu folk songs are further classified into general, ritual, festival, seasonal, and work songs. The general folk songs are sung any time irrespective of rites and rituals, seasons, festivals etc. *Baramasya*, *hurdungya*, *jhumara*, *lagni git*, *kathorya*, and *chhokra git* are general songs. Most of these songs are sung



*Tharus performing Jhumra dance, Chailahi-7*



*Buddhiman Chaudari (59) telling folktales, Rampur-3, Palase*

with dance. Tharu ritual folk songs are related to marriage ceremony. *Diuli darna magar* is sung during the initial stage of the marriage ceremony for the prosperity. *Janti parchhaber gaina magar* is sung to welcome bridegroom which is also sung for the prosperity. *Chauthyar git* is sung while the bride comes back first time to her maternal house after the marriage. Tharu festival songs are related to the festivals *maghi*, *dhurheri*, *astimki*, and *dusya*. *Dhumru* is sung in the last night of the month of Poush (just before the month of Magh starts) while *maghauta* is sung during the month of Magh. *Phag paharna* is sung during the festival *Dhurheri*. *Ashtimki git* is sung at the festival *Ashtimki* which is the birth day of the Hindu god Krishna. *barkimar*, *sakhya*, and *paiyan* are sung during *dusya* (the great Hindu festival Dashain). *Sajana* and *maina* are the Tharu seasonal songs both are sung during the summer season. *Ban gitwa* is the only Tharu song related to work which is sung at farm works like in the farm, jungle, etc.

There are four popular ballades among Tharu people – *madho-sundari*, *lakhi*, *chhita ranik maina*, and *raunak painyan*. *Madho-sundari* is based on a love of a hero *Madho* and a heroine *Sundari*. *Lakhi* is based on the story of brave Tharu lady *Lakhi*. *Chhita ranik maina* seems very close to the story of Sita, the heroine of the great Sanskrit epic Ramayana. Finally, *Raunak painyan* is based on the story of Ravana, villain of the great Sanskrit epic Ramayana. Though these ballades seem to have the common source with Ramayan, these are localized and the stories are modified too.

There are four folk epics popular among the Tharu people – *gurubabak jarmauti*, *ramvihegra*, *sakhya*, and *barkimar*. Among these first is the myth of origin, second is based on Ramayana, and third and fourth are based on Mahabharata.

Tharu folk tales have both the man and the animal characters. The message conveyed through the tales is the ethical lessons. The behavior of the characters and the relations among them covertly presents the lessons. However, some of the tales do not have such ethical lessons which are used only for the entertainment.

Tharu proverbs and riddles have the contents from the Tharu society and culture and are popularly practiced.

## Folk Performing Arts and drawings

Tharu performing arts can be classified into folk drama and folk dance. *Gaiya berhana* and *magha lotana* are the folk dramas popular among Tharu people. Both of these are performed to get rain while there is no rain in rainy season. Both of these are performed at night by the naked people with the vulgar songs sung in a group. First of these is performed by women while the second is performed by men.

Folk dances practiced among Tharu people can be classified into dances with songs and dances without songs. The songs mentioned in the Tharu folk songs are practiced with dances so these can be called dances with songs. The



*Barkha dance performed by Tharu dancers*

folk dances without song are *painya nach*, *lattha dance*, *barka nach*, and *dholaha nach*. *Painyan nach* is performed by Tharu women in a group in *dusya* festival. *Lattha nach* is a special dance with stick in hands and peacock feathers at the back performed traditionally by Tharu men in a group. However, it is also performed by Tharu women now days. *Barka nach* is practiced in Deukhuri valley by Tharu women which is similar



*Tika (tattoo) chhedlak gwara, sign of married women*



*Khusiram Tharu with Astimki ritual painting, Palase*



to *painyan nach* practiced by Tharu women in Dang valley. The dance based on Mahabharata epic and practiced by Tharu men in Dang valley is also called *barka nach*. *Dholaha nach* is performed by Tharu men in women's dress with sword in hand at marriage ceremony. A member of a dancer's team beats the drum (called *dhol*).

There are two folk drawings practiced among the Tharu people *ashtimki* and *godna*. *Ashtimki* is based on Tharu myth of origin and the drawings are performed in the wall inside the meeting room at the *ashtimki* festival. *Godna* is drawings on the lower part of the knees of Tharu women. It is a kind of tattoo and a means of decoration for married women.

