

## **Chapter – One**

### **1.1 The Chepangs: Introduction**

Nepal is a multiethnic country. Various ethnic groups live in this country. Multi-ethnicity is one of the major characteristics of Nepalese society. Each of the ethnic group has its own distinct cultural identity and uniqueness. Each of them has its own language, religious practices, life style, food habits, clothing etc. But many of those groups are still deprived of mainstream state facilities. Many of them are still to come into national recognition. However, ethnic people are rich in their culture and this cultural richness and diversity have made our country distinct from other countries. Ethnic people are nearer and dependent on nature than on science and technology. Some of the groups still live a natural life and are fully dependent on nature. One of the ethnic groups of our country which is still dependent on nature and far from scientific advancement is Chepang community.

Chepangs are one of the deprived, disadvantaged and marginalized groups among the indigenous people of Nepal. Most of the Chepang settlements have been spread along the Mahabharat range of central Nepal. Their major residence is in the Southern hills of Dhading district, Northeastern lands of Chitwan district and Northwestern hills of Makwanpur district in the average height between 2500-4000 ft. from the sea level. A small portion of the Chepang population, however, is still found living in some parts of Gorkha district, which, according to Gurung, is said to be the ancestral land of the Chepangs. Apart from this region they reside in districts of Kathmandu, Tanahu, Nawalparasi etc. The Chepangs live in the slope lands of Mahabharat range. But, nowadays, they are also migrating to plain areas of Makwanpur, Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts in search of opportunity and facility.

The first scholar to study about the Chepangs was Brian Hodgson. He states the "Chepangs are a few degree above their Confreres (Kusundas) and are beginning to hold some slight intercourse with civilized beings and to adopt the most simple of their arts and habits" (qtd. in *People of Nepal*: Bista: 90). Hodgson associated Chepangs with people of Bhutan called Lho because of the proximity of their languages. He also called the Chepangs as 'broken tribes'.

The total population of the Chepangs, according to the census 2001, is 52,237 which is 0.23% from the total population of Nepal. Among the population the number of males is 26,685 and the number of females is 25,552. The population distribution of Chepangs in four major districts is as follows:

Chitwan	38%
Makwanpur	37%
Dhading	19%
Gorkha	6%

(Source: Nepal Chepang Association)

Chepangs are short in stature with Mongolian features. They have flat and short noses, round faces, a dark brown complexion, thin and medium ears, dark eyes and prominent eyebrows with medium height. So, "it is not easy to differentiate them by appearance from the Tamangs" (Gurung: Report from a Chepang Village:6). But Dor Bahadur Bista in his book *People of Nepal* says; "they show more resemblance to the Rais of east Nepal than with any other people except that they were definitely darker than the Rais (91). Some of the Chepangs believe that their community is an offshoot of the *Kiranti* (Rai-Limbu) group that come from Sunathali, Dolkha in the East. They speak Chepang language, a Tibeto Burman dialect which is quite different from the language of the Tamangs living close to them in the same area.

Chepangs are very much friendly and frank to other people. They are completely natural, shy and honest. They respect their guests and behave kindly. Their mind is not corrupted by evil intentions. They are innocent in nature. They are more helpful and cooperative in comparison to other people. They speak more politely and sweetly. Chepang people are humorous, too. They crack jokes and laugh. Even a woman makes amorous joke with a third person before her husband, but her husband doesn't mind it. The Chepangs are not very friendly with a new visitor all at once. But when one spends two-three days with them they are very frank and interesting; they trust other people easily once s/he gets familiar to them.

The situation of education of the Chepang is not satisfactory. There is not much awareness in their community that children should be sent to school to get education. But, in these days, some of the Chepang children go to school. The literacy rate in their community is barely 23 percent. Majority of their school going children still don't go to school, instead they go to jungle to collect firewood, *githa*, *bhyakur chiuri* etc. There are not adequate schools also in their community. The educational report of the Chepang is as follows:

Level	No. of students		
	Male	Female	Total
Master's degree	1	-	1
Bachelor's degree	2	-	2
Certificate level	17	4	21
S.L.C.	122	27	149

Source: Nepal Chepang Association

Chepang community is one of the least developed ethnic groups of Nepal. Chepang people are nearer and more dependent on nature. Very less effect of

outer world's artificiality, technology and advancement is seen in this community. They have their own way of life with distinct food habits, clothing and ritual practices. Their cultural practices and living style make them nearer to nature than to physical development. A few decades ago, these people were hunters and gatherers and lived a nomadic life in the jungles of the southern central belt of the country. But now they live a sedentary life and engage in simple form of agriculture though they haven't totally left their life of hunting and gathering.

In recent days, there has come greater transformation in their living practices. Due to regular contact with other communities and several programmes organized to uplift their living condition, they have become more conscious about their position in the country. Some Chepang youths have got education and are able to hold satisfactory position in the field of employment, social service and politics. In the past, the Chepangs were totally away from contact with other communities; they had their own life style and cultural practices which were totally distinct from the people of other communities. But these days, they have close relationship with people of other communities and are also affected by their cultural practices. Though Chepang people are from Mongolian origin, their cultural practices are more influenced by Hindu culture and religion. There live Tamangs, Chhetris, and Bahuns near their community. That's why their culture and language is more affected by these groups of people. The Chepangs, now, not only live the life of hunting, gathering and simple form of agriculture but some of them are also engaged in business, some of them have established domestic industries and some are engaged in different jobs. In this regard, they are seen adopting some of the characteristics of physical advancement and modern technology. But, they are seen more conscious towards their unique identity, cultural practices and are becoming active to preserve their uniqueness.

There is no fixed and universal myth regarding the origin of the chepangs. There are several arguments and logics prevailing in their community concerning their origin. So, it is not clear and fixed how their community was named Chepang and there can't be found complete agreement in any of the statements. Regarding their group name Navin K. Rai in his book *The People of The Stones* states that the word "Chepang" has come from the word "Chyobang" where "Chyo" means "on the top" and "bang" means "stones". In the course of time the word "Chyobang" transformed into the word "Chepang". It shows that they are the people living on the hills and they originated from stones.

Another assumption concerning their group name is that in Chepang language "che" means "dog" and "pang" means "arrow". The Chepangs used to hunt with the help of dog and arrow and therefore they were named Chepang. Though there lies several disputes regarding their group name it is agreed that the Chepangs are aboriginal people of the country. Hodgson believed that Chepangs were generally supposed to be autochthonous.

As in the group name, there lies disputes in their myth of origin too. There are various myths prevailing in their community regarding their origin. The prominent story of origin is related to the legend of Lava and Kusha of the Ramayan. According to this myth, Chepangs are the offspring of Sita's son Lahari (Lava). After Sita was released from the capture of Ravan with great effort, Ram suspected his wife Sita since she had to stay under a foreign man for a long time. So, he rejected his wife to take with him to the kingdom. During her exile, Sita had to stay in the cottage of a hermit named Balmiki where she gave birth to Lohari (lava). One day Sita took her baby to the river side without informing the hermit. Balmiki became restless after returning to his cottage when he didn't see the baby in the cradle. Thinking that the

baby must have been taken away by a wild animal, Balmiki created another baby out of kush (grass) to please Sita. After Sita returned to the cottage, she was surprised to see another baby in the cradle. When she knew the reality, Sita decided to bring up both of the babies as her sons. The Chepangs widely believe that they are the descendants of Lohari, the first son of Sita, and the Kusundas are the descendants of Kusari (kush).

There are many stories prevalent in the Chepang community about the separation of the Chepangs and the Kusundas who are supposed to be the offsprings of the same ancestor. One of the legends related to them collected by Rai (1975) is as follows:

Both Lohari and Kushahari were good at archery. One day they decided to test who was better. Whoever lost the competition would have to migrate west of the Narayani river and not be seen again. In the competition they had to pierce two stone slabs of a similar size with arrows. [. . .] Lohari won the competition and kushahari had to migrate west of the Narayani river. Since then they have been rivals. They don't see each other. The folks were divided into hostile groups. They couldn't see each other face to face. If they encounter suddenly, they would start to fight. (qtd. in Gurung 11)

Another myth of origin prevailing in the Chepang community, according to Adhikari (1977): "a virgin woman in ancient times gave birth to a child, she took the infant into the jungle and left it there, pressing it with a stone to show her innocence. But the child luckily grew up by the mercy of nature in the forest and he was named 'Chepang' which is the distorted word of 'Chepiyeko' or squeezed between." (qtd. in Gurung:10). One thing we can conclude after observing these stories prevalent in the

Chepang community is that the history of this community is directly joint with nature. The people of the Chepang community have greater intimacy with nature from the origin to each of the periods of historical development.

There is no any official evidence regarding the original inhabitation of the Chepangs. Some of the Chepangs believe that their community is an offshoot of the *Kiranti* (Rai-Limbu) group that come from Sunathali, Dolkha in the east. It shows that their original inhabitation is Sunathali of Dolkha district from where they scattered into different places. But we can't find any Chepang people in Dolkha in these days. Another opinion regarding their original inhabitation is that the forefathers of the Chepangs were located mainly in the district of Dhading and the present geographical distribution is the result of a series of migrations over the past fifty years in search of arable land. Some of them also believe that their original inhabitation is the hills of Gorkha district and they migrated from there into different districts due to violent deforestation.

