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The Folk Tales of Limbu Community:
Celebration of Nature and its Symbolic Representation

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Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Damber Kumari Limbu has completed her thesis entitled " The folktales of Limbu community: Celebration of nature and its symbolic representation" under my supervision. She carried out her research from August 2015 AD to April 2016 AD. I recommend that her thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled " The folk tales of Limbu community: celebration of Nature and its symbolic representation" submitted to the central department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur by Ms. Damber Kumari Limbu, has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The Research identifies the symbolic meaning from the Limbu community folktales in order to determine how symbols are constructed in the society. The examines the Limbu folktale and the mythical tales which represent the way of life. In the Limbu community people worship nature as god where nature represents the source of power and everything to them. The creation of nature such as aquatic/animals, plants / flowers, rivers and many other elements have preserved the symbolic meaning in the Limbu culture and religion. The study attempts to uncover how the system of beliefs, values, ethos, rituals and cultures are constructed through the examination of dominant images, characterization and mostly symbols of the Limbu folktales. The study takes into consideration symbolic theories and mythical perspective to critically examine the tales within Limbu culture.

The Folk Tales of Limbu Community:

Celebration of Nature and its Symbolic Representation

Folktales are universal and enhance globalization of cultural knowledge. Passing beliefs, history and ideas from one generation to another is the basic functions of folk tales. Folktales are part of every culture, communication practices and representation of culture, rituals practice, religion and belief that are set in their society. Generally people from any community believe that folktales act as cultural transmitters. Every culture has long traditions of oral storytelling and feel important to transmit to coming generation because they reflect infinitely meaningful socio cultural codes, moral and civic values. Folk stories represent human experiences through symbols and archetypes. For social symbols and codes the folktales represent limiting within socio-religious norms and values of the particular clan or society as far as staying away from committing what are defined as sinful and unsafe acts.

Limbus are one of Nepal's ethnic groups living in the northeast Himalayas. The *Kirat* Limbu community (*yakthumba*) has also their own folktales, culture, traditions and norms. They believe in nature and worship nature in every ritual performances. So, Limbu people believe that god resides in nature and therefore have a very animistic view of nature. Mostly their folktales are based on their myth (*Mundhum*), history and daily lives. Their folktales are about the history and stories behind the mountains, caves, rivers, waterfall, flora and fauna, flowers, stone and many other natural elements. Those tales/ stories represent the history of the northeast part of Nepal and through the tales it merely represent how the culture and rituals of the community are formed and why we need to worship or follow them. In the world every community and society carries their own cultures and sets of beliefs. They have their own codes and symbols to represent their own culture. Likewise the Limbu

community of Nepal, carries their own codes and symbols to represent their culture. The natural forces, plants, animals, or inanimate things are thought as the symbols, ancestors, safeguard or tutelary spirit of a society, group/clan. Nature is regarded as power and symbol of ancestors. So, the present thesis deals with the folktales that represent the Limbu community by studying the symbols and codes which are based on nature and myth of their own. Limbu folktales has already been researched on a gradual structural shift in Limbu folktales by Ratna Bahadur Tumbapho (2011). The earlier research was done on the study of morphology, the study of form and structure which changes according to time and brings lots of meanings and style depending on the narrators. The study was in part inspired by an earlier study of Ratna Bahadur Tumbapho Structural shift in Limbu folktales. But my research work is the study of symbols that are found in the limbu folktales. The major purpose is to know how symbols has been constructed and how the symbols functions the same meaning to the whole Limbu society/community.

The present thesis deals with the Kirat Limbu community folktales that are highly based on the interrelationship of nature and human beings. People from this community believe in Nature and its power, supernatural powers, ancestor spirits to human souls based on the concepts of *Mundhums* (poetic expressions of legends, mythology, history, tales, songs, *palam* etc) and current practices. Limbu actually refers to the ancient tribe of Nepal that are chiefly inhabited in the eastern part of Nepal. So they hold the history behind most of the ancient heritages or monuments. The ancient heritages and monuments are found in eastern part of Nepal; Taplejung, Panchthar, Illam, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Dhankuta, Terathum and Sankhuwasaba. Although Nepal is a multi-ethnic society and have different religions of their own, Limbu people also have their own distinct culture, tradition and religion of their own .

They have the long traditions of narrating or reciting *Mundhum* and performing certain rituals and observing ceremonies in their own distinctive ways. *Mundhum* is a sculpture living in oral tradition. So, *Mundhum* is a sculpture that is not in written form. As a result there are some differences in the interpretations of *Mundhum*. Therefore we can find slight differences in the performances of rituals.

Mundhum are recited by only the particular performers such as *Phedangma*, *Samba*, *Yeba*, *Yema*. They are not only the traditional healers and performers of certain rituals but also the sources and authorities of *Mundhum*, rites and rituals, customs and manners, rules and codes of conduct. Some of the Tummyahangs (gentleman or respected laymen) are also considered resource persons in this respect. We also call them shaman (priest) who communicates with the spiritual world. They are believed as the messengers between the human world and the spirit world. The shamans they perform all the rituals in the natural setting. Religion, Myths, rituals are mostly influenced by the geographical factors. Limbu worship nature because their ancient habitant was geographically in the lap of nature.

