

Tribhuvan University

**Ritualistic Modification of Astimki: A Study of Cultural Hybridization in Tharu
Culture**

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Letter of Recommendation

This is to recommend that Ms. Sheela Kumari Chaudhary has completed this thesis entitled “Ritualistic Modification of Astimki: A Study of Cultural Hybridization in Tharu Culture” under my supervision. She carried out this research from June 2015 to May 2016. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Ritualistic Modification of Astimki: A Study of Cultural Hybridization in Tharu Culture” submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Sheela Kumari Chaudhary has approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This field-based research paper entitled "Ritualistic Modification of Astimki: A Study of Cultural Hybridization in Tharu Culture" moves around the impacts of modernization and the other neighboring cultures in Tharu community. It studies the continuity and change of Astimki festival and explores how the cultural assimilation, globalization, development of science and technology affect the Astimki festival especially to the new generation. The objective of this study is to show how cultural hybridity is going to be dominant among Tharu people. To support the idea, the notions of cultural hybridity by Homi K Bhabha, Chris Barker and Ashcroft are used as theoretical tool. However, Tharu have adopted some traits of other Nepali cultures and global culture in terms of language, rituals and festivals as well as the impacts of information and technology, they have also managed to conserve and promote some tribal cultural patterns of their own cultural identity.

Traditional Astimki: Continuity and Change

Nepal, a culturally unique country, can be regarded as a mosaic of various races, castes and ethnic groups. At present there exist 125 caste and communities. There are 59 ethnic groups as Adibashi Janajatis or indigenous nationalities identified the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act 2001. Among them, the Tharus are one of the ethnic indigenous groups of Nepal. The settlement of Tharu people is in Terai region from Mechi to Mahakali including inner Terai valleys. According to the National Census 2011, the Tharus contribute 6.6 % to the total population of Nepal which is 1,737,470 in figure. Each ethnic group is endowed with its own unique culture, belief, rituals and social customs, the key to their perennial existence. Many ethnic groups' folk culture has been losing their originalities due to the lacks of documentation and awareness. Even though, there is no equality of cultural practices among the Tharus all over the Nepal but all Tharu feel they are same ethnic group.

This research is based on the Tharu festival Astimki, ritualistic modification of Astimki and a study of cultural hybridization in Tharu community. Astimki is solemnized during Krishna Janmastami in the month of Bhadra in Nepali calendar. Astimki is the philosophical, mythological, historical and artistic part of the Tharu culture and most celebrated festival in western part of the Nepal of Tharu community- Dang, Banke, Surkhet, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur. Nevertheless, Astimki is also celebrated by eastern Tharu people but in majority it is celebrated in western part of Tharu community. Astimki is related with painting of Tharu community.

The significance of this study is to show some of the changing aspects of Astimki festival in comparison to its way of celebrating in the past. Because of the globalization, hybridization and cultural assimilation, Tharu culture has been shifted.

The essence of the study is to make the new generation aware of the root culture and preserve their cultural identity.

Astimki is celebrated with fasting for prosperity on the Krishna Janmastami (birth day of lord Krishna) of Nepali calendar. The Astimki has painted on the *dehari* (clay made basket for storing grain) especially at the house of *mahatawan*; the chief is an important post that enjoys political, social and economic authority. It is thus high level of executive body of community (*Tharu Folklore and Folklife* 96). *Mahatawan* is responsible for managing village state of affairs, including mobilizing community to contribute labor for infrastructure development and mediating to settle local disputes with community.

Protecting Astimki cultural practices on the world of culture hybridization and globalization is very difficult but the value of this culture still persists and that can be protected by changing the practices in the present changed context; house structure, location, architectural structural change and modernization.

Chris Barker in his book *Making Sense of Cultural Studies* remarks:

The former refers to verity of social and institutional sites of hybridization for example border zone of Miami or Singapore. The later distinguishes cultural responses, which range from assimilation through from separation to hybrids that destabilize and blur cultural boundaries. (76)

According to him, hybridity concerns with social and institutional frameworks and it also destabilizes and blurs the cultural territories.

The Tharu culture and performances have gone through various modes of transitions and transformation as they faced long period of power hegemony of dominant culture, the Hindu culture in Nepalese culture. On the one hand, Tharu

community prefers to call themselves as real indigenous group of people of Terai but on the other hand their culture have much been assimilated with dominant culture. That can be justified with study of ritual modification and hybridization of Astimki cultural practices.

The Tharu culture is rich in terms of its performance, the use of color, participatory ethos of celebration being collected at the *mahatawan's* house with fasting, painting and singing. It is collective cultural practice, a model for collective consciousness. There is no sacrifice of any creature, bird or animal. It shows the peaceful tendency of Tharu community. From this cultural practice the sense of brotherhood, mutuality, we-feeling and co-operation emerge within the people in the community. In Astimki Lord Krishna is at the centre of art and celebration. He is supposed to be the God of Hindu religion too and because of this one-sided thought there is an encroachment of dominant culture towards the root culture of the Tharu community. The comparative study of some painting of the past with the present, justify it.