Though there is no fixed evidence of the original inhabitation of the Chepangs, one thing that is true regarding them is that up to a few decades ago they used to live a nomadic life and lived in the forests and caves. Since they lived a nomadic life and settled in the forest there was no fixed inhabitation of this community. They were rarely in touch with people of other communities. They finally settled in those lands where they reside till now around a century before. G.M. Gurung in his book *Report from a Chepang Village* states:

In my observation, deforestation and interaction with agrarian groups are the responsible factors for motivating them to start a settled life with slash and burn cultivation. It is my assertion that they had a nomadic life similar to the Rautes, the last nomadic ethnic groups

observable in the hills of far western Nepal. Hence, the settled life of the Chepangs is probably a century old. The economic structure of the Chepangs is markedly different from that of the non-Chepangs in the area (Bahun-Chhetris) because it is entirely forest-based. (49)

Some of the Chepangs also say that they have the same origin as the Thakuris. It means there was separate state of the Chepangs and they had same status as that of Thakuris. There were at one time four Chepang rajas who were defeated by the Raja of Patan. The four Chepang rajas were called Poney Raja, Gill Raja, Rani Raja and Raji Raja. Their common court was at Pukunthali and Raji Raja was the seniormost among them. It shows that the Chepangs had distinct identity and had their own ruling system. But this claim has not been proved officially.

There are two groups of Chepang people. One group lives in the eastern part of the region and is known as the Pukunthali; and another lives in the western part known as the Kachhare. According to Dor Bdr. Bista "Kachhare Chepangs are more backward and primitive than the Pukunthalis. The Kachhars like to be called Sunpraja and have no subdivisions, while the Pukunthalis are called praja and have a number of clans" (People of Nepal: 98).

The Chepangs started to call themselves 'Praja' since they thought the word 'Chepang' as derogatory. The word 'Praja' Means 'subject' of the nation. The government of Nepal declared themselves to be called 'Praja' like some of other ethnic groups of Nepal in 2034 B.S. and started 'Praja Development Programme" to uplift their living standard. The Chepangs were happy to be called 'Praja' and found this word respectable. But in the course of time, the Chepang people became conscious toward their ethnic identity and again started to call Chepang instead of Praja. After



they established "Nepal Chepang Association" they declared themselves Chepang, an aboriginal people of Nepal, rejecting the name Praja.

Chepang people had their distinct cultural practices from the period of their origin. They lived a nomadic life, spent their life in the forest making caves as their shelter. Since they were far from the cultural interaction with other communities they had their own living style, food habits and clothing. They developed their own system of ritual practices which were totally dependent and related to nature. But due to deforestation and their increasing population they couldn't limit themselves in primitive state of life. Gradually, they started to come in contact with people of other communities and there occurred cultural transformation in their communities. They, at first, came in contact with the groups living near by their residence and were influenced by their cultural practices. The people living nearer to their community were the Tamangs, the Bahuns and the Chhetries. So, we can see a great influence of these people in their culture. Their language is more similar to the language of the Tamangs and they have also adopted many of the ritual practices and festivals celebrated by the Hindu people. Now, the Chepangs interact with many other groups of people and due to the regular interaction there has appeared cultural hybridity. The cultural practices observed by the Chepangs, these days, are not their pure and original practices. Rather they are the results of the influence of other groups in different periods of history.

Though there appears some influences of other groups, Chepang people are rich in their culture. They have their own culture and religion. They have their own gods and goddesses to worship and have their own festivals, ritual practices, food habits and clothing. The uniqueness of the Chepang culture is the role of 'Pande', a Chepang saman, in their religious and cultural activities. Chepang people need Pande

in each of their ritual practices. They consult with Pande if they fall ill. It means that Pande plays the role of a witch doctor to cure patients. Chepang people believe that sickness is the cause of the entrance of something evil in the human body. To cure the patient the Pande beats *dhyangro* and enchants several mantras to please the gods and goddesses and to destroy evil forces. Not only this, the role of the pande is necessary in other cultural practices too. In the time of celebrating festivals, worshipping gods and goddesses, and other ritual practices like marriage, death etc., Pande plays a vital role in their community. Chepang people don't start any new and auspicious work without consulting the Pande, their guru.

Chepang people celebrate several festivals and many of them are similar to Hindu culture. But some of the festivals are unique in their culture which they celebrate with lots of joy and happiness. Some of the festivals they celebrate are Nwagi (Chhonam), Saune Sankranti, Maghe Sankranti, Aitabare puja, Dashain, Tihar etc. Nwagi, also known as chhonam, is one of the most important indigenous festivals among the Chepangs. G.M. Gurung, in his book *Report from a Chepang Village* says:

Chhonam is the auspicious day for eating a new crop. Before the celebration of this festival, there are prohibitions for eating certain agricultural products as ghaiya (dry rice), Pindalu (cocacosa), ghiraula (sponge ground) and sour fruits like lemon. They do not eat corn and new crop until and unless the offering is given to their ancestors. Generally, all the members of a clan get together at the house of the eldest member with fruits, jand and a bunch of rice plant for the observation of the festival. (44)

This festival is observed during the month of Bhadra and Pande is necessary to celebrate this festival. Apart from this they worship different gods and goddesses on

different occasions. They worship Namrung, the hunting goddess and observe Bhumi-Puja to worship Earth deity and Gaidu-Puja to worship a cattle goddess.

The food habit of the Chepang people is mostly dependent on the natural resources of their areas. Most of the Chepang people don't have enough land to grow crops to make them enough for the whole year. So, for more than six months many of the Chepangs have to depend on nature for food. Specially, from March to May they face food problems and during this time they go to the jungle to collect githa, bhyakur, sisnu, yam etc.

Chepang people eat corn porridge and millet porridge as their main food. At the time of festivals they eat several delicious foods which they gather and save for festivals. At the time of festivals the chepangs eat jand, rakshi, meat, rice, yam etc. which are necessary for them to celebrate festivals.

Like food habits, the Chepangs have unique system of clothing as well. Most of the Chepangs wear scant clothes. Traditional male Chepangs cover their genitals by using a small piece of cloth. Similarly, female chepangs cover their breast and genitalia using small pieces of cloths. But now a days several changes have occurred in their socio-cultural lives. These days Chepang males wear vest shirt, underwear, pant, kurta etc. and the females wear lungi, phariya, kurta, suruwar, sari, cholo etc. Chepang girls are not fond of ornaments. They don't use golden ornaments. Some of the married women wear silver bracelets and some ladies wear bangles on their wrist.

Another significant characteristic of the Chepang culture is gender equality. In their community females are not suppressed as in other communities. Males and females are treated equally and they bear equal responsibility in household and outer activities. Chepang females have no any restrictions to live life according to their

desire. They have full freedom regarding marriage and other personal decisions. In this regard Gurung in *Report from a Chepang Village* remarks:

In Chepang communities a woman is free to select or elope with a man of her choice. So, marriage by elopement, divorce and widow remarriages are permissible. A woman can get divorced from her husband if she does not like him and she is free to elope with another man or a widowed can get herself married with another man. [...] Thus, in relation to the marriage issue, a Chepang woman attains full freedom as her decision is last and final. In comparison to a Hindu woman, in this respect, a Chepang woman possesses a higher status.  
(26-27)

## **1.2 The Chepangs and Nature**

Until a few decades ago, Chepang people lived a nomadic life in the jungle and they were hunters and gatherers. They used to live in caves and used to eat fruits, roots and meat. They were less concerned toward outer activities and were less in touch with other communities. Though there has occurred great transformation in the life style of the Chepangs, they are still closely attached to nature. Now they live in houses instead of caves and their main occupation is agriculture rather than hunting and gathering. They also have regular interaction with people of other groups. But to be dependent on nature for their survival and to worship nature as living force are their unique practices which make them distinct from other communities.

Due to modern technological development human life has become more artificial, sophisticated and mechanic. Nature for human being is no longer a matter of worship. Rather it is a matter to exploit for human sophistication. Human being utilize nature for their temporary benefit instead of paying respect on it. The people of this

age are more dependent on technology and advancement than on nature. They have less connection with natural elements. Human beings are lust for luxury and pleasure and for them to be near to nature means to be savage, undeveloped and uncivilized. But the Chepangs challenge this tendency and value and live a happy and natural life. They are not obsessed with physical advancement rather they are happy and satisfied with their own living style. Chepang people live the life of simplicity. They are honest, innocent and are not corrupted with evil intentions.

As mentioned earlier nature for the Chepangs is a living force. They are dependent on nature almost in every activities of their life. Their food habit is heavily dependent on nature. Majority of the Chepang people are still unable to manage sufficient food to eat for the whole year. They have to go to the jungle in search of fruits and roots to fulfill their necessity. They collect githa, bhyakur, sisnu, yam and other fruits and use them as their food. Most of the Chepang settlements are near the jungles on the slopes of hills. They reside near forest so that it would be easier for them to collect food and to build small huts for their shelter. Hunting and fishing also prevail in this community. That's why, they settle their living to make these activities easier for them. G.M. Gurung remarks that the Chepangs have good knowledge on natural resources and their utilization process. he defines interrelationship between nature and the Chepangs in this way:

The Chepangs are capable of earning their living utilizing natural resources despite uncomfortable geographical structure of their residence. The Chepangs have specific knowledge on poisonous herbs and roots and their method of utilization more than any other ethnic groups in Nepal. Though they have less interaction with external world and are deprived of opportunities of development and education, the

Chepangs have close relationship with nature. It is not difficult to understand the intimacy of the Chepangs with nature due to their creative use of natural resources (Chepang Samaj ra Batabaran: 12).