Animals are one of the most important elements of indigenous or ethnic belief system or religion in the Himalayan region because of its rich biodiversity and the role they played in the survival of the nomadic civilizations of the Native Himalayans. Shamans of this community wore animal skins and feathers and underwent transformations into animals during spiritual journeys. In addition, animals served as humans, guides, rescuers, ancestors, totems and sacrificial victims. As a religion of nature, shamanism throughout the Himalayan region held particular reverence for the relations between sky, earth and water and believed in the mystical importance of trees and mountains. As Jash Raj Subba states in his book *Ethno- Religious Views Of Limboo Mundhums [myths]*,

Central Asian inclusive of the Himalayan shamans served as sacred intermediaries between the human and spirit world. In this role they took on tasks such as healing , divination, appealing to ancestors, manipulating the elements, leading lost soul and offering public religious rituals. The shamanic séance served as a public display of the shaman's journey to the spirit world and usually involved intense trances, drumming, dancing, chanting, elaborate costumes, miraculous displays of physical strength, and audience involvement. The goal of these séances ranged from recovering the lost sub-soul(*pung-sam* sub-soul in *yumaism*) of a sick patient and diving the future to controlling the weather and finding a lost person or thing.(4)

In the folktales such as *Creation Myth*, the tale has the story of sky, earth and stars. How they were created by *Porokmi Yambhami* (God) by the blessing of the supreme god, *Tagera Nigwabhumang*. So, this tale talks about the *Mundhum* of the Limbu people. Likewise in the story of *Limbu dance and Music*, the story talks about the Limbu cultural dance (*kelang* Dance) was formed by mimicking the movements of birds like peacock and some animals.

Also, in the story of *Flower Death*, the moral of the story is restriction to marry between the clan and among brother and sister they are not allowed to exchange/give the flowers or flowers garland in festivals. So, in the Limbus community the flower (plants) has the symbolic representation of reproduction and romantic love between humans. This story is also included in the *mundhum* called *sangwa nu:mangena lumoo fung wathchingma menumana mundhum*.

Similarly there is a very famous Limbu story *The Papoo Fish* (*Limbuni boju machha*), It is the story of a grandmother who was thrown in the river for being

burden at her house. She was transformed into a *Papoo* fish. It is said that her long gray braided hair became the silver braided back of the fish. Now the Limbus don't eat the *Papoo* fish, and they worship it as holding the ancient spirit. So, in the story we can see human spirit taking the form of animals.

Plants, aquatic/animals, stones, mountains or other natural elements symbolically represent the ancient spirit of Limbu people and also the connection between god and human beings. So, the thesis intends to know more about the folktales of Limbu community that highlights the interrelationship between nature and human in detail. The major questions of the thesis will look on to: What is the significance of natural symbols in Limbu rituals? What are the reasons behind connecting nature with human?

Today, folklore broadly encompasses folktales, dances, fables, customs, proverbs, spirituals, ballads and many more. These elements make folklore/tale the oldest form of education. Some cultures use folktales to record their true history under a dictatorship while some simply reflect the customs and religion beliefs of time. Limbu folktales depicts the *Mundhum* of kirat (yakthumba) community, history of being an ancient tribe of Nepal and practice of shamanism and polytheism. Folktales around Limbu community are about myth, tradition, customs as well as stone, cave, river, lake, animal, bird, tree, flower, hill and other variety. Dr. Chaitanya Subba states in his book *The Culture and Religion of Limbus*:

Oral tradition of Limbus is rich in folktale. Most of the folktales are related to *Mundhums*, traditions, customs, origin and migration of Limbus. They are in the forms of myths, fables, fairy tales, war stories, fictions, biographies, etc. and present the vivid picture of Limbus material culture, social structure, economy, religious belief, history and

way of life of the remote past often revealing their aspiration, values, ambition and goals. There are many stories in the form of almost unwritten memories relating to certain clans of Limbu. (68)

The subject matter of Limbu folktales are also from India's some parts. According to the multi language magazine *Sayapatri*:

The Limbuwan or Pallo Kirant of eastern part of Nepal and Sikkim-India where Limbus are living for many centuries (a) places of the exact geographical areas,(b) rivers and mountains- ridges of that area and even(c) description of the aquatic, trees, insects; are Limbu folktales' subject as well as characteristics. (175)

The stories of marriage, relationship, conversation between man and god are also the characteristic of Limbu folktales. Origin story of *Fedangba*, *Samba*, *yeba* (male), *Yema* (female) and their prestige in Limbu community and their magical power are the subject matters as well as characteristics of the Limbu folktales. According to the multi language magazine *Sayapatri*:

From folktales, we know about first home construction in Limbu clan, origin story of paddy dance, origin, origin story of *Chabrung* (drum) dance, beginning tradition of *painch* (loan), human beings first marriage, beginning story of death rites, forbidden to exchange flower in Limbu brother and sister, beginning of offering birds and animals to the god in Limbu society. (176)

Limbu folktales are about Limbu *Mundhum*, Limbu religion, Limbu traditions and festivals. In the same way, Limbu Folktales are about origin of Limbu clans by the place name, by the name of trees, by family member's name, etc. Chaitanya Subba writes about the characteristics of Limbu folktales as:

Some fables, fairy tales and folk- stories are secular as well as religious in its theme and mostly concerned with good moral conduct, kinship cohesion, brotherhood, hospitality, physical strength and wisdom, truthfulness, taking care of parents, elders and children, respect for arbitrators (council of arbitrators or adjudicators) and so on. Another category of folktales are related with certain clans of Limbu. They are seen just like some historical events or accounts, but are often colored by supernatural phenomena or guided by divinities. Such stories mostly tell about how the ancestors of certain type of Limbu came to a certain type of Limbu came to a certain place and settled down, imposed, how certain customs developed etc. (69)

Oral literature carries the identity of the particular culture. Therefore folktales being the oral literature acts as the medium of cultural expression. Limbu folktales are full of cultural contents that show evidence of genuine representation with realism. Traditional values and customs are represented through folktales. Most of the folktales are related to *Mundums* tradition, custom, origin and migration of Limbus. There are many stories in the form of almost unwritten memories related to certain clans of Limbu. After Imansing Chemjong the following Kirati folktales have been compiled and published:

Kirati Lok Kathaharu - Shivakumar Shrestha (BS 2047)

Kirati Lok Katha Sangalo - Shivakumar Shrestha (BS 2051)

Kirat Lok Katha Vol I - Luxmikumar Serma (Papo) (BS 2048)

Kirat Lok Katha - Bartaman (BS 2055)

Hechha Kuppa (Kirat Lok Katha) - Bartaman (BS 2057)

Saypatri (Multi language magazine) - Royal (the then) Nepal
Academy, *Nepal Limbu Bhasa*
Lokkatha Anka Vol 6 No. 2 (Kartik-Chait 2057) Guest Editor: Bairagi
Kaila.
Kirati Lok Katha Sangraha - Rajesh Rai (BS 2062)
Limbu Folklore –Ms Mellainie Pappadis (AD 1994?)
Katha Dungai Dhunga ko (Kirat Lok Katha) - Shiva Mukarung (BS
2064)
Limbuwan ka Lok Katha - Dhanhang Subba (BS 2065) (Among the
above mentioned folktales this is the largest volume containing (61
folktales).

Tulsi Diwas, an eminent writer (folklorist) has classified Nepali folktales into ten types. But *Kirati* (Limbu-Rai) folktales of the following types are also in existence, Folktales on stones and caves, Folktales on Flora and Fauna, Folktales on Pond River and Fountain, Folktales on Demon and Demoness, Folktales on Ridges and Mountains, Folktales on Roads and Villages, Folktales on Aquatic animals/plant, Folktales related with certain clan of Limbus, etc.

In the Limbu folktales the main characters are god, a normal human being without the supernatural power and mostly animals and birds. The Limbu folktales are not like fairy tales or stories of magical superman. When we listen to the tales of the Limbu community we can feel as the true story where we are living on and where our forefathers lived on the same earth. The story of the particular place makes us feel about the history of the place and vegetations rather than tale/stories left behind .The tales/ stories highly depict the true stories of the past except few of them are somewhere unbelievable.

The main characteristics of Limbu folktales are they signify their culture, myth, religion, history and their religion. Limbu are the native/ ancient tribe of Nepal. Being the ancient tribe of the eastern part of Nepal they had depicted all the important places, rivers, flora and fauna, mountains and hills of the area in their tales and stories. They had defined all the created history of the time of their forefathers in the certain part of eastern Nepal. The Limbu people believe that god resides in nature and worships god in different forms like sun, moon, vegetation, earth, soil, wind and many others. They worship nature because they had once lived the primitive life on the earth where every day they had to depend on nature and its power to them.

Essentially, these Limbu folktales were well-designed and well transmitted orally to mirror the cultural value that has the importance in the kirat Limbu community. The tales/stories contain countable symbols of nature which represent culture ideology of kirat Limbu community. The tales are functional in educating and socializing the generation of Limbu community about the social conditions, social values in which the past generation had believed and lived. In the thesis I have tried to depict all the symbols of stories which symbolically represent the culture and religions, festivals and beliefs within the Limbu community through the animals' spirits, birds, elements of the earth and Limbu Myth.