Fig.1: Mina Devi Chaudhary is performing Astimki *puja* in traditional painting in her home, Dang
(Photo by Ashok Tharu)



Fig.2: Parbati Chaudhary is performing *puja* in poster in her home, Kanchanpur
(Photo by Madan Chaudhary)

In the past the image of Krishna was not depicted clearly, there was just the image of different people. They symbolized the earth and creation, the root of civilization. But the present pictures of Astimki totally change the root of Tharu community. Here, the pictures shows that the influence of mode of production in Tharu community. Ashok Tharu writes in the book, *Jatiya Pahichanko Lakkala* (Folk Art for Ethnic Identity):

According to certified information until present, near the 1450 A.D, *Kanha* (Krishna) character sketch has begun in Indian continent. This tradition took largely in the latter fifteenth century. Therefore, the effect of this tradition largely remained on Tharu folk culture, in the intervening time, *Kanha Puja* or Astimki tradition remained limited among the palace and great feudal building. But in Tharu folk, it still remains in the residence of *mahatawan's* of the village. (61)

In the present days Astimki is not only celebrated on the *mahatawan's* house but it is celebrated in every houses of Tharu community. These days 6 or 7 houses of Tharu people gather and celebrate Astimki. It is not obligatory to celebrate in only *mahatawan's* house. It shows the cultural shift in Tharu community while celebrating the festival because of globalization and cultural hybridization. They paint Astimki in their house and perform cultural practices of Astimki.

Many writers have viewed Astimki Festival in different ways. Some of them viewed it as the culture of painting which is celebrated at *mahatawan* house. Some viewed it as the festival of giving gift to their sisters and some viewed Astimki festival has been derived from the Hinduism. In the book *An Introduction to Tharu Culture*, Gopal Dahit Opines:

Though all the Tharus are not Hindus, their festivals are related with Hinduism. The main cause behind it is the increasing influence of

Hindu culture on the festival and rituals of Tharus. For example, the festivals like *Dasya*, *Dewari*, and *Astimki* are directly related with the God and Goddess of Hinduism. Hence, the interference of Hinduism to Tharus culture and festivals has been going in the process of Hinduization. (my trans. 83)

Here, Dahit wants to clarify that all the Tharus are not Hindus but the coincidence is that the name of Tharu God and Goddess are matched with Hindu Gods and Goddess. Though, the Tharu people are in touch of Brahminic culture, influence of Brahminic culture is seen in Tharu culture but the mode of celebration, sequence of ritual activities and their ideas and ideology are totally different in comparison to Brahminic culture.

Similarly, in the text *Tharu Folklore and Folklife* about *Astimki* festival, the writers write:

The Krishna Astami festival, also called *Astimki*, is observed with pomp and ceremony. The folk artists take a fast called *nirjala*, and paint the walls of *matawan's* house. The whole wall is divided into three sections. The upper part of the painting shows the figure of twelve-headed *Ravan*, the antagonist of the epic *Ramayan*. On the right they sketch the sun and the left the moon. The wall painting consists of figures of *Panch Pandavs* and *Draupadi*, the mythological characters from the epic *Mahabharat*. At the bottom lies the figure of the tree called *Kadamba*. These wall paintings are the epitomes of the ceramic art. The painting encompasses the entire genesis of the universe until the *Dwapar Yug*. Most importantly, these paintings speak of the folk art prevalent in the Tharu community. (136-137)

Here, in the book, it is explained that the Krisha Astami festival is also known as Astimki. The mythological characters are painted on the painting called ceramic art until *Dwapar Yug* and the painting speaks of the folk art of the Tharu community.

Likewise, another writer Ashok Tharu opines:

Pre-human Art can be classified on cave art and domestic art. The painting of horse, elephant and calf are found in same cave. In some cave colored hands with inverted glove have been found, which art is made by rice liquid in Dashain on the clay made *dehari* of Tharu people, have kept on the *Deurhar*. Cave's elephant art has received the art of ceramics location in Tharu house. (61)

Thus, Tharu defines that the pre-human art of colored hands with invented glove is found in cave also found on the *dehari* of Tharu house.

However, these writers have viewed Astimki festival from the traditional point of view. None of them tried to analyze the festival from the point of view of changes that occurs due to the cultural assimilation, globalization, modernization and hybridization. Hence, there need a thrust to examine the Astimki culture from the point of view of continuity and change.

Culture is concerned with tradition and social reproduction; it is also a matter of creativity and change (68). Chris barker in his book *Making Sense of Cultural Studies* argues that the whole world is culturally imperialized because of the 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. He further asserts that we are not being homogenized rather we are being heterogenized (132-133). When the identity formed from the mixing and movement of two cultures become hybrid. Tharu people are practicing Christianity as their own culture and they

are also performing *bhai-tika* during the festival of *Tihar*. Tharu culture is an open culture therefore they accept others culture easily and practice it as their own culture. Hence, the Tharus culture assimilates with hill people's culture.

Ashok Tharu identified that graphic language is the ancient language when the script language was not in existence. Again he quoted Bangdel's word; "searching subject matter in painting will be an irreconcilable effort" (my trans. qtd. in Tharu, 57). Here, Astimki Painting also reflects the subject matter of Tharu culture, history, mythology, philosophy and relationship with nature of Tharu people.

Astimki is celebrated auspiciously in the Tharu community. It is solemnized in three days. First day people gather and decided to go to jungle collect green leaves. Female go to collect *ghoghi* (a kind of snail, mussel), fish and vegetable to eat *vinsarya vat* or *dar-bhat* (a kind of food) at midnight. After collecting all these things, female cooked everything at evening. Every female and male eats *dar-bhat* at midnight who observes fasting in Astimki. They eat *dar-bhat* before the cock crow. There is belief in Tharu community that they have to finish eating *dar-bhat* before cock crow, if cock crow while eating *dar-bhat* they are called *duthari* (she is not pure to perform Astimki) or not allowed to participate in Astimki. Males take fast only to paint the Astimki painting. Specially, Astimki is performed by the Tharu females. In the present scenario of celebrating it even small boy children also take participate in performing Astimki. Nevertheless, they eat *darbhat* before 12 o'clock in present day.