Chepang people live in small huts which are mostly built on the top of hill. They don't have big buildings. Those huts are generally made up of woods and covered by grasses. They are small in size and easy to build. They build such houses so that it would be easier for them to transfer them to another place if needed. The clothing of the Chepang is also simple and natural. They don't believe in artificiality. Though many of them have started to imitate from others rejecting their traditional clothes, they are not interested in becoming attractive and decorated. Generally, females don't use ornaments and don't use cosmetic products.

The Chepangs respect nature. They are nature worshippers. They don't intend to exploit and pollute nature. The myth of origin of this community is directly connected to nature. The Chepangs originated in the forest, were brought up and lived on the lap of nature. So they are always grateful to nature. They believe that they were born out of nature. They don't imagine the life of artificiality away from the influence of nature. Nature for the Chepangs is almost everything in their life.

Whenever we bring the image of Chepang residence in front of our eyes, there ultimately comes the image of chiuri tree. There is inseparable relationship between the Chepangs and chiuri. Where ever are the Chepangs there are chiuri trees. Similarly, wherever are chiuri trees there are the Chapangs. Not only that, the bird *Chamero* (bat) which likes juice of chiuri very much is the most favourite bird to hunt for the Chepangs. That is why, the interrelationship among the Chepangs, chiuri and chamero is remarkable and significant in the Chepang culture. It is also said that the Chepangs, in the past, used to give chiuri plant to their daughters in the form of

dowry. But most of the Chepangs do not agree with this claim. They believe that the Chepangs used to give land to their daughters so that their daughters could earn their living without miseries. When they gave land there ultimately lied chiuri trees. This system still prevails in some of the Chepang villages. It shows that the Chepangs love their daughter very much. It also shows that Chepang life is directly connected to nature and their life is fully dependent on nature.

### **1.3 The Chepangs and Supra-natural Belief**

As their life is directly connected to nature the Chepang culture is deeply rooted in supra- natural belief. Belief in supra-natural forces is one of the major and significant cultural practices of this community. They worship several gods and goddesses so that there wouldn't be any obstacle in their life. Regarding supra-natural belief prevailing in Chepang community G.M. Gurung in *Indigenous People:*

*Mobilization and Change* remarks:

The Chepangs like the people of many other ethnic groups of Nepal believe in an unknown supernatural world. They have evolved a system of beliefs and practices through which they have established a close relationship with spirits who are believed to influence the destinies of mankind. They have inherited these beliefs and practices from their ancestors through which they enter into relation with various deities and sprits for their livelihood, security and prosperity. (70)

Chepang people believe that their life would be protected and run smooth when various deities and spirits are happy to them. So they try their best to keep them ever happy observing different rituals. For observing such rituals the role of the pande is most important. Pande plays the role of a witch doctor, priest and Purohit (clergyman). It is believed that the pande can keep different deities and spirits happy

by performing his practices. Regarding the role of the pande, G.M. Gurung in *Report from a Chepang Village* remarks:

If any body is ill, the pande is invited to find out which god or ghost has caused sickness and to cure it by beating his one-sided drum.[---] His magico – religious practices come into operation for the diagnosis and treatment of all kinds of illness. [---] In addition to this he spells some incantation to poison the river water which helps the Chepangs to fish. (78-79)

The Chepangs believe that the future destiny of humankind is influenced by supernatural spirits. They believe physical weakness, natural calamities like droughts, excessive rainfall, damage to crops etc. are supposed to be the result of either the evil desire of the witches or that of the evil spirits. To get rid of such calamities they worship several deities and gods. Among them they observe Bhumi-Puja (the earth deity) Gaidu-Puja (goddess of livestock) and Namrung (the hunting goddess). It is believed in the Chepang community that the spirits of ancestors may cause misfortunes upon the family if they are displeased . So they worship the dead spirits of their ancestors which they call *Tonklong*. Tonkling is observed in the community every five years.

One of the Chepangs informed me that the Chepangs consult the pande, their religious guru, when they plan to start a new work. Before going to search githa, bhyakur in group they consult the Pande and declare suitable time to start their journey. Similarly, before building their houses they consult the Pande to know whether the land is appropriate to build a new house. Not only that they also leave their house if any unauspicious sound comes from the walls or woods of the house. They may leave their house if they dream bad or a family member dies in the house.



Belief in supra-natural power and worship to it is a culture of the Chepangs. The influence of supra-natural belief can be seen in every activities of their life. They pray to different gods and goddesses at the time of celebrating festivals. They regularly worship their ancestral spirits and ghosts, they pray to different deities for peace and prosperity. Not only that before starting their folk song they, in the beginning, pray to different gods and goddesses and start dohori or jhyaure. That's why, supra-natural belief is one of the major guiding principles of the Chepang culture.

#### **1.4 Significance of Songs in the Chepang Culture**

Another significant factor of the Chepang culture is to value folk music and folk songs. Folk literature occupies a significant position in the Chepang community. Folk literature and folk songs make Chepangs distinct from other communities. They have their own literature which is still oral and has transformed from one generation to another. Folk tales and folk songs are two major factors of Chepang literature that occupy significant position in their culture. When Chepang people have leisure time they gather in one place and sing songs or tell folk tales. The Chepangs call *Bindrai* for folktales in their language. They spend more than four hours while telling folktales. They also sing songs while telling those tales. In those folktales they include the issues related to their origin, history and nature. *Komar Yoma, Yukpa Raja, Dangkuk, Chhyani Walai, Gandai Bhaya* etc. are some of the folktales prevailing in this community.

Folk song plays an important role in each of the cultural practice observed by the Chepang people. They sing songs in most of the festivals and on auspicious occasions. The Chepangs have various kind of songs though they do not have their own unique dance. The songs like *Kanchhi, Laulau, Mankhan, Tomthyak,*

*Tungnimani, Jyanmaya, Kongkochyong* etc. are sung specially on the occasion of marriage ceremony, Bratabandha, Celebrating festivals and other public gatherings. Generally, there is system of singing dohori based on the myth of origin on those occasions. Some of the other songs they sing are jhyaure ,juwari, ashare, bhailo, deusi etc. They sing different songs on different situations. Regarding the Chepang songs, Prem Swoveet expresses his views in this way:

Whoever else, they sing jhyaure whether they are children or youngs or olds. Both male and female sing it. Often they sing at the rantang (work) and jatra (special gathering on the occasion of god worship, where young boys and girls meet and create pleasure). When more people gather they begin to sing jhyaure, expressing their lives, willings, devotions etc- in common voice of male and female. (129-30)

Since song is an important factor of the Chepang culture, they sing songs in each of the cultural performances. There are various kinds of Chepang songs to sing on different situations and occasions. Sometimes they sing songs to offer their respect to nature and different supra-natural forces. At times they sing songs to express their pains and sufferings and to get relief from them and sometimes they sing songs expressing their wishes, desires and love attitude for others. Specially, young boys and girls express their love affair and wishes through their songs.

One of the major subject matters of the Chepang songs is to respect nature. Since the Chepangs are nature worshippers they sing songs expressing their gratitude to nature. In their songs they describe different hills, mountains, lands, falls, forests etc. They also express their views how their life is dependent on nature. We can see the description of nature more or less in most of their songs, while some of the songs are fully devoted to describe natural beauty. In the jungle young boys and girls sing

dohori and jhyaure sitting on a chiuri tree and playing hide and seek among the bushes of jungle. It means nature is directly connected in Chepang songs. Apart from the description of nature we can also see the description of supra-natural forces in their songs. Before beginning any songs they pay their respect towards different gods and deities. Some of the songs are totally devoted to mention stories of supra-natural forces. The traditional songs of this community are more about the description of nature and supra-natural forces.

As folk songs are basically sung to share wishes, desires and love attitudes between young boys and girls, Chepang songs are also significant in their community to express inner feelings and emotions of young people to their lover or beloved. But those love songs are different from general love songs prevailing in other communities. They express their pure, innocent, typical love affair in their songs. They reveal their pains, miseries and sufferings of their life through their love songs and convey it to their love partners. The romantic love songs have distinct position in their community which Prem Swoveet mentions in this way:

They sing juwari between two groups boys and girls. They feel much risk in it, that they sometimes match their life too. If a group loses in competition, the captain of this group has to go with the captain of another group, means they have to get married. (130)

Many of the Chepangs get married by means of juhari. A young boy and a girl sing dohori for a long time and agree to get married if they are convinced from each other. Even several boys may compete with a beautiful girl to marry her. Whoever is able to win her gets married.

