

## Representation of Myth in Traditional Tharu Songs

This research studies the significance of myths used in traditional Tharu songs that reflect their belief systems and rites to form their identity. Traditional Tharu songs make a map about Tharu life; their belief system, myths, tradition, culture, experience, and rituals that help them to make convincing discourses about indigenous Tharu people. Unique type of myths are included in various songs of festivals and occasions that create ideology and meaning of ethnic group. Tharu people are obsessed with nature and believe in hard work; they worship supernatural power reflected through separate myths within traditional Tharu songs. Myths in Tharu songs pave the way for their identification in society. Myths play crucial role to express the situation of Tharu people. The way of living constructs a social structure which is depicted in every Tharu song.

At present, traditional Tharu songs are going out of practice in society. During the festivals such as Dashain, Dewari and Holi sound system has replaced cultural songs and dances. Young generations of Tharu ethnic people rarely participate in cultural practices. Day by day the way of practicing culture is changing. Various types of festivals are celebrated in the Tharu community, which is heavily influenced by globalization. As a result, the way of celebrating Tharu festivals are changed. Modern dance and song have replaced cultural dance and song. Tharu people are unable to show their identity relating to their tradition, lifestyle, festivals, and rituals because most of them are illiterate and backward.

Tharu people have different songs to celebrate diverse occasions. These songs are composed to get relief from daily problems and sadness. They show the various processes of rituals and myths and depict the family value. They compose specific songs for specific occasions, rituals, festivals and seasons. Tharu people portray their belief system and rituals through various songs which are transferred from one generation to another in oral form. New generations get to know these songs from their ancestors while participating in their

rituals and festivals where they share their experience, their dreams, and the value of various myths to make their identity.

Indigenous Tharu people had their own type of writing system, which has disappeared due to nations' unfavorable law and policy. Some educated people have started translating the oral songs into written forms. Such songs are kept under the observation of 'Morhya'<sup>1</sup> or 'Barghar'<sup>2</sup>. Due to the lack of practice and performance even the written songs have started disappearing along with songs in the oral form. Thus a lack of awareness about their cultural identity leads Tharu people to leave their culture and tradition.

The book '*Pothy*' is written by Kal Ram Tharu. He has collected various songs for various occasions, festivals and seasons from different people from different places. In the context of rapid change in the global world, Tharu ethnic groups' identity has collapsed in the crowd of various identities. In this adverse situation, to connect Tharu people' life with traditional Tharu song, dream, myth, and experience, Kalram Tharu tries his best to save Tharu culture, tradition, songs and myth by collecting all the songs and publishing them to preserve them and give continuity to the distinct indigenous Tharu identity.

In Tharu traditional songs, Tharu people used different types of myths to reflect Tharu culture, practice, and belief. Representing myths through songs helps to bring their culture in existence and gives continuity to certain rituals and specific activities. Different types of myths are established to reflect the unique culture and tradition of Tharu people in traditional songs to give continuity to their way of life and maintain their identity. Tharu people sing different types of songs according to season and occasions that helps them to remember those stories which show occupation, festivals and specific tasks for a specific time. Tharu identity is created through the songs which contain various myth and rituals that differentiates them

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<sup>1</sup>The person, who initiates songs while performing in the community.

<sup>2</sup>The leader of the village.

from other religion and caste. They have distinct festivals with distinct type of songs like 'Guriya' song.

Song of the 'Guriya' festival shows the belief that married women cannot go to their mother's home until someone comes to take her from mother's residence which is represented through the song:

In Shrawan month, sister meditates everywhere

I do not see relatives from mother's residence to go to celebrate Guriya festival...

Sister seeks everywhere by standing on the waste

When will people come from mother's residence to take me to celebrate Guriya festival. (Tharu 53, My translation)

At the time of 'Guriya' festival, married women always thinks mother home and wish to come someone to bring her back to her mother home. It represents women' feelings for their birth place and relation between brother and sister. In the same way, 'Barha Mas' song also represents some specific tasks for some exact months. These various types of songs for specific months with different stories contribute to establish Tharu identity.

Devotion toward God is represented through the songs. Tharu people believe that every entity has assured power so they worship all the things even God of every side, home, yard, shed, water, well, forest, river, land, sky and the god of the road also. They have a specific way of ploughing and mutual relation with animals, food items and eating on the leaf. A group of males (*Surahuwa*) disturbs the cooks (*Bhansariya*) in making pulse to make them sing-song (*Mangar*). After that, cooks (*Bhansariya*) go to wash pulse; there also they disturb to make them sing *Mangar*<sup>3</sup>.

Various types of myths are delivered through traditional Tharu songs which are directly or indirectly connected to Tharu life. Tharu people's belief and devotion upon God is

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<sup>3</sup> Song which is sung at the wedding ceremony.

often represented by, and dependent upon the 'Guruwa' who solves the problems related from health to supernatural powers. Tharu myths portray the soul and the ghost. Myth represented in the songs gives the impression of equality among the different classes of people. We should feel feelings of other people and should not kill innocent animals. If not it can result in negative consequences.

God Krishna's childhood and bravery are represented through Astimki songs; Ram's obedience toward his parents and love for his wife Sita; Laxman, Hanuman and Sita's devotion toward Ram in Ramayana is frequently expressed through Hurdungwa songs. Along with love relation of lover and beloved; husband and wife, different types of myths related to dissimilar aspects are depicted in Tharu songs.

This research principally puts its focus on traditional Tharu songs to prove how Tharu people go through the issue of their identity construction by means of their myths. It explores various myths which are depicted in different Tharu songs that form their culture, festivals, and tradition of, not a person, but a people which help Tharu ethnic group to differentiate them from other cultural group and unify with their people. The research also explores various types of songs which use the myths to mark different festivals, seasons and occasions.

