

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Modernity, Musahar and Cultural Change

**A thesis submitted to the Central Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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Letter of Recommendation

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract

The thesis entitled “Modernity, Musahar and Cultural Change” deals with the impacts of modernization and other advanced neighboring cultures upon Musahar community. As the modern world gets changed due to modern inventions of science and technology, one of the tribes of Nepal could not be detached from this wave of change. Musahars have accepted the scientific modernization and the effects of technological globalization for advance livelihood. Although, they have borrowed some of the cultural traits in terms of language, profession, rituals and festivities from neighboring Nepali cultures and global culture in terms of information and technology along with other modern invention, they have also managed to preserve some of the tribal cultural patterns of their own. Thus, the Musahar people are living testing the fruits of modernization and at the same time preserving their tribal values.

Acknowledgements

I am highly indebted to my respected supervisor Mr. Saroj Sharma Ghimire, the Lecturer at the Central Department of English, for his scholarly guidance, inspiration, and suggestions from the very beginning to the completion of this thesis. This thesis would never have taken the present shape without his constant guidance and supervision.

I am very much grateful to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head of the Central Department of English, for the approval of this research work in its present shape. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my respected teachers Mr. Ghanashyam Bhandari, Mr. Badri Acharya and other teachers who inspired me to materialize my dream as a master of arts.

I cannot help remembering my parents for their continuous encouragement, support, co-operation, love and blessing without which my dream to be a MA in English could have never been possible.

Likewise, my special thanks go to Miss Menuka Acharya who helped me intellectually in the research work. I also express my sincere thanks to all Musahar Community people along with the respondents of the study area for providing the essential informations to complete this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends Om, Mitra and sister Yasoda Ghimire who directly and indirectly helped me to bring the present thesis in this form.

Krishna Khatiwada

December 200

Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
I. Cultural Aspects of the Musahar Tribe	1-12
Origin, Rites and Ritual	
II. Modernity and Cultural Change: An Alternative Perspective	13-24
III. Modernity, Musahar and Cultural Change	25-44
Language	
Profession	
Origin	
Dress	
Major Life Cycle Rites	
Birth	
Mundan	
Marriage Practices	
Death Rites	
Religion	
Festivities	
IV. Conclusion	45-47
Works Cited	

I. Cultural Aspects of the Musahar Tribe

The people of Nepal embody a great variety of races, religions, castes, cultures and languages. Such a diversity of the Nepali society predates the formation of the present state of Nepal. Geography, along with historical processes, seems to have greatly conditioned ethno-regional and cultural formation of the country. Interactions of land by high mountains, deep rivers and dense forests have already fostered several isolated cultural pockets within its territorial span. As a result, several independent and semi-independent but scattered principalities with relative ethno-regional identity of their own have been existing since time immemorial. Over the period, they have gone through various socio-cultural process and historical intervention.

Due to the natural and other emergency incidents, various castes and cultures are immigrated in Nepal and are influencing each other. But the qualitative and systematic study about these cultures and castes has not ever been done yet.

Among all indigenous tribes inhabited in the terai, Musahar, is one which was migrated in Nepal most probably from India. Gautam and Thapa write, "They claimed to have migrated in to this region approximately seven centuries ago from the southern regions which now lie in India" (83). They came in this land as nomadic tribe having no any fixed settlement. Gautam and Thapa further write, "They were an ancient hunting gathering tribe because they did not know anything about foo[d] grains or cereals. This indicates that they were not agriculturists meaning they were nomads" (83).

Besides their history of immigration, the various arguments are put forward about their nomenclature as Musahar tribe. Etymologically Musahar, as the Nepali word says, composed of two words-*musa* and *har* (here *musa* means mice and *har*

means eater in English). Gautam and Thapa have tried to explore about their origin, living style and also about the reason behind their naming as Musahar. They write:

[. . .] they claim to have begun to eat cereals and other food grains about two centuries ago. This was followed by clearing and cultivating lands where food grains began to be planted. It is during this period, they say, that they were harassed by rodents, especially rats and bandicoots, which infested their fields and destroyed much of the standing crops. [. . .] they launched a campaign to trap these rodents, especially the bandicoots and eat them for their proteinous flesh. [. . .] so they are believed to have been given the sobriquet Musahar, which could probably mean those who eat rats [. . .] so they became rat eaters. (83)

This definition mentions about the story behind the nomenclature about Musahar tribe. Even in various parts of Nepal, the same tribe is known as Tatmas, Khataves and Rishidev. But basically Musahar is common attributes by which they are known in general. As the profession, they were, traditionally, specialized in ditch-digging. While working in lands as ditch-digger, the availability of rats were also possible. From that time they are believed to have started to eat rats. Almost same remarks have been explicated by Dor Bahadur Bista, also introducing themselves as nomadic tribe. He writes:

Tatmas and Khataves are agricultural laborers working for wages. They specialize in ditch-digging and the like. In wedding processions they carry the palanquins of the bride and groom. Khataves are often called Musahar, meaning who eats rats, because they do just that without qualms. They are generally a poor lot, owning no land and

often not even dwelling in the same village for any length of time but moving for hire from one village to the next, even back and forth across the border. (133)

This definition shows that Musahar and the Khataves were from similar origin and later Musahar deviated themselves from Khataves taking them as lower caste in the name of carrying palanquins of the bride and groom. But G. S. Ghurye takes this tribe corresponding with Brahmin caste. He mentions, “In Hindustan the gradation of physical types from the Brahmin downwards to Musahar, corresponds very closely to the scheme of social precedence prevailing among the Hindustani castes” (125).

Similarly he categorizes the same Musahar tribe under the pre-Dravida group. He further mentions: “The Musahar, [. . .] of the United Provinces belong to the type; pre-Dravida. [. . .] Head is long, the cephalic index being gradually below 75, the nose broad, the nasal index being always above 80” (130).

His definition also mentions about their corresponding towards other castes and about their physical appearance. No detailed information about Musahar has been explored. The book *Tribal Clan and Cast of Nepal* (1992) describes that “The word Musahar believed to have come from the words ‘*Munda Uraw*’, a local ethnic tribe from Nagpur, India. So, Nepal’s Mundas are often known as Musahars” (My Own Translation, qtd. in Singh, 4). This definition tries to clarify about the origin of their nomenclature.

About their settlement and location Gautam and Thapa write, “Among the tribes inhabiting the areas of Morang, Sunsari, Udayapur, Dhanusha, Janakpur, Saptari, Mahottari, Malangwa, Rautahat and Gaur are the Musahar with strange tradition and cultures” (83). This explanation shows that they are living mainly in terai region of Nepal.

Each culture is regarded as important for it gratifies the need of the people belonging to it. The notion about the Universal culture is not acceptable or applicable today. Every culture has its own inherent and distinct tradition, assumption, structure by which it is known as separate culture having its own cultural significance. The Musahar culture is also distinct from other tribal cultures because of their ritual and cultural practices that they are practicing in their local space.

Origin, Rites and Ritual

Everything consists of its own separate history of origin. In this regard Musahar tribe has its own origin believing that they are originated from sage Balmiki. Gautam and Thapa also opine:

They claim descent from the great sage Valmiki, the supposed author of the religious Ramayana epic. The Musahar claim to have entered the region which falls present day Nepal on account of the large and extensive jungles where food like tubers, roots, fruits and such could be easily available and gathered without much pains. (83)

Like sage Balmiki who used to eat tubers, roots, and fruits only. So Musahar too, in the earlier phase of their entrance in Nepal as nomadic tribe, used to eat such things like sage Balmiki. So, their forefather defined themselves as descendent of sage Balmiki '*rishi*'. Because of such internal impacts of '*rishi*' Balmiki, they believed to have baptised their surname as *Rishidev*. Khatiwada is also of the view that, "In earlier, as a nomadic tribe, they used to eat wild roots and bulbs like sage Valmiki. So, most of them write their surname as 'Rishidev'" (Vol: 5).