Culture of Limbu

The Limbu (meaning archer) or *Yakthung/Yakthumba* (in limbu language) is an indigenous ethnic group that belongs to the kiranti group. Limbu people are very rich in culture and tradition and its own distinct ways. It is said that Limbus are one of the benches of *Kirant*. Limbu have their own script called *Sirijunga*. *Phedangmas*, *sambas* recite *Mundhum* from the book of own written script. Limbu people are extended from the Arun river in the west and Mechi river in the East and spread as far

as Sikkim, Darjeeling, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Bhutan and even in Myanmar.

Chaintanya Subba states in his book, *The Culture and Religion of Limbus*, Historically known as 'Limbuwan', this area lies between the Arun river in the west, the border with Sikkim and west Bengal of India in the east, the northern part of the plains of Morang, Sunsari and Jhapa in the south and the border with Tibet, China in the north, almost covering an area of 11,655kms (1).

Behind naming the Eastern land 'Limbuwan' Imansigh Chemjong, in his book *Kirat Itihas* writes, "They won this land with the help of bow and arrow that's why they kept the name of this land Limbuwan" (19).

Food Culture

There are varieties of cultural foods that represent the Limbu identity. The ingredients, methods of preparation, preservation techniques are different in traditional food of the community. The crops that are grown from nature are their traditional food and beverages. The traditional food items carry their own messages depending upon the occasions. We can see clearly in the table below:

Food Items	Occasion	Message
THI or SEJANGWA with pickles playing Chyabrung band music	while bride is accompanying to bridegroom's home village	Heartly welcome.
TANGBA/TONGBA [barrel-shaped vessel or pot with lid to serve the fermented millet beer which is drunk with the help of bamboo straw—pipsing]	while guests arrive at home or marriage or other ceremonies	Warm welcome and high respect
PHUDONG [hospitality with a feast of mutton, pork, chicken,	while guests are at the time phase of returning	Especial Honor

etc.]	back	
Topping of green leaves on meal, foods, tangba, food plates, etc.	while guests are provided their meal especially in marriage ceremony, etc.	Purity, cleanness and holy.
O?MANABA SADIM/SIL (grilled fresh meat of various parts of slaughtered pig)	while pig slaughter worshipping to Gods and Goddess	Offering as holy food.
SALTLESS PORK MEAT	while worshipping Goddess Pichhamma	-
SEBAMBHE [free shared meat to neighbors and relatives]	while worshipping to Gods and Goddess sacrificing pigs, chicken, buffalo, etc.	To show bond and courtesy to each other.
CHILLI AND SALT with dish	while providing meal to guests and even own-self	
Fully filled PHANGNA and KUNDA [jar and water pot] with water and leave	In the night.	Thirsty soul got the chance to drink water whenever it needs.
CHEBON [fried unhusked rice or maize; popcorn]	It is used during funerals procession.	-
SAMDAKKHONG [lump of verities of tasty cooked foods, fruits, and vegetables]	It is offered to the dead soul during the purification ceremony.	Offering it as present to dead soul.

Source: amartumyahanng.bolgspot.

Rituals of Limbu culture

The community performs their rituals by worshipping nature. During the performance the wonderful verses, dialogues, setting of certain place and decoration of the ritual spot together with acting out by shamanistic priest and the members typically takes the form of drama. About drama, Chaitanya Subba writes:

Such drama portions of the rituals performed in the open air or in real life situation have profound veering on the value system of its performers and spectators. Such performances turn into artistic drives of spectators and participants. Such dramas are played by both the shamanistic priests and their clients. (64-65)

Some of the important rituals of Limbu culture are; *Sapok Chomen* (ceremonies preceding the birth), *Tongsing Takma* (a link with the ancestors and the present), *Mekhim Thim* (marriage ritual), *Mangenna* (warding of evil influences), *Yangdang Phongma* (naming the child)and *Yumsa Nakma* and *Khauma* (Death Rites).

There are several symbols that are made for performing the rituals. Such as for blocking the path of death (*Silam sakma*).



Fig: A symbol of *Silam Sakma* (blocking the path of death)

Source: (Budda Subba Mang and Itihasik Images)

Such as for the ritual of marriage the Limbu bride puts on lots of Golden jewellery and groom wear *khukuri* and some jewellery. According to Limbu *Mundhum* the Supreme god *Tagera Ningwavumang* made the rule to put on lots of golden jewellery by Limbu bride. The Limbu *Mundhum* story explores that the bride and bridegroom should be equal by weight to marry each other. So, the supreme god made the rule to make both men and women equal by weight and then allowed to marry. If the bride is under weight she has to put lots of jewellery until she becomes equal to the bridegroom. And if the bridegroom is under the weight than he should put on weapons to equally match the weight of his bride.



Fig: Jewellery set of Limbu women for Bridal attire and for social functions.