Majorly, *Hurdungwa* songs and *Austimki* songs are taken as the sample of this research text that shows the myths about the origin of the world and the purpose of different Tharu festivals and process of those rituals. Tharu people's culture, myths, practice, and rituals are reflected in unique type of songs, festivals and occasions. They celebrate different occasions and festivals that unite them into a community and distinguish them from other communities.

Particularly, researchers will benefit from this research in their further research about Tharu culture, songs, and myths. In this modern time, Tharu culture is in dilapidating situation. Tharu people are discarding their songs, myths, and culture because of the influence

of western culture and *pahadiya* culture and lack of awareness about their own culture. This research will help the Tharu people know about their tradition, songs, culture and rituals that help to form Tharu ethnic group identity. People from different religions and other ethnic group people will know about Tharu songs, its content, and culture.

They worship the nature, supernatural power, believe in superstitions and have their own types of myth about the creation of the world and physical and spiritual life. Myths depicted in traditional Tharu songs represent distinct character of indigenous Tharu people. They believe in supernatural powers and worship plants and animals. These distinct characters help to shape Tharu people's identity through their songs. Different myths are represented through traditional Tharu songs to create their identity through their culture and belief system. Song itself is culture, and different myths are depicted by different types of songs to show the characteristics of the Tharu ethnic group.

There are many critics who have elaborated about Tharu culture. In the book *Tharu Padam Shrestha* depicts the Tharu culture and their living conditions. The division of Tharu farmers, rituals and other ethnic groups which are similar to Tharu ethnic group with relation to festivals, customs and dances are portrayed in the text. According to Mr. Shrestha, "Tharu ethnic group sing-song to share the happiness of victory by God Ram Chandra over Rawan" (25, My translation). Tharu ethnic group sing Ramayana in 'Hurdungwa' song at the time of Dashain. They take this myth as the source to be truthful, obedient and live for others by sacrificing their own happiness.

In the book, *History and Culture of Tharu Ethnic Group or Tharu Puran*, Teknath Gautam shows the differences between past and present culture of the Tharu ethnic group. Firstly, he describes the past of Tharu people. He shows the way Tharu people used to spend their life, their lifestyle, festivals and ways of entertainment. In the modern part, he talks

about recent Tharu language and literature. He shows the linguistic connection between Tharu and Sanskrit by representing certain words from the Tharu language.

Teknath Gautam depicts Tharu religions and literature in a negative way. According to Teknath Gautam, people from the Tharu ethnic group forget their songs and tone. He relates Tharu's God with the Demon. Gautam argues that the Tharu people believe that, "At first earth was like a ball of fire. The cloud of smoke which comes from fire, rained for a long time, and earth becomes full of water. All the parts were covered with water. Earthworms brought soil from the underworld to fill the watery place to make land livable for the human and fertile for agriculture" (48, My translation).

Every ethnic group has their own type of creation myth which is distinct from other groups' creation myth. For Tharu people, the first Tharu human being is Gurbaba, who orders earthworms to bring soil from hell and scatter on the earth. The book, *The Tharu Barka Naach*, describes Tharu version of the *Mahabharata*. Tharu people relate themselves with Pandavas, especially with Bhim. Barka Naach<sup>4</sup> is devoted towards five Pandavas happily after the victory over the Kauravas at Kurukshetra. It is a part of Barkimar<sup>5</sup>. Tharu people sing the songs about Mahabharata to teach the community about the relationship between brothers and to spend their life happily and peacefully.

In *The Barka Naach*, "The story is told through the dancing of performers and the singing of the traditional Tharu text by a chorus" (4, My translation). This dance is divided into different parts. According to Dinesh Chamling Rai, "The body of the songs is placed between the opening prayer (Samarauti) and the closing prayers (Swarg Arohen). The opening and closing puja are mandatory parts of the performance, but the dance songs which make up the body of the Naach are selected from the Mahabharata story to suit the situation and the desires of the performing villagers" (7). Tharu people relate this myth as they believe

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<sup>4</sup>A part of Mahabharata represented through singing and dancing.

<sup>5</sup> Full version of Mahabharata

themselves to be the descendants of 'Panch Pandavas', especially 'Bhim'. Talking about the especial respect for Bhim in Tharu culture Rai further says, "Bhim, of all the Pandavas, is the closest to the Tharu, although the Tharu worship and respect all five brothers. Tharu affection for Bhim explains why in the Tharu Barka Naach it is Bhim (not Arjun as in the classical Mahabharata) who succeeds in hitting the eye of the bird and carry away princess Draupadi to become the wife of Pandavas" (4). Tharu people worship all the powers that exist in the world to get success in their work. It is believed that at the time of performing the Mahabharata different powers become active and each tries to create obstacles in the performance or even it also can result in the death of performers. At the time of dancing and singing, Tharu people worship to control negative powers and offer wine at every prayer.

The book, *Tharu Folklore and Folklife* by Nepali Folklore Society overviews traditional values and lifestyle of the Tharu ethnic group. It covers almost all Tharu cultures, their economy, literature, dance, and food items also. It shows the relation of various activities of Tharu culture. According to the book, "The wedding songs retell the story of the Shiva Puran, the Puran that glorifies the life-story of Lord Shiva. It is known as Phulwar that expresses the episodes of the mythological wedding of Shiva and his consort Parvati" (154). Tharu people relate their wedding with deities' marriage to make their relation pure. The myth about Lord Shiva is, depicted in traditional Tharu songs, enacted at the time of marriage ceremony.

The book, *Tharu Indigenous Knowledge*, represents indigenous Tharus' knowledge about medicine. It also includes organizational system, supernatural power, and food items. Lack of awareness about cultural identity results in forgetting own traditional songs, myths, culture, and language along with the knowledge about medicine. Through various songs, Tharu culture, myths and rites are represented. To support the idea Dahit says, "Barkimar and Sakhiya have the story of Mahabharata, Astamki enrolls story of Krishna Leela and Fulwar

describes the legend of Shiva and Parvati Puran. Sajana and Sajani, Lala, Birahim, Maina and Laguna are love affair song and folklores. Some songs are related to agriculture profession, daily life cycle, dignified and glorious history" (51). Traditional Tharu songs enroll within Tharu culture, tradition, lifestyle, belief system and rituals.