### Folk Musical Instruments

Tharu folk musical instruments can be classified as the drums, cymbals, flutes, and the bell. There are two types of drums which are made of wood and leather. Both of these are long drums. *Dhol* is a big drum while *madra* is a small drum. *Kastar jhal*, *majira*, and *chatkoli* are different kinds of cymbals. *Jhal* and *majira* are made of metal, *kastar* is made of wood and metal plates, and *chatkoli* is made of bamboo pieces. *Basya* and *pilhru* are flute like blowing instruments. *Basya* is made of bamboo or metal while *pilhru* is made of clay in the shape of bird. *Kole* is a bell which is hang on the waist and played.



Aganu Chaudhari (75), playing Pilru baja, Rampur-3

### Folk games and entertainments

There are children's games popular among Tharu people. Most of the games are practiced by the girls. *Rabarbyang*, *dori hallawa*, and *phatphatya* are the games played jumping over the rope by Tharu girls. *Chikani* is played with the boxes drawn on the yard, and *chari* is played with small pieces of stones both by the girls. *Laribeti* is the game for Tharu boys.



Watching Septi game, Rampur-3, Palase

### Folk tools and weapons

Tharu people make and use tools and weapons made of wood, metal, stone, bamboo, leaf, etc.

Widely used wooden tools and weapons among the Tharu community are plough, yoke, stick, oil mill, mortar and pestle to grind salt and pepper, spinning tools, tool for levelling after ploughing the field, hammer, carrying stick, and handles for different tools and weapons. Tharu people use stone mortar and pestle as well as grinding stone. The metal tools and weapons made and used by Tharu people are axe, spade, needle, hook, different types of knives, etc. Tharu people make and use also different kinds of bamboo tools and weapons. *Khandra* is a tool to catch rats. *Khongdhya*, *tip*, and *dharya* are the tools to catch fish, crab etc. *Chhitni* and *chhitwa* are the baskets to store goods; and *bakhari* is used to store grains. *Delya* is used to put caught fishes and crabs. They also make and use hand fan called *byana*. Leaf plates of different shapes and sizes are other tools made and used by Tharu people. Clay pots and vessels like *karai*, *kuthali*, *khonteli*, *khondhwa*, *gumra*, *golra*, *chundawa*, *dehri*, *bhokti*, *saidra* etc. which are used in the different purposes such as to store food and food grains, to make, store, and drink traditional drinks, etc.



Kolhama tyal pyarta, a traditional oil mill



## Folk skill and Technology

All the traditional tools and weapons that are used by Tharu people are prepared by themselves. Besides, they make different types of baskets called *delwa*, *dhakli*, *dhakya*, *bhauka*, *panchhopni*, *painastopi*, *wenrra*, and *supli* from grass which are used to put the goods, to cover water pot and prepared foods, to support the pots with not flat bottom, and also to use in the decoration. Some of these baskets are colored with different colors and decorated with shells, peacock's feathers, etc. which look so beautiful.



An old gwali making Dhakya, Palase

Tharu people prepare traditional drinks themselves. They use different types of clays, herbals and stones to wash and bath. They sew the cloths and embroider. They prepare nets and traps and catch fish and birds. These are the Tharu folk skills and technologies.



Shaman and priest Theman Tharu knitting fishing net, Langadi

## Economic Life and Livelihood

The large part of the Tharu economy depends on agriculture, which depends on the rain. That is not much reliable and profitable. The farm works are traditional. Tharu people use plough and spade. They use organic fertilizer, basically dung. They grow paddy, wheat, barley, gram, mustard, potato,



A Janni(Tharu female) ploughing field

cauliflower, onion, pumpkin, etc. They keep cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs, chickens, etc. So the farm and animal products are the major sources of income and bases of the economic life. However, very few of the Tharu people have started other professions now days.

## Rites of the Passage

There are three main rites of the passage among Tharu folk group, namely birth, marriage, and death. *Sorahiniya* (who functions as midwife) should be present while a mother gives birth to her child. *Sorahiniya* cuts the umbilical cord which is buried at the corner of *bahari kwatha* (meeting room). Unless the newly mother is purified, no male member can see the baby. There is no fix day for purification. When the navel falls then the mother is purified. There is feast on the day of



Sorahiniya (midwife), baby and mother

purification. There is worship and chicken is slaughtered. The *Sorahiniya* is invited and served foods with respect. *Lausari puja* is performed within a month after the birth of the baby then the new mother is free to move around and meet the people.

