

Traditional Continuity and Change in *Gurhi*

Tharus, the indigenous people living in the Terai region of Nepal, are rich in cultural heritage. Their songs, language, dress, dance, food items, way of celebrating rites and rituals, and culture are typical to themselves which make them a unique caste in Nepal. They have their unique language, culture, costumes, values, festivals, rituals, food items, and way of life. The Tharu culture and performances have gone through various modes of transitions and transformations as they have faced a long period of a dominant culture, the hill, Indian and Western cultures. Tharus are culturally rich though the society is still financially struggling. They have their own culture, customs, values, and language but in course of time, some changes have come to their cultural performance. They have many festivals among them *Gurhi* is taken as the first festival of their festivals.

This research explores how *the Gurhi* festival of the Tharu community is going through different upheavals of traditional continuity and transition. It further explains how this festival is changing its course of action over time. The research tries to answer the questions like- How is the traditional *Gurhi* still going on the same way or has adopted alterations with time? Why *Gurhi* is adopting a new sort of mode in its performances? What are the new modes of performances taking place in the present time? It further explores *Gurhi*, in terms of continuity, and change along with the use of symbols and how meaning is created through them in the Tharu community.

The significance of the study is to show some of the changing aspects of *Gurhi* performance in comparison to its traditional way of celebrating in the past. Because of modernization, globalization, hybridization, westernization, and cultural assimilation, the performance of *Gurhi* has been shifted. Therefore, the essence of the study is to make aware the new and coming generation of the root culture and preserve their cultural identity.

Gurhi is the mythological, historical and artistic part of Tharu culture. *Gurhi* is one of the festivals of Tharu culture that is celebrated on the day of Shrawan Sukla Panchami according to the Nepali calendar. *Gurhi* festival is also known as *Guriya* in the Tharu community. On the one hand, *Gurhi* is the name of festival. On the other hand, the toys that are made to celebrate this festival are also named as *gurhi* (toys as a symbol of insect, dragon fly). It is mostly celebrated in the districts like Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur, Surkhet mainly the Terai region of mid and Far-western provinces of Nepal. Though it is also found in the Yadav community of the Eastern Tharu, the research is concerned with the western Tharu's *Gurhi*. How does this festival get its name?

In *Gurhi* festival dragon fly in the form of toy is worshipped during this festival. In the Tharu language, the dragonfly is known as *gurhi* (an insect). The natural creature, the dragonfly does not exist on the occasion of the ritual performance but the dragonfly gets its shape as a toy that is made up of *chirkut* (a colorful piece of clothes). These dolls are made up as the representation of dragonflies. The toys are made and decorated in a pair. The toys are made up of colorful pieces of clothes in male form and female form. The female form of toy is decorated in female dresses. And the female form of toy is decorated in male clothes. They make knots on the top to be round to make a head of a toy. Basically, they decorate the face of toys in female and male form. The festival is related to the occupation of farming. The diseases related to paddy and there is a belief that it helps paddy to keep away from different diseases.



Figure. 1 Hand-knit dolls that are prepared for *Gurhi* festival

Source Apical TV

Figure one shows the toys made by the Tharu people to celebrate *the Gurhi* festival. These toys are an important part of the festival as the same toys are beaten with sticks as *sota* (holy grass) at some junction or chowk of the village to evade the insecticides that harm and destroy the crops.

There are various myths behind the celebration of *Gurhi*. According to Nathuram Mahato, once there was a great problem on the earth. The problem was that many people were dying on the earth so a meeting was held in heaven among the Gods and Goddesses to solve it and they sent a fairy in the form of *a gurhi* (dragonfly, an insect) on the earth. When the fairy came to the earth, she had a friendship with the girl on the earth. Due to their close relationship, she was also happy on earth. Therefore, she wanted to stay there but the message came to her that she had to return to her place. The message made the girl and the fairy unhappy. Despite her sadness, she convinced her friends that she was going to depart from them. But she would take all their problems with her. So, on the occasion of her farewell, the girls prepare dolls and throw them and the boys beat the dolls requesting to take away all their diseases and problems (Apical News translated by researcher, 4:03 - 7:40).

