

## Atwari: Myth and Reality The Tharus Live By

### Abstract

*This research entitled, " Atwari: Myth and Reality The Tharus Live By " deals with the study of the relationship between myth and culture through Atwari performance. Atwari is a representation of Tharu myth which demonstrates origin of Tharu's typical communal culture and moral behaviors through its performance. Atwari is not only the festivals of entertainment and merrymaking; rather it embodies the myth that a story of origin of Tharus and their cultures. It leads them the performance of customs and tradition for the formation of their cultural identity. Lastly, myth of Atwari does not only narrate the story of origin of Tharu's culture but also embodies primordial life and development of their civilization where they spunk their mutual relationship, cultures, foods, place of origin, life style and traditional beliefs, assumptions and values. These elements are sources of identity to be Tharus and a member of the Tharu community.*

Key Words: Atwari, rituals, myth, Tharus, performance, belief

This research seeks to explore the meanings of myths in Tharu's *Atwari* which tells the stories of Tharu's relationship with their myth and culture. This research also attempts to advent the issues of how *Atwari* assists Tharu people to find the principles and themes of the mythology and the folktales. Narration of *Atwari* creates the socio-cultural context, particularly of Tharu community and their identity is formed through myth and its ritual performance. Moreover, this research particularly brings into discussion the connection of the mythology and Tharu's ritual life in their community.

Myth of *Atwari* is a source of cultural beliefs and values of the Tharu community. The researcher further argues that myths are included deeply in the Tharu culture as a way to gain the perfection and to achieve goal in career in their life. It is stated that when an individual fails to touch the goal through the materials and human attempts, he/ she uses such

mythological prescriptions, and in many cases comes out of the problems. Whatever is the logic behind it, such myths have undoubtedly psychological impacts on the people of the Tharu community, thereby leading them to unique experience.

Photographic images assist to interpret *Atwari* myth and culture to disclose the cultural beliefs and the moral behaviors in Tharu's *Atwari* to reply the posed research questions. What is the moral implication of Tharu's *Atwari*? What is the significance of preparing varieties of the foods and the beverages in Tharu's *Atwari*? Why do only males of the Tharu community hold fasting in *Atwari*? Why is familial union in the culture and in performance important? The major connection of the photos, thus, is to explore these issues; the researcher proves that, "*Atwari: Myth and Reality The Tharus Live By*" by using the mythological narration, the folktales and other materials. The photos are analyzed as a primary text that tells the story of bringing together to the divine beings and the human beings.

Tharus are culturally rich due to the varieties of the cultural performances, food items, folk traditions, deities, handicrafts, arts and music in which the mythical narrations are relevant. Although they are living among various races, castes, ethnic groups and the cultures, they have endowed unique cultural beliefs, rituals, social customs, languages, foods, dresses, and lifestyles that portray their unique identity than other communities. Tharus are one of the significant cultural groups from the Terai. The settlement of these people lies in the inner Terai that stretches from the Mechi in the East and the Mahakali in the West sharing the border with the neighboring country India. It is the evident that Tharus who claim themselves as the people living in the Terai has been there since antiquity. They have established their culture and the civilization. They also have their own methods of purifying an individual and shaping the ways of life. They enjoy several festivals such as Maghi, *Atwari*, Gurhi, Astimki, Hardahawa, Hareri, Fagui and Nikasi Poojah. From birth till death

Tharus perform different rituals that carry unique Tharu identity. They celebrate several festivals which carry the moral and the primordial importance. One of them is *Atwari* which is only performed in the Tharu community of Nepal. For Tharu community, *Atwari* is one of the second biggest festivals after the Maghi. It usually falls on Sunday in the month of Bhadra two weeks after Astimki or after dark night. Whatever it is, this festival is celebrated on the first Sunday of 'Kushe Aunshi' to wish for the longevity, healthy and prosperous life of the people of the Tharu community. This festival is celebrated only by males because mainly, males of the community seem fasting on this day. But as the time changes, gradually, females also are taking interest and are involving in this festival at present. The culture of celebrating *Atwari* differs from place to place because people have different concepts and understanding about it with diverse cultural, religious, and social background of Tharus and their community. *Atwari* carries the religious and the cultural values in which god Bhima is given a special position in Tharu's culture and worshipped during this festival among Pandavas. The reason behind worshipping him is his power and courage to defeat the demons or evil forces of the community.

There are different myths which tell about the cultural performance of *Atwari*. It is an oral story or narration which a community people attempt to transfer from past to the future generation. Laurence Coupe in his book '*Myth*' states, "Myth originally is meant 'speech' or 'word'" (9). Myth is a folktale which is related to a communal cultural act performed still at present. *Atwari* ritual is performed in the Tharu community every year which was created in the past. In the similar sense, in *Critical Theory Today* a structural anthropologist Levi Strauss argues:

It is commonly taken to be words in the form of a story that is read or heard. It is an explanation of what is presently happening in the ritual, not only of how it arose. The primary meaning of it is the spoken correlative of the acted rite or the things done.

Actually, the myths seem to be different because they are created into the different versions or forms in different communities from the same myth which distinguishes those human beings from different cultures. There is no "true" or "original" version of any myth. Each versions of a given myth is equally valid because each embodies the attempt of all structure to make sense out of an otherwise chaotic world. (quoted by Tyson 216)

Here, Strauss argues that myth tells about origin of particular culture of the community. His statement is that every myth has created from single myth that means myth of *Atwari* is a version of myths. These myths are only different at the level of surface phenomena of the cultures but they seek common rules and structures that have equal important and valid for the community and its people. The myths of *Atwari* share different structures of consciousness of Tharus that project in the formation of structurally similar myths with Hindu myths. Some regard that myth of *Atwari* is a version of myth of the Mahabharata and some believe it is taken from the Shreematbhagawata. Being a version of the myth, it is a Mytheme or it is a fundamental unit of the myth. In the same manner, Lucky Chaudhary writes in "Chinhai Naisekal Tharu Atwari Parba" about oral tradition of telling the myth of *Atwari*. He argues, "*Atwari* tale is related to Mahabharata which is oral narration of people of the Tharu community" (my translation; 1). Chaudhary says that oral story is created in certain community similar to another. Whatever is its origin, it gives Tharus' ritual its original and sole meaning. These myths are narrated to describe about the origin of Tharu's *Atwari* and rituals in the community. There are different myths that give ideas about Tharu's *Atwari* and its origin through the events in the cosmogony time. In this regard, Mercia Eliade believes that all the myths have same origin. Her argument is that myths have same structure although the content may be different. She asserts:

We have found it is necessary to dwell on this point to avoid leaving the impression that all myths and rites of "return to the origin" are on the same plane. To be sure, symbolism is the same; but context is different, and it is intention shown by the context that gives us true meaning in each case. As we saw, from the point of view of structure it is possible to homologize the parental darkness of initiation . . . Night before creation. (Myth and Reality 82)

As stated by Eliade, Tharus have varied myths about the commencement of *Atwari* but the gist is same i.e. wishing for prosperity and good health of their relatives and community members. *Atwari* festival is about the creation of the cultural phenomenon. Myth describes cultural phenomenon created in the sacred time by god or near god as a communal culture till now in the community. It helps to regenerate relationship among community people. Tharu people hear folktales told by their elders and they think that the performance of *Atwari* should be as the myth says. Then, they feel that it is really a process which takes them to the time when myth took place or the time of the origin of the cultural beliefs and values. The cultural performance of *Atwari* helps the mythical tales to be a cultural tradition of the community. The cultural performances provide the sufficient information about the birth of myth and its cultural meaning to community people.