Sameera Maiti, an Indian Anthropologist, describes about most of the aspects of Tharu culture, everyday life, handicraft and changes of myths in their songs due to the influence of hill people. It is the comic vision of life through which every social practice is based. Maiti says about Tharu song; "As a matter of fact, people dance only on special occasions whereas they burst into singing whenever they wish or want to express their feelings of joy, loneliness, devotion, etc. Thus, Tharu songs truly represent the entire philosophy of their life" (247). Here, myth is an expression of a profounding sense of togetherness of feelings, action, and wholeness of living. Temporality and spatiality create the myth, rituals, and culture of people. They connect Astamki with the victory of virtue over vice which is depicted in traditional Tharu songs along with worship of the nature and animals.

Different writers have argued about Tharu culture, and their belief system. They try to reflect Tharus' handicraft, culture, rituals and somehow songs and its content also, but they lack unique Tharu myths' spiritual and cultural importance. Most of these writers have opined that Tharu ethnic groups have their myth which is represented through different songs and dance. They critique about Tharu language, god and tradition but the meaning of different myths which are depicted through different songs according to time and season are not discussed and mentioned. And through this research, researcher tries to find out the existence of myth in the song to create unique Tharu identity which defines their present in relation to their past.



This research is based on primary and secondary resources. This paper has taken theoretical ideas from various theorists like Laurence Coupes' *Myth*, and Robert A. Segals' *Myth- A very short introduction*, Devdutt Pattanaik's *Indian Mythology-Tales, Symbols, and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent*, Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Stuart Hall's *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Mircea Eliade's *Myth and Reality*, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and *Creation and Recreation*, and Joseph Campbell's *Myth to Live By* and *The Mask of God: Primitive Mythology*.

Myth represents specific characteristics of a certain group of people which contribute to establish unique identity of the society that is conveyed through one generation to another. Myths are constructed according to the situation, circumstances and socio-cultural structure.

To sustain in the world with dignified identity certain myths are depicted in the songs. Tharu ethnic group has different types of songs according to seasons and occasions which show their unique culture. The identity of the Tharu ethnic group is based and determined on the context of mythical representation and needs of the socio-cultural phenomenon. Most of the occasional songs contain the story of legend Ram. The story of Ramayana teaches the importance of family love and jealousy in family members. This myth gives respect to others' feeling that relates it to the identity of Tharu people which can be found through this song:

Golden Deer rounds in the garden

I have never seen such a beautiful Deer.

Ram comes from the jungle and eats edible wild roots

Sita tells about golden Deer to Ram.

In which jungle you are going to?

Golden Deer is in our garden.

If you kill the Golden Deer

You will take rest on the Deer's leather.

Ram kills golden Deer with Bow

Deer utters 'Laxman' after wounded by an arrow. (Tharu 57-58, My translation)

This story of Ramayana Ram, the god, has to kill the golden deer to fulfill the wish of his wife, Sita, which is a trap organized by Rawan to kidnap Sita. Tharu people sing Ramayana through traditional Tharu song to celebrate the victory upon vice. They relate their life with Ram. Singing the song about Ram make feel themselves in primordial time. This myth indicates family value and sacrifice of own happiness for others. Myth related to human lifestyle and belief system is represented through their songs. Tharu people used to worship nature and supernatural power along with God Ram to get relief physically and psychologically in their busy and painful life. Performance has multiple dimensions to analyze the ritual, dance, theatre, music, etc. Tharu songs stand as music; where large members of singers involve performing.

Identity is constructed and moves constantly through the mythical representation and practice. Identity is never fixed rather it is produced and constructed in certain context. Myth determines the identity of a certain group which is based on constructors' culture, location, race and so on. It is the set of principles which bind the people in an excellent way as like ideology.

Though there are various obstacles in human life, Ramayana guides Tharu people to follow the truth. The story of Ram in Tharu songs helps to make human life better by solving the family problem along with daily sadness and happiness. Peoples' thinking about the world and their relation and the type of society, the consequences of greed, jealousy and revenge represent the myth at the point they imagine for human deeds. Necessity of human being and result of human behaviour is depicted in the myth. Ancestors created a world where characters, situation and result is organized for human satisfaction by creating fear in human mind for negative thinking and activities.

Myth is created to control human desire and activities. Myth deals with human wishes that human being wanted the society like to be. Greed, disbelief and jealousy destroy the peaceful and balanced society and its consequences that is imagined to depict contemporary society. Selfishness and disobedience misbalance the haven like society and truth is only thing that exist which is represented through the Ramayana. Various myths guide human to act on certain way in specific time and place. As Joseph Campbell says:

Now the first and most important effect of a living mythological symbol is to waken and give guidance to the energies of life. It is an energy-releasing and -directing sign, which not only "turns you on," as they say today, but turns you on in a certain direction, making you function a certain way -- which will be one conducive to your participation in the life and purposes of a functioning social group. However, when the symbols provided by the social group no longer work, and the symbols that do work are no longer of the group, the individual cracks away, becomes dissociated and disoriented, and we are confronted with what can only be named a pathology of the symbol. (61)

Myth represents tradition, culture and rites symbolically. It determines the way of living of people. Human activity from birth to death, festivals and different occasions are based on myth. It controls human greed, desire and jealousy by teaching moral lessons and knowledge about physically and spiritually human beings have to face the result of their deed. Peace in mind and human society is balanced through myth by arousing fear in people's mind for negative thinking and activities. It is human belief system that helps to affect people of society. Practice of various myths help to arouse trust in people about distinct stories. The story of Ram binds Tharu people in admirable way to work for the betterment of the society by ignoring private luxuries and happiness.