The Chepangs also include voices of pain and suffering in their songs. The life of the Chepangs is full of pains and miseries. They lack many things in their life and

have to struggle to survive. They have to work hard to earn their living. To get relief from those pains and sufferings they sing songs of misery. Rammani Dhungel, in this regard remarks:

To provide relaxation and entertainment for their tired body caused due to their full day labour, they sing and dance till late night which they often do in groups gathering many people. Specially, after work at night they gather around oven including olds, youngs and children and sing song along with dancing. On such occasions they often sing songs like dohori or hajuri and they include the issues like marriage, love affair, house hold and daily life activities as well as happiness and sorrows. (My Translation 91)

To sum up, the Chepang community is a unique and distinct ethnic group among many other groups of our country. This group has its own cultural and ritual practices and their own way of life. This ethnic group is excessively rich and prosperous in its cultural heritage and the songs play a significant role in the culture of this community. Communal feelings and interconnectedness to nature and supra-natural forces are distinct identity of this community. The identity of the Chepangs depend on their relation to nature and supra- natural forces.

## Chapter – Two

### 2.1. Concept of Relational Self and the Chepang Songs

The concept of relational self is an assumption that the identity of self is shaped in relation to several other factors. Nothing in the world is autonomous and nothing exists in itself. Rather the existence of each element depends on many other elements. It means the identity of an individual depends on his/ her relation with other social factors like family, society, nation and the entire world. Human identity is formed or shaped on the basis of his/ her relation with various other selves. No self is autonomous. Instead it is always relational and the existence of one is possible only because of the existence of others.

The concept of relational self is derived from feminism. Nancy Chodorow, a modern feminist psychologist, develops the concept of relational self in her essay "The Reproduction of Mothering". Anne K. Mellor applies this concept to study the female writings of the Romantic era. Mellor argues that the women writers of the Romantic period developed the concept of relational self, as Chodorow defines, in their writings relating the identity of a woman constructed on the basis of various social factors. Rejecting the concept of autonomy and transcendentalism constructed by male romantic writers, female writers constructed human identity in relation to family members, society and nature. They didn't attempt to put the self of human beings above other factors. Rather they identified the self in relation with them. It means they believed that human beings can never be above and away from nature and other social factors. Human relationship with nature is always friendly and horizontal rather than hierarchical and vertical.

Nancy Chodorow, for the first time, invents the term 'Relational Self' in her essay 'The Reproduction of Mothering' specially to deal with female issue and to

show the relational identity of females in the family and society. Anne K. Mellor, defining Chodorow's term, remarks "this self has no firm ego boundaries, and experiences its place in the world as an entanglement in shifting relationship, with family members, friends, lovers, co-workers" (*Romanticism*: 186). The credit for developing the political implications of the relational self goes to the French feminist Luce Irigaray. In this regard Mellor further says:

To develop the political implications of this relational self, one might invoke the French feminist Luce Irigaray's concept of a 'placental economy', grounded on the image of the pregnant woman who experiences herself always as two-in-one. A relational self does not make economic or political decisions based on the assessment of self interest (what contemporary economists call 'rational choice'), but rather on what Irigaray calls a practice of gift giving, of submerging one's personal desires into a desire for the good of one's family or the whole community. (186)

No human existence is autonomous that is distinct and separate from other selves, it is always relational. Human beings have relationships with several other factors. They have relationship with nature, other human beings, and non-human creatures.

Ecologists see close attachment of human beings with nature. For them human being is a part of nature and the identity of a human self is in relation to natural elements. Human identity depends on the role and position of several other creatures because human being is also a part of ecosystem. So human existence without nature cannot be imagined.

Besides natural, human existence is related to other factors as well. Some religious people relate human identity with 'God' or supra-natural power. According

to them, human identity can never be separated from god. Human being is a creation of god and they cannot exist without his grace and influence. Apart from this, human beings have relationship with several other factors (Social, political, economic etc.) which shows that human identity is always relational. Defining relational self, Anne K. Mellor remarks:

... subjectivity constructed in relation to other subjectivities, hence a self that is fluid, absorptive, responsive, with permeable ego boundaries. This self typically located its identity with in a larger human nexus, a family or social community. (192)

As human subjectivity is constructed in relation to other subjectivities, nature can be the chief factor among those subjectivities. There is a two way relationship between nature and human beings. It means they are interrelated to each other. But for it human beings should behave With Nature as a friend and co-worker rather than exploiting it.

The identity of the Chepangs is primarily constructed on the basis of their interconnectedness with nature. The Chepangs spend their life with regular interaction with nature. The Chepangs not only depend on nature, they equally respect and preserve it. Yaman Chepang, a Chepang singer, says "Nature has preserved the life of the Chepangs and the Chepangs have preserved nature. So, there is two way relationship between them" (Based on interview: my translation).

Chepang concept of relational self is truly represented in the Chepang songs. Their songs represent their relational identity prevailing in their culture. There can be seen perfect harmony among nature, supra-natural forces and the Chepangs in their songs. In their songs they pay their respect towards nature and Supra-natural forces and also there lies interconnection among these factors. Typical and traditional

Chepang songs like 'Kachhi' 'Tumnima' etc. are about the description of and worship for nature and supra natural power. They respect nature as living force or as life provider and sing songs glorifying it. The Chepangs believe that nature has provided everything they need. The following stanza of a song from *Chepang Suskera – II* shows dependence of Chepangs on nature and their respect for it:

Banpakha hang ghansa tatchu  
 yho siro tungdai maya satchu  
 langyo mina taksai mina  
 dalihang mubati broklai jechuda  
 (Achcha lau lau: B-I)

In this song the speaker requests his beloved to be near each other offering different eating things like mango, chiuri etc. available in nature. He proposes to entertain in the nature cutting grass together and exchanging their love for each other. He also says that they will drink the juice of chiuri and mango together because they are fully ripped and are ready to eat. They will sit on a branch of tree and eat those things together.

This song shows the intimacy of Chepangs to nature. Nature is a place of entertainment and they are dependent on nature for their survival. The speaker doesn't offer to go to an advanced and developed city. But he offers to play and make love on the lap of nature so that their love would be ever fresh and happy. The lover doesn't propose his beloved to go to an expensive hotel and take meal. Instead he desires to eat those fruits and roots available in their jungle. They don't desire to sit on luxurious sofa rather they desire to sit on the branch of tree and sing beautiful song. The Chepangs believe that if they exchange love in nature their love would be successful and strong. That's why the lover proposes his beloved to cut grass together in the



jungle and enjoy with natural productions. The Chepangs do not like the world of materiality and artificiality because that world is corrupted, individualistic and complex. But the Chepang like to live the life of innocence and simplicity. Because of this the speaker of this song glorifies nature as life provider.

Nature is not only a source of entertainment and of eating things for the Chepangs but their economy is dependent on nature as well. Most of the Chepangs do not have other economic sources except depending on nature. They collect different things from the forest and sell them in the market. They produce ghee of 'chiuri', broom of 'Amriso' etc. and sell them to fulfill their minimum necessities. This stanza of a song from *Chapang Suskera – II* shows their economic dependency on nature:

Ramsui latti phektatsa kai

gerai rangghau ngoto

ophek latti kungya aalti

yajyo nailau ngoto

(Chewa Dhuka: A-III)

This song shows the miserable economic condition of the Chepangs and it shows significance of nature in the Chepang life. The speaker in this song plans to go to the jungle taking sickle in his hand to collect amriso and to make broom of it. He intends to take it to a local market and sell it so that he would be able to buy a piece of cloth to cover his body.

The Chepangs do not intend to earn more money and spend the life of luxury. They desire to live a life of simplicity by fulfilling their minimum necessities taking support of nature. But they never intend to be away from the scenario of nature and natural beauty. They desire to entertain themselves and live with nature interacting with it.

The Chepangs are not only dependent on nature but they also respect and preserve nature taking it as a living force. They respect nature as god and never intend to exploit and destroy it for their short lived benefit. As they take support from nature for this survival, they preserve the forest and wildlife. The Chepangs are aware of the reality that their life is impossible without preserving the forest. That is why the jungles around the chepang community grow more instead of getting destroyed. The Chepangs sing songs respecting and glorifying nature. They describe natural beauty of their locality and desire to get pleasure. The young boys and girls feel fresh, energetic, creative and moving from the beauty of nature and propose their love attitude through the medium of singing. On such occasion they sing 'dohori' and 'jhyaure' songs to impress their love partners.

Like that of nature, the Chepangs have close affinity with supra-natural forces. The Chepangs highly believe in supra-natural power and think that the same power has made their life possible in this world. That's why, they believe that to make their life smooth they have to worship god and pay respect to him. The Chepangs are devotional and they devote their life on supra-natural power. There are many songs prevailing in this community which are sung to pay their respect to different gods and goddesses. Specially the pande sings those songs to please gods and goddesses. Not only that, the Chepangs pray to gods and goddesses while singing any kind of songs, either dohori or jhyaure or any others. The following song from *Chepang Suskera - II* depicts this concept:

Budai hoti maya lauchuda  
 simebhume chyunti kasam jyechuda  
 broklai mujecha gai ta nyahjecha  
 junibhar ngiko maya syalti gamjenchu

(Aachcha Lau Lau: B-I)

The speaker, in this song proposes his beloved to make love by praying to nature and to make a promise by making the earth deities wake up. He also proposes to sit together and preserve their love for several lives.