According to a myth, from Dwaper age only Tharus are the inhabitant of the Terai region of Nepal. They settled near the deep forests and beside the rivers by growing the crops and fruits for the foods. Then, king of the Tharus was "Dangisaran Tharu" (Gorkhapatra 12). There was also a demon called Bakasu who used to harass and threaten to Tharu people. That's why; there was a battle between Bhima (fought for king Dangisharan) and Bakasu because Bakasu ate and destroyed the crops, fruits of the field and Tharu people also. He demanded a full wagon loaded varieties of the foods, breads, fruits and the vegetables to eat. The community people decided to prepare as per his demand and one of them took it to him

by driving the wagon to Bakasu but he /she never returned to the community because Bakasu ate all the breads, fruits and cart driver too. Such a harassment and threat kept on for long time. Between such topsy- turvy, Pandavas were exiled and came to live in the Tharu community. One day, a full wagon recipe of the foods, breads, vegetables and the fruits were ready to be taken to Bakasu but a couple was quarreling to go one of them first. They knew

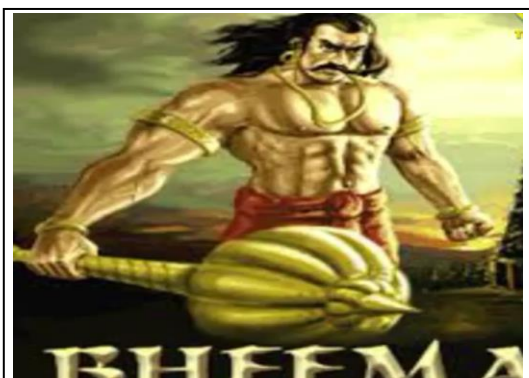


Photo 1: Idol of god Bhima  
(Photo by researcher)

that death was waiting for them. Kunti, mother of Pandavas heard and they explained the cause of the quarrel to her and then she called Bhima. At the same time, Bhima was preparing bread but he left it on the oven as soon as possible. Kunti ordered Bhima to go immediately to Bakasu and while Bhima was driving a cart, he

ate all the food items before he reached to the demon. When Bakasu asked him about the foods that he demanded, he replied that he had eaten it. For that reason, there occurred fight between them and Bakasu was killed. When Bhima returned to the community after killing Bakasu he ate that one side cooked bread which he had left on the oven. The same day was Sunday. Bhima got victory over a demon on this day. He helped Dangisharan Tharu to kill



Photo 2: A half cooked bread offered to god

Bhima (Photo by researcher)

a demon and saved whole Tharu people. From that day, *Atwari* is celebrated with merrymaking in the Tharu community. So, in respect of Bhima, he is worshipped and the first bread, cooked only one side, is offered in his name.

Representation of myth of *Atwari*

signifies Tharu's cultural behaviors through its celebration. To talk about *Atwari*, people view

regarding its mythical meaning and significance of myth and origin of *Atwari* and its patterns of the celebration in the Tharu community to worship Bhima. A Pandavas brother Bhima who is taken as powerful god and he is worshipped in a typical communal methods in his memory in the community. The cultural critic and expert Santosh Dahit in his article 'Tharu Samudayame Atwarik Chintan' narrates the mythical event in such a way:

*Atwari* festival is related to a primordial event in which Bhima, a Pandavas brother and King Dangisharan Tharu (Gorkhapatra 12) were friends. When Pandavas had been to Kakre Bihar of Surkhet, Dang state of Dangisharan Tharu was attacked by the enemies and Bhima helped him in the battle and won it. So, in the memory of Bhima's contribution and for his respect *Atwari* is performed. (my translation; 12)

Myth of *Atwari* narrates that Pandavas came to the Terai region of Nepal in the age of antiquity. At the time, Tharu community had been settled there. When they arrived to Tharu settlement, Tharus community was harassed by a demon, Bakasu. Then Dangisharan Tharu, a Tharu king asked Bhima for help and Bhima fought for Tharu people to win the battle because they might have felt their responsibility to protect the people of the community. Bhima won the battle and became the hero of Tharu people. So, Tharus gave him the divine position and still worship him as the god on the occasion of *Atwari* festival. In this respect, Mercia Eliade asserts, ". . . this scenario implies the motif of the "perfection of the beginning" and that after certain historical moment, this motif becomes "movable"; it can now signify not only the perfection of the beginning in the mythical past but also the perfection that is to come in the future . . ." (*Myth and Reality* 75). Primordial moment has great importance for the ancestors and it helps people of Tharu community to lead their life better. So, they want to continue the perfect life of their new generations. For this, they want to transfer the cultural beliefs, values and the traditions which give them knowledge about the origin of the ritual and purified to the community with cultural performance.

In similar manner, Som Demanraura, a cultural critic expresses his views about *Atwari*, a significant festival of Tharu people in the community. His article "Barka Atwari" mentions that worshipping to Bhima during the occasion indicates the praise of power and pelf. He, in relation to this, says:

For the Tharu community of the Western Nepal, *Atwari* is one of the prominent festivals among all. It is taken as a symbol of power and security. They celebrate it as symbol of victory and it helps to emerge in them the feeling of love and the brotherhood in their community and relatives. Being culturally and religiously important, in *Atwari*, Bhima is given a special position. Therefore, they worship him.  
(my translation; 12)

The Tharu community for Tharu people is like a treasure land of the culture because Bhima is worshipped who symbolizes the power and inspiration of all Tharu people for their bravery. They worship an idol of god Bhima because they want to be robust and courageous that can defeat all demonic power for the betterment of the people of the community. On the same concern Mercia Eliade mentions, ". . . ; we get the impression that their powers are due in part to their containing the rudiments of the cosmology" (*Myth and Reality* 36). Here, Eliade says that *Atwari* is the result of the godly powers. By this impression, they want to bring the prosperity and the peaceful environment to enhance the moral and the cultural behaviors in *Atwari*. On this occasion, they also attempt to grow the mutual relation among the native people.