In relation to birth rites, they carry distinct features in comparison to the other tribes from the same territory. About such variations Gautam and Thapa also elaborate about the formalities of birth ritual briefly where on the birth of a child, a

Sudeni or rural midwife, belonging to *Chamar* tribe is called and it is she who handles all matters pertaining to delivering the body. From the day after the birth the mother is given the broth of ginger mixed with the sugar like substance called *shakkhr* and other spices too. Till the fifth day no rituals are performed and then sixth day after the birth the mother's finger and toe nails are cut, red color applied on these digits and she is given a new set of clothes to change in to. On this day the mother is permitted to eat rice and other normally eaten victuals. The child is named or has the *navran* on this day and the seven kinds of cereals are mixed to make a special type of sweet which is called *stnja* [*sananja*] by the Musahar (85).

Unlike the birth rites from the other tribes of Nepal, though the ritual of *nwaran* has already been performed, Musahar has different way to over this custom. Generally, till a month after the birth, the mother has to follow the tribal rule to be purified from birth pollution. About the purification of the mother from the birth pollution, Gautam and Thapa also mention in detail. According to them only from the sixth day that the mother is considered cleansed from birth pollution. Though the mother has been purified, she has to refrain from touching wells, tanks or any water sources, even taps, for a months as is the tradition among these people. If the need arises that this mother must fetch water, she has to perform a ritual before she touches the any water sources to obtain water. First the mother takes a *lota* and places it in front of the water sources, next she has to place some paddy grains, fresh green grass or *duvo* and turmeric at five spots. *Puja* is then performed at these spots and after this *puja* the water in the *lota* is emptied in to the water source. After this the ritual is over. She is eligible for forwarding water and she can give water to anyone to drink since she is considered purified. Now, in some places, this emptying of the *lota*

in to the water source is done in such a way so that she is not observed by anyone while at the task (85, 86).

By observing such formalities we come to know that their birth ritual is somehow distinct from other tribal castes and cultures and also distinct from the mainstream cultures.

They seem to have not habituated with the ritual of *pasni*, like other communities from advanced cultural practice. Gautam and Thapa have also agreed to this view, as they mention, “Musahar folks do not seem to practice the ritual of *pasni*. While the parents are eating, the child also eats the same food regardless of the age. Thus, it is seen that no particular time or date is fixed for this feeding and hence no special feast is necessary” (86).

Mundan practice seems somehow similar from the other tribes. Gautam and Thapa also write about their *mundan* practice but they do not mention about the actual time for *mundan*, they write:

Only some of these Musahar people perform this ritual called *mundane* or *chhaewar* meaning shaving of the initial hair [on] the boys head. [. . .] Prior to the actual *mundane*, they perform *puja* to their tutelary and other deities. Then the boy is placed on the mother’s lap and his hair is cut by a barber. [. . .]. The collected hair is taken and thrown into a large river; otherwise they merely dump it into a nearby bamboo grove. (86)

Just like other rites and rituals, most probably, Musahar people carry distinct features regarding the marriage practices. As Khatiwada mentions, they, from the initial phase of marriage, do have distinct characteristics and also take long time for it, he writes, “Marriage talks are initiated by girl’s side. If the boy and girl are liked by each other

the next step of this procedure is to investigate whether there is any agnatic link between boy and the girl or not. The custom is to investigate the gap of nine generation. Only then the marriage date is fixed” (Vol: 5). In marriage practice, they almost take five to even days where singing for the bright future of the couple, the formalities of *uwatan*, *matkhor*, *bilauki magne*, *janti jane* and the like are done before marriage by spending three to four days. By describing such formalities, Khatiwada provides the brief explanation in relation to marriage practices where Musahar people spend generally, five to seven days to complete marriage procedure. On the first day, Musahar folks of the both side sing love songs, blessing songs for a bright future of couple. On the second day, the ritual of *uwatan* is performed where a paste, composed of turmeric, oil and *pina* is rubbed on the bodies of the prospective groom and the bride by their sisters and *bhaujus*. On the third day, the ritual of *matkhor* or *kumraun* is performed. This day girl and boy take bath going near water sources, rivers and after bathing they have to perform worship by placing the items mentioned in five small heaps near the water sources. The fourth day is the day of *janti jane*. Prior to the day of *janti jane*, they perform the ritual of *bilauki magne*, by going to the houses of neighbors and affluent villagers, groom collects things like rice, paddy, grain, money and such. In the girls side also women put earthenware pots full of water on their head and take the girl all around the villagers (Vol 5).

Such descriptions shows that the inherent distinct tribal quality of Musahar people before the actual marriage. They have different and interesting customs and ritual practices of their own. After that, in actual marriage, the procedure is initiated with *dura lagaune* or *kumraun*. Exchange of *tilak* (dowry), the custom of *madva* in which the formalities of *sindur halne*, *lah chhu* are done. Khatiwada writes about the

formalities of day of actual marriage and the *behuli vitryaune* or the ritual of entree of bride in groom's house after returning of the *janti*:

While reaching at girl's house, girl's relatives also take groom all around the villagers where he collects money, rice and such things. This ritual is called *dura lagaune*. Formally marriage starts with the presentation of *tilak*. After the acceptance of *tilak* from groom's side, the rite of *madva (jagge)* is initiated. In *madva*, including *sindur halne* and *lah chhu*, all the functions, related to marriage, are performed. Only after third day, they return home with bride. And after worshipping their *kul devta* in groom's house by the both bride and groom, only then the marriage procedure is over. (Vol: 5)

But the concept of child marriage and polygamy are even not totally removed from the Musahar people. Gautam and Thapa also agree with this view, they elaborate, "Child marriage and polygamy are prevalent among the Musahar. Then payment of *jari* exists but in a rare state [. . .] widow marriage are not encouraged among these people" (90).

On the death of a person they have not any necessary rules whether to bury it or burn it. It depends upon their economic condition. Gautam and Thapa also mention:

On the death of a Musahar, those who are able to cremate the corpse, while those who are unable to bury it. Initially corpse is bathed and clothed in new clothes and then placed on a *khat*. The funeral goes themselves dig the grave or construct the pyre, as the case may be, making the grave or pyre in a north-south direction and placing the corpse's head in the northern direction (91).

For the burial or burn the corpse is removed toward the river side. But before that they have other such formalities to be done according to their own norms.

Gautam and Thapa write about such formalities of death rites. While removing the corpse from the house, an earthenware pot is also carried containing five *kaudi* shells, oil, barley grains, *tulsi* etc. This pot must be carried by the person who is to light the funeral, pyre. Prior to placing the corpse inside the grave, the five *kaudi* shells are placed in five different directions and the person goes round the grave five times with the lighted oil lamp in his hand. After this, the corpse is placed in the grave. Now, the son of the deceased puts a handful of mud into the grave and this action is followed by the other funeral goers. The wooden handless of the implements, used in the digging of the grave, are thrown away and then the funeral goers wash before they return home. After all the funeral goers return to the house of the deceased, a *karahi* or *utenail* shaped like a semicircle, live coals, stones and *chilli* are placed on the path and these must be circled from the left side to the right. After completing these rounds, each funeral goer must eat some of the *chilli* and then only enter the dwelling. (91)

During the days of obsequies they perform other rituals in the grave yard and also in the home. About their formalities of *sarjhapi*, *pinda daan* and *shraddha*, Khatiwada writes:

On the fourth day after funeral they perform the ritual of *sarjhapi* by making mound in that place. In the case of *vaishnav*, they plant a *tulasi* plant. On the seventh day, *karta* performs the ritual of *pinda daan* after bathing in river or lake. On the eleventh of the day, the ritual of *shraddha* is performed by offering twelve balls of rice or *pindas*. On the thirteenth day, *karta* wears new clothes. Thirteen *pindas* are again

offered as *daan*. On this day karta eats everything including meat, rice, alcohol, (*tharra*) and such. (Vol 5)

“Though the Mushar claim to be Hindus, the rites and rituals are quit different from what is done by the Hindus” (Gautam and Thapa, 92). Khatiwada also writes, “Their greatest Gods *Dina* and *Bhadri* (Ram and Laxman, mythic heros) are worshipped once a year on any month. Every Musahar family has a separate deity, related to Hindu myth, which they worship in their houses” (Vol 5).