Tharu songs contain myths about their belief system or rules to reflect respect for all seen and unseen entities in the world. One must respect others' feeling and existence is depicted in the traditional Tharu songs to construct identity through Tharu myths. Ignoring others' existence can be negative for the human being is represented and nature is helpful and easily forgives for human beings' mistake. Tharus' relation with nature and equal treatment for every class of people is expressed through myth in traditional Tharu songs. Such as:

Beautiful lady fetches the water from the wooden well.

Prince comes from somewhere with massive force.

"Listen commander my request.

Stop your huge force for a while and have cold water."

"I neither stop my huge force nor take cold water.

My beautiful beloved like you may be, is waiting for me."

Prince decorated the horse and moved ahead

Then he reached his palace by riding the horse.

Queen gives water to the king's hand in the golden pot.

Water in the golden pot changes into the blood.

Queen gives food to the king's hand on the golden plate.

Food on the golden plate changes into the soil.

"Dear, either you kill domestic pigeon or destroy the state.

Don't you listen to the words of water fetching lady in the well?"

"I neither killed domestic pigeon nor destroy the state.

I ignored the request of the water fetching lady at the well." (Tharu 31, My translation)

By these lines, we come to assume that Tharu people equally treat all the entities whether it is living thing or nonliving thing. This myth shows the Tharu belief system that there must be

human society and its relationship with animal without hierarchy and discrimination that help to sustain all human being and nature. The study of myth reveals about the mind and character of the people just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individuals. Myth motivates the community to be socialized animal although that myth is an illusion. So, myths are the symbolic projections of a people's hope, value, fear, and aspirations. Identity is created through the myth that is constructed according to situation, belief system and culture which is also evident in Tharu songs. Myth is a representational form of tradition, rituals, and culture where mythical aspects are spiritually represented. This knowledge is different from physical knowledge. Myth admits that every person has another way of seeing more than the sensual way to look at these worldly objects.

Myth, ritual, dream, religion etc. are the social common issues that are concerned with anthropology and day to day experience of common people. Similarly, myth takes specific shapes from the cultural environments in which they grow. The myth is, in the general sense, universal. Myth and songs are laid in one another. Both are the representation of language. Language is the form that constructed discourse which is the production of society. Similarly, myth is also constructed according to the cultural phenomenon. The myth is focused on social issue primarily sexual images and subordinate aspects. Subordination is represented to women who are dominated by male ideology, as Sita is represented in Ramayana and powerless people are dominated by the bourgeois ideology which is presented through Mahabharata. The myth itself is not only constructed one but it is language representation too. Therefore, myth, songs and language are socially constructed and situated to establish Tharu identity. In this context, Devdutt Pattanaik, states:

Myth making is an essential ingredient of civilized life. Through myth making humans capture and communicate their understanding of the world. This understanding is crucial in order for people to interact with nature, harness her

bounty, with-stand her vagaries, and establish a culture where a community can thrive. There can be no culture without myth, because without myth there is no understanding of life. (56)

Every cultural group has its own types of myth according to the situation and their belief system. Without myth, the identity of a certain group cannot exist. Myth originates a kind of fear in the mind of a people to make society peaceful. The myth is concerned with the motives that underlying human behaviour. It tends to be speculative and philosophical ideas of the myth for the proper regulation of the societies. Myth about the Prince depicts human's desire to behave all people equally. Every entity has important role to live human their life happily. The distinct view about world contributes to establish identity of a group of people.

Myth helps to construct certain viewpoint about the world, origin of human being and other animals and plant and their relation with it. Every cultural group has their own perspective about the origin of earth and the relationship between plants, animals and nonliving things with the human being. Myth, social ritual and traditions are issues a culture develops and domesticates to influence its members. Festivals and various occasions are formed on the basis of myths to praise various powers and maintain equal relation with human, animals, plant and universe. The process of creation of the earth, plants, animals and human being is represented through Astamki songs of Tharu ethnic group:

Firstly the earth originated with water and soil.

Secondly, the Kush herbs unearth from land.

Thirdly the dense forest emerges in the earth.

Fourthly the Bamboo hill emerges in the land.

Fifthly the Beth plant emerged in land.

In which land the food crops get emerged.

In the same place, the divine resides. (Tharu 33-34, My translation)

Above mentioned lines represent the Tharu ethnic believe that at first the environment is created beautifully in livable condition for human beings.

Myth is supposed to be in existence since the formation of the soil and stone. An application of myth takes us beyond historical and aesthetic realms of literary study back to the beginning of human kind's oldest ritual and beliefs and deep into our hearts. Tharu ethnic groups believe in this myth and remember at Astimki festival. They worship all plants, animals and every side throughout the Astimki songs. They put Horse, Elephant, Tiger, and Snake made of soil; plants, herbs, and Gurbaba<sup>6</sup> as a first human being on the earth placed in the shrine. They believe in all the entities have authority so; they offer wine and milk to please all the power of the world to make their life happy. Tradition with all its baggage of myths and rituals offers to the characters a sure stay, where people would find not only success but also permanent peace of mind. Various myths reveal different secret of the world, human behaviour, culture and tradition. As Joseph Campbell states:

The mystery of the universe and the wonder of the temple of the world are what speak to us through all myths and rites—as well as the great effort of man to bring his individual life into concord with the whole. And the imagery by which this mystery, wonder, and effort have been rendered in the recorded traditions of mankind is so marvelously constant—in spite of all the varieties of local life and culture—that we well may wonder whether it may not simply be coeval with the human mind. (109)

Through festivals and traditions inner reality of specific task is represented through action which is revealed in various myths. Secret of earth and different rites are discovered through separate stories. Tharu ethnic groups' myth exposes the reason of special occasions. Creation myth exposes the process of creating the world along with different entities, plants and animals. This myth represents unique steps of development of earth through traditional Tharu

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<sup>6</sup> For Tharu ethnic people Gurbaba is the first human being in the earth.

song. This myth depicts the psychology of a cultural group that unites them in a form or belief system.