Source: NepalMelbourneshop.com

Folk dance and Folk lore/songs

The folkdance and the folksongs are sung and dance according to the occasions. In the Limbu society Paddy dance, well known as *Dhaan naach*, in Nepal and known as *Yalang/Yarakma* in the community is performed in the rhythm of

Palam (folksong) in the marriage or *mela* (market organized once a year/month). And another most popular dance is Kelang dance known as *Chyabrun* dance. The purpose of this dance is to save the house from various kinds of insects that may destroy the wooden portions of the house or to save the house from evil spirits and ghost and from natural calamities. There are also ritual dance where shamans beat the drums and brass plates and dance vigorously. Whereas *Manglang* is a devotional folk dance to make supreme god/goddess happy.

Folksongs such as *Hakpare Samlo* is a verse in *Mundhum*, *Palam Samlo* is sung during *dhaan nach* (paddy dance), *Nisammang Sewa Samlo* is a invocation to god/goddess, *Khayali Samlo* is a song of jokes where jokes are cracked among the singers, *Swapma Samlo* is a cradle songs for babies, *Tamke Samlo* is sung during cultivation of maize and paddy crops, *Pang Samlo* is sung in remembrance of friend in loneliness, *Kesham Samlo* is sung in happy anniversaries and celebration. And *Hamlakwa Samlo* is sung during the death of someone so it is a lament song.

Similarly, Limbu women have a distinct role and position as a traditional weaver. They are skilled in fiber art, dying and fabric decoration techniques. Mostly they weave *Dhaka* clothes such as *Dhaka sari*, shawls, tie, mat, *cholo*, *kurtha surwal*, tea mat, napkins and very well known *Nepali Dhaka topi* (Nepali cap), handkerchief and many others from the fabric and sell them commercially. Limbu women regarded weaving as a symbol of prestige, dignity and progress.

***Mundhum* (myth)**

Myth is the sacred stories which are thought to be imaginative and at least some parts is said to be true. The myth defines how the particular culture contains a set of beliefs, formation of culture and tradition. As Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines myth as a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain

natural events or to describe the early history of the people. There is difference in understanding the nature of myths because myth is meant to express and codify one's belief. Whereas for Eliade, myth is simply defined as an account of a sacred history; that is of history that is outside of the profane. Because it is connected to the ultimate reality of the sacred, myth function to explain how reality came into being and how the profane is connected to the sacred. Myths thus answer existential questions such as why are we here? Why do we die?

Similarly *Mundhum* is regarded as myth and therefore it is the most sacred in Limbu society. In the Limbu society *Mundhum* has been transmitting orally from the primitive age. It is a sacred narrative which explains and teaches us how the world and humankind came to be in their present stage. *Mundhum* is defined by various Limbu scholars such as Jash Raj Subba states in his book *Ethno religious views of the Limboo Mundhum*,

As sacred stories, *Mundhums* are often endorsed by learned forefathers (*Yehangs* and *Tumyahangs* in *Yumaism*), rulers and *Phedangma* shaman priest and closely linked to religion or spirituality. In the Limbu society in which it is told, a *Mundhum* is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past. (29)

Kirat Limbu practice shamanism and their rituals are mostly related to the worship of mother nature, ancestors, sun, moon, wind, fire and main pillar of house. Mostly *Mundhum* comes in every rituals and practice of Limbu culture. It comes in folksongs/dances, rituals, marriage, birth, death, religious practitioners, misfortune preventers, warding off evil influences and many more. The *Mundhum* are named as *Sappok Chomen* (ceremonies preceding the birth), *Yangdang Phongma* (Naming a child), *Mangenna* (Warding off evil influences), Marriage, *Nahangma* (Anointing the

family head), *Tongsing* (A link with the ancestors and the present) and *Simmering Mundhum* (death rituals). The performance of rituals according to *Mundhum* represents the great devotion to the mythical age and the culture.

Now in this modern world people are changing their religion. According to the Nepal Census of 2001, out of the 359,379 Limbu, 86.29% are practicing traditional *Kiranti* religion and 11.32% are followers of Hinduism and others. Modern Limbus, especially those living in parts of India also been influenced by Christianity. The religion differs the way we believe on them. The Limbu *Mundhum* is different to others where people of this religion follow the culture of nature.

In the traditional *Mundhum* of *Yumism*, the entire mythology of the religion deals with the life and livelihood of divinities originated from the soils and rocks (*Khambongba- Lungbongba*). The *Mundhum* says us that the god resides in every elements/parts of the nature. Therefore for the plantation of crops we perform *Mundhum* to worship the soil and the earth for better production and great weather. They believe that god resides in nature and nature provides us the life. By worshipping them according to *Mundhum* we will live a happy Life and protective life.

Herman Northrop Frye (1912-1991) was a Canadian Literary critic and the theorist, considered one of the most influential of the 20th century. He developed the theory of literary criticism in his book '*Anatomy of Criticism*' (1957) where he introduced four interrelated essays to explore the nature of literature and how it functions as an art form. The research is analyzed within the second essay, Ethical criticism: the theory of symbols. In the second essay there are several phases of symbolic study. But the research analyses the texts with mythical phase where symbol is studied as an archetype. The mythical phase look at poetry as one of the techniques of civilization and is concerned with social aspect of poetry says Frye. In the phase, symbol is an archetype or the communicable unit.