In relation to festivities, Khatiwada describes, “*Holi* or *Phaguwa* is their greatest festival. Besides this, they celebrate the feasts like *Maghe Sankranti*, *Jitia Pawan*, *Juth Sital*, *Deepawali*, *Chauthi Chand*, *Chhath*, *Gauren*, *Ghadi Pawan* and such” (Vol 5).

By analyzing their each aspects of life it can be concluded that Musahar carries distinct cultural and tribal features by adding an extra brick in the wall of cultural diversity of Nepal.

Nepal has been a model of mosaic society, with various mutually unintelligible groups and further division by caste. It has been wealth of cultural diversity. This cultural mosaic structure gives ethnic identification and the resource management patterns for subsistence of the people of every religion.

Culture is an adjacent aspect of environment and culture is always a changing phenomenon. It is ever changing; its influences the economic, ecological, socio-political aspects of any human society. But it is very difficult to define about cultural change. Malinowski says:

Cultural change is a process by which the existing order of a society is transformed from one type to another. Cultural change thus covers the more or less rapid process of modification in the political construction

of a society in its domestic institution and its mode of territorial settlement, in its belief and system of knowledge, education and law, as well as in its material tools and use and consumption of goods on which its social economy is based is altering. Change is a permanent factor of human civilization [. . .]. It may be influenced by factors and forces spontaneously arising within the community. (1)

Primitive men developed their technology slowly with the change of environmental factors. The environment provides different sources of livelihood to human beings and scarce source could not sustain the increased population. Consequently, advanced technology has been developed. Culture has been changed due to technological change. Since culture consists of learned patterns of behavior and belief, cultural traits can be unlearned and new ones learned as human needs change, just as specific items of learning are necessarily mortal.

Due to the interaction between various castes and cultures, there may be the possibility of the rise of new (alternative) cultural practices and the core study of Nepalese cultures is becoming vast and hard day by day. When we look at regional distribution, we find ourselves distinctly variant from other groups or cultures because of our professions. Due to various cultural significances, the fundamental aspects of tradition and spiritual assumptions and due to our cultural practices and living in different regional varieties we seem as if we are different than other cultures. But excessive development of modern education, information technology, transportation and fast life processes are some of the causes by which each community is gradually losing the inherent cultural practices from its own grip.

Now the individual or collective identity exists due to the cultural practices that they carry within. Such cultural practices create the identity for individual, group,

society, and nation and so on. But nowadays due to the various reasons the traditionally followed cultural practices are under the impacts of factors and forces. Now, no culture is pure and untouched by the factors and forces like modernization and globalization of culture caused mainly by information and technology. Due to the scientific modernization and globalization every culture is practicing some newness. Along with the impacts of modernization and globalization each culture, in no matter, is buttressing the other advanced neighboring cultures, out of which the notion about diffusion and acculturation are in practice. So, crisis in cultural identity is being seen. About the cultural identity, by citing Adhikari, Prasain writes, “This itself is a formidable problem for all the societies attempting to preserve their identity through the preservation of their culture and rural societies which for centuries have been following it questionably, face a great cultural dilemma” (7).

Each community of Nepal has undergone changes. None of the community is static. Each has experienced social, economic and cultural changes with varying degree of progress. Musahar culture is not exception to this. At present the process of change is undergoing within Musahar community; their resource management patterns, population size, natural resources and cultural practices are deteriorating.

II. Modernity and Cultural Change: An Alternative Perspective

Modernism is the consciousness of time and it conceives time as nonlinear, disjunctive and nonlocutionary phenomenon. Modernity is an inaugural moment instigating a conclusive break with tradition. It is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, styles and along with new scientific invention. Agreeing with such views Bhattarai writes:

Modernism indeed never comes to an end, or at least we do not know, as yet, neither it can nor will come its end. Since modernism, despite the precursors one can find in the past, is a novelty in a development of western culture what we do know, however, is that modernism can fall upon days of exhaustion, when it appears to be making time and waiting for new avenues of release. (2)

The most recent modernism simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and the present, and we are, in a way, still the contemporaries of that kind of aesthetic modernity which first appeared in the midst of nineteenth century, since then, the distinguishing mark of works which count as modern is the new which will be overcome and made obsolete through the novelty of the next style. A modernist culture soon learns to respect, even to cherish signs of its division.

Basically, modernism can be understood as the decay of faith and the confusion of tongues. It works out of the loss of certitude in the high matters of religion and ethics. Modernism is the wide spread disagreement about first principles in life as in literature, the need for trans-valuation in all spheres of thought. It is the problem of how to live and what to live for once a livelihood has been assured. Most obviously science has introduced new knowledge that has undermined certain faiths, corroded the feeling of the transcendent of human destiny. More significantly, it has

introduced new modes of thought and new condition of living, weakening the habit of faith and breaking up the settled way of life in which faith can most easily take root.

By describing such characteristics of modernism, Bhattarai mentions:

In modernist era, everything has become immensely complicated and uncertain, the community of man still not an ideal but a fact, if at times a depressing one. Modernity has created a heterogeneous society in which the trunk lines of communication have been cut across a hundred points and finally become tangle in a maze. In the twentieth century this ferment exploded in a burst of centrifugal activity we face today and extraordinary purpose, way of life- diversity less between then within classes. The intellectual as well as industrial world becomes daily specialized, new points of view multiply as rapidly as mechanical gadgets. (4)

It is no doubt; the motherland of modernity is basically the European land. But the rest of the land received or receiving modernity in two ways: directly (hegemonic) and indirectly (influential). Basically colonized countries got double victimized during colonial period. On the one hand, they came under hegemonic cultural as well as political colonization and they themselves got slightly entertained by the colonial rule on the other. But those politically non-colonized countries adopted modernity through media, industrial production, scientific invention, and transportation by imitating directly or by following other advanced neighboring cultures that have already transformed themselves in European way. The process of colonization paved the way for globalization of the culture. Sharing of cultural norms, values were prevalent in the period of colonization. Globalization is related to political, social, cultural and economic aspects. Eduardo Mendieta writes, “Globalization has to do

also with process of political, cultural and social integration that in many ways antecede economic globalization” (410). About the cultural modernity that developed mainly after colonization, Mendieta further comments, “coloniality of power” (410). So, by globalization we should not understand merely the planetarization of a certain form of economic imperialism. And out of this a kind of cultural formation emerged. Mendieta writes, “The emergence of cultural formations and trends that are not easily reducible to national forms of cultural sovereignty and affirmation. Such musical, fashion and even literary productions are, rather, a product of the interaction between local context and global trends” (411). Such view provides the notion about cultural synergy or acculturation or enculturation.

Those colonized countries not only adopted or imitated the western European culture fully but they also preserved their certain inherent communal quality in their local space. So, the notion about glocal culture began to be practiced. Glocalization is the mixed state of global and the local. About glocalization of culture, Robertson writes:

Capitalist modernity does involve an element of cultural homogenization for it increases the levels and amount of global coordination. However, mechanisms of fragmentation, heterogenization and hybridity are also at work. It is not a question of either homogenization or heterogenization, but rather of the ways in which both of these two tendencies have become features of life across much of the late-twentieth-century world. (qtd. in Barker, 27)

Robertson is of the view that heterogenization, homogenization and hybridity all are the mechanisms to be glocalization of culture. Due to the globalization of culture and spontaneous attraction towards such culture on the one hand and strong sentiments

towards cultural nationalism on the other, we live always somewhere in middle. As Pieterse opines, “Bounded cultures, ethnic resilience and the re-emergence of powerful nationalistic sentiments co-exist with cultures as trans-local learning process” (qtd. in Barker, 27).