Another mythical narration which conceptualized it is relevant to Tharu's *Atwari*, it is about the born of the Sun. Tharus worship to the sun on the same Sunday. This myth tells how *Atwari* began to perform in the Tharu community of the Western Nepal. According to the Shrimatbhagwata Puran, prince Devdutta was the son of the king Santanu and other three brothers were there. Three brothers except Devdutta were contracted from disabilities,



Bhismapitahma from blindness, Pandu from Leprosy and Bidur from the skin diseases.

Among them, Devdutta was a real worshipper of the sun because there was a religious belief that those who worship the sun he would never suffer from the diseases and gains robust, healthy and the sound body. It is also believed that Tharus of Nepal are the descendants of the prince Devdutta and they are following the traditions created by their ancestors. They also regard that the Sun was born on Sunday in the month of Bhadra after the dark night (aunshi) to spark the whole world with its light. For the support of this statement, Eliade enumerates that, "It would be hard to find a more eloquent example of belief that each new birth represents a symbolic recapitulation of the cosmogony and of tribe's mythical history" (*Myth and Reality* 33). As Eliade explains about the birth of sun, she provides reason that Tharus are its worshippers because they are the generations of Devdutta.

*Atwari* myth has symbolic representation related to cosmogony in Tharu culture. Tharu people use the fire or hot red coal as an image of the sun. It presents the historical background of Tharus by talking about the sun and the nature worshippers Tharu people. Similarly, Chhabilal Koipla expresses, "A sun is a main source of the fire. It is itself the fire. They put the fire and firstly use for Agyari<sup>1</sup> to hot red coal as the sun" (Tharujatike Atwari Parba: Ek Charcha 2). Kopila expresses that the fire symbolizes to the sun. It provides energy for the living beings and protects them from the dark. That's the reason Tharus worship to the sun in *Atwari* on the day of Sunday. While narrating the myth of the Sun and the ritual performances of *Atwari*, it narrates the history of Tharus. On the similar sense, Clifford Geertz interprets that, "Culture . . . it denotes historically transmitted patterns of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms . . . and developed their knowledge and attitudes towards life" (*Interpretations of Cultures* 89). It is meant that Tharu's *Atwari* describes a history of Tharus through the myth of the Mahabharata

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<sup>1</sup> Offer something to the god of fire

and origin of the culture. The symbols represented in *Atwari* myth gives Tharu's historical and primordial meaning of the culture in human life's styles and the cultural activities inherited by the ancestors of Tharus to new generations as a social process.

Bhima and the nature god; the sun both are worshipped on Sunday that erases hollowness between the nature, the human beings and the god. It brings them on the earth and makes them the part of the community. Mainly the myths emphasize to the day of Sunday and it is named by Nepali word 'Aetbar' (i.e. Sunday). In this context, the critic of Tharu culture and the festivals Lucky Chaudhary gives the meaning of *Atwari*. He tells that, "*Atwari* is translated from the word 'Aetbar' or 'Aetbari' because it falls only on Sunday. It carries Tharu's moral identity which is only performed in the Tharu Community" (my translation; 1). So, this ritual assists for the self- reflexive acts for identity formation in the community as a descendent of Devdutta through the cultural performance. Ethnic groups recognize this festival for the communal feeling and the mutual relation among them. They take fasting for the welfare of the community rather than individual goodness. They share the collective memories in ritual acts which explores distinct myths. Tharus as an ethnic group they have their own language and customs which have their own codes and the symbols. They celebrate distinct rituals than non-Tharu people. They all have common cultural interests and aims. Tharus govern rituals in the Tharu community to explore distinct myths through their ritual activities and the foods and the beverages which they cook on this day. The basis for their cultural beliefs, values and assumptions are the myths of *Atwari*. On Sunday of Bhadra month in which *Atwari* festival falls is a prominent day of celebration of the victory of Tharu people over their enemies which initiated new culture in an ancient time. The memories of the great achievements of Tharus enforce them to enact the performance as one of the important moral cultures in the Tharu community.

The mythical representation of *Atwari* in the Tharu community signifies distinct Tharu identity and their cultural manifestation which are undergoing transformation due to the globalization. The cultural beliefs, values and the cultural performances differentiate them from other cultures to seek their unique customs. So, *Atwari* is not only the occasion to sing, dance and merrymaking; rather it embodies Tharu's history and the moral behaviors and signifies the cultural implications of Tharus. They imply socio-cultural behaviors as the communal functions whatever they inhabit. Every acts performed there, is a representation of the mythical story along with the formation of Tharu identity. Therefore, Tharu's *Atwari* carries the mythical story which helps the Tharu community to create particular ways to perform them into certain patterns as their own culture.

To observe the modes and implicit meanings of myths of *Atwari*, it is necessary to excavate depiction of Tharu's primordial life, customs and the civilization by using the performative reading of theoretical tools. It is conceptualized and symbolized to seek the underlying myth behind the performance of *Atwari* once in a year in the community among Tharus by preparing varieties of the foods and the beverages. Myths give life to the primordial identity and the civilization of the scenario. That's why; Som Demanraura in "Barka Atwari" views for its cultural and religious values. He recites, "*Atwari* poojah teaches Tharu people their religious and cultural importance for the communal performance" (my translation; 12). He says that *Atwari* has great value in the Tharu community. Geertz Clifford also relates the myth and the religion as cultural dimensions and Tharu people need to learn for them. He states, ". . . learning a myth by heart is as much as religious activity . . ." (*Interpretation of Cultures* 96). To perform any ritual, there must be the myth which depicts the context, purpose to make aware the new generations about specific aims of rituals. They transform from generation to generation through oral or by the performance like *Atwari* ritual. *Atwari* ritual performance illustrates a visual and enacted art. It means that everything

can be performed even everyday activities are performance. The performance of *Atwari* is bound within the settlement of Tharu ethnic groups. So, *Atwari* is a communal performative act.