Nepal is multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country. There are many cultures and subcultures, but it has its own distinct culture which imbibes its different and diverse cultural characteristics. When one original culture contact with other culture at that time both cultures assimilate some good aspect of each culture and adopts some cultural practices. Because of this cultural assimilation there rises a

hybridity between and among different culture. The cultural hybridization erases the ordinary culture and creates gap in one generation to other generation of every tribe. Cultural hybridization depicts in many forms, not only in cultural way but also in political, racial, social and linguistic. It has been used in post-colonial discourse to mean cross culture exchanges and is understood as the process that colonized people mimic the colonizers culture, borrow western ideas and practices rejecting their own socio-cultural structures. On this concern of hybridity, Ashcroft et.al writes in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*:

Hybridity occurs in the post-colonial societies both as a result of conscious moment of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when the settler-invaders disposes indigenous peoples and force them to 'assimilate' to new social pattern. It may also occur in later periods when patterns of immigration form the metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influences (e.g. indentured laborers from Indian and China) continue to produce complex cultural palimpsests with the post-colonized world. (183)

The condition of hybridity emerges when a new culture enters and tries to assimilate with indigenous culture. Powerful culture and its image suppress local culture in hybrid culture. The local cultures lose their root and with new culture get mixed with new cultural experiences. Hybridity concerns various problems in which people are dislocated and displaced from their familiar social environment and indigenous culture when they are compelled to assimilate with new culture.

Malaria Eradication Project of the 1950s changes the social, political and economic transformation of Terai (Guneratne 2002). The Tharusg are only one tribe

who survive and fight with malaria in Terai. Hilly people immigrants in Terai settle with Tharu community and shares common experiences and practices throughout Tharu people also adopted the culture of hill people. Hence, the Tharu communities comes contact with other ethnic group and the new values of modernization and national integration as Nepalese enjoying. The hill people culture is politically and socially high in Nepali culture. Therefore, the Tharus force to adopt the new culture to be modernized and standardized in their society. Gradually, the youth are practicing the new culture in Tharu community. The flow of youth to other culture is no other than the cause of modernization, globalization and hybridization.

Likely, Bhabha brings postcolonial perspective in relation with contemporary critical theory in a quite radical way. He explains at length, the act doubling the whites mans image in effect displayed the representation of authority. In his *Location of Culture*, he tries to clarify about mimicry and ambivalence that function within colonial discourse. It has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between colonizers and colonized discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer by adopting the colonizer's culture, habit, assumption, institution and values. He says that mimicry, therefore, location a crack in the certainly of colonial dominance an uncertainty in its control of behavior of the colonized. Bhabha further opines, "It is from the area between mimicry and mockery where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double that my instance of colonial imitation comes" (123).

In another word, the colonized mimic the colonizer by adopting colonizer's culture, language and values. The mimic men never become pure white man, and what they mimic appears also as mockery or parody. The colonized wants to acquire the superior position of the colonizers through mimicry. Hence, Bhabha writes:

The menace of mimicry in its double vision which is disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/ recognition of the colonial object. (126)

He stresses that mimicry is to be colonized. A mimic man is not the same person as the colonizers by wearing a mask to imitate the colonizer. In fact, mimicry of the colonizer places the colonized in an ambivalent, hybrid space or in-between-ness. In this way, cultural hybridity incorporates with different forms which are studies in cultural change of Tharu community.

The Tharus are adopting the *pahari* culture. They are performing *bhai-tika*, *Dashain* and *Dipawali* like hill people culture. The Tharu culture is affected by Indian culture and other culture because it is connected with India geographically and many *parbatiya* migrated after malaria eradication. Terai is the land of fertility that's why different culture people had been migrated in this area. Therefore, the Tharus culture is assimilated with others culture. While observing the dresses and ornaments of the Tharus we can find vast change and cooptation of dominant culture in the Tharu culture. They are using the dresses according to the fashion which is brought by capitalist culture and media culture. Tharu youths are rapidly attracting towards fashion culture, they read magazine, watch western programs and practices it in their lifestyle. They speak English mixed Nepali language in their house instead of using Tharu language. In the observation of Tharu community of Kanchanpur and Kailali, many Tharus adopted Christian religion. They are practicing Christianity. However, the Tharu community is changing day by day under the threat of modern culture and dominant culture and the Tharu culture becomes hybrid. Therefore, Tharu people are not totally adopting other culture and not also forgetting their own culture. They are

continuing traditional culture in the changed pattern.



Fig.3: Painted by Sita Chaudhary



Fig.4: Painted by Susma Chaudhary

(Photo from Art Exhibition on 9 May, 2016 at Bhirkutimandap, Kathmandu)

Astimki, one of the most important festivals of the Tharus, has more significance in painting. In the past on the day of Astimki Tharu people used to paint different pictures on the doors, walls and windows. This festival is related with painting and the most important task for the Tharus, to perform the skill of painting. In this festival the Tharus have opportunity to show their skill of folk painting. The painting is found as in different forms. The painter used their idea in painting. Here, the painting of Sita and Susma are different but the painting patterns and contains are same. However, at present this tradition is going to be extinct. Instead of painting the people go to bazaar and buy capitalistic product different posters which are related with Lord Krishna. In one hand it kills the creativity of Tharu people and in another hand the new generation cannot be able to know the reality of the painting and it cannot pass from one generation to another.