The global and the local mutually constitute. Nation states were forged within a global system and the contemporary rise in nationalistic sentiment can be regarded as an aspect of globalization. The idea of the local, specifically what is considered to be local, is produced within and by globalizing discourse. Thus the expectation of identity declaration is built in to the general process of globalization. Globalization involves the dynamic movements of ethnic groups, technology, financial transactions, media images and ideological conflicts. Featherstone is also of the view that, “The globalization process should be regarded as opening up the sense that now the world is a single place with increased contact becoming unavoidable, we necessarily have greater dialogue between various nation- states, blocks and civilizations” (342). And due to such globalization of culture, the notion about cultural hybridity emerged. European colonialism has left its cultural mark across the globe. Here, a white god and the European sword combined to enforce and justify domination. European cultural modernity is evident through language, sport, architecture, music, food, painting, film, television and the general sense amongst whites that European culture presents high culture. Nevertheless, the impact of external cultural influences is more complex than the idea of simple cultural imperialism. The concept of cultural imperialism depends at heart on a notion of projection and coercion. Rhizomorphic and disjunctive global cultural flows are characterizable less in terms of domination and more as forms of cultural hybridity. But ideologically, not only non-western

cultures are influenced by the west rather west itself is under the influence of non-west in some or the other way. Barker opines:

Globalization is not constituted by a monolithic one way flow from west-to-the-rest. This can be seen in the impact of non-western ideas and practices on the west. For example: the global impact of world music; the influence of Islam; Hinduism; Buddhism and other world religions within the west; the commodification and sale of ethnic food and clothing. (161)

Such items like coca-cola; the Olympic games; Hollywood movies; world music; Hip Hop music; Bollywood movies (Indian films); Buddhism (fastest growing religion in the west); the advertising industry; motorcar sales; tourism and so on now, represent both global homogenization and the maintenance of diversity equally. Those physically non- colonized countries have adopted or now adopting European modernity through direct imitating or through the other once colonized neighboring countries or communities that have already transformed them into modern way. But we should not take these two dichotomies as separate. Featherstone writes, “It is not helpful to regard the global and the local as dichotomies separated in space or time; it would seem that the processes of globalization and localization are inextricably bound together in the current phase” (342/43).

Certainly, due to the impacts of modernity or technological globalization the inherent qualities of culture are deterritorilizing. Featherstone writes:

The process of globalization is therefore uneven, and if one aspect of it is the consciousness of the world as a single place, then it is in this select quarters of world cities that we find people working in environments which rely upon advanced means of communications

which overcome time-space separation, as new means of communication effectively make possible simultaneous transactions which sustain “deterritorialized cultures”. (350)

The globalization process is seen as producing a unified and integrated common culture. Hence we find that theories of cultural imperialism assume that local cultures are necessarily battered out of existence by the proliferation of consumer goods, advertising and media programmes stemming from the west.

It is the era of modernization and globalization of information and technology along with the local culture. The sense of cultural change, acculturation, diffusion, hybridity, glocalization etc. is coming world widely through the gate way of modernity. But what actually the modernity is? Is it the outcome of technological progress, literary development or something else? Charles Taylor writes, “Modernity is not that form of life toward which all cultures converge as they discard beliefs that held our forefather’s back. Rather it is a movement from one constellation of background understanding to another, which repositions the self in relation to others and the good” (115). He defines traditional as culture and modern as aculture.

“Modernism is the expressive dimension of modernity” (Friedman, 431). Wherever it occurs in whatever particular form, appears to beg the question, to be a tautological statement with little explanatory power. If modernity lacks particularity as a concept, then the claim that modernism is modernity’s expressive domain is necessarily emptied of specificity as well. If the periods are modern, then all aesthetic expression must be modernist. Friedman Opines:

Modernity involves a powerful vortex of historical conditions that coalesce to produce sharp ruptures from the past that range widely across various sectors of a given society. Friedman writes, “The

velocity, acceleration, and dynamism of shattering change across a wide spectrum of societal institutions are key components of modernity as it change that interweaves the cultural, economic, political, religious, familial, sexual, aesthetic, technological, and so forth, and can move in both utopic and dystopic direction”. (433)

Modernity is conceived as a set of transformations that any and every culture can go through and that all will probably be forced to undergo. So, modernity can be understood as issuing from a rational or social operation that is culture-neutral. Taylor writes, “Modernity is characterized by the loss of the horizon; by a loss of roots; by the hubris that denies our dependence on history or God, which place unlimited confidence in the power of frail human reason; by a trivializing self-indulgence which has no stomach for the heroic dimension of life” (116).

Some defines modernity in relation to colonialism. Walter D. Mignolo defines, “Coloniality, in other words, is the hidden face of modernity and its very condition of possibility” (qtd. in Friedman, 425). Similarly, Friedman writes:

Colonialism is constitutive of western modernity, essential to its formation [. . .] as a consequence, we must not close the curtain on modernism before the creative agencies in the colonies and newly emergent nations have their chance to perform. Their nationalist movements and liberations from the political dimensions of colonial rule are central to the story of their modernities. (427)

The geographical blind spot of prevailing concepts of modernist internationalism is a particular instance of what geographer J. M. Balut more generally calls the ideology of European diffusionism. He defines this ideology as a narrative of modernity:

Europeans are seen as the “makers of history.” Europe eternally advances, progresses, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is “traditional society.” Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical center and a permanent periphery: an inside and an outside. Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates. (qtd. in Friedman, 429)

Moreover, modernity is often associated with the intensification of intercultural contact zones, whether produced through conquest, vast migration of people, or relatively peaceful commercial traffic and technological or cultural exchange. One step ahead, Gaonkar puts it, “Modernity is not one, but many.” Gaonkar is one among a growing number of theorists and historians who are calling for a new discourse about modernity, one based on an acknowledgement of “multiple modernities,” “early modernities,” “alternate modernities,” “polycentric modernities,” or “conjectural modernities”. They are not mosaics, each modernity is separate and isolated from all others, evolving autonomously and equally (Friedman, 435).

Now, Musahar community from the North-East part of Jhapa also seems to have followed the alternative form of modernity in their local space. But neither Musahar community is buttressing the European modernity totally nor are they able to preserve the inherent tribal quality of their own. Now, they are adopting glocalised kind of culture. Living in surrounding of other advanced cultures and also among global and modern scenario, they are carrying hybrid culture in their practice. They are slowly familiarizing with modern advanced equipments such as: mobile, television, radio, computer, bicycle, tractors, trucks, buses and other vehicles. Unlike the tribes or communities of once colonized countries, the Musahar communities of Nepal are rather in indirect impacts or influences of modernity and globalization that

these qualities deriving from advanced neighboring cultures and castes. They are neither directly familiar with European modernity nor are able to formulate their life in traditional way by preserving their inherent tribal quality, so, it can be claimed that they are practicing an alternative form of modernity in their local space.

The concept of alternative form of modernity is the sole concept that most of the communities at present time are buttressing so as to make themselves adjust in new arrival of time or, say, in global context. Critics are of the view that such alternative modernity is of that type developed or developing from European modernity but being alternated from it to adjust in local context. So, it carries both qualities: European and local or can be said situational.