*Atwari* performance begins from Saturday. Tharu people seem busy in preparation for the festival by fishing, grinding flour and collecting vegetables for the night's foods; 'Bhinsarya'. They pick up vegetables like Ladysfinger (Okra), Snakeguard, Pwai vegetable, and different kinds of pulses and beans grown in the yard for Monday. There is culture in the Tharu community that on Saturday some prepare the foods in the evening and some worshippers wake up after the midnight and prepare the foods with dry fish or fish curry to eat 'Bhinsarya' or 'Datkattan<sup>2</sup>' (Dar). The dry fish curry is compulsory in *Atwari* because it is regarded a special recipe in the Tharu community. Here, Shankar Lal Chaudhary, a cultural critic and the cultural leader of Tharu community, gives the sufficient information over the matter and the meaning Dar of *Atwari* in '*Scio-Economic Status of Dangaura Tharus*'. He further opines:

On Saturday before the time of Cock gives his crying early in the morning at the time Tharu people who perform Aetbari take "Dar" which means delicious food. After taking 'Dar' the whole day on Sunday one has to be in "fasting" and on the next day i.e. on Monday, 2-3 persons prepare loaf of rice and some kinds of other delicious foods and vegetables. (16)

As Chaudhary says Dar means a delicious food. It is a tasty food because even the poor or rich all people eat similar kinds of food items on this day. They eat 'Bhinsarya' or 'Dar' before the day myth was created. The myth was created on Sunday that's why Tharus eat Dar on Saturday. If anybody eats it after cock's crying, he/she is regarded as impure to take fasting

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<sup>2</sup> Foods eaten before fasting

on Sunday. Further, he explains about those performances of Sunday till early Monday morning and the different types of recipes they cook to offer to the god Bhima. It is



Photo 3: Tharus eating 'Bhinsarya'

(Photo by researcher)

continuity of ancient tradition of their ancestors. It also indicates that Tharus go back to the origin of the culture in the past when this festival began and came into existence in the community. It can be further explain about the origin of the cultural myths and the traditions. In this

connection, Mercia Eliade argues on the cultural performance that, "On the occasion of the re- presentation of myths the entire community is renewed; it rediscovers its "sources," relives its "origins". The idea of a universal renewal brought about by the religious re- presentation of a cosmogonic myth is documented in many traditional societies" (*Myth and Reality* 35). That is to say, while tradition of *Atwari* of Tharus is performed, these acts of the ritual performance narrates the mythical events from which the cultural, moral behavior is born and performance on the occasion of *Atwari* narrates the myths that bring the gods, humans and the demons as the part and particles of the traditional community like Tharu community. On the one way, Tharus come back to their home if they are out of their community for celebrating *Atwari*. They meet with friends and relatives. It helps to reconnect to brothers with their long separated sisters on this occasion and they exchange their sorrows and happiness with other. On the other way, the myth recovers the primordial time of beginning of culture of *Atwari*. By giving information about origin of *Atwari*, myth helps Tharus to re-establish the moment when the things and behaviors were created in the cultural performances of *Atwari*. It is a process going back to their ancestor's sacred and original time the beginning of *Atwari* to ensure the renewal of the cosmos, life and the community. It

encourages to Tharus to re-establish the creation of traditional and cultural norms and values through performances in the Tharu community. Cultural performances help to reveal the mystery of the creation of the culture and history of Tharus which shares same nature of its beginning. A thing in a new state proceeds and gets some modification, in this way returning to their ancestor's culture of their time means they are getting some new matter even though it was created in the past. They know it from their elders of the community so it is new thing for them still now. Oral stories create the possibility of putting them into certain patterns and a script to know the moral tradition of Tharus of the Terai region of Nepal.

In this way, the fasting in *Atwari* begins from Sunday. On Sunday, those who are fasting take bath in the morning and dub cow dung in the entrance room of house or somewhere outside of house. Such place is used to prepare breads. To cook bread they put on the fire by rubbing sacred wood called ‘Ganyari’<sup>3</sup> or pine tree wood for the fragrance because once used fire is regarded as impure. In the cultural process, the worshippers are not let them hungry and thirsty for long hours. They prepare Sarbat (sweet water) and then worship the sun with incense and put the particles of pine tree and the sweet water in the fire. They put



Photo 4: A man performing Agyari in

*Atwari* (Photo by researcher)

water three rounds from the right and three from the left side and they drink that sweet water to satisfy their day long thirst. They drink water although the fasting continues. Then, they prepare the breads, the round chapattis are necessary because it regards the image of the sun. The first bread is offered for

which is cooked from just one side only and then at 5 o'clock in the evening all the worshipers divide the breads and the fruits like Guava, Banana, Cucumber, Yam, Sweets,

<sup>3</sup> Pine tree used to light the fire

Honey and Curd into two parts from their plates or Tapari, the first one for the married sisters and second for worshippers themselves to have for the rest. Before they eat, they worship god Bhima by giving half cooked bread for him which bread is called 'Bhyawan' or 'Bhauri' in Tharu language and they put all the types of recipes of the breads and fruits' pieces in the



Photo 5: The useful materials for the 'Agyari' process (Photo by researcher)

fire. This process of the performance of *Atwari* is known as 'Agyari' or 'Hawan'. They prepare round bread from Andi rice flour and from Barley flour. Both the fire and the baked round breads symbolize the sun. They take the fire as the imagery of the sun as the divine thing to which the

cosmogony social beings and worship to it. They eat fruits till before the eve of the day. On this day, salt, turmeric powder, chilly, fish and meat are restricted to eat. Next day on Monday in the morning, they take bath in the river or well and cook the foods with five or seven varieties of vegetables. These vegetables are *Pwai*<sup>4</sup> mixed with pulses of beans, dry fish, Kheriya<sup>5</sup>, Ladysfinger and Snakeguard etc. They worship by putting *Sarridhup* (Chips of the pine wood) in the fire and put the water with five or seven rounds from the left and five or seven rounds from the right to the fire. And they divide the foods into two parts to all the recipes of the foods and vegetables for their sisters then only they eat it. This is known as 'Pharhara'<sup>6</sup> in Tharu language. The divided foods and vegetables, bread items and fruits are taken to the married sisters or daughter's home by brothers or by other members of the family on the same Monday this is known as 'Agrasan'. *Atwari* is a part of their life of the Tharu people. They have particular process of performance through which they gain differ identity

<sup>4</sup> A plant whose leaves are eaten as vegetable.

<sup>5</sup> Flour wrapped in Yam leaves and fried in oil.

