

**Tribhuvan University**

**Performing Gurung Identity through *Thōte*: Shift in Ethnic Politics**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of M. Phil. in English**

**By**

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**Letter of Approval**

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## Abstract

This research is an analytical study of *Thōte*, one of the Gurung tribal rituals, as a 'socio-aesthetic mirror' of Gurung identity. It explores the ritual as a reenactment of the Gurung tribal attributes and aesthetics on the one hand, and a dramatization of the socio-political agendas of their identity politics on the other. The rhythmic pattern of its performance with performers' face and body painting, other decorations like garlands of *ranijhar*, tribal music, weapons, and dress code in the village to the carnival nature of mass street procession in the form of a 'cultural collage' including even other Gurung cultures, rituals, songs, dances, and individual creations in Pokhara reveal and identify the Gurung tribal identity and aesthetics. As a socio-political mirror, the ritual not only reflects the social, economic, religious, cultural, and geographical aspects of the community, but also most importantly shows a gradual shift in the ethnic politics. The rising identity consciousness of the tribe after the political change of Nepal in 1990 has led to the dialectics between the *Thōte* performance and the tribe's identity politics. Due to the dialectics, the ritual performance has become a more performative political discourse of dramatizing the dialogue between the tribal identity markers and the socio-political forces emerging in the local, national, and global societies. The ritual site, therefore, has turned out to be a space of enacting the intra-communal, inter-communal, and glocal conflicts where the tribe strategically exploits its tribal attributes, everydayness, aesthetics, 'strategic essentialism,' and politics of negotiation and fusion to maintain their identity keeping a harmonious but conversational relation to the local, national, and global forces. As a result, the ritual performance and the Gurung identity both are in shift and becoming more corsscultural and glocal.

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