Such modernity came in third world or coming not directly or quickly but slowly or gradually. Dilip P. Gaonkar is also of the view that the notion of alternative modernity is:

Born in and of the west some centuries ago under relatively specific socio historical conditions [. . .] It has arrived not suddenly but slowly, bit by bit, over the long dureé- awakened by contact; transported through commerce; administered by empires; bearing colonial inscriptions; propelled by nationalism; and now increasingly steered by global media migration, and capital. (1)

This shows the slow spreading of modernities from west to the rests. But the same modernities seemingly divided in two ways: societal and cultural. Gaonkar further writes, “To think in terms of alternative modernities is to recognize the need to revise the distinction between societal modernization and cultural modernity” (1). It can clearly be claimed that almost all cultures of Nepal celebrate both type of modernities.

The cultural modernity always works in opposition, in difference. Cultural modernity is related to our daily life. Almost the same remark is set by Gaonkar, he explains:

The cultural modernity- rose in opposition. It first appeared in the aesthetic realm led by different, sometimes competing, groups of avant-garde writers and artists starting with the Romanticism in the late eighteenth century and was gradually absorbed and carried forward by the popular medias of news, entertainment, and commercial arts and advertising. Thus cultural modernity came to permeate everyday life.

(2)

But the question arises how cultural modernity travelled to the rest of the world? This issue is dealt by various critics like Habermas, Foucault, Bouldelaire, Lyotard etc. but Gaonkar claims that, “Modernity has travelled from west to the rest of the world not only in terms of cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements but also as a form of discourse that interrogates the present. [. . .] Every national and cultural site today can not escape the legacy of western discourse on modernity” (13, 14).

But one can provincialize western modernity only by thinking through and thinking against its self understandings, which are frequently cast in universal idioms. To think through and to think against mean to think with a difference- a difference that would destabilize the universalist idioms, historicize the context, and pluralize the experiences of modernity.

To think in terms of alternative modernities is to privilege a particular angle of interrogation (Gaonkar, 14). Some critics even think about the double negotiation between societal and cultural modernization. Gaonkar is also of the same view:

The site of alternative modernities is also the site of double negotiations-between societal modernization and cultural modernity and between hidden capacities for the similarity and different. Thus alternative modernities produce combinations and recombinations that are endlessly surprising [. . .] everywhere, at every national cultural site, modernity is not one but many; modernity is not new but old and familiar; modernity is in complete and necessarily so. (18)

In this regard, the local cultural community not only celebrates modernity for the betterment of their livelihood and allows the influences of other advanced neighboring cultures thereby losing their traditional cultural, professional and ritual aspects but also preserves some inherent cultural traits in its local space.

To wrap up, modernity is an inaugural moment instigating a conclusive break with tradition but it is also the problem in larger aspects; the decay of faith and the confusion of tongues: the loss of certitude in the high matters of religion and ethics. Scientific as well as aesthetic modernity travelled from Europe to rest of the world especially through colonization. The process of colonization paved the way for globalization of the local cultures. Sharing of cultural norms, values were prevalent in the colonial period. Information technology, through science, has introduced new knowledge that has undermined certain faiths, corroded the feelings of human. Modernization and globalization have bestowed new taste to each culture and due to which it contains hybrid quality these days. It is not a question of either globalization or lacialization rather the ways in which both of these two tendencies have become the features of life thereby the notion about glocalization is in practice. The emergence of cultural formations and trends are not easily reducible to national forms of cultural sovereignty and affirmation. The global and local mutually constitute and create an

alternative thought of living. Alternative forms of modernity is that type developed or developing from European modernity which is evident through language, sport, music, food, painting, film, media and the other mass products, but alternating from European modernity to adjust in local context. So, this research attempts to identify the alternative form of modernity in relation to Musahar tribe from the North-East part of Jhapa.

III. Modernity, Musahar and Cultural Change

Every society undergoes changes in its different aspects such as cultural, economic, social and political. Especially the resources for subsistence and its management patterns have been changed and influenced by different factors. Under the influences of such factors like impacts of modernization and influences of other neighboring groups, various ethnic minorities groups of Nepal have been losing their identity. The Musahar is also one of the ethnic indigenous tribal groups of Nepal facing dual position in the present scenario. First, their cultural practices are being influenced and affected by other advanced neighboring cultures and second, slowly and gradually they are swallowing the flavor or relish of modernization or modern scientific inventions such as mobile, bicycle, tractors, buses along with the establishment of various factories, mills, tea estates and the like. Due to their gradual attractions towards modernization they are losing their own traditional occupations like soil cutting and farming. It is due to the negligence of their own on the one hand, and the socio-cultural intervention of neighboring cultures and impacts of modernization in their livelihood, the indigenusness of Musahar culture is at the threshold of extension.

It would be a problem for tomorrow to identify various ethnic traits of this ethnic group due to change. Musahars are rich in their own tradition based ritual, social and cultural practices but due to such factors and forces like impacts of modernization and influences of other neighboring cultures, these cultural practices are forgotten and are replaced by other new forms.

The present research explores into some fundamental cues and tries to discover the actual condition of the Musahar community at present. This research has been done through directed observation, interview and questionnaire. The methods of

participated and non participated observation have been followed. The main area of this research study is the North part of the Mahendra Highway of Jhapa. The research has been centered in Surunga VDC of Jhapa. At least, two villages of Musahar community have been selected which covered more than two hundred people from the Musahar tribe.

In Jhapa, the Musahar tribe is not taken as native tribe. In the journal, *Jhapa ka Aadibasiharu* (The Natives of Jhapa), the writer Shastra Dutta Panta has not stated any information about them. But like Bishnu Pathak and others, they are taken as late comers and untouchable *dalits*. Earlier, they were believed to have come in this district in search of job or work, especially for farming depending upon landlords. They worked at first as ploughman or cultivator. Slowly they started to live in ‘ailani jagga’ (uncultivated land) provided by the landlords. When the first comers got established in this region, they, later, invited other relatives and their population increased. At present, they consist of more than 1381 indicating in Jhapa district (*Jilla Parichaya Jhapa*, 28).

The present research has focused mainly the VDCs such as Surunga, Arjundhara, Khudunabari, Budhabare, Charpane and Sanishchare where the population of Musahars consist of 113, 43, 14, 18, 5, 64 persons respectively as described in the journal *Jilla Parichaya, Jhapa*. The same journal has calculated 1381 Musahar people in Jhapa district where Surunga VDC alone has 113 people from Musahar community. This research has covered more than 257 Musahar people of the total calculation. So, at least, this research might cover the whole situation of Jhapali Musahar.

To prove the hypothesis of this research topic, the present researcher has visited various parts of research area and analyzed the present condition of Musahar

community through the methods like observation and interview. This research is basically centered on Surunga VDC where majority of Musahar people are located.

Language

As is the field research carried, the vast changes in them are being seen in terms of language, profession, ritual festivities and other related aspects. So, in terms of language, population size, cultural and ritual practices, the present research has analyzed the impacts of modernization and influences of the other neighboring cultures in them simultaneously, due to which such metonymies are day by day deteriorating. But out of such factors and forces, what they preserve as some inherent tribal quality while practicing alternative form of modernity, is the sole concept of this study.

During the field research, it is found that the main influences that they are bearing or receiving is in terms of language. Linguistically they are Maithili speaking people (Khatiwada, Vol: 5) but they even accept that their language speaking style is diverse according to the place that they live in. Even the Maithili language in Saptari, Siraha, and Udayapur is different as is in Jhapa. Though the Maithili is their mother tongue, almost all people of second and third generations of their community do not speak Maithili or, say, they do not know to speak Maithili; they only understand. While the necessity comes they reply in Nepali. About 60 people from 'Musahar Gaun' in Surunga -1 of Jhapa, only three persons speak in Maithili very well. Some of the daughters-in-law in the village can speak in the Maithili by mixing it with Bhojpuri; those who are brought there through marriage from bordering areas of Nepal and India.