Fig.5: Traditional painting.



Fig.6: Modern Painting

(Paintings from Art Exhibition on 9 May, 2016 at Bhirkutimandap, Kathmandu)

Here, both painting are different from each other. The people are being modern therefore the painting also changing according to their concept. Furthermore, it is painted on the *dehari* attached with wall or on the wall. Every people engaged in fasting would worship the painting. Tharu folk artist makes the canvas in the *dehari* which is kept inside the house called *bahari* (guest/ meeting room). Canvas is made up of *kameromato* (white clay). There are many *daheries* inside the Tharu house but this *dehari* is kept in *bahari* to paint the Astimki. Tharu lady smears the whole *dhehari* by *dhauramati* (white clay) and floor by *gober* (cow dung). If it is dried again they smear it by the powder of rice solution. After the canvas is totally dried, the artist starts painting. The artist takes fast the very entire day of Astimki till the female would not finish their worshipping and take some fruits.

The ancient Tharu artist used natural color. They produced green color from bean leaf, brown color from *khayar* (catechu), red color from *pawai* seed, black color; dried gourd burned and grinded it in liquid, yellow color from turmeric. But,

nowadays they started to use chemical color. Each color has special meaning and significance in Tharu community. Color using depends on artists. Here, black color considered as emptiness and the life is not outside the range of this color. Red color is symbol or expression of life, heart, aggressive, energy, power, refreshment, velocity, stimulation, surge, friction, profession, will, cupidity, success, luxurious, and life of completeness. Green color recognized as the royal pomp, tyrannical, arrogant and tendency to affect other self respect, desire to receive more recognition, compatibility, and unchanging nature. This color is symbol of socialization, patience and comfort. Therefore this color is used in the external part of divine figure of *Kanha* in the Tharu culture. The Tharu artist used purple color to highlight the painting and give deep shadow to the entire content of external part of painting.

Moreover, the yellow color is used to demonstrate the intellectual power of character in the Tharu Painting. It uses to provide delightfulness, brightness, vigor, awareness and wisdom of the character in the painting. Sun's pleasant heat is existent in this color. Gray color is used to demonstrate every kind of stimulation and psychological tendency to freed mentality. The Tharu artist used this color on the figure of *Dropati*. Blue color is recognized as completeness, depth, truth, faith, love, dedication, tradition and innumerable value. Therefore, this color is used in the ocean, border, vine, flower and buds. Brown color is used in the clothes of the characters by artist to represent emotional state of the body. In this each color have significance in Tharu culture. The Tharu artists are continuing the same color because their ancestors had been using the very color without having knowledge about the color.

In the past, the male artist only paint the Astimki painting but present day female artist is involving in painting. Tharu females are also making the art of Astimki. Sharita Chaudhary, in her article *Tharu Lokkala ko Goretoma* opines, "In

Tharu culture in the past there was ill practice that Tharu females were not allowed to make Astimki pictures but my father by breaking the tradition gave me a golden opportunity to paint Astimki pictures" (19).

Mark Liechty, in his book *Suitably Modern* writes about the cultural transferring or changing in Nepal and his main focus is to demonstrate the modernization in culture. According to him, "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).

Thus, the Tharu people bring poster of Krishna which can easily found in market instead of drawing Astimki painting in their house. Tharu community is highly affected by modern culture and consumerist culture. They are losing their creativity. Astimki art is only the art left in the Tharu community which can preserve the Tharu art in practice. But it is also vanishing slowly in Tharu community replaced by plastic posters. Here, the cultural practices are being influenced and affected by other neighboring culture and slowly and gradually they are swallowing the flavor or relish of modern scientific invention such as radio, television, mobile, and computer. Due to the gradual attraction on these materials, internet and social sites they are losing their own culture by the means of contacting or communicating with others culture. The Tharus are copying the living way of life style of neighbor culture (dominant culture), cultural activities, and dresses.

The performance of Astimki is conducted on the periphery of painting. Whole community involves into the theater; song, paint, and rituals take place. Painting is about origination of creation, Mahabahrat, Ramayan and Krishla Lila. But, in the present it is only limited on Krishna Lila. The pattern of cultural practices has been

changing in gradual way. While visiting the Tharu village we can find continuity of the practices and also observed some changes on it. The Astimki song is related with Sakhiya (cultural dance; performed by boys and girls in the Dashain festival in Tharu community) song. Astimki song starts from Astimki and continued with the song of Sakhiya and finished on it. But the Tharu youths are attracting towards modern culture. Despite of singing Astimki song they are singing and playing Hindi songs because of the settlement of Tharu community is in Terai which is near the border of India. And the Nepali songs are also sung in Astimki nowadays. They do not wear cultural dresses and ornaments conversely they wear *kurtha surwal*, pant, t-shirt, and *sadicholo*. They adopted *pahari* (those people who are migrated from hilly area) culture and global culture.

In Second days, Tharu people engage in preparation to celebrate Astimki from early morning. Especially, females take fast in this festival. On this day females sanitize their ornaments and bath early morning, the painter also take bath then draw the paint. Females collect vegetables (five vegetable for next day), fruits (guava, cucumber, banana, and lemon) which is available in their orchard, flowers; *ghunyasar*, and *longara* and knit *duna* (leaves made small-plate) and *tapari* (plates made by leaves). Girls go to local markets for shopping and pass their time because adoration is only performed in the evening. After finishing all the works females again take bath just before they perform the worship. They wear new dresses (cultural dress); wear shinning and dazzling ornaments and make-up.