The research significantly answers the question; why change is taking place in the *Gurhi* celebration? The changing pattern of the traditional celebration of *Gurhi* marks the demand of time and its adjustment with other cultures. But the patterns of alterations are quite different than the traditional way. *Gurhi* is celebrated on the day of Sharawn Sukla Panchami according to the Nepali calendar. The toys of dragonflies are made by the girl participants out of colorful pieces of clothes in their own homes. They collect pieces of colorful clothes so that they can make attractive toys of a dragonfly. The people of the community prepare various food items for this ritual. They cook *kohari* (food item made of beans), and *bariya* (a type of bread fried in oil), as well as they, sing different traditional-cultural songs, that carry cultural value. The girls of the community prepare toys of dragonflies. The girls of the Tharu community as performers swing the toys. The boys collect *sota* (a kind of plant). The plant *Kush* (a sort of holy grass) is decorated by them and is used to beat the toys. They perform *Gurhi* ritual and distribute fried beans to participants and audience and return to home.



Fig. 2 The girls of the Tharu swinging *gurhi* (the hand-knit dolls) at the village

Source: NTV Kohalpur.

Here, the children and the Tharu young girls are swinging the hand-knit dolls that were the part of celebration before fairy's farewell. This type of activity is not seen nowadays. This shows the change that is found in the performance of *Gurhi*. Even, they used to sing traditional and cultural songs by expressing their emotions, feelings, pains, and hardships. But singing a traditional song has been lost. Such transitions are seen in the performance of the ritual.

Tharus have their own culture, and language but in course of time, some changes have come to their cultural performance. They have many festivals. Among them, *Gurhi* is taken as the first festival. Tharu say that Magh is their new year, though *Gurhi* is the first festival because it is celebrated after completing the plantation of paddy.

Lucky Chaudhary in his article "Tharu Jaatinke Aghuwa Tihuwar *Gurhi*" writes, "*Gurhi* festival is the first festival of Tharus. The very festival is celebrated after completing the work of paddy plantation." (3) Here, Chaudhary clarifies that *Gurhi* is the first festival but it is the first after completing the paddy plantation. It may contradict how it can be the first festival. According to the Nepali calendar, the new year begins from Baisakh though Tharu thinks that *Maghi* is their new year. Although it seems that it cannot be their first festival.



Fig. 4 An old Tharu woman cooking *kohari* (a food item made of the bean by frying) for the celebration of *Gurhi* as a Prasad

Source: NTV Kohalpur

Fig. 4 shows the continuity of preparing *kohari* (food item of bean) during the time of the festival. The food item is special for the ritual. Tharu believes that the food item has been used since the beginning of the celebration but nowadays some changes can be seen. Some use the same food item and some use different food items like gram, *bhuja* (popcorn), and *bariya* that are distributed to male performers and spectators as a *Prasad* (holy food item).

Generally, agriculture is the main occupation of Tharu. They celebrate the festival that requires them to be healthy therefore they can work in the field. In this connection, Chhabilal Kopila in his article *Hamar Sanskriti: A Collection of Articles* adds: "Agriculture is a major occupation of Tharus because of the profession they have to work with mud. So many kinds of diseases can affect them. By celebrating *the Gurhi* festival they believe that can chase away the diseases. This kind of belief is found among the Tharu community." (40-41) Tharus are nature worshipers and they worship dragonflies that eat mosquitoes and other small creatures. Dragonflies help farmers in their agriculture and protect people from diseases like malaria. In this way the simple reason behind the celebration of *Gurhi* among the Tharu community is people perform what makes them healthy.

Similarly, Shankar Lal Chaudhary writes in his book *Socio-Economic Status of Dangaura Tharu* about *Guriya* as:

Guriya is performed on the day of "Nagpanchami". After the special type of foods are prepared and eaten by all after they perform pooja for snakes scorpions and insects and paste, the pictures of snakes on the front of the Gate. At every festival, they sacrifice chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, and plenty of drinks which cost heavily. (22, My Translation)

Here, Chaudhary states that *Gurhi* is also known as *Guriya* and is performed on the same day of Nagpanchami. But it has its own unique and different pattern and ritualistic meaning.

Although the writer talks about the sacrifice of animals, the sacrifice is not performed on the occasion of the festival.