It is due to the influences of Nepalese cultures and, they say, the system of education that their children receiving from the school in Nepali medium, they are day

by day familiarized with Nepali language. The education system, on the one hand, based on Nepali medium and the settlement of the community among Nepali speaking groups on the other, affected or are affecting their mother tongues regularly. Now, various NGOs and INGOs are propagating their programs in rural village areas to enforce the education in pre-nursery level's pupils. Various child development (*bal vikas*) programs are running in the villages for several years, which prepares pupils for nursery level by entertaining them with English, Nepali alphabets, dance practices, 'Bal geets', light sports and the like. Only in nominal fees they receive such education which may develop their physical and mental capacity equally. The Musahar pupils, between the ages of thirty to forty months also visit there where they have to receive knowledge in Nepali medium. So, they are trained basically with Nepali language from babbling or lisping stage.



(Building of Saraswati Bal Vikas Kendra in the left side and the Musahar pupils- Bishal and Bikas (showed by mark) in the class room in the right side in Surunga-1 of Jhapa)

They are easily sending their children for education in various institutions, regardless of the gender differences and without the sense of the crisis of money. Now the Musahar community is able to send their children in schools like the children of

other castes from the society and when they visit school from the Bal Kendras, they are taught in the Nepali language.



(Som Nath in grade-6)



(Abhishek in grade-9)



(Muna in grade-7)

(All these highlighted Musahar students are from Surunga-1 and study in Saraswati Ma. Vi. Surunga-3 of Jhapa)

So, the pupil from the early stage gets entertained with the Nepali language and in the home they speak so. By which their speaking capacities of Maithili language is day by day deteriorating. Now, professionally Musahars work in various places such as farm of landlords, in mills areas, in garments, in tea states, in vehicles like tractors, buses etc where they have to speak in Nepali to share their understanding or to make communication possible.

In the North-East part of Jhapa Nepalese speakers are in majority. Other natives of Jhapa also bear different lingual practices of their own; distinct from Maithili language. So, to adjust in local context they have no any options instead of speaking the Nepali language. Only those who live in house and those who are aged, speak Maithili language but for their own purpose. Through field research, three different generations are found with three different language practices. Old, and totally uneducated, generation freely speak Maithili. The other people of the ages of 25 to 45 speak Nepali clearly and Maithili too but in unfamiliar way. But especially the children and young people speak Nepali as like the Nepali speaker but in the case of Maithili, they understand only but can not speak.

The Musahar people of this specific area even use Nepali words for various formalities related to their ritual and cultural practices instead of using Maithili. They pronounce *janma* (Nepali) for *janam* (Maithili); birth in English. Most of them pronounce *chhewar* for *mundan*. Their tongues are familiar with *pathi* (a virgin female goat in Nepali) instead of *bakri* (Maithili) that they slaughter in the ritual of *chhewar* or *mundan*. Most importantly in marriage practices, almost all the ritual formalities are mixed with Nepali words. They use Nepali expressions than Maithili while talking about some of their rituals. For instance *dih milaune* for *dih milani*, *bilauki magne* for *bilauki magi*, *dura lagaune* for *dura lagani*, *janti* for *barati* or *bariyat*, *behula* for *ladka* and *behuli* for *kanya*, *maiti* for *maike* or *lahira* respectively.

Slowly, Musahars are losing their grip from the Maithili language. It will certainly be noticed that after few years they may totally be habituated with Nepali language. And this is happening due to the direct physical relationship with Nepali speaking community on the one hand and the (modern) education system, out come of modernization, on the other.

Profession

First and foremost, Musahars are most importantly influenced by other advanced neighboring cultures in terms of language. It is due to the settlement among Nepali speaking groups on the one hand and the impacts of modernity through education system, media, information and technology on the other. But in terms of professions or professional occupations, they are highly affected by modernization or modern developments. Modern developments like mobile, camera, television, radio; CD/DVD player, different vehicles, transportation, electricity etc are making their livelihood easier than the earlier. Though, in a meager income they have bought TV, DVD player, hi-fi sound system, as they say, to use for own self and to show others to increase reputation. Buying and keeping of such modern inventions are the matter of pride to them nowadays.



(Panchilal from Surunga-9, Tekra of Jhapa standing near the television inside his house (left), and television, DVD player and sound box belonging to the house of Sanjay (right) in the same village).

Now, they seem to have less interested in animal husbandry (livestock), soil cutting and the like as is their tradition. Rather their occupations have been changed due to technological change. Now, they are not dependent rather independent. As economic sources or mediums, they are choosing various fields such as crushing at river bank, different factories, tea estates, driving and the like. Nowadays, they are

playing with modern equipments and are habituating with them. Almost all the youngsters from Surunga-1 of Jhapa work at Biring River where they sort out pebbles and sand and each couple earn about one thousand per day.



(Picture: 1)



(Picture: 2)



(Picture: 3)

(The family of Thantu (picture: 1), Mahabir and his wife Phul Maya (picture: 2) and Dhone (picture: 3) from Surunga 1 of Jhapa are working at Biring River).

They are sending their children for education in various institutions, without the sense of the crisis of money. Some of the youngsters even work in tractors, buses and the other vehicles. They have received the license from related offices and applying it in related fields.



(A driving license belonging to Subhash from Surunga-1 of Jhapa)

The definition of Musahar as nomad and wanderer as Bista has said, “They are generally a poor lot, owning no land and often not even dwelling in the same village for any length of time but moving for hire from one village to the next, even back and forth across the border” is not really applicable today (133). Now they are the lord of their own land. They do not bear any kind of feudalism from their former landlord(s). Almost each of the family has their own Nepali citizenship and *lal purja* or *dhani purja* (a written document that shows the possession of the land).



(Nepalese citizenship, belonging to the couple of Phul Maya and Mahabir, Surunga-1)



(Citizenship card and *lal purja*, belonging to Thantu from Surunga-1)



(*Lal purja*, belonging to Phul Maya from Surunga-1)

In the topic entitled “Settlements”, Gautam and Thapa write, “That the Musahar were nomads can be proved by the types of huts, they construct for dwellings, which are small and low in height. It is light and constructed from locally available materials such as bamboo, straw, *khar*, and *bhato* or split of bamboo pieces” (84). But now, almost in each place where they used to live, are living permanently. They have made viewable and countable houses of their own by using woods like *saal/ sakuwa* (known as the king of the wood) and others.



(Houses belonging to Dhone (left) and Khone (right) in Surunga-1)

Musahars do agree with the definition provided by Bishnu Pathak and others that, “They are skilled in soil cutting which is considered their traditional occupation” (5). They, sometimes, even now work as soil cutter but this occupation is not the area of their primary interest. At the time of flood in river, if the sand business is banned by related VDC and if they really want to work in field, only then they work as soil cutter even if it is required; because as the source of income, the occupation of soil cutting is less profitable than the working in river bank. But in some cases, the Musahar people from other places of the study areas still want to work as soil cutter. But due to the modern equipments like tractors, trucks that they are now taken as a medium for carrying soil from fields to houses, their opportunities in the field of soil cutting have been grabbed. Those people, who are far from the river bank, depend upon farming in daily wage system and animal husbandry. They are choosing such professions instead of soil cutting due to the interruption of different vehicles.

The impact of modernization towards the traditional occupation of the Musahar people has carried dual effects; negative as well as positive. Those people who work in the river bank can not stop their anger towards the dozer, working nearby.



(Dhone from Surunga-1 is preparing to fill up pebbles in the tractor by showing back bone to the dozer at Biring River)

They load a tractor spending four hours but a dozer loads its tractor within thirty minutes. Due to ‘modernity’ they are living easy life on the one hand and their profession is also at risk on the other.

In mills areas too, they earn in large ratio. Some of them are even interested to go to the tea states of southern part of Jhapa in daily wage bases. Some boys work in different vehicles such as tractors and buses as driver, conductor and *khalasi* (gate keeper).