Most of the people in modern time are imprisoned by worldly things. For the worldly things, they do inferior work too. They forget tradition, culture, ritual humanity, theology, etc. Myths, culture, festivals and tradition teach us humanity. If there is humanity, there is peace of mind. Tharu people worship all the entities and supernatural power for their peace of mind which is reflected through this Astimki song:

Firstly I remember the divine Sun.

Oh divine Sun God, please brace me

Secondly, I remember the divine Moon.

Oh divine Moon, please brace me.

Thirdly I remember the Prophet...

In the East, I remember the east god...

In the North, I remember the dwelling of Lord Ganga...

In the west, I remember the holy shrine of Devi...

In the South, I remember almighty Hanuman...

In Sky, I remember the sky god...

Under Earth, I remember Lord Bashu's shrine...

Secondly, I remember the landscape and entire land organism...

At starting point, Tharu people worship divine powers to save from negative power. They start to remember from divine Sun and then other powers Moon, earth, sky, under earth and powers of every direction.

They also try to praise all human beings' constructed structures and ask for not to harm them.

Thirdly, I remember Lord Harikabilash...



Now I remember the goddess of Kuwabhar...

Thirteenthly, I remember the goddess of Deukurha...

Now, I remember the goddess of 'Pigeon's Cave'...

Now, I remember the goddess of Kosham...

Now, I remember the god Thakur Baba...

Thirdly, I remember my entire divines.

Indigenous Tharu people also remember all the powers which are believed to be in concrete structure. Thakur Baba and Kuwabhar are human constructed structure whom they believe that those powers can fulfill human's hope and can harm too. Deukurha stands for water god, Pigeon cave's stands for goddess of land and Kosham goddess is plant god that Tharu people worship to secure their life from various powers. Then they remember all living and nonliving beings;

Those gods whom I remember

May I get the chance to serve them.

Those gods whom I miss to remember

Please forgive me.

All deities, please listen to my prayers.

Please remind, if I have forgotten any prayers.

Hey, my entire villagers please listen to my request.

If my words are mistaken, please forgive me. (Tharu 32-33, My translation)

Tharu people try to praise all the power in the universe to spend their life happily. Tradition is more influential than earned wisdom. Their culture, tradition, ritual, and theology have been managed scientifically by their ancestors. It has natural knowledge/ wisdom and that usual knowledge has a scientific reason too. Various myths and traditions help a people to unite in a group. Tradition, ritual, culture, theology etc. have collective value in human life and the

human soul. If people go far from these things they fall into an abyss of immense loneliness, and the same invades the human soul. Tradition, ritual, culture, and human psychology have a close relationship with one another.

Tharu people worship God Krishna and his childhood and his helping nature which are depicted through Astimki songs along with the deities of all directions, plants, animals and power existed in the world. The identity of Tharu people is related to nature and they had consciously tried their best to construct their own identity. Identity is the production of discourses and regulates the individuals' worldly conception and perception. Distinct type of rituals, festivals, and lifestyle set the mentality and behaviour of indigenous Tharu people in both physical and spiritual level. Identity itself is not the product of origin rather it is the way of representation in the society. Identity is various according to the context determined. Identity itself is not functional but it is functional and circular because of representation of myth, culture and society. Social, cultural and political aspects are based on circulatory mythical representational attitude and practices. In this sense, Coupe Laurence says:

We will discover that 'mythology' – the body of inherited myths in any culture-is an important element of literature, and that literature is a means of extending mythology. This is, literary works may be regarded as 'mythopoeic', tending to create or recreate certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world. Thus cultural and literary criticism may involve 'mythography', or the interpretation of myth, given that the mythic is an important dimension of cultural and literary experience. (4)

Every cultural group has their own type of myths which represent their world view. To depict these myths in literary work they recreate it.

Myth represented through traditional Tharu songs helps to extend the myth through the generation to generation and also shows the importance of certain culture. The song plays

a role to express their own belief about the world and human relation with nature. Certain myths are depicted in a different way through songs to extend their value and culture. As Northrop Frye says:

Every work of literature that we continue to read and study meant something to its own time and sometime quite different to us. Both poles of understanding have to be kept in mind. If we disregard its original historical context, we are simply kidnapping it into the orbit of our own concerns; if we disregard its relevance to ourselves, we are leaving it unrevived in the morgue of the past. But if we keep the two together and in balance, we are stabilizing a tradition, and are engaged in a process which includes ourselves and yet is something bigger than ourselves. One end of this process is a creation, and the other end a recreation. (67)

Frye argues that different myths create the meaning and identity to stabilize our culture and tradition. He concerns the myth for creation and creativity of humanity and culture. Some story depicts the world as it is at present and some folktales represent beyond reality, which is related to psychology and spirituality. Myth can be utilized by maintaining equal distance to make it source for tradition, rites and festivals. It is related to human beings' origin, past, and tradition. Believing in superstitions and not believing in myth; both can result in negative consequences for the society. Myth expresses the psychology of a people that helps to maintain balance in society by creating fear for immoral activities. In absence of such stories results in disorder in community. Each and everything is just a manipulation of an already existing entity. People don't have the capacities to establish new rules especially on culture and tradition because we have a kind of fear. Previously expressed knowledge and belief system about the world and human relation with other entities through songs and in oral form is recreated. Myth affects the life of human being whether or not the inheritor of myth is aware; the myth remains latent in the very language the subject uses. To make sure about

their existence, to identify own cultural group, they create a new culture within the myth; they recreate their identity.