Likewise, Gopal Dahit in his book *An Introduction to Tharu Culture* writes about *Gurhi* festival. According to him:

People of this community make special kinds of food items by frying gram and other beans, which are put in the water earlier. All the gods and goddesses of home are worshiped and "*lagubashu*" snake is specially worshipped in the morning and milk is offered as *prasad* to them. Then, the special food items of a gram, bean, local wine, etc. are given to eat and drink guests. Boys make colorful sticks known as *sota* and girls make dragonflies out of clothes. Girls come with the toys and throw them saying that take all kinds of diseases, pain, and suffering. At last, the girls distribute the food items to the participants and return to their homes. (76 My translation)

Here, Chaudhary states the way of celebrating *Gurhi*. He adds how it is celebrated, what kinds of food items are prepared, and what kinds of activities are performed during the ritual. Although *Gurhi* falls on the same day of Nag Panchami, *Gurhi* has its cultural value among the Tharu community. During the celebration, the girls prepare dolls and boys make ready *sota* (a sort of plant). The people of the Tharu community believe that the celebration of *Gurhi* makes them healthy. At last, they distribute fried beans to the participants.

Likewise, Unnati Chaudhry writes about *Gurhi* in the article "*Gurhi: Gaun Se Shaharsam*." *Gurhi* used to be celebrated only in villages but over four /five years, it has been celebrated in cities like Dhangadhi, Kathmandu, and so on. The festival has been celebrated since 2073 at Kirtipur in Kathmandu. (12 My translation) Here Chaudhary states, that in the

present context, the celebration of *Gurhi* has got space in cities though it was only limited to rural areas among the Tharu community.

Here, in the above article, the writer talks about the changing pattern of the celebration of the festival *Gurhi* now it is true to say it is celebrated in the city too. The ritualistic performance has been performed in the cities in a formal way like a stage program. *Gurhi* is a festival for children in the Tharu community. It is also taken as the festival of brotherhood. In other words, it is the festival of fraternity among the Tharu community. Chabilal Chaudhary states in his article "*Gurhi: Festival of Children in Tharu Community*" that *Gurhi* is a festival of children. He writes that it is the festival of children and the festival is incomplete in the absence of them (3). The writer asserts that *Gurhi* is the festival of children.

The above citations only talk about how *Gurhi* is performed and celebrated. However, this research explores the ritualistic modification of *Gurhi* and how this celebration brings hybrid culture to the Tharu community. The culture of the Tharu community and their traditional and cultural dresses, ornaments, food items, the way of life and so on. has been changing as time changes. Dang is the origin of the Tharu people and from there migrated to Banke, Bardia, Kailali, Kanchanpur as well as other parts of Nepal. Over the due course of time, hilly people come to Terai and different global cultures affect Tharu's original culture by forgetting the original culture and adopting new ways of cultural practices, they became hybridized.

In *Gurhi* performance, performers come up in a cultural dress and present dance therefore, it fascinates the audience's attention and makes them enjoy a lot and take them for a journey of pleasure. During the dance performance of *Gurhi*, performance can also be thought of as ethnic expression in the sense that choices about presenting dances are rooted in, reflect and help the norms and expression of the culture to which they belong. Similarly,

the dancer's costumes, appearance, and movements make them as if they are our ancestors of the Tharu community.

Generally, a ritual can be considered as a kind of imitation of behavior, which is performed at any appropriate time. It is a set of actions, performed mainly for symbolic value, and a religion or traditions of a community can well guide the performance of the rituals. Performing rituals is not only means of making a cultural practice; rituals are also the perspectives to watch and understand various kinds of performances in society. Ritual is a cultural practice that is observed and celebrated by the people of the concerned society on any particular occasion. Likewise, relating to performance arts Victor Turner says, "The performance arts among them derive from the subjunctive, liminal, reflexive, exploratory heart of the social drama" (13). They also shape our lives and bring effect to our communities. The performance of *Gurhi* gives the social identity of the Tharu community through the performance of rituals because rituals create and maintain a society's cultural identity.

There are different genres of cultural performances that demand a separate medium of expression. However, Victor Turner, regards all performative activities as a social drama, unlike aesthetic drama; he believes that there is a specific pattern for social drama. By analyzing how the human basic plot moves, he purposes four phases of public action: breach, crisis, repressive, and reintegration as a theatrical universal. That is, a breach in social Fabric, caused by the social action, natural disaster, disagreement, or other disruptive events; resulting cultural crisis; a repressive action, generates advice, and finally a reintegration of the society as either a return to the status quo or as a new social order. Schechner writes: "The bottom line is solidarity, not conflict, conflict is supportable only inside a nest built from the agreement to gather at a specific time and place to perform to do something agreed on and to disperse once the performance is over" (189). Processions are another kind of natural theater.