(Subhash (left) as a conductor of a bus numbering Me. 1 Kha 791, that is in route from Birtamod to Kechana Bagan of Jhapa, and Dipesh (right) as a driver in a tractor which is used to transport sand, pebbles, stones and the like in local areas).

Those who are working in vehicles say that ‘if one comes in this *gaadi* (vehicle) line, he looks no other area to work’, which probably means they are easily entertained with four/ six wheeler vehicles. They like to be called ‘*guruji*’ (driver *saheb*) by others who are at upper grade according to class and cast division. Now, they do not take for granted any of the occupations which have come as inheritance.

The gradual influences of other neighboring advanced cultures and importantly impacts of modernization, the traditional occupations or professions of Musahar people have totally been changed. They even hesitate to think about their

tribal identity as Musahar (mice eater). They refuse to be known as mice eater. Some persons from the old generation used to eat mouse but nowadays they are not getting habituated. Their forefather used to dig the land for rats to eat and now some youngsters, too, dig the land but not for rats like that of their forefathers but only for *bam machha* (a kind of fish, which looks like snake in terms of physical appearance).



(A Musahar young, from Surunga- 1 is searching *bam machha* by digging the land).

Young generation does not even like to be called as Musahar. The people knowingly or unknowingly announce ‘we are not Musahar, we are Rishidev.’ None of them are familiar with the profession they had.

Origin

“They claim descent from the great sage Balmiki, the supposed author of the religious Ramayana epic” (Gautam and Thapa, 83). But now, the significance of their cast and clan are in question. When they entered in Nepal, like sage Balmiki, they used to eat wild fruits, tubers or say *kandamul* only. So, their forefather defined themselves as Rishidev. But now, they eat meat, grains and drinks alcohol and such. So, it is, now, the matter of question whether they are descended from sage Balmiki or

not. They, in terms of cast and clan, have totally lost their grip and deviated from the inherent fame of the tribe.

Dress

“Initially, in older times, they used to wear only so much as to cover their genitalia and mammary glands [. . .]. Today we can observe them dressing in a way similar to the other inhabitants [. . .], the *dhoti* and the *kurta* are the clothes worn by males, while the females wear usual *fariyas* and *cholo*” (Gautam and Thapa 84). Now, their dress patterns, today, also have changed. They, while appear in village markets, from back side, look like modern men. Almost none of them wear *dhoti* and *kurta*, rather their bodies have already been familiarized with T- shirt, shirt, pants (jeans or cotton) and shoes (leather or sports). In the case of the female they wear *saari* and *cholo*. Girls wear *kurta*, *salwar*, shirt, pants and other modern dresses.



(Daughter of Thantu, enjoying the bicycle, jeans and kurta (left), and two female interviewees-Somni and Budhni with the formal Nepali dresses and a boy appearing with jeans and T-shirt in front of researcher, right).

They do not know whether their dresses are similar with European or western appearance but they only know that they have started wearing such modern dresses with the impact of television, films and other advanced neighboring communities. No sense of culture based dressing pattern is prevalent among Musahar.



(Picture: 11), (Source: Khone Rishidev)



(Picture: 12)

(In picture eleven, Musahar people are celebrating a marriage feast but all of them are not in their tribal dresses and in picture twelve, all of them are dressing with the dress like that of other persons of the Nepali communities).

Major Life Cycle Rites

Birth

On the birth of a child, traditionally, as Gautam and Thapa write, “A *sudeni* or rural midwife, belonging to Chamar tribe is called” (85). But in Jhapa, no people from Chamar tribe are found surrounding with Musahar tribe so it is impossible to call for the midwife from Chamar tribe. Now, they themselves handle the case of delivery. In normal case, child is delivered in the house and while in abnormal case, a pregnant woman is admitted in nearby health post. They are also excited by the decision of the government to give money to the mother who delivers child in the health post.

The sense of change is felt only in terms of *nwaran* (naming day of a newly born child). Traditionally, from the twelfth days the mother is cleansed from the birth pollution. Now, the family situations decide the day of *nwaran*. In the lack of midwife or care taker, and if no other matured member is available in home to take care of other members of the family, the ritual of *nwaran* is compromised. If necessary, arises, they, any day from sixth to twelfth, perform the *nwaran*.

Unlike the definition made by Gautam and Thapa, who have described, “Though the mother has been purified, she has to refrain from touching the wells, tanks or any other water sources, even taps for a month as is the tradition” (85). But now, no such bondage is prevalent. She, from the day of *nwaran*, can touch such things without any hesitation or social bondage. But generally, they give the name to the children according to the day that they born. The child who are born on Monday (*sombar*) are named like *Somnath*, *Some*, *Somni* and in the case of Wednesday (*budhabar*) they are called as *Budhe*, *Budhnath*, *Budhni* and the like.

Mundan

They do not necessarily perform the ritual of Mundan. As is the tradition, Mundan was necessary; but now, they perform Mundan only if it is vowed in front of deity as *vakal*. In the small age, on the situation of the physical up down and any kind of diseases, in any accident or in any kind of abnormal incident, if the baby falls in trap, they call for *vakal* by saying that they would perform the Mundan of a child by slaughtering *pathi*, pig, duck, cock and request the related deity to free the child from any kind of danger. After Mundan, if done, they do not necessarily throw the hair in river or bamboo grove. Some of them throw it under banana tree and some keep the hair in their own house. Among the people only few of them have performed the ritual of Mundan.

Marriage Practices

In marriage practices too, some changes are welcomed while replacing and modifying some traditional values. In the initial phase of marriage, the process of *dih milaune* is changed. According to Gautam and Thapa, “The custom was to observe the gap of nine generation” (87) but now they have different way to reach to this *dih milaune* or arranging the lineage. They do not look forward the agnatic link between

the families of girl and the boys. Each of the family separately worships for the deity of their own. They have made different *thanis* (small hut parted for family deity).



(Picture: 13)



(Picture: 14)

Some regard *Gahil* (picture: 14) as their *kul devta* (family god) and some *kaali* (picture: 14) and others *Luksair*, *Sursair*, *Baman* and the like. Some make *thani* inside the house and some make it outside the house. Each family has traditionally their own *kul devta* and it is the continuous process and not even changeable. The person of the non-Musahar community is not allowed to enter into the *thani* whether it is inside or outside. Any one of the family can enter into the *thani* for *puja* (worship) except married daughter and even the Musahar people belonging to different *kul devta*. These days as *dih milaune*, they match only *kul devtas* of the girl and boy's side. It is strongly followed that for marriage the *kul devta* must not be the same. For example, if boy regards *Gahil* as his *kul devta*, then all girls who regard *Gahil* as their *kul devta* are taken as boys' sisters thereby marriage between them is impossible. But if boy regards *Gahil* and girl regards *Kali* as *kul devta*, only then, the marriage procedure is initiated. So, the formality of *dih milaune* is narrowed down nowadays.

Due to the scheduled life and the nature of job, in most of the cases, they do not spend five to seven days for the single marriage. The people who work in river bank, mills, tractors, buses do not have enough time to spend five to seven days for

marriage; such things are getting changed. The ritual of *matkhor* is day by day forgotten. The new bride and groom do not go to the water sources to bath. Only few people are remembering the songs, which their forefather used to sing during marriages, though in a zigzag way. The new generation does not know whether there are/were any songs from their own tribal culture. Now, within two or three days the marriage ceremony is over.

Now, they do not perform the formality of transferring the heat of tortoise's bone, which they used to. On the next day after marriage, when *janti* return with the bride, the custom was to transfer the heat of tortoise's bone to the bride's cheeks, as they believed, any kind of evil things could easily be removed from the bride's face, and that custom may prepare bride to pray for the respected *kul devta* of groom's house. While in search of rats, the tortoises also could easily be found and availability of tortoise bones was possible in each and every family. But now, they left to dig the land for rats and there exists no possibilities of finding of tortoise's bone. Due to the lack of tortoise's bone they seem to have not performed this custom today but it was necessary in earlier as times part of their tradition. In this regard, Gautam and Thapa also write, "The *janti* return with the bride and she is made to stand directly in front of the main door [. . .]. A basket or *tokri* is placed in front of her, on which a tortoise bone is placed and then burnt. The heat of this fire is absorbed by someone's hand and this heat is transferred to the bride's cheeks" (90).