Different myths are represented through different songs to express their feeling and reality of human being according to the situation. Other types of sources are not long lasting to give continuity for a long time. Such as oral myths lost when a person dies who knows the myth and its importance. Conveying oral myth depends on the mood of the person who knows the story, without any occasion. People sing different songs according to occasion and festivals. So, songs are repeated again and again throughout the year which helps people to know the songs and its content about myth, daily activities, and food items. Above mentioned features are attached with traditional Tharu songs that contain livelihood of Tharu people including food items, the way of farming in agriculture and forest dependent life. They depict *Isaru* as their ancestor to represent their livelihood. All these are things represent in below mentioned Tharu song:

Tapping the steps Isaru moves forward  
 Then he reached to dense forest...  
 And he found Panan wood...  
 Then he chopped the middle to make plow and yoke...  
 And chopped the wood with a golden axe to make plow.  
 When Isaru finish chopping the plow  
 Then he gives the shape the plow with the golden peen...  
 Then he found the Ginen wood...  
 Then he chopped middle to make the scaling wood and handle.  
 Then he makes the plate out of Mahureni leaf.  
 And he makes a small plate out of Saal leaf...  
 Krishna marks the border line from east west.

Then he starts plugging from north to south. (Tharu 35-37, My translation)

Tharu culture and lifestyle is represented throughout their song. The process of making equipment for agriculture, types of food making process and way of ploughing the farm is depicted in traditional Tharu songs which are based on their own myth. Tharu ethnic group identify themselves with agriculture and nature. Their lifestyle is based on forest and river like sources. The song represents Tharu life that they used to depend on the forest to make tools for farming to everyday necessary things such as food, vegetables, fruits and different types of fishes and other water animals from the river. Above mentioned song represents male lead outside work. Inside homework is assigned to female is depicted in this song, 'wake up my wife and sweep the yard'(Tharu 5, My translation). Female have take care the house and food items for the family members. 'Housewife cooks rice,/ she cooks pulse of lentil ad kidney bean' (Tharu 35, My translation). Gender-based activities are represented within myth through traditional Tharu songs. Responsibility feeding family is taken by women.

Traditional Tharu songs display a unique interest on the issue of identity through culture, songs and myth because it includes the whole range of ideas and factors determining the identity of Tharu people throughout the socio-cultural, economic phenomenon. Identities are complex which are themselves the product of socio-political and cultural practices.

Therefore, identity is one of the processes of establishing one's existence in society. They continue their old cultural values and belief system to make their identity. The story represents throughout the songs give the impact of the situation and lifestyle of the Tharu ethnic group. In this reference, Devdutt Pattnaik says:

Myth constructs a worldview for a people. It serves as a looking glass through which life comes to order. In other words it constructs a paradigm so that the apparently chaotic world comes to possess a structure. Every culture has its own set of sacred narratives, symbols, and rituals to condition the mind of its people and make them

look at the world in a particular way. In this way every culture distinguishes itself from the rest by having its own paradigm. (34)

Cultural groups' belief system sets the viewpoint about the world that how they take other things' origin and human relation with other entities. Mindset of certain cultural group is revealed through distinct myth. The myth illustrated in the song shows the relation between Tharu ethnic group and forest, and the way of farming and lifestyle. They have their own story about the origin of earth and lifestyle that helps to differentiate them from other cultural groups. Astimki song includes the Tharu belief about the earth and other songs depict physicality and spirituality of Tharu ethnic group.

Identity is not the matter of individual choice rather it is the matter of social concern. Tharu ethnic group has its own types of myths about daily activities and occupation which is different from others that construct Tharu identity. Tharu people depend on agriculture and other natural resources. They believe in hardworking without neglecting others' existence.

Tharu as an ethnic group has its own language, which has its own codes and symbols. Ethnic group recognize for communal feeling; they do for the welfare of the community rather than individual's goodness. They share collective memories as a ritual which explores distinct myths. Different myths and rituals are represented through traditional Tharu songs. Tharu 'Hurdungwa' songs contain the incidents of Mahabharata that is given below:

Arjun shoots Mohan arrow which King Tiriya denies...

Dhuruj shoots the first arrow that destroyed the chariot...

Dhuruj shoots second arrow that disappears and third arrow kills the ox...

Padumi shoots the 'Gada' arrow and falls down the Chakra arrow. (Tharu 3-4, My translation)

Tharu people sing different songs according to season and festivals which contains different myths; one of them is Mahabharata. They relate this myth as the source to control and live

their life happily by leaving greed for power. Tharu people believe that they are descendent of Pandvas of Mahabharata especially 'Bhim'. This myth is enacted through song and dance which is known as Barka Naach. There are various types of myths which are different from each other but all myths express the origin of culture and ritual of the Tharu people. In the primordial time, these myths, tradition, dream, culture, ritual, religion etc. were supposed to be same in each society but later on people make them individual or their group's private culture, private religion, private ritual etc. In this sense we can say that we are not creating any new thing just copying the tradition created by the ancestor.

Myths are created in a particular context. In the beginning, the myth makers who were in power and rich in knowledge, they created many myths in their favour in different context. The ancestors who use great imaginative power in the beginning and the later generation they copy it. Mircea Eliade explains reason of change in myths, "The variants of a myth or of a folklore there can be and have been recorded but not the invention of a new myth. Recorded myths are always more or less marked modification of a pre-existing text" (146). Various types of myths are created according to the situation and necessities that is based on ancient myths which is portrayed through different medium such as poem, song, novel etc. Eliade further explains:

This is not to say, of course, that these great mythologies have lost their 'Mythical substance' and are only 'literatures' or that traditions are archaic societies were not rehandled by priests or bards. Just like the great mythologies that were finally transmitted as written texts, the 'primitive' mythologies discovered by the earliest travelers, missionaries, and ethnographers in the 'oral' stage, have a 'history'. In other words, they have been transformed and enriched in the course of the ages under the influence of higher cultures or through the creative genius of exceptionally gifted individuals. (4)

Every cultural group has its own types of myth which determines their culture, tradition and daily practices. On the basis of national policy, circumstances and relation with other religion and ethnic group people, certain changes appears in the myth and culture which is reflected in the literature. Tharu people have different songs for different occasion with different themes for celebration of happiness and to forget miseries and painful moments. To situate with contemporary situation, they adopt a new way of celebrating culture which is also reflected through traditional Tharu songs. Through Mahabharata they discuss over family issues – how much is to be shared, what is one's own, what belongs to the other. In Tharu version of Mahabharata, Bhim hits the eye of the bird and carry away Draupadi to become the wife of Pandavas.