<sup>6</sup> End of the ceremonial in festival where varieties of vegetables and foods are offered.

because of its ways of the celebration, behaviors and beliefs in cultural activities of Tharu people. In this context, Janak Chaudhary has recorded an interview of Bhagiram Chaudhary, a cultural critic who is inhabitant of Kailali district elaborates the cultural ways of the performance of *Atwari*. He says:

After 'Bhinsarya' for Poojah, Tharus dub a place with fresh cow dung and put fire in dry cow dung to bake breads. Then, disperse the chips of pine on the fire both day on Sunday for *Atwari* worship and on next Monday in the morning, Tharus prepare rice, seven types of vegetables like *Phulauri*<sup>7</sup>, *Kheriya*, dry fish curry, Yam, leaves of Pwai and Pulses for ending ceremonial of it. *Pharhara* begins with 'Hawan' as similar as the previous day's worship. At last, on the same day, divided the breads, fruits, rice, and other things useful in daily activities are taken to married daughter's home as 'Agrasan'. (Hamar Phulariya translated by researcher; 12:50 -17:20)

Tharus prepare breads, foods, beverages and fruits for the demon Bakasu to protect



Photo6; Andi dhan Chapatis, Bariya and Khurma  
Breads (Photo by researcher)

themselves from his misbehavior and threat. They prepare huge amount of recipes for long period of time. But, when Bhima defeated him in death, they worshipped him as protector of their life. Tharus thought that he had mercy over the victims of Bakasu's harassment.

They learn the morality and the moral behavior from him. For this, Mercia Eliade also talks that myth determines the production of ritual beverages and a community connects with the cosmogony world by knowing the myth. She says, "It is clear that to prepare the ritual beverages . . . it is necessary to know their myth of origin which is closely connected with the

<sup>7</sup> Mix of more than two lentils fried in oil.



cosmogenic myth" (*Myth and Reality* 29). A rite is performed only when its origin is known and the myths reveal all the things about how it was performed for the first time among the



Photo 7: Rice and five types of vegetables for 'Pharhara' in *Atwari* (Photo by researcher)

community people. So, Tharus have been preparing the numbers of the food items and the beverages for Bhima from the ancient time of Nepal. The reproductions of such things on the occasion of *Atwari* are prominent to materialize Tharu's traditional beliefs and values in the community.

Similarly, talking about the patterns of celebrating *Atwari* Chhabilal Kopila tells in his article "Tharu Jatiko Atwari Parba: Ek Charcha". He discusses:

On the day of *Atwari*, people who take fast do not use kitchen but use entrance room of the house. This place is purified by using the cow dung. The 'Ganyari' wood is used to put the fire to cook bread. Then once again, they dub the place with cow dung where they sit for the worship with particles of Ganyari wood and sacrifice pieces of breads and fruits like Guava, Cucumber, Banana, Yam and sweets. Next morning, they worship to the sun and Poojah is performed as the previous ways then have rice and five or seven varieties of the vegetables. Lastly, Agrasan is taken to daughter's home. (my translation; 2)

The ways of *Atwari* performances are taken from myths because the mythical events teach Tharus their morality and give them way of moral behavior, unique identity and social-cultural background of Tharus through these cultural performances in Tharu's *Atwari*. For this Elide again states, "Mythical stories . . . by which the present life, fates, activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motif for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them" (*Myth and Reality* 20).



Photo 8: Two men are going to give 'Agrasan'

(Photo by researcher)

Eliade's concept is *Atwari* performance has the moral and cultural significance to gain ritual knowledge from myth. Then, while brothers and sisters or relatives of family go to give Agrasan, they get chance to meet and share each other's sorrows and happiness. It is taken as the

token of love from brothers and security of family affiliation. In this context, Meena Chaudhary, the inhabitant of Kailai district expresses in her interview about the meaning and value of Agrasan in Tharu's *Atwari*. She views:

'Agrasan'<sup>8</sup> is made up of by two words 'Agra' means 'Fore' and 'Rasan' means 'Foods' which means that the worshippers divide breads, fruits and rice before they eat to worship god Bhima. It also is known as 'Pahura' or 'Koseli'. It counts as part of *Atwari* and is valuable in the Tharu community because when the relatives go to give it they exchange the sorrows and happy moments. It helps them to get love, affection and make the mutual relation between brothers and sisters. (Hamar Phulariya translated by researcher; 21:25 – 22:45)

Like the myths bring the human beings and the god in one place, an Agrasan too does the same. Agrasan is a gift of the varieties of foods, vegetables and fruits and some people give the money too according to their capacity. Some people also give rice, grains, Supo, Nanglo and Khatauli as the Agrasan. Members of a family go to married sister's or daughter's home to offer the 'Agrasan'. Sisters in return give them warm welcome in their house. Long separated relatives like the brothers and sisters get a chance to meet in a place. They express their suppressed desire, pity, the difficulties that caused the sorrows and try to obtain

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<sup>8</sup> Fruits and foods are given to sisters and relatives

happiness in few moments with their kinships and relatives. When relatives go to daughter or sister's home, they are welcomed with gratitude. Even, they prefer alcoholic drinks and meat because in the Tharu community to serve such drink is compulsory. They feel like they are respected when they are served meat and alcoholic drinks. Therefore, the main priority given in *Atwari* is to meet with married relatives and that shows care and respect to them. It helps to reconnect them with each other. If no one come to their home on this day means something problematic in their relationship.

Similarly, the Eastern Tharus of Nepal say '*Raiba*' to *Atwari* festival. It is celebrated on the last Sunday in the month of Bhadra from ancient time in the Tharu community. The modes of performance may be different but aims of celebration are same. People do not know about its existence but their prediction is that cultural dimensions in the community provide them energy after plantation of the paddy in the rainy season. It is the tradition of Eastern Tharus that they celebrate *Raiba* in a group and do not eat salt on this day. All Tharu community or the whole village people gather in a place for the celebration. From children to old aged people seem bathing in the ponds or rivers from early in the morning and they worship the sun. They clean home and its surrounding by dubbing with cow dung. They try to keep themselves clean and they eat milk rice, curd and beaten rice and rice pudding. They believe that if any one eats salt in foods, whitish line can be seen in their dress which is bad omen for the community. In this context, Gopal Dahit tells the ways of *Raiba* performance in '*An Introduction to Tharu Culture*'. He opines that, "Tharus of the Eastern Nepal celebrate *Atwari* festival as a *Raiba* and care the more for cleaning the houses by using cow dung and the mud to contribute for the hygiene and the sanitation. They take bath in the ponds and the rivers. In *Raiba*, they eat sweets, curd, beaten rice" (57-59). Here, Gopal Dahit has brought different concepts of *Atwari* in the name of *Raiba* for the Eastern Tharus which falls on the same Sunday but *Atwari* is a ritual performance of worshipping god Bhima and nature god,

the sun on the one hand. On the other hand, *Raiba* is done in a group for maintaining the hygiene and the sanitation around Tharu's shelters, communities and the villages. Hence, both can be regarded as similar festivals. Although they are living in different parts of the country and celebrate same festivals on different name. They share similar functions of celebrating. Mercia Eliade includes similar ideas with Gopal Dahit in her theory '*Myth and Reality*'. She conveys, "The man of traditional societies feels the basic unity of all kinds of "deeds" "works" and "forms" whether they are biological, psychological and historical" (31). All kinds of activities that a person performs for the benefit of the community are traditions. Tharu people have united by their common 'deeds', 'works' and 'forms' of culture which has impacted them biologically, psychologically from the historical events happened in ancient period in the community. They have their ways to achieve the communal goals through the performances. Hence, these ways of the performances have great cultural importance in the Tharu community. These festivals help Tharus to form their unique identity through their life styles, values and beliefs in traditional activities. From the common beliefs on this festival they integrate together for the performance. The communal activities of Tharu people denote their typical identity and the cultural significance.