Despite the influences of other advanced neighboring cultures and impacts of modernization, they even preserve certain inherent tribal or communal qualities of their culture and tradition. In marriage practices, *bilauki magne* or *kumraun*, *dwar lagaune* (sisters of groom block the returned married couple entering into the house until they provide some money, jewelry and such), *dura lagaune*, *sindur halne*, *lah*

chhu (groom eats the blood from the girl's finger mixing with *khir* and vice versa) and the customs related to *madva* (jagge) even today are performed as earlier.

Death Rites

The Musahar community has been following the death rites without much of the change and modification. On the fourth day they even perform *sarjhapi* by going to the place where the dead body is burnt or buried. During thirteen day they perform thirteen *pinda daan* and the *karta* wears new clothes and eats the things that he likes. These days, however, they do not perform the *pinda daan* and *shraddha* on the seventh and eleventh day.

Religion

None of the Musahars seem to have affected by other religions instead of Hinduism. The main god they regard important is *Dina, Bhadri* (just like Ram and Laxman in Hindu myth). They even assure that their religion will not be changed. But now, they only remember *Dina, Bhadri* on the day of Ashad 15 (June, 29) which is the day to pray for these gods. The custom was to make separate *thani* out of the bamboo pillar; a mound is made to pray these gods. But such *thanies* are not made these days. Because of the lack of enough land and their inability to keep the *thani* neat and clean, they have found it inconvenient to make the *thani* of *Dina, Bhadri*.

Festivals

Slowly or gradually they are abandoning to celebrate their some minor festivals such as *Jitia Pawan, Juth Sital, Chauthi Chand, Gauren, Ghadi Pawan* and the like. If they remember such festivals in right time and if they have time for them, only then, they, sometimes, perform these rituals otherwise not. But they take *Holi* and *Chhath* as their greatest festivals and celebrate them. They celebrate *Holi* like the *Dashain* celebrate by Nepalese Hindu. On the occasion of *Holi*, the members of the

family gather in house; those who have gone away, return to the home and celebrate joyously. They also celebrate *Chhath* by going nearby river or pond.

Thus the research shows that the Musahar community, most importantly, is in the influences of advanced neighboring Nepali speaking communities and modern technology and mass media. The Maithili, tribal language of Musahar, is day by day disappearing from their tongues thereby familiarizing with Nepali language broadly. Their settlement among Nepali speaking communities and the education system in Nepali medium have also pushed the traditional culture at a threshold of change.

Slowly and gradually their traditional occupations have been changing by the crucial projection of modern scientific inventions. Electricity, telecommunication, roads, vehicles, information technology and the flow of different cultural traits have also become the means of living a luxurious life for the Musahar community. Their traditional professions have totally been changed due to technological change. Due to the Industrialization, they also seem busier than earlier. So, the current status of their professions is affecting their rites and ritual and day by day they are becoming uprooted in terms of traditionally followed customs. In birth and death rites various formalities have been ignored and the Musahars have no time to celebrate all the rituals inherited traditionally.

However, it is noteworthy that despite the influences of other neighboring cultures and modern technologies Musahar community have still managed to preserve some inherent tribal cultural traits in terms of religion, rituals, festivities, and worship of various *kul devtas* (family god).

IV. Conclusion

Each culture is variants in its different cultural practices. Culture is also base for the creation of identity. But the vast changes in information and technology and due to rapid flows of globalization and modernization of culture are, the main causes, now, for the lingering of the cultural practices. Culture changes due to technological change. At the present scenario, no culture is unseen and untouched by the factors and forces like globalization and modernization of information and technology through which every culture is traveling from one location to another: sharing the cultural values is the common feature of the modern culture in the present scenario. While traveling through modernity, each culture, can be said, associates with western modernity in some or the other way. But despite such influences of modernity, each culture preserves some traces of inherent cultural quality in their local space too. So, there seems, the practice of the modernity by each culture in alternately, assimilating themselves in global as well as in local context. Along with the impacts of modernity which is the main cause, nowadays, for deteriorating of local cultural values by altering the habits of the people, the influences of other advanced neighboring cultures are, most probably, the second cause by which the inherent aspects of tribal qualities are day by day forgotten and a new form of culture is in practice.

Musahar communities of the North-East part of Jhapa are not an exception to this. Though they have their own distinct tradition based cultural or tribal practices, the factors like impacts of modernization and influences of the other advanced neighboring cultures, the certain inherent tribal and cultural practices are day by day deteriorating as they are butressing the common attributes from these factors and even preserving some inherent tribal quality so as to practice an alternative form of

modernity in their local space. First and foremost influences that the Musahar community is receiving in terms of language.

Because of the system of education in Nepali medium from pre-primary to at least primary levels, the new generation of the Musahar community is habituating with the Nepali language. Living in surrounding with Nepali speaking communities is another misfortune to them that they can not control the flow of the Nepali language to them by gradually losing the speaking, writing and even the understanding capacities of Maithili language, the tribal language. Outwardly, though, it looks like, their tribal Maithili language is day by day forgotten because of the settlements among Nepali speaking communities and the education system in Nepali medium, but the concept of advance education is by product an European legend. So, inwardly, because of European modernity that is spreading all around through scientific modernization, led by education, their Maithili speaking capacity has totally been removed.

The vast changes in the Musahar communities are being seen in terms of professions, ritual festivities and other related aspects. It is because of the European modernity in general and Nepalese modernity in particular. Various movements from 1950 to the present time, made people conscious and such movements paved the way for the social, political, economic and cultural formation of Nepal. So, nowadays, Nepal has also been celebrating a new form of modernity thereby each and every cultural aspects is under its grip in some or the other way. Musahar people are also witnessing to change in their life. Especially the modern scientific inventions have made their livelihood easier than the earlier. The traditionally occupied professions of them have already been changed. Neither are they recognized as soil cutter nor as mice eater. Due to modernization the opportunities in various fields have been

opening and Musahars are also familiarizing with it and as the source of income modern inventions like different vehicles and other equipments are the mean. Their habits, their sentiments have been changing according to the need of the time.

But despite the projection of modernization and influences of other neighboring cultures, they have preserved some inherent tribal quality in terms of religion in general and rites and ritual in particular. None of them seems to have interested in other religions beside Hinduism. They even pray for their most favorite gods *Dina Bhadri* less than once a year. In terms of death rites and other rituals of marriage, birth and ritual festivities they are continuously following the formalities as is in tradition. Each of the family prays for the separate deity of their own. Almost all the formalities of death rites are performed even today. In marriage too, the rituals of *bilauki magne, dura milaune, dwar lagaune, kumraun, lah chhu, sindur halne* including the processes of *madva* are still in practice. So, it can not clearly be claimed that they are losing their grip from their own culture. Only the thing, they have gone through the changes to adjust into the new arrival of the time. Culture is an adjacent aspect of environment. It is a changing phenomenon thereby not static. Some cultural and the tribal aspects of the Musahar community are also going through the slow process of changes. *Mundan* practice is slowly disappearing. *Matkhor, dih milaune*, shaking from the heat of tortoise bone and other minor rituals are forgotten from the marriage practices. They even do not spend five to seven days for single marriage. Within two or three days it is wrapped up.

So, because of the gradual impacts of modern technologies and influences of advanced neighboring cultures, Musahar communities of North-East part of Jhapa celebrate glocal experiences by preserving some inherent tribal cultural qualities along with losing some of the cultural traits of their own.