The Chepangs do not imagine the possibility of any auspicious work without the grace of gods and goddesses. Making love is also an auspicious work and it also cannot flourish if gods and goddesses are not happy with them. So they feel the necessity of pleasing different powers on each of the occasions. Along with supra-natural powers, the Chepangs also worship nature because they believe that through nature the supra natural power appears in front of them. Nature is the manifestation of different gods and goddesses. So to worship nature is to worship god for Chepangs. The Chepangs do not create any image of gods and goddesses to worship them. But they worship natural elements to please their gods. Yaman Chepang in this regard says:

The Chepangs are the people who believe in spirituality. But it doesn't mean that they worship on the image of ten handed gods and goddesses and the idols of them. They remember different gods and goddesses and worship nature. Either they worship a tall stone or a large tree found in their locality. [. . .] The issue of nature comes together even while worshipping the supra-natural forces. (My Translation: Interview-I)

As I have already mentioned, traditional Chepang songs are purely the description of nature and supra-natural forces. Some of the songs are descriptions of natural beauty and prosperity while some of them reflect deep respect for supra-natural forces. But some of the traditional songs merge both issues and present them artistically. The

song "kongkochyong" is a true representative of this category. Though the subject matter of this song depends on the situation of singing time, the song, presented here, is about an imaginary story. This song creates an imaginary situation where a dead couple comes down the earth from the heaven at night to entertain the beauty of nature and to suck the juice of chiuri. The following stanza of a song from *Chepang Suskera-I* is presented in this way:

Lohar tairanko tairanti  
 saman tairanko tairanti  
 ratai lhaiti aaljeya  
 jhangai lhaiti aaljeya  
 muwaliko mulada  
 dyahnwaliko hyahnlada  
 eleng wanghang ryahtohang  
 sunhai wanghang mutohang  
 krutai klyongti muyakcha  
 godai klyaiti muyakcha  
 (Kongkochyong: A-II)

The speaker of this song offers his female partner to go down to earth from the heaven for eating different things available there because it is going to be night. The speaker also announces others to go with them if they are interested. There are rivers on the way which should be crossed swimming together. He proposes to go sitting on flat stones and embracing each other.

This song signifies two things, one is that the Chepangs highly believe in supra-natural power and believe that there is life after death. They can live in another world similar to this world. Another is that nature for the Chepangs is more important

even than heaven. The dead couple from heaven desire to come down to earth to seek pleasure in eating fruits and roots available in the jungle. It shows that nature is the most valuable thing for the Chepangs. This song deconstructs the boundary between the earth and the heaven. Even the dead people can come to their previous place for entertainment and easily return back to their own place.

The songs, mentioned above, show that the Chepang life is interrelated to nature and supra-natural forces. The self of the Chepang is formed on the basis of their relationship with nature and supra-natural power. So their identity is based on these factors. A true interconnectedness among the Chepangs, nature and supra-natural forces has been reflected in Chepang songs. Chepangs believe in supra-natural power and worship them believing that their life would not be possible without the grace of gods and goddesses. Similarly, they preserve and respect nature believing that nature has provided them everything they need in their life.

## **2.2 Ecocritical Interpretation of the Chepang Songs**

Before starting the interpretation of the Chepang songs, it would be better to define what ecocriticism is. Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and ecology. It is a critical perspective that focuses on the relationship between human beings and the natural world. It means the relationship between humans and non-human world is the primary focus of ecocritical studies. Defining ecocriticism, Glotfelty and Formm remark:

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its

reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth centered approach to literary studies. (XVIII)

Ecocriticism is the environmental study of literature that looks at the effect of environment/ ecology in literary texts. It studies how nature has been presented in literature and what kind of a relationship between human beings and nature has been created in the text. William Ruckert defines ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." (qtd. in Glotfelty:xx)

All the natural things like human beings, animals, plants and other physical elements have cosmic unity that we call life. When we study the relationship between literature and landscape, human and non-human world, we are not studying two separate things but their interdependencies. The lives of earth are connected to each other and all are dependent on the basic natural elements for their survival. That's why, no life can be survived without being dependent on each other. Each of the living and non-living elements existing in this earth are directly and indirectly connected to each other. It means "every thing is connected to everything else" (Barry Commoner).

Chepang songs create a direct relationship between nature and human beings. These songs present nature as living force and friends for human beings. In the Chepang songs nature is highly valued and nature is the primary subject matter of their singing. There is a direct influence of nature in the Chepang life. So the Chepangs sing songs describing and glorifying nature. There is interconnectedness between nature and human beings in their songs. The following stanza of a song from *Chepang Suskera - II* presents the cosmic unity among the natural elements:

Makai minjya chhyoiching gojya  
tingsi lohang aamjesa bela dahjya

nyamsai minjena koksai minjena

koksaiko tunghang moti longwa nojena

(Aachha Lau Lau: B-I)

In this song there is the description of natural productions and also the description of the interrelationship between human beings and non human creatures. There is a description of the natural scenario of rainy season in the song. Maize ripened in the field. *Jhyanukiri*, a kind of insect, sang and the time came for eating rice on the leaf of 'bhalayo'. Similarly, Koksai and nyamsai (Khanayo and Nimaro in Nepali) gets ripened in this season and bird named longwa (kalchaude) sings sitting on the khanayo tree.

This song is significant regarding the interconnections among nature, human beings and non-human beings. In the nature, not only human beings, other creatures also make their residence and enjoy natural products. In the rainy season birds and insects are also happy because they get enough eating things in the jungle. The Chepangs are happy in this season because they get several eating things from nature. Maize ripens, other fruits and roots ripen in this season which are the eating things of the Chepangs. The concept of cosmic unity can be observed in this song because each of the beings is dependent on nature for survival. The birds sing songs sitting on the tree to express its happiness. Other insects produce sounds hiding them in the bushes because they get place for living in this season.

Most of the Chepangs have to depend on nature for their food habits. So, in those seasons when the fruits and roots are matured and ready to eat, the Chepangs are very happy. Regarding the food habits of the Chepangs Yaman Chepang remarks:

The Chepangs don't have eating things for more than six months. After that they have to be dependent on what are available in the nature. For

example they survive eating githa, bhyakur, tarul (yam) sisnu etc., hunting different birds, killing crabs and fishing in many of the seasons. Due to these causes the relationship between the Chepangs and nature is like that of flesh and nail. (My Translation: Interview-I)

The above mentioned song not only shows the interrelationship between nature and human beings. It also symbolizes the cultural aspect of the Chepangs. The Chepangs eat rice on the leaf of bhalayo specially on the occasion of Saune Sankranti. This is a cultural practice of the Chepangs which is directly related to nature. Chepang culture is not away from nature rather their culture has been developed from the territory of nature. The Chepangs worship the elements of nature like stone, tree, mountain to please their gods and goddesses. They eat rice on the leaf of different trees like bhalayo, tantari etc. on different occasions. This practice of the Chepangs undercuts the assumption that nature and culture are antonymous. The chepang culture blurs the demarcation constructed between nature and culture as Glottelty and Harold posit ". . . human culture is connected to the physical world affecting it and affected by it".

(XIX)

Ecologists posit that human beings are part of nature. In this nature there survive several other non human beings which are equally important and necessary for human existence. Without the existence of non-human creatures, human life is impossible. That's why, we equally have to respect and preserve other beings to maintain balance in ecosystem. If human beings are totally guided by anthropocentrism forgetting the significance of other creatures, there appears environmental crisis and imbalance in ecosystem.

Chepang people equally respect other non-human creatures and feel that those creatures are also equally necessary for human existence. One of the stanzas of a song



from *Chepang Suskera – I* shows how much the Chepangs respect and sympathize other creatures:

Ngoiko dali hiklanko  
 boiko dali kailangko  
 syalung baphai ghaijeya  
 sundai wangtang wa ryaya  
 (Kongkochyong: A-II)

Here 'hiklan' and 'kailang' are two kinds of birds. A couple is sucking the juice of Chiuri sitting on a branch of tree. But they don't want to finish all of the chiuries of the tree. They decide to leave one branch for hiklan (kyanki) and another for kailang (chibe). Otherwise, they will cry the next day if they don't find chiuries left for them.

We can know, through this song, that the Chepangs reject the notion of anthropocentrism. The Chepangs equally love and respect other non-human creatures like birds, animals, insects etc. The fruits, roots and juice of flowers available in the jungle are not only for human beings, other creatures have also equal right on them. Though most of the human beings in the world have become individualistic self-centered and indifferent towards other creatures, the Chepangs reject those notions and love every creature. In this regard, Chepang songs are similar to romantic poetry that forces us to acknowledge that animals are also a kind of life in nature. Defining the practice of anthropomorphizing animals in romantic poetry, Onno Oerlemans states: "Romantic depiction of animals force us to acknowledge that animals are a kind of life in nature that is at once much like our own, and which is yet different from it, not capable of being reduced to merely human designs or desires" (4).

The world is facing ecological crisis due to much exploitation of nature in the name of fulfilling short lived human benefits. The environment has become polluted

and the entire ecosystem has got damaged. Several species on earth are being endangered. On the one hand, human beings are responsible for such ecological crisis while on the other they have become a direct victim of this crisis. But human beings remained unnoticed during the long period of history. Most of the human communities from ancient times adopted human centered approach keeping themselves above every other creature. This approach dominated human society which disregarded the significance and necessity of nature and other non-human beings.