Fig. 7: Females of Dang carrying Astimki materials to perform *puja*.

(Photo by Ashok Tharu)

First of all, elder female of house lights the lamp of *pala* (small earthen bowl) in front of her deities in *durhar* (the room where deities placed). Then she puts rice, flowers; *ghunyasara*, *longara*, lemons, cucumber on the plate and lighted *pala* lamps of every ones plates who takes fast. Married females take a plant of paddy and maize. After finishing these activities elder female raised the plate which is decorated then after all people engaged in fasting would take it on their hands. This day Tharus folk *Radhas* (faster are called *Radha*) take fast whole day as possible as they take *nirjalabrata* (fast without water drink). Proficient in hair dressing art, *laljhovanna* with white *funna* in their hair, being full make-up wearing cultural dresses: *lehanga*, *cholya*, *gonnya*, and *aghrahan* or *angya* and ornaments: *shikarya*, *jhimalya*, *tarya*, *kukurmanka*, *barkamala*, *suttya*, *mundri* (ring) *jhuhargurya* (jholkya in yellow color), *chotigurya* (lal, red color), and *totlaggya-gurya* (karya or baijanghyar), *pairi* or *churwa*, *vichhya* in leg finger, *Desauri* wears *baka* (hand wear), *bijayet* (wear in arm), *taunk* (wear in neck), *mangya*, *canra* (wear in leg), *tikli*, *phuli*. They come forward in line from *durhar* towards *mahatawa's* house carrying with decorated plate. From every house the

folk *Radhas* come out for *mahatawan's* house to worship. In the light of blazing flame of *pala* their beauty of pleasant charm would seem to look more and more on the night.

Similarly, when the folks *Radhas* reach *mahatawan's* house, wife of *mahatawan* or elder wife brings decorated plate from her *deurhar* and put every things in front of painting then others faster do as well line by line. The elder female put *agyari* (incense, burning pine wood with butter), vermilion, a plant of paddy, a plant of maize, pure water in tumbler and burning *pala* lamp. These things are related with nature and shows that the Tharus are ethnic and indigenous group of Nepal and they are nature worshiper. Every worshiper finished putting the things of plate in front of Astimki painting line wise elder to younger then the *mahatawan's* wife or elder female starts worship the Astimki painting. First she puts vermilion in sun, moon, five *Pandabas*, five *Dropadis*, *basukinag*, *doli* carrying with two peoples, *kadambari* tree, *Kanha* carrying flute and standing on the *kadam* tree (*kadambari* tree), worm, crab, *purain*(sub caste of lotus), tortoise, *raini machharya* (Eel fish), horse, elephant, camel, deer, scorpion, oxen with halo and *juwa*, monkeys, birds, *kajrik banwa* (a kind of forest), *sethly kukarya* (female dog), boat with fisherman and *gurbaba* (the premier Tharu) is sitting on the boat and *unta manaiya* (the man having head down and legs up), respectively and there is also the paint of '*Barmurwa*' *Ravna* (Ravan) but he is not worshiped character in Astimki painting. There is some belief upon this painting, if somebody would worship Ravan she would give birth to *runche* baby (addicted to crying baby). She burn *dhup* and put it in front of painting. Then she puts little butter in the fire wood for perfume and finishing this act she sipped a little water from the palm of her hand for purification. Tharu elder female finished her worshipping in this way and then every female who takes fast worship similarly. According to Preethi

Chaudhary, the permanent resident of Ammarpur Kanchanpur, the Astimki was performed as the main ritual ceremony only after all the cattle were brought back to home (shades) from grazing so that even the animal members are also present during the ceremony. This context valorizes animals and non-human beings equal to human beings.

Moreover, as soon as the worship starts the aged females and other female start singing the song related with Astimki. The song of Sakhiya dance which has been performed on *dashya* (dashain) festival is started with the song of Astimki. Sakhiya song is related with Astimki song. Astimki and Sakhiy songs are same but the tune of song is different. When Tharu folk Radhas finished worship, they return back to their own home for *falhar* (to eat fruits, milk, curds). The room is smeared by cow dung where the process of *falhar* has been conducted. In *falhar* elder females put fruit; banana, cucumber, guava etc. and curds, milk and sweet made of flour, ghee and sugar on *duna-tapari* and put it in front of them. They put *agyari*, butter and pure water in middle and then elder female put out some fruit, curd, milk and sweet flour from her *duna-tapari* and put it on other empty *duna* (small leaf-plate) and *tapari* (big leaf-plate) then other elders to younger do similarly. Again the elder takes some pieces of every fruits, milk, curds and sweet flour in her hand and offer it on the *agyari*, put some butter on it after then others also perform similar way. After finishing these activities they start eating, at first it has started by elders to younger. In this way, they break their fast by eating fruits. Again they go to *mahatawa*'s house for entertainment. Every one sings the song, aged females sing the song related with Astimki and the younger would copy them. In this way, they sing song continuously and entertain the entire night. In this night they never let to extinguish their *pala* lamp, time to time they filled the lamp with oil till morning when they have not finished

their Astimki.

Krishna Sarbahari, in his article *Astimki/Sakhya Kabbyako Bishesta* (Characteristic of Astimki/Sakhya Epic) illustrates that the story of origination of creation have found in Astimki painting and the song. According to him:

It is said that those tribe have the story description of the origination of creation, is to be honored as the primitive human civilization. The story of creation also found in Tharu tribe. The great description is found in the Gurbabak Jarmauti or the Tharu folk Bramha myth.