The cultural and traditional performances show Tharus ways of living in the community and these all are the results of mythical narration that occurred in the time of an antiquity. Tharus eat different types of foods produced in the community at the end of the rituals. So, culture is a basis to produce things in communal events and behaviors', institutions and the patterns to attribute for it and the ritual context is visualized through the performances. The cultural performances such as dances and songs, rituals help Tharus to develop a familial or communal unity among Tharu people. *Atwari*, a tradition of Tharus, is ancient and is transmitted properties of the community. The pure aesthetic of *Atwari* performance can be felt in an appropriate time. Tharu's *Atwari* performance is particularly

rooted in the local grounds to speak about their cultural patterns i.e. Tharus come back their home and worship the sun and Bhima in their own cultural patterns with the use of particles of pine and prepare varieties of foods on the occasion of the festival. Through *Atwari* performances new generations learn their customs and traditions in the Tharu community.

Tharu's *Atwari* focuses on cultural perspectives based on its myth. It is considered to be an ephemeral folk life and will be studied in the light of the performance and the cultural theory. Along with the influences and obstacles created by the hilly and Indian cultures, *Atwari* festival has existed with its traditional values in the Tharu community. Thus, the act of celebrating *Atwari* and its cultural performance are the expression of Tharu's creative skills and the moral behaviors which explore oneself and the community as a whole. This research is also an exploration of cultural aims of the fasting and the changes that occur in the celebration of *Atwari* in the Tharu community. The researcher focuses on answering what changes have occurred in Tharu's *Atwari* and explains its aims of the celebration. Only males of the Tharu community take fasting in *Atwari*. On this festival, mostly performance is done by males of the community because it is originated from the battle between Bhima and Bakasu. They take fasting because god Bhima had helped to Tharu people by protecting them from Bakasu. He had robust body, strength, courage and power to defeat the enemies. They take fasting and worship Bhima because they want to be like him. They believe that worshipping Bhima will keep peace, happiness and the mutuality can be maintained among people in the community. Therefore, *Atwari* is regarded the festival only for males, not of females of the community. Nowadays, it seems that females also take fasting along with males. Although this is a festival of Tharus, particularly of males but the participation and involvement of females in fasting in *Atwari* is increasing every year. I think the reason is males need assistance from females due to their skills in cooking whereas males gather the ingredients and utensils for worshipping. Females are also now become the parts of *Atwari*



Photo 9: Tharu women participating in the Atwari (photo by researcher)

festival to help the community to continue its existence. Few years back, while worshipping god Bhima, the local and natural ingredients used to be used to worship in *Atwari* festival. They used particles of pine woods as incense for the fragrance but now both sticks of

*Agarbatti* (incense sticks) and the chips of pine are used in *Poojah*<sup>9</sup>. But, it is fact that performances as such are deteriorating day by day in the name of the modernization because they think it is Tharu's most expensive festival. Only few people have realized its value and they attempt to continue So, Shankar Lal Chaudhary in '*Socio-Economic Status of Dangaura Tharus*' writes, " From sister's side, they bring meat and local wines for their brothers and both sides people stay overnight and enjoy. In fact, this is very expensive celebration and due to which economic condition of Tharus determine to be deterioration of *Atwari* festival" (16). Chaudhary in this matter says that economic status of Tharu people is a determinant factor to bring changes in *Atwari*. So, now, such cultural performances are limited to the illiterate people of the remote villagers. That is why, it is about to vanish, if not preserved it immediately. In discussing factors that bring changes in traditional values and beliefs on *Atwari* myth, a cultural theorist Clifford Geertz in '*The Interpretation of Cultures*' recounts:

Population growth, Urbanization, Monetization, Occupational differentiation, and the like, have combined to weaken the traditional ties of peasant social structure; and the winds of doctrine which have occupied the appearance of these structural changes have disturbed the simple uniformity of religious belief and practice characteristics of an earlier period. (148)

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<sup>9</sup> Worship to the god.

As Geertz is stated that the changes occurred in *Atwari* festival can be realized because such changes weaken the cultural practices that's why cultural practices are limited only on the people of the remote villages. Present generations of Tharus have grown with different cultural practices, beliefs and values than their ancestors because various factors play role to bring changes in the cultural practices of *Atwari*. Such factors are population growth, monetary values; people from the same society are holding jobs in the different fields and impact of different religious ideologies. The changes on the structure of the /community society also help to bring unfamiliar cultural beliefs. The different patterns of practice of celebrating *Atwari* festival are also the causes to bring deformities on the cultural performance in the Tharu community.

According to the tradition, while they divide the foods, breads and fruits for the Agrasan, all the dishes should be kept on the leaves of Banana, Lotus, *Doniya Tepari* made of *sal's* leaves and Nemraen<sup>10</sup> (Malu in Nepali). But now, because of the impact of the globalization and the modernization, they are using the plates, dishes made of plastics and papers in the place of leaves. Most of them are still willing to continue the use of such leaves rather than using industrial products if these are available in the nearby community. The changes occur in making the breads in *Atwari* since they are using color to make it attractive and spend extravagant money to show their status. It is celebrated in the six districts: Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Banke, Dang and Surkhet in the name of *Atwari* and in the East part as *Raiba*. As the time passes, numbers of Tharu people who hold fasting in *Atwari* is degrading at the present moment. The reason behind it is in Lucky Chaudhary's words:

Firstly, they less believe in the religious tradition unlike ancestors. Secondly, they do not have the handicraft skill and enthusiasm unlike their ancient people. Thirdly, they may not know the ways of the performance. Fourthly, they might not stay hungry

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<sup>10</sup> A flower plant whose leaves are used to serve foods.

while fasting in *Atwari*. Fifth is the negligence towards Tharu traditions by their own community people. And lastly, new generations are unable to understand the importance of their culture and the traditions. (my translation; 1)