Folk stories represent human experiences through symbols and archetypes. For social symbols and codes the folktales represent limiting within socio-religious norms and values of the particular clan or society. Likewise the Limbu community of Nepal, carries their own codes and symbols to represent their culture. a natural force, plants, animals, or inanimate things are thought as the symbols , ancestors, safeguard or tutelary spirit of a society, group/ clan. Nature is regarded as the power and symbol of ancestors. So, the present thesis deals with the folktales that represent the Limbu community by studying the symbols and codes which are based on nature and myth of their own.

The research focuses upon the study of symbols in Limbu folktales by considering the tool of Symbol as archetype developed by Northrop Frye. Symbolic study focuses on the study of symbols of the text in order to study the deeper meaning of any texts. The area of symbolism is so wide that almost everything whether concrete or abstract can be taken into its boundary. So, the field of symbolism shows

a strong relation between religion and other areas of culture. Thus it is obvious that poets and critics prefer to speak and criticize on particular issues through symbols creating their images from various domains and sometimes borrowing them from religion.

The Mythical stories/ tales of the Limbu society are concerned with the primitive society and the *Mundhum*. It means the selected folktales will be studied through conventions and genres. Folktales of any culture are also about the myth stories that explore the origins of the universe and the origins of humankind. Myth stories also explore the commonalities and differences in the symbols represented in cross-cultural universal images of the creation of the world. The symbol which characterizes mythical phase is the conventional symbol or what Frye calls the "archetype". Frye observes that the study of convention is based upon analogies. In the case of archetypes, analogies are based on symbolism. Frye says that " wherever we have archetypal symbolism, we pass from the question ' what does this symbol, sea or tree or serpent or character mean in this work of art? Archetypal symbolism works in two directions for Frye. On the one hand because the language of myth and symbol enters and informs all the verbal culture, he uses what he has learned about symbolism as a literary critic to interpret texts. On the other , he sees these disciplines as informing literary criticism itself. That means the book can be read not as a fact which is trying to prove something by its massive accumulation of data but as a grand imaginative vision.

The Limbu folktale discourse presents a symbolic communication in the society unification of the sacred time at the time of the ritual, symbolize and represent the past that we are bringing back today and living it in the form of ritual. Jash Raj subba states:

The Limbu *Mundhum Tongsing Tokma* is a ritual imitated or re-actualized from the mythical event for acquiring their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. By imitating the exemplary acts of a god, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the great time, the sacred time to achieve reality or value such as winning co-operation of ancestors and divinities for the family/clan. (129)

Most of the folktales of Limbu community carry the lesson of myth of that community. It describes the myth rather than just moral stories. The most popular folktales of this community are taken in to account for the symbolic study of their culture. The stories mostly focus to the study of symbols than focusing on any other issues. The archetypes fall into two major categories: characters and symbols. Here in the folktales of the Limbu community both the characters and symbols may be taken in to consideration. In the Limbu folktales and *Mundhum* the symbols that are highly related in their cultural and religion value are nature. Most of the symbols are related to the nature and its creation. Such as aquatic/animals, flowers, birds, rivers, forest and soil/earth that has symbolic representation of their culture are highly motivated in the research.

In the story of "Papo fish", the grandson Papohang and his neighbor Changwahang plan to kill their grandmothers taking them to the bank of *Tamor* river and float them. They carried their grandmothers in the *doko*(bamboo basket) and went to *Tamor* and threw it separately. But Papohang grandmother could not float and asked for help to save her life. And finally Changwahang heard the noise and asked Papohang to go and knock his grandmother into water. He did the same and knocked her again to the water and water float her down to the river. After floating their grand

mothers they returned back to home. At home Changwahang grandmother was coughing. It was only then Papohang knew that he was deceived by Changwahang. He came to know that Changwahang threw an artificial grandmother made of Banana tree steams which float very easily in the river. Papohang finally realized what he had done to his grandmother. One night he saw his grandmother in his dream. In the dream grandmother said" After you floated me down the river I was carried away to the *Koshi* river. I have taken re-birth in the form of a fish and my clan should recognize me as *Papogna*. Let no descendent of Papohang eat *Papogna*. If they eat, I will feel unhappy and curse them, they will have disabled children or will have no children at all. So, *Papohang* Limbus take *Paponga* as their grandmother and do not eat it even today.