Besides this, the narration of creation also observed in Astimki song.

(my trans. 24)

Ashok Tharu also writes that from the origination, lithosphere or land was needed for which it is said in Tharu folk epic. According to *GurbaabakJarmauti*, the *Gurbaaba* with the help of crabs and warms, brought *Ammarmaati* (indestructible soil) from the *Pataalalok* (Hades) and created the lithosphere (my trans. Tharu, 58).

Astimki song is related with the life style of the Tharu culture but it expressed by the appreciation of *Kanha* (Krishna) and his life style. As soon as the *mahatawan's* wife started worshipping the aged females started to sing the song. Astimki song started with the creation of water, land, the earth and creates green grass *kush* (a kind of grass used in religious ceremony, *Poacynosuroides*) on it. After then creates grain, man and greens vegetable. Astimki song describes agrarian culture of Tharu community and life style by creating every natural thing in the song. And this song ended with the murder of *Kansha*. The song started with the Astimki song but ended with Sakhya (dance performed in Dashain by Tharu community) song. The song of Astimki and Sakhya are same but the tunes are different from each other. Tharu females sing the song the whole night. In this way, Astimki song is the description of

origination of creation.



Fig. 8: Art painted by Sarita Chaudhary.

(Photo from Chali Gochali Magazine)

The Tharus make canvas in the *dehari* by clay in square shape but at bottom in middle left some space and raise the boarder both side of empty space inside the canvas.

Tharu female smears whole *dehari* by *dhauramati* (white clay) and floor by *gobar* (cow dung) one day before or morning of Krishna Janmastami. The painters, early in the morning bath and start painting. There are one or more than two painters. Tharu painters first draw the picture of *din* (sun) in the top and right side or the canvas and left the *Jonhya* (moon). According to Ashok Tharu, "the canvas is symbolized as the divine or supernatural figure of *Kanha* (Krishna). Tharu artist used bamboo or cotton brush and natural color, produced in their home" (57). The canvas is divided into three parts. First line, the painter sketches the picture of five Pandavas, carrying umbrella or stick. Bottom of Pandavas or second part of painting, draws the picture of five *Durpatis* (Dropadi), wearing *lehanga* and carrying *majaira* (dance instrument of

the Tharu culture) on their hand.

Third part of the canvas there sketches *doli* (a kind of palanquin) carrying with two peoples; bride is sitting inside *doli* with her friend who takes care to her and draws the picture of *lottyia bokuiya* (brother of bride carrying tumbler). The artists draw the pictures of hand fan; it symbolized that Tharu people are residents of Terai which is hot place of Nepal. They draw the picture of *nachanya* (dancer), *madarya* (drummer), and *songya* (joker). It describe that the Tharus life are full of entertainment. The character *songya* is important in Tharu dance. Painting of *barmurwa* (Ravan) is painted right inside of the canvas. There is some belief in Tharu community that by chance somebody worship *barmurwa*, she would give birth to *runche* (addition of crying) baby. Therefore, *barmurwa* is not worshipped able figure of Astimki painting.

Artists draw the pictures of plugging man by two oxen, *halo juwa* and carrying stick in his hand. The Tharus main occupation is agriculture from the civilization. They work on the field laboriously. Hence, Astimki paintings reflect the Tharu identity and culture. Astimki is the festival of memorizing 'agrarian culture' of Tharu community. They draw the picture of *kajrik bannwa*; a kind of forest. This forest reflects Tharu people live near the forest and protect the forest.

Astimki is celebration of the creation. Artist painted the figures of *basuki nag* (snake) surrounded by ocean, aquatic creature; *rainsi machharya* (Eel fish), crab, worm, tortoise and crocodile. They also paint the picture of terrestrial creatures; elephant, horse, peacock, scorpion, *sethly kukarya* (dog) outside of water. Dog is security guard of house and community. These animals are painted on Astimki painting and related with the life of Tharu people as well as their culture. The Tharus are near of nature and they worship the nature. So, they are nature worshiper. There is

a painting of flower called *purain* (sub plant of lotus), is the first plant create on water. It represents that the Tharu culture is pre historical creature of the world (Tharu Ashok). Similarly, artist draws the picture of boat, boatman floating the boat and one or two passengers on the boat in the water. At the middle of bottom point painters draw the picture of tree; *kadam* tree (favorite tree of Kanha), on the tree there painted monkeys, birds and the Kanha with his flute. And the bottom of the tree illustrated the figure of *ulta manaiya* (head down and legs are up man); is the symbol of creation. The younger painters paint picture copying the elder painter outside the canvas on the *dehari*. In this way, the painters finished the painting of Astimki. These wall paintings are the epitomes of the ceramic art. The painting encompasses the entire genesis of the universe. Most importantly, these painting speak of the folk art prevalent in Tharu community (137).

At the last day of Astimki, before the dawn female cook different five types of vegetable and rice or pure food. Once again every worshiper make up as previous day and every one worship the paintings then collect worshiped materials from the Astimki spot in their *taparies* (plate made by leaves) except rice.



Fig.9: Females are heading towards river.