Unlike other communities, the Chepangs equally respect non-human beings thinking that each creature born on earth has equal right to survive. They think if there were no other creatures in this world, they would have nothing to hunt for meat. If there were no crabs and fish, they would have nothing to kill for eating. Similarly, if there were no trees, they would not find Chiuri in their jungle. Describing the significance of nature Yaman Chepang says:

This is the grace of nature that we are surviving up to this time. If there were no nature, nothing could happen to us. Therefore we have to respect nature, we have to worship it and love it. Due to this, the Chepangs desire to be near to nature. It means the Chepangs see their life in nature. (My Translation: Interview-I)

The Chepangs do not keep ambition in their life to achieve physical luxury and artificial entertainment. They wish to spend their whole life in the lap of nature. They believe that life in the lap of nature is more secure, smooth, comfortable than the life of physical luxury and sophistication. They want to play with and entertain from nature and live a life of simplicity. They reject artificial and complex life and love their own natural beauty.

Chepang songs are very much similar to romantic poetry. Wordsworthian poems and the Chepang songs are similar in many respects. Both of them praise nature as a living force. Only difference is Wordsworth expresses his personal experience regarding nature while Chepang songs represent Chepang culture. In the Chepang songs nature has been presented as the most powerful and creative source that provides everything needed for the Chepangs. Similarly, Wordsworth has presented nature that provides everything for him. Nature, for Wordsworth, is a source of pleasure, knowledge, humanity, morality, sublime and so on. He believes that nature is a foster parent and a true guardian of him which always guides him towards right direction.

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

(Tintern Abbey: 168)

As the Chepangs have to be dependent on nature for most of their life activities, Wordsworth here respects nature that plays the role of good guardianship for his mind, heart and soul. Nature cures and refreshes human mind, guides human heart towards proper direction and fills human soul with morality. It means no one can survive without the influence of nature. Similar is the case in the Chepang songs. Chepang songs represent Chepang culture of respecting nature as a creative force and life provider. Chepang songs represent Chepang culture of glorifying nature avoiding artificiality. The following song from *Chepang Suskera – I* shows how much the Chepangs respect nature rejecting artificiality:

Boy:

Jhinuwako aahm kanchhi tatariko lo

musuro ko kyan kanchhi nangkai ko

tolharit kanchhi saikal banaulyam

tal hetauda kanchhi mal chitwan

Girl:

Relgadi chyawwaya kanchha saharbajar byahwaya

jhala ra malata kanchha bijuli chyawwaya

rodanda baichada kanchha dynhnti kim pahichada

(Kanchhi: A-I)

The boy in this song offers his beloved that he will give jhinuwa (basmati) rice and dal of musuro keeping on the leaf of tatari if she is ready to go with him. He also proposes to visit the lakes of Hetauda and plain lands of Chitwan riding on the bicycle. After they reach the city, according to the proposal of the boy, they see the city environment and physical advancement. But the girl doesn't like such artificiality and complexity of the city. That's why, she replies that they have seen the trains and have known the city too. They have also seen electricity that could make day and night similar. But the girl proposes to return back to their own village decorated with flowers.

This song is an example to prove that the Chepangs are nature lovers and they reject the life of artificiality and physical luxury. The boy doesn't offer any expensive ornaments and clothes to his beloved. Neither does he offer her to eat expensive food items in standard hotels and restaurants. He simply offers rice and dal which would not be served in an attractive plate but on the leaf of tatari. The boy doesn't offer to travel in a car or in other expensive vehicles. He simply offers to travel riding on a cycle. This shows the innocence, simplicity and naturality of the Chepangs. They even do not imagine to be away from the state of naturality.

Her desire which she expresses to her boy friend is significant. Her wish to return back to their own village shows her rejection of modern scientific advanced world. The chepangs have their own belief that scientific advancement and physical development drags human beings toward individualistic and self centered approach and push them away from their originality. The chepangs do not want to lose their originality embracing artificial advancement. They believe in the myth of origin and want to reside around the periphery of their own native place. The chepangs love natural beauty more than physical development. The girl, in the song, doesn't like trains, motors and electricity of the city rather she likes the beauty of flowers available in her own village.

The love songs of the Chepangs also include issues of nature. It means in their love songs too, they describe natural beauty. But their love songs are different from other love songs in other communities. The love partners offer natural things to each other through their songs instead of any expensive and artificial gifts. The lovers make love and seek pleasure embracing each other sitting on a flat stone or on a chiuri tree in the jungle and eating wild fruits and roots. They don't intend to attract each other offering attractive and decorated gifts rather they offer natural things like flowers, fruits etc. available in their surroundings. The lovers exchange their pains and miseries through their songs. But they don't intend to attract to each other with exquisite gift items. We can see descriptions and romance of nature in their love songs. Regarding the issue of love Yaman Chepang expresses his views in this way:

. . . the nature is connected even in the issue of love affair. Other people offer golden and silver ornaments like bracelets, bangles, ear rings etc. to their beloved. But in our love we offer those beautiful flowers bloomed in the jungle and propose to put them on the black

hair of the beloved. We do not need luxurious sofa, we make love and embrace sitting on the flat stone. We observe blue sky and entertain with melodious sounds of birds. Similarly, we eat different fruits and roots available there. [...] This kind of expression can be found in the love songs of the Chepangs. (My Translation: Interview-I)

The song "Aachche Lau Lau" is a love song in which the speaker tries to impress his beloved offering her different things. But this song appears to be a description of nature because the speaker talks about different flowers and fruits available in nature and offers those things to his beloved. The speaker offers to observe natural scenario to his beloved sitting together on a stone. Two of the stanzas of this song from *Chepang Suskera – II* are as follows:

Yalyang wanghang krut kyaiti  
 braklai chyunti mujecha langka kanti  
 leksi ora darim ora  
 hiklan wa nojeya kaila nojeya  
 aachcha lau lau.  
 Nantariko bhakahang  
 haunya hati git mecha dandapakha hang  
 syangkawali roklyaiti  
 galomyang kha lauti bainang  
 aachcha lau lau

(Aachcha Lau Lau: B-I)

In the 1st stanza the speaker requests his beloved to sit together on a flat stone embracing each other. Leksi and darim (phaledo and dhayaro) have blossomed. The birds are happy. So he requests her to enjoy together observing the blue sky. In the

second stanza the speaker wishes that they will sing songs imitating the rhythm of nantari (jhyaukiri) and echo the hills and mountains. Similarly, he also promises to put on a flower on the black hair of his beloved bloomed in the forest.

In this song the speaker does not intend to attract his beloved offering expensive gifts. He simply offers to sing songs together in the jungle eating wild fruits and roots, breathing fresh air amidst the wilderness. He does not offer luxurious sofas and chairs. The environment has become beautiful and joyful because flowers have bloomed everywhere. The birds are happy and are singing melodious songs. The love of the love partners get flourished and become fresh in such a situation because the environment is peaceful, beautiful, creative and romantic. In this happy movement the lover offers to sing songs together in a melodious voice so that every natural elements gets amazed listening to their songs. To imitate the rhythm of nantari means to respect it. The chepangs desire to sing songs imitating the rhythm of insects and birds. This shows the belief of the Chepangs that those insects and birds can sing better than the human beings. This concept also deconstructs anthropocentric view that only human beings are capable of doing creative work.

The Chepangs believe that nature is a creative force that provides human being energy and creativity. Love for them, is a gift of nature. So loving each other is a natural quality of human beings. Since it is a gift of nature it gets flourished and becomes stronger in the lap of nature. The artificiality makes love weak and short lived. That is why, the speaker requests his beloved not to hide the gift provided by nature:

khaitenauya belanghotsa

bahudai hotsa khaitenauya

(Tambairo: A-IV)

In this stanza the speaker asks question to his beloved whether she can be indifferent towards the gift of nature. Gift of nature, here, symbolizes love since love is a gift of nature; no one can hide and forget it. It is natural if a young boy and young girl fall in love. But the Chepangs do not forget to pay their respect to nature feeling that their love would not be successful and possible without the grace of nature.

Not only love songs, the songs of pain and suffering also include the issue of nature. The life of the Chepangs is full of miseries and sufferings. They have to be dependent on nature almost in every fulfillment of their needs. They do not have proper cultivable lands to grow crops sufficient for the whole year. For more than six months most of the Chepangs have to be dependent on natural products for their eating things. They collect some of the natural products and sell them to earn little money. Otherwise, they live a simple and natural life depending on nature itself. That's why, in most of the songs of miseries and pain, the Chepangs include the significance of nature in their life and the in dependence on nature. The following extract of a song from *Chepang Suskera – II* shows the misery of the Chepangs:

Ithemnang lakhasarung koskha hemnang jhola  
 ngelai pitnang gotsag ramanang dhara pani khola  
 saiyau makai bauni to harti  
 jengo suto ngelau hang gudarti

(Chewa Dukha: A-III)

In this song, the speaker expresses his miserable condition that he has dangled a bag on one side of his body and has dangled 'jabi' on another. He has to collect 'tanki' 'sag' and 'sisnu' near the river or elsewhere and has to be eaten to fulfill the appetite cooking along with the flour of rotten maize. The maize is also given by other people in return of their labor.