Myth plays an essential role in human life. Such myths are hidden in the human mind and some myths are depicted in traditional Tharu songs which transfer from generation to generation. Every society/culture has made its myth, and each myth has a close relationship with each other. Religion, ritual, dream, experience etc. all these are the myth and they interpret them in their own favour that creates the situation of primordial time. In the ancient time, a myth used to work as a law, and somehow it works now as well. That is why; religion, dream, experience, etc. have the direct link to day to day life of a human being. Tharu songs evolve a symbol from out of a tension between the archetypal and mythical experience, and a living response to life and its values. Death ritual also helps to unite a people and establish the relationship between human, nature, and society. Death ritual represented in the songs is:

Sirwa and Pati made of Saal wood.

Four stands of my husband's bed made up of Panan wood.

Brother and nephew weep.

She opens her hair and weeps whose husband died.

Four people carry the dead bed together.



They take my husband to the beach sides of Yamuna River living me alone.

They make a funeral pyre in north-south direction.

My husband has spiritual doors in east-west direction...

The Grave is fired in four corners.

They cover my husband with shroud. (Tharu 10, My translation)

Rituals assist people for self-reflexive in the mass as who am I? Where do I belong to? and how these songs create a sense of harmony in the community. Tharu ethnic group have a distinct way for the death ritual and other occasions. They have songs for death to birth and for other occasions and seasons also. This song represents the rituals of taking the dead body to the graveyard and last activities. They either bury or fire their dead body with music to complete the funeral. These processes create the identity of the Tharu ethnic group that differentiates from other cultural groups. Myths, rituals, cultures, and phenomenon etc. creates the identity. This ritual assists for the reflexive for identity formation in the mass. They have a common interest and aim to celebrate distinct rituals than other people. Myth creates certain norms, values, and customs in the community which gives the sense of identity. Myths are absorbed deeply by culture as mediums to attain perfection in life and achieve goals in a career.

Tharu ethnic group has their own types of lifestyle, celebrating festivals and rituals. They carry their dead body on opposite bed to take it at graveyard by four people in every corner. They used to bury or fire the dead body in a certain position. Human activity is based on myth. Every rituals, festivals and culture depends on the myth that is represented through action. Robert A. Segal says, "Myth does not stand by itself but is tied to ritual. Myth is not just a statement but an action. The least compromising form of the theory maintains that all myths have accompanying rituals and all rituals accompanying myths" (61). Rituals highlight the formation of the society for people' prosperity, reminiscence of past and to carry on in the

future by performing orally or enactment. Most of the Tharu myths are represented through traditional songs to save the myth for next the generation. Songs are sung on special occasions and enacted at her time of celebrating festivals and rituals. Different songs contain different myths which are signed in different time and seasons that is represented through enactment on different festivals and cultures which show the relationship between different entities. Dead ritual represents the universe, mother-nature, and ancestors, which leads the fantasy myth through performance. Devdutt Pattanaik says:

Myth is all about communication; it is a special kind of communication that establishes a relationship between the macrocosm (universe), mesocosm (society) and microcosm (human). Communication is established through three avenues: narratives, symbols, rituals. Narratives, symbols and rituals that express myth may be seen as the vocabulary of a religion; they construct one communal belief that binds a people. (14)

Myth establishes the relationship between human, society and universe. It brings cultural group in a line that share same ideology about the phenomenon. Separate myth symbolizes unique tradition and culture. Various rites are organized to communicate and bring together people of a cultural group. For that propose Joseph Campbell also says:

The myths and rites constitute a mesocosm—a mediating, middle cosmos, through which the microcosm of the individual is brought into relation to the macrocosm of the all. And this mesocosm is the entire context of the body social, which is thus a kind of living poem, hymn, or icon of mud and reeds, and of flesh and blood, and of dreams, fashioned into the art form of the hieratic city state. (150)

Traditions, cultures and rituals gather people to form a group which establishes individuals' relation with universe. It is society that executes the relation between individual and the world and maintains balance by making an individual to follow certain process relating with nature. Various types of story of the Tharu ethnic group reveal the lifestyle and belief system

through the songs that shows the relation of Tharu people with nature. Traditions, festivals and rituals are enacted on special occasions. Songs play the role to remember such process of special events for present and future generation by recalling the tradition of their past. As the myth of death funeral is represented through the traditional Tharu song, it is enacted at the time of the actual death funeral. It connects human with society and universe physically and psychologically or spiritually that it reveals that the dead person has a spiritual door and at last we have to mingle in the earth. Tharu people make use of myth, mythologies and folklore as their source for their songs, not for the glorification of the chosen myth but to relate the myth to the present and to the past beliefs found in these myths. Certain ritual that is enacted in a cultural group helps to unite a people and establish the relationship between human and universe. Tharu people govern ritual which celebrates in the community which explores distinct myth through their body movement, customs and their acts.

Every cultural group has a distinct myth for distinct occasions which is celebrated differently. People represent a traditional form of myth in action on special occasions. They remember all the deities, nature and ancestors and the universe rather than any idol to create harmony in the community. It explores relevance of ancient time to the new generation as well as help to form their identity. Myth gives life to belief system, identity, and civilization of that scenario. Myth can never be dismissed as belonging to the past because a great deal of its charm lies in its principal quality – that of repeating itself. Thus the old aged myth reappears in disguise form to confront us. Myths and folktales always interpret human life, and in the contemporary context, they interpret modern sensibility or the current consciousness.

Tharu ethnic group prays the nature, ancestors, and universe for the betterment of harvest, health, and everyday life. These culture, tradition, religion, and myth are the thing which underlie in the human mind as a member of a certain cultural or civilizational legacy.