(Photo from Tharu Community)

Every worshiper goes towards the river or local water source in line wise. In case the

pala lamp would extinguish that worshiper called *duthari* (eaten something in the fast called *dutheri*) in Tharu belief. When worshipers reached to the river they decorate their *tapari* with lamp. *Tapari* is decorated by three or five lamp boxes. Everybody put out *pala* from their *taparis* and put cotton, oil and burn it. They leave them on the flowing water of the river, the lighted lamp floating *taparies* over river look beautiful. When they put their *taparies* on the river they say that *khati purya lai ja jar juri lai ja* (take away all our diseases, take away all the evils). Children rush towards water source to collect the floating fruits to eat. After then they bath, wash *pala* lamp and return to their own home for *fharhar*, bring water from the river for purification.



Fig.10: Females are decorating *taparies*.



Fig.11: Female are about to leave *taparies* in the river.

(Photo by Ashok Tharu)

Furthermore, female serves rice in *tapari* and curry (five vegetable) serves in *dunnya* (small leaf-plate). Five vegetables like; *gabda* (arum plant, *Colocasia esculenta*), *pawai*, *kerau* (pea), *fulauri* (savory ball consisting of vegetables cut up, coated in batter of gram flour, and deep fried in oil) and fish. After serving every curry in *duna* and *tapari* and every one sit near of food for *farhaar*. They put out few (little) food and vegetable (five type of vegetable) from their *duna* and *tapari* and put it into other *duna* and *tapari*. This process is called *farhaar*. Moreover, the Tharus prepared different items of foods. The items haven increased with the continuity and change in

different contexts. There are possibilities of more than five vegetables but they separate only five curries and rice for their brothers and sisters. Again everyone takes out little-little pieces of every dish and butter offer on the *agyari* from elder to younger, respectively. Finally everybody accept the Prasad and the fast have been finished. Along with adding more food, dishes on the separated food by worshiper, offer their sisters and daughter. Brothers go to give the gift to their sisters; this offering is called *Agrashan*. On this day sisters look the way and wait their brothers when their brothers will bring the *Agrashan* for them and they will meet their brothers. This culture has been shifted as it was practiced in the previous time. Tharu people in the past used to go to their sisters' house to give *Agrashan* in Astimki festival. Nowadays the new generations do not go far away where their sisters are and they only go to their neighbor house to give *Agrashan* in Astimki but it is practiced in Atwari (big Sunday) festival.

Arjun Guneratne writes about the Tharu modernization and the development of Tarai. And the factor that brings the change in Tharu community. According to him:

...transformation concerns the development of the Tarai. The opening of the Tarai 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 Tarai and the Tarai region to the hill. These roads facilitated the movement of hill people into Tarai, 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 hill people or the other eastern people and they become familiar with others cultural values and norms. They learn Nepali language too. They gain knowledge by going to schools and colleges. Tharus come in contact with the new culture and people as well as familiar with western culture. They practice the new norms and values of other culture. Hence, this mimicry makes the Tharu culture hybrid. Tharu people are speaking Nepali, English, Hindi and Tharu mixed language. Their language is also being hybridized. Their costume is changed according to the fashion. Tharu people do not wear culture dresses in Astimki festival but they wear the costumes of other dominant culture.

Similarly, they never use cultural ornaments conversely they use jewelry which is easily found in market. These kinds of changes occurs hybridization in Tharu community. Astimki is influenced by the festival of Hindu females *Teej*. Astimki is the festival of female though it is affected by *Teej*. Tharu females are adopting the some cultural practices of *Teej* of Hindu female. In spite of using cultural dresses; *lahanga*, *choliya*, and *gonnya* they are using dazzling and ornamented red *sadi*.

Here, Bhabha stress that hybridity is revaluation of the assumption and belief of colonial identity in which there may be repetition of dominant identity. He writes:

Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting focus and fixities; it is the name for the 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, hybridity is the product of colonialism. The colonizers are powerful to secure their identity. Colonized people lose their identity, culture, and go under the system of colonizers but they cannot adopt the new system completely. Consequently, Tharus are losing their organic culture by practising the new culture. They are practising the untouchable system.

There is not the system of untouchability in the Tharu community when the female is in menstruation period. Those female, who are in menstruation period can take fast and worship and celebrate the Astimki. There is no discrimination in Tharu community. But nowadays, untouchable culture is adopted by the Tharu community. If the Tharu female is running in menstruation she cannot take part in performing Astimki. Hence, this type of cultural adaptation causes hybrid culture. However, hybrid culture brings problem and erases the root culture.

Furthermore, there we can find architectural structure change in the Tharu house. Architectural changes in houses of Tharu community can affect on the Astimki painting. Originally the houses of the Tharus are built on north and west direction and thatched roof. There is three or four part in the house: first kitchen (north-west) and *deurhar* (deities room is north-east), second and third are bed room, both side of bed room there is *piryari*; way to go to the kitchen and bedroom and the door of gallery begins from *bahari*. And the last or the southern part is *bahari*. In *bahari* there are two doors east and west. Mostly the rooms are parted by *deharis* and some have *chasra* (half wall); Tharu people hanged their clothes on it. Therefore, in the past Astimki painted on the *dehari*. But in present the structure of house is changed. The Tharus make like gallery type of house and rooms are separated by walls because

dehari takes more place. Generally, the Tharu houses are made up of clay and wood but it is replaced by modern houses and there are no *deharis*. Thus, they paint on the wall or bring posters from market.

Bhabha writes that hybridity is a place where cutting edge of translation and negotiation that creates third space. There is no subjectivity. It will be the case of other or ourselves. The term negotiation, according to him, is the cultural exchange. He further writes, "The every event of theory comes the negotiation and antagonistic instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative popularities between knowledge and its objects and between theory and practical political reason" (25).