As Chaudhary explains the problems that arise in cultural performance is meant Tharus need to be aware about their cultural importance. The last reason behind demeaning of *Atwari*'s popularity in the Tharu community is striking, the lack of interest to understand their culture. At present, even Tharu's new generations have forgotten ancestral culture, the degrading beliefs in *Atwari* festival cause to lose their cultural interest. Because of such consequences and behaviors of Tharu community, it becomes hard to preserve the originality and purity of the Tharu's ancient culture. It is still continue with its particular performance but some changes can be seen when they use to the modern utensils and they cook recipes which do not belong to the Tharu culture. They are using bows, paper plates and Chinese pot instead of Duna and Taparies made of from Sal's leaves. They also used to use the locally available leaves of Lotus, Nemraen and Banana are still in use for serving the foods somewhere in the Tharu community. Whatever the changes are seen in the performance of Tharu's *Atwari*, are outcome of the change of the time and people's psychic became modern that necessitates bringing the differences in the culture. The main thing in *Atwari* is the patterns of the culture and beliefs of Tharu people on it. So, it should be always on the community people for the essence of preservation of culture. In discussing about the preservation of human art and the culture, Northrop Frye evokes that culture is preserved through recreation when humans feel hard to recognize with its origin/creation. He notes:

. . . where the sacred city is a human structure of art and yet preserves a vision of 'sages standing in God's holy fire'. Here creation has finally become one with recreation, and revelation at the end of the human effort is also a creation of something at the beginning. (*Creation and Recreation* 47)



For Frye, for the preservation of cultural values of *Atwari* Tharus are combining previous and new cultural materials into a traditional arts that provide similar sense of Tharu's tradition and culture. It conserves identity of Tharus and their beliefs on *Atwari* myth because of the uses of these modern things on which they serve foods and put materials to worship in festival



Photo 10: Uses of dishes to serve foods  
*Atwari* ([www.tharuwan.com.np](http://www.tharuwan.com.np), 2019)

and it also helps to recognize recreation of a creation. i.e. use of Incense sticks in the place of particles of pines, and plates instead of leaves. They also prepare vegetables more in numbers that do not belong to Tharu culture and tradition. In this way, old things have changed into

new forms to continue the traditional behaviors, values and assumptions of Tharus myth of *Atwari* in the Tharu community. But such manmade materials cause to lose the inherent nature of the culture. Participation of Tharu females in fasting in this festival is a positive change which also should be in the future for the continuation of this culture on the basis of the myths of *Atwari*.

Therefore, the performance in *Atwari* seems to have more participating to take fasting, both the males and females. Changes of materials for the fragrance to worship god do not spoil the methods of tradition and the meaning of myth and its culture. So, it is only regarded to be replaced of things for same use on this occasion. In this way, even bringing some changes cultural values and beliefs are preserved for new generation of Tharu people. Tharu's *Atwari* is an ancient cultural festival originated from the mythical tales and its consequences happened in the Tharu community at the time of an antiquity. This is an inspiration that Tharu people got from the mythical heroes like Bhima and Dangisharan Tharu to establish *Atwari* as a culture and the tradition of Tharu community. Mythical events of *Atwari* provoke

Tharus to produce communal behavior to be a part of a culture. The mythical heroes have been ideal of Tharu people from the past to till the current moment in their traditional activities as a part of their life. So, the culture is defined to be the base of producing the meaning in terms of which the human beings interpret their experience and guide their action in the social/ communal activities. Actually, the historical approaches have played the vital role for the formation of ritual identity and belief in the culture of the community that lead them to create the conservative view of local identity of that community.

Culture is a mirror of any society or community through which social customs; beliefs and the behaviors are studied and analyzed. Tharu culture has its particular ways of performance based on such traditional values which are prevalent in the social/communal activities. The ceremonial processes from birth till death are different in the Tharu community than other communities. Deities and worshipping methods and process are also found distinct in their ways of shaping ritual acts. Some deities seem similar with Hindu gods but the performance gets totally different. In this logic, *Atwari* is also a Tharu version of the myth created from the Mahabharata and the myth of the cosmology. Tharus enjoy with the varieties of songs, dances, varieties of festivals and foods in their festivals and the occasions. Generally, common foods of Tharu community are local wine, alcohol made of from rice, *ghonghi*, fish and rice but due to the geographical diversity of their settlement there arise new cultural of foods and the cultural performance gets different in the Tharu community too. Whatever the influences to their cultures, food styles in the rituals; the cultural performances in *Atwari* define to be Tharu's communal myth and culture.

Tharus belong to indigenous cultural group in the Terai. They are believed to be the most ancient, simple and honest people. Tharus belong either to the East or to the West of the Terai. However, they are from the same origin. It is believed that they were originated in Kapilvastu and gradually migrated to the Western part of the Terai of Nepal. In this process,

Dangisharan Tharu established a Tharu kingdom in Sukaura of Dang district. To me, still now, it is regarded as a place where Tharus were originated and developed their culture and tradition on what myths say is Tharu's source of civilization. Simply, it is the first civilization in the Terai furnished by Tharus. Shankar Lal Chaudhary in his book '*Socio-Economic Status of Dangaura Tharus*' includes the history of Tharus. They have inhabited in the Terai since Dwaper age so they are called an indigenous people of the place. He further introduces:

. . . Tharus originated in and around Kapilbastu nearing district of Dang Deukhur, how such a powerful king Dangisharan ruled 12-13<sup>th</sup> century before . . . when the Rajput women/ Men fled away in Nepal Terai. So, in a short time how Tharus became so brave and expanded from east and west. This supports that Tharus originated in Nepalese soil. They have not come from outside. "Dang is the homeland of Dangaura Tharus". (5)

During ancient period, Tharus were the ruler and the king was Dangisharan Tharu of Sukaura, Dang- Deukhur where Tharu's *Atwari* was in practice as their native culture in the Tharu community. There, they created their particular dresses, arts and skills, languages and the culture in the antique period. Among many festivals, *Atwri* is one of them still survives its values and assumptions in the Tharu community. Tharu's *Atwari* is an ancient festival which still practices in their community. It carries the mythical story of the evolution of Tharu people and their traditional practices and the cultural values. Tharus are the first people who established the civilization in the Terai of Nepal. In this concern, Gopal Dahit puts William Cookes's statement in his book '*An Introduction to Tharu Culture*', to say, "Tharus are the agents of civilization who extended land for the settlement from Ganga-Yamuna river to the lap of the Himalayas" (my translation; 6). As Cookes states that Tharus are first people in the Terai who established indigenous civilization, on the same conception Northrop Frye demonstrates, "Man does not live directly or nakedly in nature like animals but with

enveloped that is called culture or civilization" (*Creation and Recreation* 5). Frye says that *Atwari* performance is a civilized communal act of the Tharu community firstly created by Tharu people. Myth of *Atwari* also prescribes culture of Tharus who settled beside the river when Pandavas brothers were exiled and came to live with Tharu people. Tharus are helpful people. Pandavas were welcomed by Tharus to settle in their community and they assisted the community by protecting Tharus from their enemies. That is why; the celebration in the community on Sunday is done to create particular performance on the memory of Bhima and in the respect of nature god. Tharus are also the nature worshippers. They worship the Sun as the nature god as the source of energy and light for making appropriate to the human life in this place. Such ritual performances have created the first civilization of Tharu people and it identifies them as the first people and the son of soil in the Terai of Nepal.