In the song, 'Siu Phulwar', the myth about Shiva is represented that is sung at the time of Tharu marriage. The sample of the song which reflects the myth of Lord Shiva is given below:

Orchard garden is created by many leaves, and flower garden is created with the help of creation.

By picking up, flowers make a bunch.

Gauri worships Lord Shiva with her friends together.

She puts flowers in the house and prays for accept.

She takes flower and Tika.

Parvati worships Lord Shiva to merry with him.

Other people worship other goddess, Parvati worships Lord Shiva.

'I will meet Lord Shiva', Parvati worship Lord Shiva. (Tharu 12-13, My translation)

Above mentioned song is part of 'Siu Phulwar'<sup>7</sup> which is related to the marriage of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Tharu ethnic group relate the story of Shiva and Parvati with their won life and they sing the story especially at the time of their marriage. Along with this myth, they wish for the couple for their better life by comparing their life with plants and universe throughout the songs at the wedding ceremony. Myth represented in oral form or through different songs is enacted on special occasions or in rituals. The myth about Lord Shiva, sung through traditional Tharu song is represented at the wedding in action. Tharu songs sustain Tharu ideology and culture in literature and make Tharu people aware of their tradition and rites. Tharu people have different occasions that offer different myths which are represented separately.

They had own types of background, myths and institution that they celebrate in their own way which is depicted in the songs. They worship nature, universe and ancestors for

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<sup>7</sup> The song about Shiva and Parvati which is sung at wedding ceremony.

their better life by maintaining good relation with nature and society. At the time of action to represent myth as in oral form or in the song, people unite to celebrate the occasion or rituals in the primitive form. As J. G. Frazer says, "The real value of such tales is that they serve to illustrate the nature of the worship by providing a standard with which to compare it; and further, that they bear witness indirectly to its venerable age by showing that the true origin was lost in the mists of a fabulous antiquity" (7). Myths reflect the necessity of worshipping the God and goddesses and give the incident to show the glimpse of the ancient time to show the reason for celebrating a certain occasion, festival or ritual. Myths disclose the purpose of certain rite by establishing the situation of primordial time. Different tales show the pieces evidence of past that why and to whom people are worshipping. Human being communicates in concrete world with spiritual world through different myths which are applied in various festival, occasion and rituals. "Overall, the myth seems interested more in his relations with other than in either his or their impact on the physical world" (21) as Robert A. Segal illustrated in his book *Myth-A Very Short Introduction*. Myths results in a situation to believe on various powers to sustain in physical world peacefully. It generates a kind of fear in human mind that soul can suffer according to the activities of physical world. Tharu ethnic groups' belief upon formation of world with various entities and its power and equal treatment for all is depicted in Tharu songs through various myths. Ethnic group has its own types of myth about the origin of the earth and other entities and such myths place human life in primitive time. Throughout the time as they got to know different phenomenon and tales about the formation of the universe, myths about family relationship and values; and experience of human life with whom they establish their relation. A people follow the activities what their ancestors have been doing without knowing the purpose and importance of such occasions and rituals. However, identity is related to the combination of social,

economic and cultural factors, and not alone to challenge the statements of cultural and social values of the dominant group.

Though the process of identity construction is always in process of changing, it never reaches in its complete state. Because the features like myth and identity are socially constructed. They cannot adopt all the aspects of high caste culture by eliminating their own tradition. "The foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities – diet or marriage, work or education; art or wisdom" (8) as Mircea Eliade portrays in his book *Myth and Reality*. Myths represent the history of human life that they celebrate those incidents in certain festivals to make themselves at that time through action. To make themselves in ancient time they celebrate different occasions and rituals which is reflected in various myths. Tharu indigenous people have various kinds of songs from birth to death, marriage to every festival that contains history, identity and civilization. Traditions, myths, festivals and rituals give the sense of mutual relationship to the people. These culture, tradition, religion, and myth are the things which underlie in the human mind as a member of a certain culture or civilizational legacy. The existence of identity is always in process, and myth is always transformed. Stuart Hall says that identity is not constant, it changes according to national policy, education, environment that help a people to sustain in different situation. For Hall:

It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the point of identification, the unstable points of identification of structure, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'.

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Identity is created through the relation with other caste or ethnic group people that helps to differentiate from other people or they relate themselves with a certain group. It is constituted by the means of representation of myth, orality, and product of discourses. They are created through socio-political, cultural, mythical, racial, sexual and gender like aspects of human society. Every ethnic group has a distinct culture which depends on the myth that they used to share through different medium such as folklore, songs or through action to establish their identity. Culture is the base to identify with a certain cultural group that depends on myths which are shared from ancient time. Folklore, rituals and festivals all contain separate myths which determine the culture, everyday life of people to create the identity. Identity depends on tradition, culture and rituals and these things are acted as the myth is described.

Myths represent belief system of specific cultural group. They share their understanding of the world and existence of various entities through various myths that are illustrated in traditional Tharu songs. Songs work as a medium to extend various myths and its values that help to create and recreate various narratives to maintain balance and peace in the human mind, relation and behaviour. Tharu ethnic group has their type of narrative, symbols and rituals that differentiate them from people other religions to construct their identity. It helps to establish relation between human, society and universe that is enacted in various rituals, festivals and occasions.

The overall emphasis of this research on Tharu songs collected by Kalram Tharu in his book *Pothy* rests on the issue of identity formation of Tharu ethnic group based on myth, as how it is exposed and constructed in the oblique expression and situation of Tharu people at present social setting. As other ethnic group people, indigenous Tharu has their type of myths about the origin of earth along with other entities that differentiate them from other groups of people to form the identity. Tharu myths represent their belief upon supernatural power and superstitions that leads to create a discourse about Tharu life, art and culture.

Traditional Tharu songs become a medium to convey their values and traditions for upcoming generations that contain various myths and represented through action in different rituals, festivals and occasions.



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