In the case Tharu festival Astimki is affected festival from other culture. In the past the image of *Kanha* was not depicted clearly. But in present *Kanha* exist clearly like the person. According to the changing context of the world, Tharu people change their Astimki painting and add drawings of their life experiences. In the interview with Ashok Tharu, in his observation he finds some painters paint *Pandavas* with carrying guns. This is the reference of Maoist insurgency period. Maoist insurgency also affected the Tharu painting.

The Tharu culture is also influenced by *pahari* culture. Today the generation totally creates the gap between old and new generation. Despite of worshipping in the paint and the periphery of Astimki painting they are worshipping the poster of Krishna which can find in the market. The consumerist culture effects on the Tharu ritual practices. For example, Maya Dahit (kanchanpu- krishnapur Baluwaphanta) in her interview said, she never saw the painting of Astimki in her life. When she has been celebrating and worshipping Astimki, she is worshipping on the poster of Krishna not the painting of Astimki. Again she added she has no knowledge about Astimki song

how it is performed in Astimki.

Astimki is based on the periphery of the life style of the Tharu community but it is expressed by the appreciation of *Kanha* and his life style. *Kanha* is depicted as he is from the Tharu community. *Kanha's* father and mother, *Isharu* and *Jashu* respectively, are narrated as farmer. They labor hard in the field. The practices that the Tharu community performed while farming like the way *Jashu* and *Isharu* also perform. Mending *halojuwa* to eating lunch with fish, meat at the working place is the system of the Tharu community these also describe on the Astimki song. When *Jashu* was pregnant and she was in the time of delivery they call the *sudeni* to care of *Jashu* (mother of *Kanha*). Every detail can express through the Astimki song and Sakhiya song.

Tharu people celebrate Astimki festival in a collective way of the *mahatawan's* house. But at the present they are celebrating in their own home. Tharus are also being educated and they are going to the center of the Nepal. The contact with other culture, adopt it and bring practice on his/her culture that's become hybrid culture. They are attracting towards scientific invention like mobile, television, computer, iPhone, and tab. Gradual attraction of these materials they are contacting with western and global culture, with communication they are welcoming the modern culture in their society. Tharu females are attracting with soap operas. The Tharus are influenced by media culture. They are copying the models wearing costumes and ornaments. By watching television Tharu girls wear *lengha choli* of Indian culture but not their cultural *lehanga* and *cholya* in festival or cultural program. Mostly, youths are attracting towards modern culture and bring practice in their life. The sense of cultural change, acculturation, diffusion, hybridity, and globalization in the present world is the gate way of modernity. The youths are adopting global culture and

mixing themselves with local culture as glocal.

Dor Bahadur Bista in his book *People of Nepal* writes that the Tharu organization plays important role in changing the Tharus life. According to him,

As with all other societies in 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 which provides hostels in Birgung for school children and students of both sexes. It has also made an effort to published 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. Some have given up pork emulating the habits of high caste Hindu. (127)

In this way, the organization, *Back Ward Society Education Base* brings many projects to upgrade the Tharu community and other non Tharu those who are back ward in western Terai. They gave opportunities to educate, applied awareness programs that are why the Tharus are courage to face with other society and communicate with them. Hence, the NGO's played to change the Tharu community respectively.



Fig.12: Astimki puja performed in Champan Samaj Kathmandu.

(Photo from Tharu Community)

In an interview with Pooja Chaudhary, she opines that the Astimki festival is celebrated by *Champan Samaj* (Tharu organization) in Kathmandu. Tharus, who are living in Kathmandu valley due to their profession and study, celebrate Astimki in Kathmandu. They paint Astimki in paper, hanged on the wall and celebrate. In this way, the cultural event is celebrating in fragment way in Kathmandu. However, there is not possible in practicing cultural events in real way therefore, we need to preserve them just for showing way. The Tharus can protect their cultural dresses and

ornaments by using it in cultural programs. For example, in Maghi, Astimki and Dashain festival they could wear cultural dresses and preserve it. Nowadays the sentiments towards ones culture and cultural consciousness of preservation of traditional culture among ethnic communities is the plus point to preserve to the ethnic culture.

In conclusion, culture is variants in its different cultural practices and the culture never bears single meaning because it is in continuing process. The Tharu culture has been changed from the way it is used to be celebrated and the way it is celebrating nowadays. The cultural shift from one generation to another generation is no other than the consequence of hybridity, cultural assimilation, globalization and technological development. The way how the Astimki festival was celebrated in the past has been shifting nowadays. The youths even are not familiar with the culture and its importance in which different places of the house.

In the past Tharu people used to paint the painting themselves through using different house-made color but nowadays youth people buy the capitalistic product poster and pictures. As the time moves the new generations are not imitating the old culture/ real culture. Instead of this the young people are inclined to Hindi songs, movies as well as Hindi and Nepali language. The attraction of the new generation towards the other culture then their culture may loss the original or real aura of the Tharu culture.

The attraction of Tharu youths to the other culture is no other than the shift of *pahari* community in Terai after the eradication of malaria and its geographical connection with India. Though, old generation are still performing festival, it is necessary to handle it to the new generation to preserve and conserve it. The new generation should practice the Astimki festival to preserve their cultural identity.

However, there are some changes in the cultural practices because of globalization, hybridization, cultural assimilation and development of science and technology in this industrial world. Hence, Astimki performance has been practiced by new generation with slight change. So there is both continuity and change in the way of celebrating Astimki festival.

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The pictures contribution by Ashok Tharu.