There was a child marriage among the Tharu community in the past, however it is not in practice now. Marriage is called *bhwaj* in Tharu. *Aguwa* (the mediator) has an important



Wedding ceremony with bridegroom, Palase

role in the Tharu traditional marriage. *Aguwa* arranges the meetings of the two parties of the marriage and mediates to proceed ahead. *Ghar herna* (to see the house, by the other side of the proposed marriage) is held in the month of Magh and the marriage is performed in the month of Phagun (the following month). The marriage is held on Wednesday, traditionally but it is also held on Sunday and Friday at the night. A lady either aunt or sister in law (elder brother's wife) functions as *bhojiniya* in the marriage ceremony. Unless the *bhojiniya* collides the heads of the bride and bridegroom, the marriage is not complete. So *bhojiniya* has important role in the marriage. The bridegroom wears traditional white dress during marriage ceremony. Both the men and women participate in the marriage procession. There is a feast with pork, mutton or chicken and drinks in the marriage. Besides, there are other kinds of marriage also in practice now a days.

When a person dies all the people come to observe the dead body in Tharu community. The dead body is carried to the river side on the upside down cot. A priest carries husked rice, maize and *tina* to the grave. Only male members participate in the funeral procession. Purification is performed within thirteen days, often held on Thursday or Monday. Purification is completed after shaving the head, and getting oil from the priest. There is a feast with cooked rice, black lentil, pork and fish which are supposed to be purification items.



Wearing new white clothes completing death ritual

## Traditional institution and organizations

Tharu people have *praganna* as a administrative unit to systematize ethnic, social, and cultural issues. *Deshbandhya* is the chief of a *praganna*. *Matawa* is the chief of the village who is elected at once by the chief of the houses of the village and continued thorough inheritance. *Agahwa* is the assistant of *matawa* which is elected by chief of the houses of the village. *Gardhurya* is the chief of the house. Besides these hierarchical administrative structure, there are task specific posts and the responsibilities among the Tharu people. *Ghargurwa* performs any religious ceremonies and *kesauka* helps *deshbandhya* and *ghargurwa* in such ceremonies. *Daharya gurwa* performs the ceremonies related to the female reproduction functions. *Mohya* is the leader of the males musical instrument player, and *mohinya* is the leader of the females folk dancer and singers. *Pachhaginiya* is the assistant folk dancer and singers. With these posts, responsibilities, and the units are the Tharu traditional organizations.

'Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha' is the first modern Tharu ethnic organization established in 1980 Vikram Sambat. Now, there are other cultural and social organizations as well.



Khyala, a meeting, Palase

## Concluding Remarks

Tharu is one of the ethnic groups which is rich in terms of own folklore, cultural heritage and language. The folk group is also rich in its traditional skill, knowledge and technology. It has its own way of life and beliefs. Despite these facts, because of the pressure of the globalization and modernization, the folk group is under the threat of shifting the traditional knowledge, skill, technology, culture, belief, ways of life, and by thus the crucial thing their identity. The FOFO study of the Tharu folk group helped the group to be aware towards the preservation of their identity. However, there is a need of further support for them in this direction.

Based on reports of Dr. Govind Archarya, Mr. Ashok Tharu, Mr. Bir Bahadur Khadka and Mr. Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary  
Prepared and translated by: Mr. Bhim Narayan Regmi.

## Some Major NFS Activities

### Evaluation and Participation

Nepali Folklore Society under Finnish Local Cooperation organized Folklore and Folk life (FOFO) Study Project and regularly followed up and evaluated by the evaluation group of foreign ministry of Finland. In this connection, in course of overall program evaluation Lati Matinen and Makela Merja with Kanta Singh, from ministry of foreign affairs of Finland visited the project office, Bhatbhateni on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2006 and 29<sup>th</sup> January 2008 respectively.

Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, president of NFS and Project Leader presented about the overall progress of the project to the date in the office. According to Prof. Diwasa six folk groups have been studied focusing on the four major areas of the folk group – folk language and folk communication, folk literature and performing arts, material folk culture and folk heritage, socio-cultural folk life and folk ways within three months field stay for each group under the project. The folk materials objects and field research reports of the studied folk groups were collected in project office which gives information of folklore and folk life of studied different folk group. Altogether twenty two reports have been prepared and submitted to the project office; however two reports – one of the folk group Athpahariya Rai and another of the Danuwar are yet to be submitted to the office. The separately presented reports are combined later and edited in a book form to be published in Nepali first and also the translated version in English later. The editing of Gandharva and Gopali books in Nepali have already been completed and the editing of Aathpahariya rai, Danuwar, Meche and Tharu books in Nepali and English is in progress. Five issues of NFS newsletter containing the brief descriptions and the achievements of the study, and the news related to folklore activities have been published.

He also informed that one of the most important view of the Nepali Folklore Society from the beginning of its establishment is the use of the outcomes of such studies can be and should be utilized in the national development. It is the first time in South Asia to make such a collaborative effort in the study of folklore by forming the research teams from people of different disciplines.