These theaters assume that there is a distance goal and fixed route to perform. The goal of the performance is achieved only at the ending point or place. And along the way to the goal, the performer performs at a certain point, where spectators watch the performance.



Fig. 10 The performers and audience are going towards chowk to perform *Gurhi* in the surrounding Tribhuvan University.

Source: Photo by researcher

To see *Gurhi* in the light of the procession pattern, the celebration begins with gathering at chowk or on the stage. The chowk or stage is a place for the performance of *Gurhi*. As in *Gurhi* performance, the performers come from their house in cultural dresses with toys and beans and gather in a chowk. Similarly, spectators come to watch their performance and have *parsad* (holy food item). Without an audience, the goal of *Gurhi* cannot be achieved so audiences are an important component of performance.

Regarding this point Richard Schechner says:

A procession, which is a kind of pilgrimages to gather along the route, and at appointed places procession halts and performances are played, parades, funeral corteges are precious. Even though eruption seems opposite of procession in many respects still both eruption and procession can occur together. Eruption and

procession can come simultaneously, especially when larger numbers of people are involved. (178)

Thus, the performer of *Gurhi* gathers in a chowk or an appointed place where they perform their ritual. The performers go to chowk or appointed place like stage in the form of pilgrimage. They go in procession. Nowadays, especially in cities, numerous people gather to observe the celebration though the pattern of celebration has been changing. In *the Gurhi* celebration, the performers among the Tharu community gather in chowk and nowadays gather where the stage is. During the performance, people come to observe and enjoy there. The stage or chowk is like a theater for *the Gurhi* celebration.

Gurhi festival is celebrated in rural as well as urban areas of Nepal. The scattered people of the Tharu community have started to perform *Gurhi* rituals in cities too. It used to be celebrated only in villages in the past. However, the pattern of celebration has been modified in the cities than in the villages. In villages, the Tharu perform some sort of traditional and cultural way. But in urban areas, some sort of modification is found in *Gurhi* performance.



Fig. 6. A Tharu girl dancing on the stage in cultural attire in Dhangadhi

Source: Apical TV

Figure no. six displays the shift that is found in the performance of *Gurhi*. The young lady is dancing in her cultural attire of the Tharu community on the stage.

Nowadays, *Gurhi* performance is organized to perform on the stage, especially in cities. Even it shows the modified patterns of performing *Gurhi*.

Gurhi is an informal ritual performance but in the present context, people of the Tharu community are making it formal by organizing it in many places and the performances are city-centered. Tharu ritual performances of *Gurhi* have been modified because of the cultural influences caused by Intra and inter-community migrations as well as increasing consumerist culture resulting in a hybridized and relatively more accommodative culture.

Tharus are the indigenous ethnic group having their language and culture that make them unique from other ethnic groups. Because of migration, globalization, urbanization, modernization and mixed society, some shifts are found in the Tharu culture. As a result, the performance of *Gurhi* is more city-centered and organized at present. The program is organized and performed on the stage. Though *Gurhi* is an informal ritual, people are making it formal. This shows some changes and modifications at present. They are forgetting their own culture and adopting others' cultures.



Fig. 7 Tharu girls and a man dancing traditionally and culturally in cultural attire in the village

Source: NTV Kohalpur

Figure no. six depicts the rural performance of *Gurhi*. They perform cultural dance but in a mixture of Nepali and Tharu languages songs.

Performers of *Gurhi* maintain distance between audiences and themselves. Singing and dancing are the part of *Gurhi* celebration. During *Gurhi* ritual a *Nachaniya* (dancer) and a *Gawaiya* (singer) they are aware of the difference between themselves and the audience. Therefore, they maintain distance among audiences. In this connection, Elizabeth Bell writes: Performance theory attempts to make clear what, how, and why performance is both a key term and a key to understanding the intricate ways we participate in social and political life and create its many expressive forms. Elizabeth Bell writes:

A performer manifests performance consciousness or reflexive awareness of oneself as performing works on many level. First the performer is aware of the frame and pays attention to the relationship among performer and audience. A second level in performance consciousness involves a kind of inner dialogue within the performer herself. The third level of performance consciousness involves how a performer pushes emotions, ideas and attitudes for the sake of an audience. (43-44)