In the story, the river symbolizes death where grandmother was left to die. And the *Papo* fish is the transformation of human. The soul or spirit of human is in the form of animal fish. This symbolizes the *Papo* fish as the ancient spirit of the *Papo* clan. It represents the curse to the *Papo* clan. Mostly the dream of the grandson has taken the story into another interpretation. After he realized the mistake Papohang desire of his grandmother is shown through dreams. The conflict of desire and reality was in the form of dream. According to the Northrop Frye:

In archetypal criticism the significant content is the conflict of desire and reality which has for its basis the work of the dream. Ritual and dream, therefore are the narrative and significant content respectively of literature in its archetypal aspect. The archetypal analysis of the plot of a novel or play would deal with it in terms of the generic, recurring, or conventional actions which shows analogies to rituals: the wedding,

funerals, intellectual and social initiations, executions or mock executions, the chasing away of the scapegoat, villain, and so on. (105)

If we view the stories from the Sigmund Freud's displacement'; that refers to the decentering of dream thoughts, so that the most urgent wish is often obliquely or marginally represented on the manifest level. Displacement also means the associative substitution of one signifier in the dream for another.(225)

Similarly, In the mythical story/tale of "Sekmuri fung", a human lady gives birth to the tiger son (kesamee) and the human son (Namsamee). They could not last their relation as brothers and agreed for the battle. To know the result of the battle their mother took two symbolic flowers; *Sekmuree fung* for human son, the flower of long life in limbu culture and *Andang/ babari fung* for the tiger son, the flower of omen and failure in the Limbu culture. She placed both kinds of flowers along with a water pot and oil lamp at the bottom of the main pillar and observed them. At last, the tiger was defeated by the human son (Namsamee). Since then *kirat* Limbu have been using *Sekmuree phung* as a means of worship on auspicious occasions.

Symbolically if we view the story there are the symbols of animals as beast given birth by human itself. Here in the story, Tiger is the symbol of destruction, enemy, anger and purely a beast. Which in the other sense, it is also can be viewed as the characteristics of human being or as the nature of human being. The flower *Sekmuree fung* and *Andang fung* has symbolic importance according to the belief of Limbu culture because its value and belief of their auspicious and omen are related to the mythical belief of Limbu culture but not others. In the Limbu traditional society these flowers are truly related and used as their symbolic power for rituals. And in the story flowers were placed with the oil lamp (*diyoo*), where oil lamp is a fire and here fire symbolizes spiritual vision. Therefore symbol with deep roots in a culture's

mythology has great value in their performance of rituals and traditions. In the traditional Limbu society they don't plant *Andang* flower because it is believed that it creates bad luck and have evil effects in the society. So, because it has its mythical importance in its culture people follow them with no argument. It is how culture is created in Limbu society and that is not only their culture but the strong belief that are performed as a way of their life.

Similarly, in the mythical story of "Forbidden Flower", once upon a time among the *sawa yethang yakthungsa clan Kejung fekwa* had only sons. The couple always wished for a daughter to be born in the house. The husband would say that after the birth of a daughter he would kill all of his sons. Fortunately the woman got pregnant and knew after five months of pregnancy. The husband said if the girl child will be born this time I will kill all my sons. In fact the husband started making the graves in deed. But the wife was not happy to put her sons in the grave. The sons were innocent so their mother planned to escape them from being killed. She sent all of her sons to the forest to hide until she gives birth. She secretly tells her sons that, if the sister will get birth than the red flag will be on the roof of the house. So that you never return back to your house. But if again son is born than there will be white flag on the roof of the house. Then you can come back to your house safely. But, in the house a daughter was born this time, so their mother put a red flag on the top of the roof.

After they saw the red flag they never returned to the house to save their life. And few years passed, the daughter grew up and wishes if she had brothers. And her mother told the stories of their brothers how they were out of the house after her birth. Then she promised not to return back home until she finds her brothers. Then she wanders here and there in the jungle for several days.

One day she finally meets her brothers. But her brothers couldn't recognize her. And she tells all the stories that her mother told her. So they finally agreed to recognize as their own sister. She started staying with her brothers in the jungle . One day she thought of making flowers garlands for her brothers and she went to pluck beautiful flowers up in the hill. But the moment she went to pluck flowers in the name of her brothers, all of her brothers transformed into crows and flew away. She was unknown about what was happening around her. She started crying and asking the lord to return her brothers.

After noticing her extreme sadness the god appeared there in the form of saint. Then the saint makes aware her about the flowers and its symbolic meaning in Limbu culture. The flowers symbolize the romantic love so it is forbidden to exchange or offer flowers among brother and sister. After she knew that she had made mistake unknowingly she under the guidance of the god she perform *Mangenna* to raise her brothers head from being insult. Finally all of her brothers returned back and she became happy to get them back.

In the mythical story, the flower is the moral lesson to the Limbu society. It teaches the society how flowers can be the symbol of evil and sin when exchanged between brother and sister. In the story forest is the symbol of safety or protection. Whereas the flag of two colors were discussed in the story. The red as the symbol of death and dangerous and the white as the symbol of survival and purity are understood according to the story.