Now, Nepali Folklore Society is planning to prepare cultural documentary, cultural data bank, and collection of material cultural heritage based on these studies that will be used for further research and as an agenda for national development.

At the end he explained about the political instability and the insurgency in Nepal during the field stays which affected the research could not complete in time, and requested for the extension of the time frame to complete the works already planned and for further cooperation.

The evaluation team was highly impressed with the presentation and the collections and took the requests positively. Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi, Vice President, Prof. Dr. Churamani Bandhu, Secretary General, Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha, Treasurer, Dr. Jai Raj Pant, Secretary and Mr. Bhim Narayan Regmi were present during the presentation.

Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi and Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi have presented on the works done under the projects run by NFS at one day seminar organized for the NGOs that are running projects in Finnish Local Cooperation.

### International Workshop

A group of Nepali Scholars participated in ‘International Workshop on Traditional Knowledge Systems, Museums and Intangible Natural Heritage: a capacity building workshop’ held at Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad and Araku Valley, Andhra Pradesh, India from 2-8 February 2008 organized by ICOM in collaboration with Salarjung Museum, Government of India and Pacific Asia observatory for cultural diversity in human development.

The capacity building workshop aimed to promote museums as the hubs for documentations of traditional knowledge, intangible heritage and natural history and systems that are culturally perceived.

There were more than 50 participants from different countries like France, Italy, Afghanistan, Australia, Pakistan, Vanuatu, Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India and Vietnam. The opening key note was delivered by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan IIC chairperson, Asia Project.

Prof. Tulasi Diwasa, Prof. Dr. Churamani Bandhu President, Secretary General respectively of NFS (Nepali Folklore Society); Mr. Jal Krishna Shrestha, Mr. Bharat Rawat, President, Secretary General respectively of Nepal chapter ICOM and specialists Prof. Prem Kumar Khatry, Dr. Hari Prasad Shrestha and Mr. Bhes Narayan Dahal were the participants from Nepal.

Prof. Tulasi Diwasa presented the country report “Traditional Knowledge and Intangible Natural Heritage of Nepal” on behalf of the participants from Nepal. Prof. Khatry, Dr. Shrestha and Mr. Dahal also presented a paper on documenting intangible natural heritage.



International workshop participants at Salar Jung Muesum, Hyderabad

## Nepali Folklore Society (NFS): An Introduction

Every nation exists on its own identity, which is reflected in the typicality of its folklore and folklife. The different groups of people living in Nepal have maintained their identities in their own values and norms, beliefs, knowledge and experience, language and literature, arts etc. Despite this fact, we can also notice the changes taking place in the traditional folklife and folk culture along with the influences of modernization process. In this connection, after realizing the need for an academic institution at the national level with the goal of studying, preserving and promoting the folklore and folklife in the country, Nepali Folklore Society (NFS) was established as a non-governmental and non-profit making organization registered in Kathmandu.

NFS is guided by one of the directive principles of the state, which emphasizes the ideal of national unity by maintaining the diversities in society through the promotion of language, literature, script, art and culture of all the country, has been carrying out various activities to achieve the goal.

To be more specific, this Society was established to carry out the following activities in order to achieve its goal just mentioned.

- Collecting, documenting and analyzing the specimens of folk art and literature from various folk groups
- Organizing workshops, talk programmes etc. on folklore at a certain time interval
- Mobilizing folklore experts to carry out a systematic research on folklore
- Celebrating folklore festivals by organizing special programmes at national level
- Organizing national and international conferences on folklore
- Demonstrating/disseminating various aspects of Nepalese folklore
- Organizing programmes to honour those personalities who have made a significant contribution for the preservation and promotion of Nepalese folklore
- Working in collaboration with other national and international institutions interested in the study and promotion of folklore/folklife
- Translating the research-based writings on the folklore, folk culture and literature

- Publishing newsletters and journals, dealing with the various issues related to folklore
- Creating awareness among the people on their rich cultural heritage, traditional technology and indigenous wisdom

### Executive Committee of NFS

1. President: Prof. Tulasi Diwasa
2. Vice-President: Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi
3. General Secretary: Prof. Dr. Chudamani Bandhu
4. Secretary: Dr. Jaya Raj Panta
5. Treasurer: Mr. Tej Prakash Shrestha
6. Member: Dr. Ananda Sharma
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8. " : Dr. Shiva Rijal
9. " : Mr. Hiranya Bhojpure
10. " : Prof. Dr. Govind Raj Bhattarai
11. " : Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi

### 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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The authors' original papers published in the Newsletter may not necessarily represent the official view of the Society.

© Nepali Folklore Society, Kathmandu  
ISSN 1819-3803

**Printed at:** dongol printers, 4256932