The performing arts like singing, dancing, and performing rituals in various forms as well as other cultural performances have been used from the beginning of human civilization. Such arts Tharu affirm some of the deepest sanction of living, singing the traditional songs but young generation performing *Gurhi* that is an oral emotional expression of common people. The legacy of traditional songs goes back to ancestors. And the performance of songs equates to the performance of drama. It is because songs contain all the dramatic elements such as music, dance, plot, dialogue, character, action, and interaction. They used to sing traditional

songs during the *Gurhi* ritual but at present, they have forgotten such original and traditional songs rather they sing other songs that are modern and are affected by Nepali, Bhojpuri, Hindi, and western songs.

The cultural hybridization erases the traditional culture and creates a cultural gap from one generation to another generation. Cultural hybridization depicts in many forms, not only in a cultural way but also in political, racial, social, and linguistic. It has been used in postcolonial discourse to mean cross-cultural exchanges and is understood as the process by which colonized people mimic the colonizers' culture, borrowing western ideas and practices and rejecting their socio-cultural structures. On this concern of hybridity, Bill Ashcroft et. al write in *Key Concepts In Postcolonial Studies*:

Hybridity occurs in the post-colonial societies both as the result of a conscious moment of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when the settler-invaders dispose of indigenous people and force them to assimilate to new social patterns of immigration from the metropolitan societies and other imperial areas of influences continue to produce complex cultural palimpsests with the post-colonialized world. (183)

Therefore, dominant culture forces to assimilate new ways and patterns of celebrating their festival. As such cultural transition and transformation are found in *Gurhi*. As a whole, this has brought a transition in Tharu culture.

Once, *Gurhi* used to be only celebrated in rural areas because the majority of Tharu people used to live in villages and the number of Tharu was few in cities. Tharu living in the city also used to perform the ritual traditionally with songs and dance by wearing cultural dresses but in a small group.



Fig. 5 Boys and girls are gathered to perform *Gurhi* in the village

Source: Photo by researcher

Over time, Tharu migrated to such big cities of Nepal as Dhangadhi, Mahendranagar, Nepalgunj, and Kathmandu to get jobs so that they could make their easier existence. Some of them migrated there as laborers and some of them migrated there for government service, education, good job, and so on. Though their main occupation is farming, it was not easy enough to make a better life. Because of these reasons, the number of Tharu has increased in urban areas. On the other hand, the people from hilly areas also migrated to low land for a better life. When people from different socio-cultural backgrounds started to live together, the cultural influence is seen. There was an absence of the people of the community. Though they were in small groups in cities, they used to celebrate in their locality. But the trend of celebrating *Gurhi* is changing, the celebration is held on the stage, at the chowk of the cities.



Fig. 3 The Tharu youths performing *Gurhi* on stage in Dhangadhi

Source: Photo from Rockstar

Cultural assimilation and domination of hill culture have resulted cultural transition and transformation in Tharu culture. The hill culture has affected in the performance of ritual of Tharu culture. Cultural changes and transformations in Tharu culture are caused by assimilation with hill people, means of communication, transportation, education, and so on. Arjun Guneratne writes about the modernization of Tharu tradition and culture and the development of Terai. And the factor that brings the change in the Tharu community. According to him:

...transformation concerns the development of the Terai. The opening of the Terai brought in two significant forms of development that shaped the relationship of the Tharu to the state. The first of these was the establishment of a road network connecting the eastern and the western Terai and the Terai region to the hill. These roads facilitated the movement of hill people into Terai, but they also made it easier for Tharu in different districts to establish contact and interact with one another in ways ...the Nepali language and an interpretation of Nepali history, culture, and society based on the experience of the high caste *Pahari* groups that dominate the

Nepali state. Road and schools gave the Tharu elite opportunities to engage one another but also a language-Nepali-through which such communication could be carried out. These schools become a crucible in which a new ethnic consciousness began to take shape. (24)

Tharu people come to contact with hilly people or the other eastern people and they become familiar with others' cultural values and norms. Tharu came in contact with the new culture and people as well as familiar with western culture. They practice the new norms and values of other cultures. Hence, this imitation of hill culture makes the Tharu culture hybrid. Their costume has been changed according to the fashion. Tharu people wear cultural dresses in *the Gurhi* festival in the modernized form they wear the costumes of other dominant cultures. On the other hand, education, development of science and technology some changes in seen in the way of celebration. Similarly, Nepali language is also another factor to bring transition in the Tharu culture. Because of this, the members of the Tharu community mix Nepali language while singing songs during *Gurhi* celebration.