Tharus are taken under a typical cultural group in the community rather than whole ethnic groups. A cultural group from which performance of *Atwari* is done for self-consciousness to know the culture that has similar cultural beliefs and symbols to make separate cultural identity. It is not required cultural differences but is required members of Tharu community who have belief in their cultural distinctiveness. In this notion, Lucky Chaudhary remarks, "Non-Tharus do not show their interest in *Atwari* because it is not in their consciousness" (my translation; 1). He argues that non-Tharus do not psychologically able to obtain values of *Atwari* that's why it belongs to Tharu community. On the same way, to identify to Tharu people in accordance their own cultural consciousness, anthropologist Arjun Guneratne in '*Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal*' states that culture has become means to gain particular Tharu identity. He mentions:

An ethnic group . . . ; it is a cultural group that it is self-consciously aware of its culture, a group for whom its culture or some aspect of it- has become an object and the symbol of its separate identity. Objectively speaking, ethnic consciousness does

not require any great degree of cultural distinctiveness, but it does require that the members of a given ethnic group believe in their cultural distinctiveness. (13)

The distinct of identity of Tharus is possible from their distinct cultural consciousness and practices. The cultural activities and the behavioral aspects on myth of *Atwari* distinguish in mythic version because of the use of different objects and the symbols in Tharu cultural patterns. Such patterns are imposed by themselves to create particular meaning on the cosmology to make unique Tharus cultural identity. As nature worshippers Tharus particularly worship the sun as a god of the fire and do 'Agyari' in *Atwari*. Tharu people understand myth on their own ways to make it their communal aspect in the annihilation of the community. They are confined to emphasize their cultural identity at local level from the various culturally distinct communities. *Atwari* is limited within cultural groups of Tharu people and the Tharu community of the Western Terai. Tharus can be regarded that they belong to Hindu religion because Tharu people worship Bhima in *Atwari* as their idol super being who is also a character from Hindu mythology the *Mahabharata*. In this sense, Tharus regard themselves as the Hindu religious people. Some gods and goddesses and the magical words which Tharu people use in hymn are similar like Sanskrit script. The myth of *Atwari* also matches with the Hindu myth. If it is observed, only it seems a distinguished in cultural behaviors of Tharu people than the other Hindu ethnic and cultural groups in Nepal. In this concern, Tharu community people use materials and methods on purifying gods, beliefs, values and ceremonial activities are different than other community people. Although Tharus call themselves Hindu people their performances are different than Hindu religious methods. In this way, it can be said that Tharu culture is a mix tendencies of culture performed in *Atwari* festival in the Tharu community. In the process of making cultural identity of Tharu ethnicity, culture is formed in terms of the cultural symbols used in Tharu's *Atwari*. They prefer common view that it is primordial characteristics and religious symbols to provide

Tharu communal cultural identity. It has always been understood with the same set of meaning that one finds in the present moment. Bhima in *Atwari* symbolizes as an ideal of Tharu males because they hold fasting on this day to be brave and strong like him. He gets respectful position in the Tharu culture. Specially, it is the reference of the primordial culture created from the myth of Tharu's *Atwari*. It refers origin of Tharu's history and the evolution of Tharu culture and the moral activities inherited to their descendent from the ancient time.

Tharu's *Atwari* embodies the myth of the Hindu religion. In order to differentiate concept of Tharu's myth from the Mahabharata Tharus originated the myth of *Atwari* and its performance. *Atwari* represents ethnic, cultural event to show moral behaviors of Tharu people. The myth of *Atwari* leads to make Tharu cultural identity distinct from the rest. It is observed from the cultural performance in the Tharu community which depends on myth of the community to be a culture. Human beings are known by culture. Cultural identity is one of the important parts of human's life which one obtains from his/her culture of the community. In accordance with myth, human's activity as culture is sustained for betterment of life and it teaches social or communal behaviors of ancestors to their descendents. Such cultural activities turn the human life to achieve their cultural identity that separates them from other communities. Myths are psychologically inherited from the family members or from the community people. Gopal Dahit again states in '*An introduction to Tharu Culture*' that *Atwari* encourages Tharu people for better life. He avers, "Cultural aspect nourishes energy to worshippers so *Atwari* performance becomes tradition in the Tharu community" (my translation; 59). In the like manner, Joseph Campbell sees myth from psychological perspectives of socio-rational backdrop of the culture in *The Marks of God: Primitive Mythology*. He discusses, ". . .myths of our several cultures work upon us, whether consciously or unconsciously, as energy releasing, life-motivating and directing agents; so that even though our rational minds may be in agreement, the myths by which we are living

or by which our father's lived- can be driving us, at that very moment, diametrically apart"

(4). Here, Campbell talks about Tharu people who by their rational minds learn about *Atwari* myth and the culture in their community. It motivates and directs them for driving better life like the ancestors followed community's culture. For this reason, it can be said that it is a communal- cultural identity which Tharu people have obtained from their *Atwari*, a communal festival. It is related to Tharu people's beliefs of being as brave as Bhima, a comogenic ideal of the community people. They offer him breads, the foods, fruits and sweets and pray for the peace and prosperity for their relatives. They practice *Atwari* with the hope that their community could have peaceful and solidarity among Tharu people with communal feeling.

This concludes that *Atwari* performance of Tharu people provide them their identity, transformation of values and their cultural meanings in the community. The mythical meaning of *Atwari* is an oral tradition of retelling the folktales and the stories of brave man and about angels and the relation between the godly figures and prayers. Such myths have played prominent role to lay the human behavior into a shape of the culture in the community. Hence, every community has its own stories of past to narrate the ancestral ethics, cultures and tales that represent their ethnic and cultural identity. It is *Atwari* which narrates cultural identity of Tharus about their ancient life and living. It tells their origin, occupations, language, cultures and traditions, foods styles, dresses, achievements and the moral behaviors of an indigenous people of the Terai, Nepal.

Finally, the researcher limits his study in *Atwari* myths and its ritual performances which give the communal- cultural significance. The findings of this research is that *Atwari* myths renew the Tharu community with the practice of *Atwari* because it helps to reconnect with family members, relatives and brothers with sisters and exchange their feelings with one another on this very occasion.

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