The archetypes may symbolize a variety of objects, ideas, or emotions. For one culture it may symbolize one idea and to other culture it may vary according to their culture and meaning. Frye proposed that the totality of literary works constitute a "self-contained literary universe" which has been created over the ages by the human

imagination so as to assimilate the alien and indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that serve to satisfy enduring human desires and needs which we call civilization. Civilization is not merely an imitation of nature, but the process of making a total human form out of nature. He means that as civilization develops, the natural world is transformed from the non-human into something with human shape and meaning. This process is given direction by desire. Desire is the energy that leads human society to develop its own form. *Yehangse:ma* (myth of creation of Universe) *Mundhum* ritual is imitation or re-actualization of 'the sacred creation model' of the Mythical Age conceived by our forefathers for acquiring our reality or for better health, cure, healing or good fortune by participation in a transcendental reality.

Generally various festivals of Limbu society are celebrated in accountable seasons. Such as *Chasok- Thisok* is a festive occasion to offer the food grains and other agricultural products to natural deities Supreme goddess Yuma is worshipped ceremoniously in her various forms and roles by offering newly ripened food grains and fruits. The season is marked by blooming of Nepal cherry tree. Likewise *Yokwa* is also a worship ceremony of ancestors as well as nature divinities before getting involved in agricultural activities. It is usually conducted when the peach starts blooming. People gather at the top of the hill or at suitable place from where they can see their cultivation and pray for water or rain, favorable weather and bumper crops as well as avoidance of accidents or wounds and bruises while working and flood and natural calamities. Mercia Eliade in her book *The sacred and the Profane* states, Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represent the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning". Hence sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable. (69)

Overall it is a festival of worshipping earth as well as other nature divinities before initiating works in the field. In the context of festivals, we can mark various symbols for study. The festivals of the traditional Limbu community are identified through the nature. The blooming of peach or Nepali cherry makes the community aware of the celebration of festivals. Here we can notice that blooming of peach or cherry are the symbol of productive season. Whereas the worshipping of nature, earth or nature divinities has also the symbolic theme. In the Limbu traditional myth while creating the Universe, the supreme god *Tagera Ningwavamang* created various kinds of gods for the assistance to create the Universe. The supreme god created god of soil/earth.

Therefore people of this community worship the soil/ earth god and ask the permission to sow or harvest crops through celebration of festivals. They complete the performance through various rituals and they are still in practice of such festivals. The soil/ earth is the symbol of god where they get production for their living. Nature represent as the symbol of life which provides us everything. Rain, water, good weather, bumper crops, avoidance of natural disaster and good health are asked with the natural divinities. Nature is the archetype of the universe which symbolically represents the life and the giver.

People have created their own belief and imagination "self-contained literary universe" so as to assimilate the indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that serve to satisfy enduring human desires and needs. *Mundhum* claim to describe the primordial events that made society and the natural world is that which they are. In all societies which share this cyclical view of time, where the world moves through cycles. the cosmogony was repeated annually. That is the reason why we worship nature divinities in particular season. In the traditional societies, New Year's rites

usually take place in the spring because that is when the year actually begins. We as a part of nature, we follow the cyclical nature of earth. "Sacred time" however is the ritualized experience where participants actually do go back in time or bring that past into the present. As Northrop Frye has said;

In its archetypal phase, the poem imitates nature, not nature as a structure or system, but nature as a cyclical process. The Principle of recurrence in the rhythm of art seems to be derived from the repetitions in nature that make time intelligible to us. Rituals cluster around the cyclical movements of the sun, the moon, the seasons, and human life. Every crucial periodicity of experience: dawn, sunset, the phases of the moon, seed time and harvest, the equinoxes and the solstices, birth, initiation, marriage, and death, get rituals attached to them. (105)

Ritual is the narrative aspect of the archetypal phase follows only because ritual is defined as a recurrent act of symbolic communication. Thus, for a traditional Limbu society time is cylindrical and a season repeats annually. Myth describes the sacred first appearance as the "sacred time" during the mythical Age. Based on cylindrical time and sacred time the time or season for conduct of ritual are decided respectively. It appears that the formation of culture, values, rituals and their beliefs in the Limbu folktale is governed by a symbolic ideology.

Whereas every tales have some specific symbols which create the belief in the community to represent the value of culture and tradition. The selected folktales have the images of forest, colors, rivers, birds, aquatic/animals and flowers which represent the dominancy of nature in the particular society. This is why symbols carry much significance in the Limbu culture.

Looking at these tales through symbolic analysis and the setting of the story where we find the real context of the society, it may be said that the way of cultural formation and rituals performance is logically constructed from pre-historic time. Unlike other fairy tales and stories we find these community tales different in actions. There are no magical powers to achieve the wanted things and there are no direct approach of gods and fairies for the help and assistance. Overall we are put into a real world where we do not find differences but some of the stories have put human into symbolic form of Tiger, Fish or other creatures. The Folktales of Limbu culture are mostly related to the *Mundhum* of Limbu culture. *Mundhum* is the guide to their life. So, the people of this community have the strong belief in the symbols that represent their culture and identity.

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