Therefore, *Gurhi* is a musical festival in which an event is intended primarily for the listeners and spectators and is, accordingly, more limited in its duration, such a festival is, in fact, a well-organized concert, lasting from two and half an hour to four hours. During the *Gurhi* festival, the performers sing and dance and entertain the audience. Because of the music festival, the members of the Tharu community get an opportunity to perform cultural as well as modern dance.



Fig. 8 The children and young people of Tharu ready to distribute *prasad* in the village

Source: Photo by researcher

Culture shapes the performance and the performance gives identity to the particular community. Tharu culture, in this sense, is no exception to give a special cultural identity to its people. The performance of *Gurhi* reflects the life standard of the Tharu people. Moreover, the costumes, the use of language, the musical instruments, and the unique setting itself identify the specialty and their unique cultural identity. For instance, their typical costumes, *Lehenga*, *Gatiya*, *Choliya*, *Dhoti*, *Shirt*, etc, and ornaments like *Sutiya*, *Nathni*, *Ghugana*, *Mangauri*, *Taunk*, *Jhilmiliya*, and the language, the way of celebration of festivals and rituals are internally related to the very culture of Tharu community and their identity.

Like other cultural performances, the *Gurhi* has its history. History can be reflected through different human deeds. One of the prominent means to reflect history is cultural performance. There is no doubt that it has an equal level to other means in keeping original and transforming or preserving the typical Tharu cultural history for its coming generations. In terms of the preservation of history, it talks about the origin and occupations of the Tharu

people. It is reflected through the costumes, the songs, and the performance. As Tharu people put on their traditional costumes during the *Gurhi* performance that they make themselves, show their cultural history of embroidery skills like making hand knit dolls to perform in *Gurhi* festival. Similarly, the songs expressed during the performance of *Gurhi*, reveal their occupation, their ancestral belief, and their active involvement in cultural rituals. The song here represents a tragic and pathetic feeling when the fairy will not be with them.

Gurhi ri gurhi roibo ki dhoibo

Pathgraka larka banaiburi gurhi

Translation: Oh, dragonfly do you cry or weep

I make a baby of stone. (NTV Kohalpur Channel, translated by researcher, 6:04-6:55)

Moreover, the songs reveal the history of their struggle against hardship, their cooperation, and their sympathetic feeling to overcome the hardship.



Fig. 9 The girls and women distributing *prasada* (holy food item) to the children

Source: Photo by researcher

After the celebration of *Gurhi*, the girls and women distribute *kohari*, the food item made of beans. It is distributed to everyone who attends the ceremony even the people who pass through they are also given as *prasada* somehow at the last act or performance of the

ceremony. In the past, they used to bring food items and puppets on their handicrafts like *dhakia*, *Pantopna*, *nuyiya*, *Tathiya* but nowadays some bring such products like plastic cups, and spoons and some of them come there with cultural hand-knit materials on the spot. *Prasad* (holy food item) distribution is somehow the last act of *the Gurhi* celebration. While distributing *prasad* the female members of the Tharu community as a performer keep their distance by staying together those who are the performers and the audience come one after another to get *Prasad*.



Fig. 12 Girls taking photo after distributing *Prasad* (holy food item) in colorful cultural dresses

Source: Photo by researcher

Schechner proposes his basic performance structure. He assumes that the basic performance structure contains three phases; gathering, performing, and dispersing. The gathering is the first step in which audiences are acknowledged when and where the theater of performance takes place, so they gather at a certain point. The real phase of performance is performing and it refers to the state of unfolding the event or story. It includes the special observations, practices, and rituals that lead to the performance and away from it. Schechner puts the concept of Turner's four phases of social drama- breach, crisis, redressive, and

reintegration- under the umbrella term performing; finally dispersing is an end of the show or performance. In this phase, the audience returns to their original state. (177) In *Gurhi* festival, the three phases gathering, performing and dispersing are found. The last stage is dispersing that is represented through the below figure.