This shows that the chepangs do not have other alternatives except being satisfied with those eating things available in nature. They have to collect the flower of tanki, sisnu, githa, bhyakur etc. to maintain their everyday meal. Similar issue has been raised in the following song from *Chepang Suskera - II* that is sung in Nepali. It also presents the Chepangs dependency on nature for their food habits.

Boy:

Githa bhyakur sag sisnu baini khane  
dukhi jiban yasari bitaune

Girl:

Sarai dukha payako daju pahileni  
sag sisnule chhodena ahileni

Boy:

Dukha panya thakkar ni baini khaya  
sag sisnu mai yo Jiban bitaya

(Jabi Bhiri: B-II)

Githa, bhyakur, sisnu, yam, tanki, pindalu, chiuri and other seasonal fruits and roots available in their jungle are the major eating things of many of the Chepangs. Their entire life is spent eating only those things, without tasting other food items. That is why, this song is a true representation of the miseries of Chepangs.

The chepangs also sing songs to describe their landscape. In those songs they describe different natural elements and their beauty and significance. They present descriptions of different places of their residence along with their special significance. The following song from *Chepang Suskera – II* sung in Nepali language presents the description of their landscape along with specific significance of each of the places.

Haa Pani hai paryo tyo pari pakhama

rujhayo ranaban samjhi runchha man

eni lai lai bari lai lai

Haa. Ghansai ra katau amriso daliko

raniban pakhaima jhalko aankhaima

eni lai lai bari lai lai

Haa Dekhariko chhangchhangi jharana

tunghali khola jhyro sarai man paryo

eni lia lai bari lai lai

Haa Gargalko bato lechyaunma jaunla

aiselu khaunla sangai ramaula

eni lai lai bari lai lai

Haa pani hai bharaun potrangko khola

hansi kheli rakhaun dui dine yo chola

maya lai lai lau lau bari lai

Haa lekhungai jaunla pandrungai jaunla

simebhume pukari pirati launla

maya lai lai lau lau bari lai

(Pani Hai Paryo: B-III)

Each of the places included here has its own specific significance in the Chepang community. This song visualizes a complete picture of the Chepang landscape where there are rivers, falls, hills, jungle, slope lands etc. This romantic presentation of the Chepang countryside glorifies their land. They feel that they have everything they need in their villages. They have romantic places to entertain with their lovers and beloved. They have rivers for fulfilling their need for water. They have falls to observe and get pleasure of it. They also have forest in their area where they cut grass

and from where they get wild fruits and roots. That's why, this song creates an entire world of the Chepangs and they are glad to be residents of this landscape.

### **2.3 Chepang Songs and Supra-natural Power**

Supra-natural power is a force or power that cannot be explained by the law of science and that seems to involve gods or magic. It means supra-naturalism is a belief in unseen or hidden power that is imagined to be a controlling force of every activity and happening. Supra-natural is the opposite of natural because natural means something that can be explained by the laws of science or something that is in the state of real practice.

As most of the Chepang songs include the issue of nature, they equally include the issue of supra-natural forces. The Chepangs highly believe in supra-natural power and that it is this power which has made their life possible. They worship different gods and goddesses on various occasions. But a typical characteristic of the Chepangs is that they do not worship the image of the gods and goddesses carrying their imaginary images and establishing their idols. They worship natural objects like stone, tree, mountain etc. thinking them as manifestations of god. According to their belief, gods appear to human beings through nature and to worship nature is to worship god. The Chepang songs depict this culture of the Chepangs and present it in the same way. Answering the question how the Chepang songs present the issue of supra-natural power, Yaman Chepang says:

The Chepang songs present this issue in the way that we are here in this place. The gods and goddesses who are here, we do not know in which form you are, we have not seen you. But we respect you and worship you. You have to preserve us from every kind of difficulties.

(My Translation: Interview - I)

On most of such auspicious occasions, the Chepangs interact with each other through medium of singing. While celebrating festivals and performing other rituals they share their feelings, emotions and opinions through the songs. The Chepangs get identified through songs if they meet any people of their community for the first time. Not only that, when a woman comes to her parents house on occasions of festivals or ritual performances, she has to bring several eating things accompanied by male companions to carry them. After they arrive home, the male companions of the woman and the members of her parents' side start singing to introduce to each other. They keep on singing for several hours on different subject matters.

The interesting thing is that the Chepangs remember and respect different gods and goddesses before starting any auspicious work. They believe that their purpose will get fulfilled if they worship god in the beginning of their work. While singing songs too, the Chepangs in the beginning, pray to different gods and goddesses. While singing dohori, they, at first, request their gods to make him/ her able to attract his/ her desired person. Those songs generally start in this way:

Boy:

Aahmai bhumi ding aahmai simai ding  
 nangko rani kai nangko raja kai  
 naulang gambaichi bhumi gambaichi ding  
 aahmai debi ding sat debie  
 man bhung ko bhung chhitta bhungko bhung  
 debi bhubaichi pathai bhubaichi

Girl:

Aahmai hajuri gana swalangko gana bananko  
 debi timra nyasam binasam

(Dhungel: 87)

The boy requesting the gods and goddesses says "Hey! earth deity (earth goddess) your daughter who is not speaking, make her attracted towards me. Hey! seven gods and seven goddesses sit around this girl and make her positive to me". The girl being a bit angry replies "Oh dear ! from which place you are and which goddess baby you are or from which goddess' body you are speaking here?"

This song presents the depth of supra-natural belief rooted in the Chepang community. In the beginning of the song they pay their respect towards different gods and goddesses and request them to protect their life and also to make their mission successful. The Chepangs also believe that they are sons and daughters of the god. God is in their body and they are able to speak and work due to the presence of god in their body. So, they believe that neither they can disregard the significance of god nor they can exist on this earth without their presence. The Chepangs always surrender themselves before supra-natural power. They never think that they can do anything they desire ignoring supra-natural forces. They believe that their life has certain limitations guided by hidden forces. G.M. Gurung puts forward the significance of supra-natural belief rooted in the Chepang community. He in his book *Indigenous people: Mobilization and Change* states:

The chepangs are preoccupied with and predominated by their own faiths and beliefs. They believe in some invisible supernatural beings and powers. Their beliefs in these powers and the ways of entering into relations with them construct their religion. Their relationship with these supernatural spirits is one of the veneration, fear, meekness, dependence, and propitiation. So, various spirits are invoked to obtain their goodwill. (41)

Since the chepangs believe that no work becomes successful without the grace of god and goddess. They pay their respect and worship them on each of their auspicious occasion. While performing different rituals and celebrating festivals, they, in the beginning, worship their gods and other spirits to make them happy and to achieve their blessings. Young boys and girls pray for gods and goddesses to get success in their love affair and to achieve their desired person as their life partner. The following song from *Chepang Suskera – II* shows the supra-natural belief of the Chepangs:

Budai hoti maya lauchuda

Simebhume chyunti kasan jyechuda

Broklai mujecha gaita nyahjecha

Junibhar ngiko maya syalti gamjenchu

(Aachcha lau lau: B-I)

In this song the speaker proposes his beloved to love each other praying for nature and make promise to each other waking up different deities. He also requests her to sit nearer getting together and preserving their love for several lives.

The only way to preserve and flourish their love is to please their gods and goddesses. Without their grace, love cannot move smoothly towards success. They believe if they promise in front of gods and goddesses, they get their grace that helps flourish their love and make it successful. Another significant issue seen in this song is that the Chepangs pray for supra-natural forces along with nature. Nature and supra-natural power are not two separate entities but they are interrelated. For them to worship nature is to worship supra-natural power. Similarly, while worshipping their gods and goddesses they equally respect nature believing that gods and goddesses get manifested in natural organs. They believe that nature itself is creation of supra-natural power. That is why, there lies interconnectedness between these two factors.

When human beings worship supra-natural forces along with nature there creates a beautiful harmony and interrelationship among these three factors. Similar meaning can be seen in the following extract of a song:

Niji noyakai baudai-kai hotyakai

Simebhume chinhya kai raisuwa nojena

(Tambairo: A-IV)

It means if the earth deity becomes angry and if we are away from nature, the birds like 'chibe' and 'jureli' cry. Cry of birds symbolize bad omen that creates a bad situation and make love weaker and shortlived. This song also shows the devotion of the chepangs on nature and supra-natural power. They never intend to overcome and reject natural and supra-natural power. For good omen and smooth life, supra-natural forces must be pleased and they must be on the lap of nature. It means getting away from these forces, one cannot run his/her life smoothly and cannot get success in his/her mission.

The chepangs believe in fatalism. If any disaster falls on them, they believe either their goods and goddesses are displeased or it is because of the evil force which was not respected properly. They blame themselves for those calamities and repent before different gods, spirits and ancestors. They call the pande, their religious guru, to perform a special ritual for omitting such obstacles. The pande enchants several mantras to please gods and to destroy evil forces. That's why, shamanism is an important practice observed in the Chepang community.