Fig. 11. The audience and *Gurhi* performers returning to their home

Source: Rapti Television

Figure ten depicts the spectators and performers of *Gurhi* returning to their homes. After the performance, the audience and performers come in a normal and original state. Then, they return to their normal lifestyle.

Performance can work as a historical document. Among the various kinds of historical sources, cultural performance occupies a specific place. Since culture shapes the people, it directly or indirectly reflects a historical background of a performed culture. That is in some traditional songs, we find the serial events of past times being reposted. Hence, performance inherently acts as history. In the same way, the appearance of performers, their costume, jewelry, language, way of performing style, and manner also signal history. So, cultural performance carries a perfect history that has not been affected by other issues. *Gurhi's* performance tells history regarding the Tharu community. It tells us about

their occupation, cultural dress, ritual, and way of life. Even the cultural songs tell us about their hardship in farming. They have various and numerous cultural songs which are related to farming. Tharu song narrates the history of how they settled down in Terai or plain area of Nepal and made it worth full to the human residents. *Gurhi* performance is also related to farming. The performance depicts the historical and cultural sector of Tharu.

Mark Liechty, in his book *Suitably Modern*, writes "Process of urbanization, market, penetration, bureaucratization, industrialization, and class formation play themselves out in ever-changing power relations that bring the local and global together in explosive and unpredictable ways" (9). In this sense, Liechty means that the factors like urbanization, penetration, bureaucratization, and industrialization cause cultural change.

Preserving the Tharu cultur has become a great challenge to the young people of Tharus in the world of cultural hybridization and globalization. The cultural identity can be preserved by changing the performing aspects like performing on stage in cities, mode of performance, songs, tone, costumes, and lyrics. The Tharu culture and performances have gone through various modes of transitions and transformation as they faced a long period of power of hegemony of dominant culture, the hill, and western culture. Tharu community prefers to call themselves a real indigenous group of people to lowland but their culture has much been assimilated with the dominant culture.

In this connection, Homi K Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* writes "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting focus and fixities; it is the name for strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal that is the production of discriminatory identities that secure that pure and original identity of authority." (112) Thus, the dominant and powerful secure their identity but the powerless people lose their culture and finally, lose their cultural identity. As a result, Tharus are losing

their original culture by practicing the new culture. As such cultural influence is found in *the Gurhi* festival. The changes are found in the *Gurhi* performance because of hill culture.

Tharus are highly adopting hill people's cultures who migrated to lowland. Tharus are highly affected by Western and hill culture and modern and fashionable dresses. Tharus are wearing jeans-pants, T-shirts, miniskirts, sarees, and so on in the name of modernization. Even in performing their folk culture, they are wearing modern costumes rather than their own. They used to wear Dhoti, Plain shirt, Bheguwa, Goniya, Lehanga, Choliya and so on. At that time there were not any effects of hill culture and western culture over Tharu culture. There was the pure traditional Tharu culture. They celebrated their festivals being pure Tharu. There was not any mixture of any cultures. They sang the song and performed Naach in their actual way. Hill people are also highly migrating to the lowland because the lowland is the land of fertility and safer than the hill area. Therefore, Tharus culture is assimilated with other cultures.

Similarly, we also find changes in their dresses, costumes, ornaments, food items, and way of life. They are using the dresses according to the fashion that is brought by capitalist culture and media culture. Tharu youths are rapidly attracted to fashion culture, they are practicing modern and western culture by reading the paper and watching fashion channels. Tharus are being educated and are going to every corner of Nepal. They are getting in contact with other cultures. The contact with other cultures, adopting it and bring practice on their culture that has become hybrid culture. They are attracted to global media culture like mobile, television, computer, iPhone, and social media like Facebook, TikTok, and so on. Chris Barker in his book *Making Sense of Cultural Studies* argues "the whole world is culturally imperialized because of global media culture. People around the world are adopting the world culture and the lifestyles therefore they are living in the shadow of cultural imperialism" (132-133). With the gradual attraction of these materials, they are contacting with western

and global culture, with communication they are welcoming the modern culture into their society. Female Tharus are attracted to soap operas. That's why it can be said that Tharus are influenced by media culture. They are copying the models wearing costumes and ornaments. By watching television, Tharu girls are wearing jeans-pants, vests, sarees and Indian model *lehenga, cholia* in their festival or cultural program. So modernization is another cause of cultural change. Moreover, youths are attracted to modern culture and bring practice into their life. The sense of cultural change, acculturation, hybridity, and globalization in the present world is the way of modernity. The youths of the community, are adopting the global culture and mixing themselves with local culture as global.

Education and social organization bring cultural change in the Tharu culture. Though the patterns of celebration have been changing, the new generation of Tharu has preserved *Gurhi* performance as their cultural identity so far. They have preserved it by changing the mode of performance. As Dor Bahadur Bista in his book *People of Nepal* writes that the Tharu organization plays important role in changing the Tharu's life. According to him:

As with other societies of Nepal, the Tharu community is undergoing tremendous changes. There is a wave of reform among educated young Tharus. They have changed their food habits, reformed their religious practices, and introduced modern education. There is Tharu organization known as the Tharu Welfare Society...It has also made an effort to publish information about Tharus. This society encourages education among the Tharus of the interior regions and teaches them clean habits, such as not keeping chickens and pigs inside the house. (127)

Here, he writes about the change and modification in Tharu culture. He even adds that along with alteration traditional continuity in Tharu culture persists too. These changes are the result of modern education according to him. Therefore, *the Gurhi* festival also cannot remain

as it was. The changes have occurred in terms dresses, language, ornaments, and so on during the celebrations of *Gurhi* as well as in other ritual performance.

In the past, the members of the Tharu community used to wear *Paijama, Dhoti, Pokta, Shirts, Lehanga, Cholia, Goniya*, and traditional and cultural ornaments but nowadays youth wear pants, t-shirts, vests, miniskirts, and other modern dresses due to cultural hegemony. While performing their folk dances they used to sing-song in pure Tharu language and the traditional one in a traditional tone but now they are singing the song in Nepali and Tharu language. As time moves the new generations are not following their chronicle culture rather they are imitating and practicing western and hill cultures. Youths are inclined to Hindi songs, and movies as well as Hindi and Nepali languages. The attraction of the new generation towards the other culture may lose the original, pure and traditional Tharu culture. The attraction of Tharu youths and a new generation to other cultures is no other than the shift of the hill community to Terai after the eradication of malaria and its geographical connection with India as well as western culture. Though old generations are still performing festivals, it is necessary to handle it for the new generation to preserve it. The new generations have a great responsibility on their arm to practice the *Gurhi* ritual to preserve their cultural identity of the Tharu. In the way Tharu used to perform the ritual some transitions are seen and traditional and cultural way of performances is also continued. Many transitions are found regarding *Gurhi* performance in cities such as the performance is held on the stage, they do not swing the dolls, do not sing traditional songs while swinging the dolls or while throwing and beating dolls.

However, there are some changes in the cultural practices and performances in *Gurhi* because of globalization, hybridization, cultural assimilation, and the development of science and technology in the industrial world. Therefore, *Gurhi* is practiced by new a generation with slight changes they have some traditional and cultural continuity

in *Gurhi* performance. So, there is both continuity and change in the way of performing *Gurhi*. At present, the people of the community are forgetting or changing the pattern of celebrating *Gurhi*. The people of the Tharu community gather in a certain place and the program is organized on the stage to perform. They used to sing traditional and cultural songs for the celebration but most of the people of the generation have forgotten the songs. That's why they dance to the music that is played on the sound system. They sing multilingual songs. The ritual performances have shifted because of cultural assimilation, modernization, soap opera globalization, and so on.

In conclusion, there is a global impact on Nepalese culture. Tharu cultural activities are only limited to small tole, a village because it was only celebrated in local areas of the Tharu villages. Now, the way of celebration is changing, it is organized in the wider area where the people from different places come to celebrate together to show their cultural unity. When it started to come in the form of stage and organized program, it got space for means of communication and social media and due to them it has become known by the people of different parts of Nepal. The media has played a vital role to preserve the Tharu culture. The articles of *Gurhi* are published in national newspaper *Gorkhapatra*, and other local newspapers like *Hama rPahura*, *Paschim Today*, *Dhangadhi Post*, online news, and so on. They also believe that *Gurhi* will be known all over Nepal as the Tharu festival when it is celebrated in an organized form. The cultural transition and transformation from one generation to another generation are the consequences of hybridization, cultural assimilation, globalization, and technological development. The researcher would suggest that the Tharu culture would be saved by wearing traditional dresses, ornaments during the *Gurhi* celebration and making them aware of cultural identity.

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