The Chepangs believe in the existence of another world where people live even after death. They do not think that death is the end of life. After death there starts another life. But they believe that life of another world is different from the life of this world. They believe that people from heaven come down the earth to get pleasure

among the natural beauty of this earth and to eat sweet fruits and roots available in the jungle. But they come down the earth only at night when all the earthly creature take rest in their habitations and return back before they wake up. The traditional song 'kongkochyong' which is famous in their community, depicts this issue and presents an imaginary story of supra-naturalism. In the song presented here, a couple of extra-terrestrial bodies come down to earth from heaven at night where they used to live in their previous life and seek pleasure in natural beauty. The song from *Chepang Suskera - I* is as follows:

Lohar tairanko tairanti  
 saman tairan ko tairanti  
 ratai lhaiti aaljeya  
 jhangai lhaiti aaljeya  
 muwaliko mulada  
 dyahnwaliko hyahnlada  
 eleng wanghang ryahto hang  
 sunhai wanghang mutohang  
 krutai klyongti muyakcha  
 godai klyaiti muyakcha  
 (Kongkochyong: A-II)

This stanza includes the desire of a couple to come down to earth for seeking pleasure of nature. It is getting dark (night). They wish to enjoy the fruits and juice of flowers found on earth. So, they request others, too, to go with them if they are interested. They plan to reach their previous living place swimming in the river, resting on the stone and embracing each other.



After they reach their destination they drink the juice of chiuri and other fruits. They enjoy eating those things and playing among nature. When they are contented from those fruits and juices, they are conscious of the time and decide to return back to their own place. After that, they express their views in this way:

Sipru kanda mailauko  
 meru kanda mailauko  
 sarma sanghang enjecha  
 gerai rangchhang enjecha  
 kowa jaima cheumato  
 pankat jaima cheumato  
 laiko wathhang wah jecha  
 laiko ruide wahjecha  
 x      x      x      x  
 Saisaimako suisui ta  
 suhitiya ryajena  
 haihaiyako huihuita  
 parwang choma ryajena  
 saida wangma wangjeha  
 sundai wangma klajiya  
 hastamaie e taihnani  
 laiko wathhang wahjeya  
 (Kongkochyong: A-II)

In the first stanza, the couple desire to return back to their own place, the heaven. They decide to return back hiding their body among the bushes of the jungle. They

want to hide themselves from the birds like 'kowa' and 'pangkat' and want to move ahead crawling like snake through the bushes of amriso.

In the second stanza, the couple is seen hurrying to return back their own place because it is going to be morning soon. The insects have started to produce sound and cocks have started to crow. So, they intend to return back faster, otherwise people will see them and will laugh at them.

The couple wants to hide them not only from human beings but also from other non-human creatures. They are the people of heaven; they are different from the earthly human beings. The people of heaven do not have any right to come down earth and eat those wild eating things which are supposed to be the eating things of earthly creatures. That's why, they hide their bodies among the bushes to be unseen from other creatures and move ahead crawling like a snake. They want to return back to their place before dawn otherwise they may be recognized by the earthly people. If they see them, they will laugh because they are different from the earthly people.

This song is very famous and in practice among the Chepang community. Specially while observing ritual practices, celebrating festivals and in mass gatherings they sing this kind of song which are sung to pay their respect on supra-natural forces. Regarding the singing time of these songs, Yaman Chepang remarks:

They sing those songs Specially in gathering in the time of entertainment, in the time of festivals when daughters come to their parent's house for getting information about her, and to get rid of tiredness (My Translation: Interview-I)

The Chepangs not only sing songs in which the heavenly people come down the earth, they also sing songs in which the earthly people go up in the sky and travel there like clouds. They create such imaginary situation in which both the lover and beloved fly

in the sky like birds and hide themselves among the cloud. That is why, the Chepangs create a direct relationship between earth and heaven because people from earth can reach heaven and return back. Similarly, people from heaven can come down to earth and return back easily.

To sum up, Chepang songs construct the concept of relational self that prevails in the Chepang culture. Chepang culture is based on the interdependence and interconnectedness among humans, nature and supra-natural forces. Each of these factors has a two way relationship. It means each of them affects and is affected by other factors. The Chepangs reject modern advancement and technology that create artificiality in human life. Instead they love the life of naturailty and simplicity. Scientific development has pushed human beings away from nature and supra-natural belief. Human beings only believe in those things which can be explained by the laws of science. They think only about those things which provide immediate benefit in their life.

But the Chepang songs undermine and challenge these selfish and individualistic notions developed in the human world. Those songs create human identity based on relational self. Human existence is possible only in relation to natural and supra-natural forces. They present nature as mother because the Chepangs believe that they have originated from nature. Chepang songs present the eco-consciousness which is dominantly guiding the Chepang community. The Chepangs sing songs paying respect on supra-natural forces because, for the Chepangs life can smoothly be run only after supra-natural forces is pleased. So, the Chepangs worship various gods, spirits and deities through their songs. Song is one of the most important part of Chepang culture and the whole Chepang culture is reflected in their songs.

## Chapter – III

### Conclusion

Chepang songs are true representatives of Chepang concept of relational self. The Chepangs do not imagine life without direct influence of nature and supra-natural forces. Their cultural performances and life activities truly represent their concept of interdependence. Each of their cultural practice is connected to nature and supra-natural power. The identity of the Chepangs do not exist if they are separated from nature and supra-natural belief. They do not believe that life can be existed without the grace of nature and gods and goddesses. It means their life is possible due to the presence of nature and supra-natural power. This belief of the Chepangs construct the Chepang identity based on relational self that shows interdependence between the Chepangs and nature as well as the Chepangs and supra-natural forces. Chepang songs truly and perfectly depict this concept of the Chepang culture.

Since Chepang songs are true representatives of Chepang culture, Chepang culture is fully based on the concept of relational self. It means Chepang culture is constructed on the basis of a perfect harmony among the Chepangs, nature and their supra-natural belief. The Chepangs believe that nature provides life for them. They survive due to the availability of natural products around their locality and supra-natural power is a force that makes everything possible in the world. That is why, for the Chepangs, life without the influence of nature and without the grace of gods and goddesses is completely impossible.

The Chepangs believe that the more human beings are nearer to nature and supra-natural forces the more they are secure, simple, innocent, moral, disciplined and friendly. And to be nearer to them human beings should please several gods and goddesses and should pay respect on nature. Nature, according to the Chepangs, is

manifestation of supra-natural power that should be worshipped to make human life smooth. This belief of the Chepangs has truly been represented in the Chepang songs.

It will not be wrong to say that song is one of the significant and necessary factors of Chepang culture. Songs have major role and position in their culture. In most of their cultural performances and ritual practices the role of singing comes to be significant. The Chepangs express and exchange their feelings, wishes and emotions through the medium of songs. Not only that, in public gatherings the Chepangs sing songs and introduce to each other with the help of singing. They sing different kind of songs like dohori, jhyaure, asare etc. in different situations. In cultural and ritual performances the Chepangs sing traditional songs like Kanchhi, Kongkochyong, Laulace, Mankham etc.

The more human beings adopt technology the more they are away from the influence of nature and supra-natural belief. If human beings start to adopt physical advancement avoiding their dependence on nature and supra-natural forces, their life gradually starts to transform towards complexity, artificiality and sophistication. The Chepangs have also gradually started to adopt technology due to their regular interaction with the people of other communities. Many of the Chepangs have forgotten their original culture and have started to adopt the culture of other communities. Some of them have migrated from their original inhabitations in search of opportunity and to embrace technology. Their life has become more complex and artificial than in the past.

Due to cultural transformation, significance of songs is gradually decreasing. The original cultural practices of the Chepangs are existing only in some of the original inhabitations. Otherwise they have almost forgotten their originality.

Traditional songs like Kanchi Kongkochyong, Mankham, Tungnima, Laulau etc. are disappearing. Only some of the old people and a few conscious youths have knowledge on them. Instead of those songs, modern romantic songs along with attractive music patterns are becoming popular. Those traditional songs have started to be sung in different way along with music though, originally, the Chepang songs are sung without music. The practice of singing songs and telling folktales in public gatherings is slowly decreasing. Instead, they play cassettes of different folk and modern songs while celebrating festivals.

One thing that is remarkable regarding Chapang song is that the subject matter of their songs has not been changed though technique has been changed. Most of the Chapang songs deal with the issues of nature and supra-natural forces either they are traditional or modern. The Chepangs have derived modern artificial technology to make their songs attractive but their continuous faith on the power of nature and supra-natural forces has not been lost. Rather it has further been flourished. This shows that the Chepangs still respect nature and gods and goddesses as their ancestors respected in the past though there has come several transformations in their life.

Respect on nature and worship for supra-natural power have become the constituent part of their song despite several cultural transformations. Traditional songs are still sung in the villages as it used to be in the past though its popularity and significance has been decreasing day by day. Very less people have knowledge on those traditional songs. But the problem is that those who have knowledge on those songs are totally illiterate. Those who are literate do not have knowledge on language and those songs. So, there is great challenge to preserve and continue their traditional cultural heritage.

All in all, Chepang songs truly represent Chepang culture that constructs Chepang identity based on the concept of relational-self. The identity of Chepangs is based on the interconnectedness among the Chepangs, nature and supra-natural forces. If any of the factors gets ruined, Chepang culture gets imbalanced and becomes incomplete. That is why, Chepang songs construct the Chepang identity based on relational self that shows interdependence between the humans, nature and supra-natural forces.

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